

MEDIÆVAL UNIVERSITIES.



THE Universities of the Middle Ages, to which the first manifestations of intellectual life in the society of the 12th, 13th, 14th and 15th centuries may be traced back, have at last found their

historian. The Rev. Father Henry Denifle, O.P., in a book entitled "*Die Universitäten des Mittelalters bis 1400*," published in 1885, not only has unfolded the history of the origin and growth of those great institutions, but has also revealed to the learned men of Europe their true nature, and thereby, as H. Rashdall wrote in the *Academy* of London, corrected many errors and wrong ideas to be found in books of the pre-Deniflean era.

Before the year 1400 there were in Europe 55 universities—23 in Italy, 11 in France, 8 in Spain, 5 in Austria, 3 in the Germanic Empire, 2 in England, 1 in Ireland, 1 in Portugal, and 1 in Switzerland. To this number, if we add 12 colleges wrongly called universities, as Father Denifle proves, we are bound to acknowledge that the so called *Dark Ages* were better provided than we are with great institutions of learning.

In order to write the history of these universities, Rev. Father Denifle was not satisfied with the information given by Savigny, Du Boulay, Leclerc, Dollinger, Paulsen, Giesebrecht and others, but he perused the documents themselves, privileges, diplomas, papal bulls, university statutes, *libri cancellarii et procuratorum, libri rectorum*, etc. He travelled for five years through the different countries of Europe, and, especially in Rome, he unearthed invaluable treasures.

The first question he treats in his first volume relates to the *name and nature* of mediæval universities. As he rightly remarks, there is more than a question of mere philosophy implied in the names given to these institutions; their names make known to us their real nature. In a letter of Honorius II, May 11th, 1829, the University of Paris was called *studium*; a few years later, after 1229, the universities were distinguished from lesser institutions of learning by the names of *studium generale*, *studium univērsale*; but these

epithets did not refer to the matters taught, but to the students; that is to say, they did not mean, as many wrongly believed, that all sciences were therein cultivated, but that students, whatever country they might come from, were heartily received within their walls. It is, in fact, well proved that in most *studia*, theology, the queen of sciences, was not taught before the middle of the fourteenth century. Bologna, for instance, had no theological school till 1360, Salamanca till the end of the fourteenth century, while from 1219 to the end of the seventeenth century there was in Paris no chair of civil law.

As to the name *universitas*, it was also and frequently used in the Middle Ages, but with a meaning altogether different from its present one. By *universitas*, like the Roman jurists, the schoolmen meant a *corporation*, which, enjoying a proper administration and organism, was also called *corpus*, *collegium*, *sodalitium*, *curia*, *societas*, *consortium*. In that general sense, they might say: *universitas piscorum, mercatorum, fabrorum, Universitas Perusinarum* meant the corporation of Perugia. When they wished to express by that name scientific institutions, they were wont to say: *Universitas studii* or *universitas magistrorum, universitas scholarium* and *universitas magistrorum et scholarium* according as they meant the corporation of professors, the corporation of students, or both. It is consequently evident that the *universitas* as well as the *studium generale*, expressed not the sciences taught in a given institution, but the persons who, in that institution, were members of a special society.

Nevertheless, the term *universitas* began, as far back as the thirteenth century, to assume the meaning in which it is received in our days: thus *universitas Oxoniensis, Pragensis*, were quite as often used as *studium Oxoniense, Pragense*; but this modern acception of the term *universitas* was rather German than Latin, for the Latin countries, Italy, France and Spain, preserved, even after the year 1400, the old name of *studium*, and called *universitates* special corporations within the universities.