

CLASSICAL  
AND MEDIEVAL  
LITERATURE  
CRITICISM

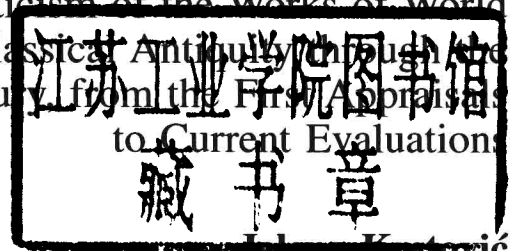


CMLC 69

Volume 69

# CLASSICAL AND MEDIEVAL LITERATURE CRITICISM

Criticism of the Works of World  
Authors from Classical Antiquity through the  
Fourteenth Century from the First Appraisals  
to Current Evaluations



Jelena Kristović  
Project Editor

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## Preface

Since its inception in 1988, *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism* (CMLC) has been a valuable resource for students and librarians seeking critical commentary on the works and authors of antiquity through the fourteenth century. The great poets, prose writers, dramatists, and philosophers of this period form the basis of most humanities curricula, so that virtually every student will encounter many of these works during the course of a high school and college education. Reviewers have found CMLC “useful” and “extremely convenient,” noting that it “adds to our understanding of the rich legacy left by the ancient period and the Middle Ages,” and praising its “general excellence in the presentation of an inherently interesting subject.” No other single reference source has surveyed the critical reaction to classical and medieval literature as thoroughly as CMLC.

### Scope of the Series

CMLC provides an introduction to classical and medieval authors, works, and topics that represent a variety of genres, time periods, and nationalities. By organizing and reprinting an enormous amount of critical commentary written on authors and works of this period in world history, CMLC helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments.

Each entry in CMLC presents a comprehensive survey of an author’s career, an individual work of literature, or a literary topic, and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions. Early commentary is offered to indicate initial responses, later selections document changes in literary reputations, and retrospective analyses provide the reader with modern views. The size of each author entry is a relative reflection of the scope of the criticism available in English.

An author may appear more than once in the series if his or her writings have been the subject of a substantial amount of criticism; in these instances, specific works or groups of works by the author will be covered in separate entries. For example, Homer will be represented by three entries, one devoted to the *Iliad*, one to the *Odyssey*, and one to the Homeric Hymns.

CMLC continues the survey of criticism of world literature begun by Thomson Gale’s *Contemporary Literary Criticism* (CLC), *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC), *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism* (NCLC), *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800* (LC), and *Shakespearean Criticism* (SC).

### Organization of the Book

A CMLC entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author’s actual name given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the original date of composition.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.



- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose works have been translated into English, the list will focus primarily on twentieth-century translations, selecting those works most commonly considered the best by critics. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication. Lists of **Representative Works** by different authors appear with topic entries.
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- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism.
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Thomson Gale.

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A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by the Thomson Gale, including *CMLC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

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# Contents

Preface vii

Acknowledgments xi

Literary Criticism Series Advisory Board xiii

<b>Alcuin c. 735-804</b> .....	1
<i>English scholar, theologian, letter-writer, and poet</i>	
<b>Exodus</b> .....	84
<i>Second book of the Old Testament, circa 10th-5th century B.C.</i>	
<b>Siger of Brabant 1235-1282</b> .....	165
<i>French philosopher and theologian</i>	
<b>Upanishads</b> .....	268
<i>Vedic texts, circa 7th-5th century B.C.</i>	

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Author Index 357

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Topic Index 455

CMLC Cumulative Nationality Index 467

CMLC Cumulative Title Index 469

# Alcuin

## c. 735-804

(Also known as Albinus) English scholar, theologian, letter-writer, and poet.

### INTRODUCTION

Alcuin is recognized as a brilliant scholar and a key intellectual figure in Charlemagne's effort to reform education, often referred to as the Carolingian renaissance. As an instructor in Charlemagne's Palace School, he helped to transmit the great ideas of Latin culture from England to France. Without his contribution, many of the classics would be lost to modern times since English manuscripts did not fare well under the regular ransacking of the country by Vikings. Through his teaching, Alcuin spread the thought of St. Augustine, St. Ambrose, Gregory the Great, Bede, and others, instructing not only the King and Queen, but also their sons and daughters, clerics, and some of the most promising men of the continent. Under his supervision, numerous manuscripts were copied and circulated to monastic libraries. Alcuin was also instrumental in developing the Caroline Minuscule, a neat script that was easily read and written; in 769 Charlemagne decreed that all books and official records follow this style. Numerous great works of the past were recopied, specifically many classic Greek mathematical texts that would otherwise have perished. As a theologian, Alcuin worked on a revision of the Latin Vulgate version of the Bible, chiefly to rid it of errors made by copyists, and composed numerous letters and tracts refuting the positions of heretics. The Missal that he compiled was adopted by the Frankish church and gained popularity throughout much of Europe, leading to improved church unity. As Charlemagne's secretary, Alcuin undoubtedly edited and wrote numerous official statements under the King's name, but details about these efforts are scarce. He also wrote numerous educational treatises, but critics consider them relatively unimportant because of their lack of originality; much more valued by Carolingian historians are his hundreds of extant letters (most written between 793 and 804). Scholars note that it is difficult to underestimate Alcuin's influence, because many of his pupils took on important government and church posts in widespread locations, in turn impacting the lives of countless others.



### BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Alcuin was born in Northumbria in about 735. Little is known of his parents except that they were probably of high social rank. In about 740 he enrolled in the York cathedral school, founded by Archbishop Egbert. He soon drew the appreciation of Egbert and the master of the school, Aelbert, and accompanied the latter to the continent on several occasions in search of rare manuscripts. In 767 Alcuin assumed duties as director of the school, working to build it into one of the finest in all of Europe, including an impressive library. In 781 he met Charlemagne, who invited him to join the Frankish Dynasty at his Palace School in Aachen in order to develop an educational curriculum and a library. Alcuin kept this post from 782 until 796, returning to England only twice on assignment, between 786 and 787 and between 790 and 793. In 796 he was appointed Abbot of St. Martin at Tours, a position he held until his death in 804. Most of Alcuin's writings originate from the time of his service under Charlemagne.

## MAJOR WORKS

Alcuin wrote in Latin. When he composed his educational works, he was not striving for originality; he wanted textbooks for his students and drew largely from the works of previous masters. These treatises, all from 782 or later, are typically in the form of dialogues and include the *Ars grammatica* (*On Grammar*); *De orthographia* (*On Orthography*), a work indebted to Bede that consists of a list of problematic words and tips on using and spelling them correctly; *Disputatio de rhetorica et de virtutibus sapientissimi Regis Carli et Albini magistri* (*Debate of the Wisest King Charles and the Teacher Alcuin, about Rhetoric and the Virtues*), a fictitious dialogue addressing the choice of correct subjects for debate; *De dialectica* (*On Dialectics*), which again finds Charlemagne and Alcuin in dialogue, discussing the differences between rhetoric and dialectic; and *Disputatio regalis et nobilissimi iuvenis Pippini cum Albino scholastico* (*Dialogue of Pepin, the Most Noble and Royal Youth, with the Teacher Albinus*), a dialogue of riddles between one of Charlemagne's sons and Alcuin (who sometimes referred to himself as Albinus). His most popular moral treatise was *De virtutibus et vitiis* (*On the Virtues and Vices*), which drew on the ideas of St. Augustine. His theological works battling Adoptionist heresy include: *Adversus Felicis haeresin libelles* (798 or after; *Book against the Heresy of Felix*); *Contra Felicem Urgellitanum episcopum libri VII* (800; *Seven Books against Felix of Urgel*), *Contra Elipandum libri IV* (800; *Four Books Against Elipandus*); and *De fide sanctae et individuae Trinitatis* with the appendix *De trinitate ad Fredegisum Quaestiones XXVIII* (802; *On the Faith of the Holy and Undivided Trinity*). *De fide* was his most important and popular single work, and exists in nearly one hundred surviving manuscripts of all or part of its text. It covers topics from creation to the fall, to Trinitarian relations and eschatology. In it, Alcuin asserts that faith is the first prerequisite to true happiness. Alcuin also wrote several lives of saints and kings and some 130 poems. Perhaps his most celebrated poem is "Versus de patribus, regibus et sanctis Eboracensis ecclesiae" (780-82; "Poem on the Saints of the Church at York"), a history of the church at York. His poem "De clade Lindisfarnensis monasterii" (793; "On the Destruction of the Monastery at Lindisfarne") concerns the first Viking attack on England. Other significant efforts include "O mea cella" ("Alcuin's Cell") and "Verses de cuculo" ("Verses on the Cuckoo"). Perhaps the most important of Charlemagne's declarations actually penned by Alcuin is "De Litteris Colendis" ("On the Study of Letters"), which details the King's plan to reform education.

## CRITICAL RECEPTION

Although Alcuin's accomplishments in the Carolingian renaissance have always been praised, his literary reputation was more that of a compiler than an original thinker. In modern times, however, critics are considerably more appreciative of Alcuin's contributions. Mark Damien Delp examines *De dialectica* and rejects criticisms that characterize the work as mediocre and merely a compendium. Delp explains how Alcuin transforms his material to meet theological needs. This skill is also examined by John William Houghton, who describes how Alcuin variously develops permutations of others' thoughts, takes portions out of context, and sometimes uses parts of an idea in order to argue a view antithetical to the original. Peter Dale Scott contends that Alcuin is also extremely underappreciated as a poet. Scott writes that in subordinating rhetoric to a functional role, Alcuin was taking "an important step in the evolution towards modern notions of poetry." In an essay on "Verses de cuculo," Scott declares Alcuin "the innovator of Christian pastoral," skilled in the use of symbolic imagery. Colin Chase argues that too many modern scholars make the mistake of imposing their theories, concerns, and preoccupations on the Carolingians, resulting in anachronisms. Chase examines one of Alcuin's most celebrated poems, "O mea cella," which is also analyzed by Joseph Pucci. Pucci writes: "Because his engagement of Virgilian pastoral is so convincing, Alcuin places himself in the paradoxical position of seeming to embrace precisely what he rejects at the poem's end: a love of earthly beauty." Andrew Fleming West examines Alcuin's educational writings, particularly *Ars grammatica* and *De Orthographia*. West states that, "in spite of their puerile character, they did more good service than anything else he wrote." Celia M. Chazelle analyzes a letter dealing with a theological issue and Martha Bayless analyzes Alcuin's "remarkable" riddle collection, the *Disputatio regalis et nobilissimi iuvenis Pippini cum Albino scholastico*.

## PRINCIPAL WORKS

- Ars grammatica* [*On Grammar*] (treatise) 782 or after  
*De dialectica* [*On Dialectics*] (treatise) 782 or after  
*De orthographia* [*On Orthography*] (treatise) 782 or after  
*De virtutibus et vitiis* [*On the Virtues and Vices*] (treatise) 782 or after  
*Disputatio regalis et nobilissimi iuvenis Pippini cum Albino scholastico* [*Dialogue of Pepin, the Most Noble and Royal Youth, with the Teacher Albinus*] (treatise) 782 or after

*Disputatio de rhetorica et de virtutibus sapientissimi Regis Carli et Albini magistri* [*Debate of the Wisest King Charles and the Teacher Alcuin, about Rhetoric and the Virtues*] (treatise) 782 or after

*Treatise de Fide Trinitatis* [*On the Faith of the Holy and Undivided Trinity*] (treatise) 782 or after

*Adversus Felicis haeresin libelles* [*Book Against the Heresy of Felix*] (treatise) 798 or after

*Contra Elipandum libri IV* [*Four Books against Elipandus*] (treatise) 800

*Contra Felicem Urgellitanum episcopum libri VII* [*Seven Books against Felix of Urgel*] (treatise) 800

*De fide sanctae et individuae Trinitatis* with appendix *De trinitate ad Fredegisum Quaestiones XXVIII* [*On the Faith of the Holy and Undivided Trinity*] (treatise) 802

### Principal English Translations

*The Rhetoric of Alcuin and Charlemagne* (translated by Wilbur Samuel Howell) 1941

*Alcuin of York: His Life and Letters* (translated by Stephen Allott) 1974

*Two Alcuin Letter-Books* (translated by Colin Chase) 1975

*The Bishops, Kings, and Saints of York* (translated by Peter Godman) 1982

*Poetry of the Carolingian Renaissance* (translated by Peter Godman) 1985

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## CRITICISM

### Andrew Fleming West (essay date 1892)

SOURCE: West, Andrew Fleming. "The Educational Writings of Alcuin." In *Alcuin and the Rise of the Christian Schools*, pp. 89-116. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1892.

[In the following essay, West surveys Alcuin's didactic works.]

Alcuin's writings have been preserved to us in tolerable completeness, and may be classified under a fourfold division. First come his theological works, which embrace the greater part, perhaps two-thirds, of all that he wrote. This theological portion may in turn be divided into four parts, exegetical, dogmatic, liturgical and practical, and lives of the saints. Of the remaining third of his writings, the major parts is embraced in his epistles, and least in extent are the didactic treatises and poems which make up the rest.

It will thus be seen that the greater part of Alcuin's writings have little connection with the history of education, and yet, even his theological works have incidental interest in this respect. Besides a few scanty gleanings from his exegetical writings, there are two of his practical treatises, *On the Virtues and Vices* and *On the Nature of the Soul*, which have a general connection with education, but beyond this there is nothing to be found. The epistles are of high value for the general history of the times, and more particularly for the abundant light which they shed upon the activity of Alcuin in his relation to the restoration of school-learning. The poems have a lesser value, but contain important help for the history of the school at York, where Alcuin was bred, and for his later career in Frankland. But the chief interest centres in his specifically didactic writings, for they contain most fully his general views on education as well as separate treatises on some of the liberal arts.

Let it be remarked at the outset that Alcuin is rarely an original writer, but usually a compiler and adapter, and even at times a literal transcriber of other men's work. He adds nothing to the sum of learning, either by invention or by recovery of what has been lost. What he does is to reproduce or adapt from earlier authors such parts of their writings as could be appreciated by the age in which he lived. Accordingly, while he must be refused all the credit that belongs to a courageous mind which advances beyond what has been known, he must yet be highly esteemed for the invaluable service he rendered as a transmitter and conservator of the learning that was in danger of perishing, and as the restorer and propagator of this learning in a great empire, after it had been extinct for generations. A passage from the letter dedicating his commentary on the Gospel of John to Gisela and Rotrud, states so aptly the timorously conservative attitude which appears in all his literary efforts, educational or otherwise, that it is worth citing here. He writes: "I have reverently traversed the storehouses of the early fathers, and whatever I have been able to find there, I have sent of it for you to taste. First of all, I have sought help from St. Augustine, who has devoted the greatest study to expounding the most holy words of this holy gospel. Next, I have drawn somewhat from the lesser works of St. Ambrose, that most holy doctor, and likewise from the Homilies of the distinguished father, Gregory the Great. I have also taken much from the Homilies of the blessed presbyter Bede, and from other holy fathers, whose interpretations I have here set forth. For I have preferred to employ their thoughts and words rather than to venture anything of my own audacity, even if the curiosity of my readers were to approve of it, and by a most cau-



tious manner of writing I have made it my care, with the help of God, not to set down anything contrary to the thoughts of the fathers.”

Fortunately for his theological works, he depends mainly on the really great fathers of the Latin Church. Most of what he writes comes from Augustine, Jerome, Ambrose and Gregory the Great, while Bede is the chief of his later authorities. Of the Greek fathers, however, he knows nothing, except through Latin versions, and of these he makes no considerable use beyond drawing on a translation of Chrysostom to help in composing his commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews. His literary sources are all Latin, nor is there any Greek to be found in what he wrote, apart from some citations copied from Jerome and occasional Greek words from elsewhere. On the educational side he depends mainly on Isidore and Bede, but with subsidiary help from Cassiodorus and the treatise *On the Categories* falsely ascribed to Augustine. He knew of Boethius, but made only indirect use of him. Martianus Capella is not so much as mentioned.

The separate educational treatises of Alcuin of undoubtedly genuine character are the following: *On Grammar*, *On Orthography*, *On Rhetoric and the Virtues*, *On Dialectics*, a *Disputation with Pepin*, and a tedious astronomical treatise, entitled *De Cursu et Saltu Lunæ ac Bissexti*. Three others are ascribed to him with less certainty: *On the Seven Arts*, *A Disputation for Boys*, and the so-called *Propositions of Alcuin*.

First and most important of these is his *Grammar*, which falls into two parts, the one a dialogue between Alcuin and his pupils on philosophy and liberal studies in general, and the other a dialogue between a young Saxon and a Frank on grammar, also conducted in the presence of Alcuin. The former dialogue is an original composition and contains in brief compass Alcuin's views on the end and method of education, and on the duty of studying the liberal arts, to which the entire dialogue serves as a general introduction. “Most learned master,” says one of the disciples, opening the dialogue, “we have often heard you say that Philosophy was the mistress of all the virtues, and alone of all earthly riches never made its possessor miserable. We confess that you have incited us by such words to follow after this excellent felicity, and we desire to know what is the sum of its supremacy and by what steps we may make ascent thereunto. Our age is yet a tender one and too weak to rise unhelped by your hand. We know, indeed, that the strength of the mind is in the heart, as the strength of the eyes is in the head. Now our eyes, whenever they are flooded by the splendor of the sun, or by reason of the presence of any light, are able to discern most clearly whatever is presented to their gaze, but without this access of light they must remain in

darkness. So also the mind is able to receive wisdom if there be any one who will enlighten it.” Alcuin benignantly replies, “My sons, ye have said well in comparing the eyes to the mind, and may the light that lighteneth every man that cometh into this world enlighten your minds, to the end that ye may be able to make progress in philosophy, which, as ye have well said, never deserts its possessor.” The disciples assent to this and then renew their entreaty in the same figurative and flowery manner. “Verily, Master,” they urge, “we know that we must ask of Him who giveth liberally and upbraideth not. Yet we likewise need to be instructed slowly, with many a pause and hesitation, and like the weak and feeble to be led by slow steps until our strength shall grow. The flint naturally contains in itself the fire that will come forth when the flint is struck. Even so there is in the human mind the light of knowledge that will remain hidden like the spark in the flint, unless it be brought forth by the repeated efforts of a teacher.” Alcuin answers: “It is easy indeed to point out to you the path of wisdom, if only ye love it for the sake of God, for knowledge, for purity of heart, for understanding the truth, yea, and for itself. Seek it not to gain the praise of men or the honors of this world, nor yet for the deceitful pleasures of riches, for the more these things are loved, so much the farther do they cause those who seek them to depart from the light of truth and knowledge.”

After this elaborately courteous opening the dialogue proceeds to show that true and eternal happiness, and not transitory pleasure, is the proper end for a rational being to set before him, and that this happiness consists in the things that are proper and peculiar to the soul itself, rather than in what is alien to it. “That,” says Alcuin, “which is sought from without is alien to the soul, as is the gathering together of riches, but that which is proper to the soul is what is within, namely, the graces of wisdom. Therefore, O man,” he calls out in fervid apostrophe, “if thou art master of thyself, thou shalt have what thou shalt never have to grieve at losing, and what no calamity shall be able to take away. Why then, O mortals, do ye seek without for that which ye have within? How much better is it to be adorned within than without!” “What, then, are the adornments of the soul?” the disciples naturally inquire, and Alcuin answers: “Wisdom is the chief adornment, and this I urge you to seek above all things.”

Alcuin then explains that wisdom is itself eternal because it is an inseparable property of the soul, which is immortal, and in this differs from everything else of a secular character. But its pursuit is laborious. The scholar will not gain his reward without study, any more than the soldier without fighting or the farmer without plowing. It is an old proverb that the root of learning is bitter but the fruit is sweet, and so St. Paul

asserts that "every discipline at the present is not joyous but grievous, yet afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them that were exercised in it." Progress in secular knowledge is to be made by slow ascents, step by step, and is to lead to "the better ways of wisdom, which conduct to life eternal." "May the divine grace guide and lead us," exclaims Alcuin, "into the treasures of spiritual wisdom, that ye may be intoxicated at the fountain of divine plenty; that there may be within you a well of water springing up unto everlasting life. But, inasmuch as the Apostle enjoins that everything be done decently and in order, I think that ye should be led by the steps of erudition from lower to higher things until your wings gradually grow stronger, so that ye may mount on them to view the loftier visions of the pure ether." The disciples are overwhelmed and humbly answer: "Master, raise us from the earth by your hand and set our feet upon the ascents of wisdom." Alcuin accordingly proceeds to set before his pupils the seven ascents of the liberal arts in the following manner: "We have read how Wisdom herself saith by the mouth of Solomon, 'Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars.' Now although this saying pertains to the Divine Wisdom which builded for Himself a house (that is, the body of Christ in the Virgin's womb), and endued it with the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, or may mean the Church, which is the House of God that shines with these gifts, yet Wisdom is also built upon the seven pillars of liberal letters, and it can in no wise afford us access to any perfect knowledge, unless it be set upon these seven pillars, or ascents." Here is a distinct advance on Alcuin's part beyond the earlier writers on the liberal arts. Augustine had regarded them with qualified approval because they were helpful towards understanding divine truth. Cassiodorus saw in addition a mystical hint of their excellence in the fact that they were seven, and fortified his position by the text, "Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven columns." Alcuin takes up the text from Proverbs quoted by Cassiodorus, and finds in it the liberal arts as a matter of direct interpretation. *Sapientia*, or Wisdom, who had builded her house and hewn out her seven pillars, he mystically explains first of Christ the Divine Wisdom and next of the Church, each endued with the seven gifts of the Spirit, and then proceeds to his third application, which is that *Sapientia*, or Wisdom, which in the speech of his time often meant learning, was built upon the seven liberal arts. Augustine found the arts outside of Scripture, but deemed them helpful towards understanding it. Cassiodorus found in Scripture a mystical hint as to their excellence, and Alcuin gets them out of Scripture itself. It needs not to be told how influential such an interpretation would be on the fortunes of secular learning; for if the arts were once found in the Scriptures, there was no way of getting

them out of the Church. Henceforth the proscriptive utterances of Tertullian, though echoed once and again down the middle ages,<sup>1</sup> could never dominate the Church.

But let us return to the dialogue. The pupils renew their request: "Open to us, as you have often promised, the seven ascents of theoretical discipline." Alcuin replies: "Here, then, are the ascents of which ye are in search, and O that ye may ever be as eager to ascend them as ye now are to see them. They are grammar, rhetoric, dialectics, arithmetic, geometry, music, and astrology. On these the philosophers bestowed their leisure and their study." Then he adds with a boldness which might well have alarmed him: "By reason of these philosophers the catholic teachers and defenders of our faith have proved themselves superior to all the chief heretics in public controversy," and closes with the exhortation: "Let your youthful steps, my dearest sons, run daily along these paths until a riper age and a stronger mind shall bring you to the heights of Holy Scripture."

Plainly in Alcuin's mind the arts were seven and only seven. They are the necessary ascents to the higher wisdom of the Scriptures. Not the fact that they are simply useful to the Scriptures, but indispensable, is what gives them such value in Alcuin's eyes. Much of the rhetoric in which his ideas exfoliate is childish enough, but it is impossible not to see behind it all a pure and gentle spirit, who valued the scanty sum of learning he possessed for no lesser reasons than the love of God, purity of soul, knowledge of truth, and even for its own sake, as against any pursuit of learning for the vulgar ends of wealth, popularity or secular honor.

The second dialogue in the treatise is properly grammatical. Two of Alcuin's pupils, a Saxon and a Frank, are beginners in the study, or, to put it in Alcuin's flowery language, "They but lately rushed upon the thorny thickets of grammatical density." The Frank is a boy of fourteen years and the Saxon of fifteen. The master presides over their interrogations and answers. It is decided that grammar must begin with the consideration of what a letter is, though Alcuin stops on the way to expound the nature of words. It is defined as "the least part of an articulate sound." The letters are the "elements" of language because they are ultimate and indivisible, and are built up first into syllables, and thereafter successively into words, clauses, and sentences. Letters are of two sorts, vowels and consonants, and are defined as follows: "The vowels are uttered by themselves and of themselves make syllables. The consonants cannot be uttered by themselves, nor can they of themselves make syllables." But this sapient definition by antithesis, though accepted by the pupils, does not contain all that is to be said. There is an occult

reason why the alphabet is divided into vowels and consonants, as Alcuin at once informs them. "The vowels," he says, "are, as it were, the souls, and the consonants, the bodies of words." "Now the soul moves both itself and the body, but the body is immovable apart from the soul. Such, then, are the consonants without the vowels. They may indeed be written by themselves, but they can neither be uttered nor have any power apart from vowels." This explanation seems to satisfy them, for they pursue the matter no further. The peculiarities of the consonants are then discussed very much in the same manner, and the syllable is next taken up. It is defined as "a sound expressed in letters (*vox litteralis*), which has been uttered with one accent and at one breath." The discussion of syllables falls into four parts, accent (*accentus*), breathings (*spiritus*), quantity (*tempus*), and the number of constituent letters. After these are discussed, the pupils entreat that before proceeding further they may be furnished with a definition of grammar. Alcuin accordingly tells them that "Grammar is the science of written sounds (*litteralis scientia*), the guardian of correct speaking and writing. It is founded on nature, reason, authority, and custom." It has been well observed that this shrunken notion of grammar on the part of Alcuin as contrasted with the wide conception of the study that prevailed among the grammarians of the later Roman Empire is thoroughly characteristic of the intellectual feebleness of the later time. Instead of being both the art of writing and speaking, and also the study of the great poets and orators, it has now become only the former of these, a childish, technical and barren study. This appears more plainly as we advance to Alcuin's alarming enumeration of the parts of grammar. They are "words, letters, syllables, clauses, sayings, speeches, definitions, feet, accents, punctuation marks, critical marks, orthographies, analogies, etymologies, glosses, distinctions, barbarisms, solecisms, faults, metaplasms, figurations, tropes, prose, metres, fables, and histories."

Words, letters and syllables, the first three of Alcuin's twenty-six parts of grammar, have been discussed, and each of the others is next defined. Alcuin then proceeds to the consideration of the different parts of speech in the following order: the noun, its genders, numbers, "figures" and cases; the pronoun, its genders, "figures," numbers and cases; then the verb with its modes, "figures," inflections and numbers; and the adverb with its "figures." Lastly he treats of the participle, the conjunction, the preposition and the interjection. By "figures" Alcuin means the facts relating to the simplicity, composition or derivation of words. Thus, under his "figures" of verbs, the word *cupio* is in simple figure, *concupio* is in composite figure, and *concupisco* is in derivative figure, because it comes from *concupio*. The whole treatment of the parts of speech is similarly feeble in spirit and almost entirely restricted to etymology, so

that Alcuin's *Grammar* is really devoid of orthography, syntax and prosody. Whatever is excellent in any way in his *Grammar* ought to be credited to Donatus, whom Alcuin follows. Isidore also furnishes him many a definition, but wherever this happens the treatise is apt to be childish. An example or two may suffice. The derivation of *littera* is said to be from *legitera*, "because the *littera* prepares a path for readers (*leg entibus iter*)."  
Feet in poetry are so named "because the metres walk on them," and so on. Yet his book had great fame, and Notker, writing a century later, praised it, saying, "Alcuin has made such a grammar that Donatus, Nicomachus, Dositheus and our own Priscian seem as nothing when compared with him."

In the manuscript copies of the *Grammar* there appear to be some slight parts missing at the end, so that it may have been more extended than we suppose; but there is no ground for thinking it covered more than etymology. However, Alcuin's next work is on orthography, and is properly a pendant to his *Grammar*. It is a short manual containing a list of words, alphabetically arranged, with comments on their proper spelling, pronunciation and meanings, and with remarks on their correct use, drawn to some extent from a treatise by Bede on the same subject. It is a sort of *Antibarbarus*, a help towards securing accuracy of form and propriety of use in the employment of Latin words, and must have been serviceable in the instruction of youth, but more so in the copying of ancient manuscripts. We may reasonably believe that Alcuin's scribes in the monastery of Tours, busily engaged in recovering one and another patristic and classical writer, were guided by his book in the purification of the copies they made, and for which the monastery at Tours became so famous. "Let him who would publish the sayings of the ancients read me, for he who follows me not will speak without regard to law," is the translation of the couplet which stands at the head of the *Orthography* and indicates its purpose. It is Alcuin's attempt to purge contemporary Latin of its barbarisms. He puts his comments oddly enough. "Write *vinea*," he says, "if you mean a vine, with *i* in the first syllable and *e* in the second. But if you mean pardon, write *venia* with *e* in the first syllable and *i* in the second. Write *vacca* with a *v*, if you mean a cow, but write it with a *b* if you mean a berry." In the same way be careful to write *vellus* with a *v* to mean wool, and *bellus*, if you mean fair. Similarly, when writing, do not confuse *vel* with *fel* which means gall, or with *Bel*, the heathen god. By no means consider *benificus*, a man of good deeds, the same as *venificus*, a poisoner. So *bibo* and *vivo* are not to be mixed. Such examples indicate that Alcuin had to struggle against "rusticity" in pronunciation as well as in writing,—a rusticity which was due to the modifying influence of the barbarous Tudesque upon the pronouncing of Latin,—an influence which, even in Alcuin's time, was

altering the forms of words in a manner which presaged the final demolition of Latin prior to the rise of French.

Some of the definitions are quite amusing. *Coelebs*, a bachelor, is defined as "one who is on his way *ad cælum*," evidently the true monk. "Write *æquor* with a diphthong," for the reason that it is derived from *aqua*. *Mālus*, a mast, is to have a long *a*, but "a *mālus homo* ought to have a short *a*."

It is on the *Grammar* and *Orthography* that Alcuin's didactic fame principally rests, and justly so, for in spite of their puerile character they did more good service than anything else he wrote. Let it be remembered that the tall, blue-eyed barbarians, whom Alcuin was aiming to civilize, were but little children when it came to school-learning. Let it also be remembered that Alcuin, divesting himself of all vanity and conceit, wisely and even humbly set before them what they could learn, and the only thing they could learn at the start. Even his master, Charles, had to toil painfully to bend his fingers, stiffened with long use of the sword, to the clerkly task of writing, and confessed that he acquired the art with great difficulty.

The dialogue *On Rhetoric and the Virtues* has for its two interlocutors Charles and Alcuin, and was composed in response to a request from the king. Alcuin instructs him in the elements of the rhetorical art with special reference to its applications in the conduct and settlement of disputes in civil affairs, and closes with a short description of the four cardinal virtues,—prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. It is, therefore, not strictly a book on rhetoric, but rather on its applications. It is based on rhetorical writings of Cicero, which are rehandled by Alcuin, and always with loss and injury to his originals. The hand of Isidore is likewise visible in places, and contributes to the general deterioration. If the *Grammar* was rudimentary and ill-arranged, the *Rhetoric* suffers yet more from its miscellaneous presentation of ill-digested bits of rhetoric, and from its greater dullness of style. Moreover, it is less jocose in spirit than are parts of the *Grammar*, though Alcuin's specimen of sophistical reasoning, which he produces for the instruction of the king, is indeed comical. "What art thou?" asks Alcuin, and after Charles answers, "I am a man (*homo*)," the dialogue goes on as follows:—

ALCUIN.

See how thou hast shut me in.

CHARLES.

How so?

ALCUIN.

If thou sayest I am not the same as thou, and that I am a man, it follows that thou art not a man.

CHARLES.

It does.

ALCUIN.

But how many syllables has *homo*?

CHARLES.

Two.

ALCUIN.

Then art thou those two syllables?

CHARLES.

Surely not; but why dost thou reason thus?

ALCUIN.

That thou mayest understand sophistical craft and see how thou canst be forced to a conclusion.

CHARLES.

I see and understand from what was granted at the start, both that I am *homo* and that *homo* has two syllables, and that I can be shut up to the conclusion that I am these two syllables. But I wonder at the subtlety with which thou hast led me on, first to conclude that thou wert not a man, and afterward of myself, that I was two syllables.

After the *Rhetoric* comes the *Dialectics*, which is in part extracted or abridged from Isidore, who in his turn had taken from Boethius, and in part copied almost solidly from the supposed work of Augustine on the *Categories* of Aristotle. If possible, it is less original than the *Rhetoric*, but is at least what its title indicates,—an attempt to say something about dialectics. However, as the age of medieval logic had not yet begun in earnest, Alcuin's treatise was perhaps as much as the times would bear, especially in view of the existing indifference or antagonism in the Church to the subtleties of Aristotle. In conjunction with the *Grammar* and *Rhetoric*, it may be taken as constituting such instruction in the *trivium* as was given in the palace school.

Interesting in its way as a specimen of Alcuin's teaching is his dialogue written for Pepin, then a young prince of sixteen years, and entitled *The Disputation of Pepin, the Most Noble and Royal Youth, with Albinus the Scholastic*. It rambles without plan and allegorizes without restraint. Parts of it run as follows:—

PEPIN.

What is writing?

ALBINUS.

The guardian of history.