

mote than the Reformation, and when the supremacy and exorbitant power of the church of Rome were still at their height. But nothing can be farther from the truth. On inquiry, we learn with surprise, that the original plan of education at Oxford and Cambridge, as in the other European universities, was public and common to the whole mass of students. The present system has been upheld by no blind veneration for ancient usages, nor by the conservative principle carried to excess. There has been no dread of innovation exhibited in modern times. The substitution of the collegiate for a more general university scheme of instruction is the result of a modern revolution, altogether subsequent to the era of the Reformation, and no small part of it is a creation of yesterday, devised at the close of the eighteenth, and only carried out since the commencement of the nineteenth, century.

In order to understand how the colleges, or a few private corporations, obtained their ascendancy over our two great national institutions, it is necessary to revert to the history of those early ages when the European universities originated. It appears that there was often a prodigious concourse of students to those seats of learning where the public teachers acquired celebrity. We may refuse to credit some old chroniclers, who reckon the number at Oxford and elsewhere at ten, twenty, and even thirty thousand; but it is certain that the scholars were often so crowded together in small towns, as to be exposed to great hardships, owing to the exorbitant price demanded for board and lodging. Benevolent individuals, who commiserated the sufferings of the poorer students, were induced from time to time to found houses, where they