UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD.

The honour of founding this celebrated university is usually assigned to Alfred, who, according to John Rous, the antiquary of Warwick, who flourished in the fif­teenth century, “ built in this city three halls in the name of the Holy Trinity, for the doctors in grammar, philosophy, and divinity.”@@1 This opinion, though long maintained and strenuously supported, appears to be now generally abandoned.@@2 The ablest antiquaries of modern times seem to be agreed that, although the university may be traced to very high antiquity, and far beyond the age of satisfactory records, the illustrious monarch whose name was formerly associated with it as its founder or restorer, had really no share whatever in its establishment.@@3 It is at least certain that no document or well-authenticated history can be produced in which the name of Alfred ap­pears as a benefactor of the university. Soon after the reign of Alfred, at least during the succeeding century, schools for the acquisition of learning appear to have been established in Oxford ; but these were either of a private character, or were attached to the religious houses with which the town abounded. It is certain that Oxford was a place of study in the reign of Edward the Confessor (1041-1066)\;@@4 but even at the time of the conquest it does not appear to have enjoyed any greater pre-eminence than that which naturally arose from the number of its mo­nastic establishments, and from the circumstance of its having been, during the preceding century, a favourite residence of the English monarchs. Its schools might therefore be more numerous and better attended than those in other towns, and might possibly derive from royal favour some trifling privileges. When many of the secular scholars resided in one house, it got the name of a hall or hostel ; and governors or principals were appointed over them, who superintended the discipline and civil affairs of the house. the schools were divided into grammar-schools, sophistry-schools, schools for arts, medicine or physic-schools, law-schools, divinity-schools, &c., names which, but for the literary re­mains of the early ages, would seem to indicate something like a defined system of education. No traces, however, of a regular plan can be discovered before the foundation of the first college in the middle of the thirteenth century.

In the beginning of the twelfth century, Oxford is again mentioned as a place of education. Robert Pulein, a theo­logian from Paris, expounded the holy Scriptures under the patronage of Henry l., and gave new life to the study of theology in England.@@5 He continued his labours under the protection of Henry II. till he was called to Rome, and became chancellor of the apostolic sce. In the reign of Stephen, Vacarius, a Lombard by birth, who had studied the civil law at Bologna, formed a school of Roman law at Oxford; and it is reasonable to suppose, as Mr Hallam ob­serves, that a foreigner would not have chosen that city as the scene of his labours if he had not found a seminary of learning already established there. The introduction of this new science was opposed by the students; of philosophy and theology, who prevailed upon the king to prohibit the lecturer from teaching, and to demand that all the books of law should be delivered up to him. This prohibition however was not carried into effect, since it appears from two decretals of Alexander III. in 1164 and 1170, that Vacarius remained in England in the reign of Henry II. ; and there is evidence that the school subsisted for some time after his death. The difficulty and expense of ob­taining copies of the original works on the Roman law in­duced Vacarius to compile for the use of his pupils an abridgment of the Pandects and Code which, according to Savigny,@@β was written in England about the year 1149. This opinion of Savigny is confirmed by Wood, who assigns 1149 as the date of the introduction of the civil law into Oxford, and refers to the same period, or to a time very little later, the introduction of the scholastic theology and the degree of doctor.@@7 The study of the civil law, though honoured with the special patronage of the clergy, obtained but little fa­vour from the laity of England. The circumstance of its being introduced from Italy, and recommended by eccle­siastical authority, disposed all laymen to look upon it with suspicion, while its rigid enactments accorded ill with the more liberal principles of the common law. The attention even of the clergy was soon diverted from it by the introduc­tion of the canon law, which must have been taught at Ox­ford soon after the publication of Gratian’s *Decretum.* The Benedictines of St Maur mention the existence of an emi­nent school of the canon law at Oxford about the end of the twelfth century, to which many students repaired from Paris.@@8

Even in that rude age, education seems not to have been entirely neglected by the English monarchs. Henry I. is said to have paid great attention to Oxford as a seminary of learning, and to have granted to the teachers and scho­lars, in their individual capacity, some important privileges. In the reigns of bis two immediate successors learning de­clined, but it again revived under the encouragement of Richard I. New halls and schools were established under his patronage, and money was issued from his exchequer for their support. To so flourishing a condition indeed did he raise Oxford, that in the early part of the succeeding reign (a.D. 1201) it is said to have contained 3000 scholars.@@β The first reference to any public instrument where the term university *(universitas)* is applied to Oxford, is the 3d John (1201), an earlier date than any extant application of the word to Paris.@@10 An unfortunate incident which oc­curred in 1209 interrupted this course of prosperity, and even threatened the destruction of the town as a seat of learning. A student, while engaged in some active exer­cise, accidentally killed a woman belonging to the town, and dreading the consequences, fled from justice. The mayor and burgesses immediately surrounded the hall to which the supposed murderer belonged ; and failing to apprehend him, they seized three students entirely unconnected with the affair, and hanged them without proof or trial. The teachers and scholars, justly enraged at this barbarous act, unanimously quitted Oxford, and retired, some to Cam-

@@@, Du Boulay says that Alfred first entertained the intention of founding the university about the year 884, and invited masten from Paris to form and teach it ; “ ex liar nostra universitate Magistros evocavit ad eam componendam simul et regendam.” Hist. Univ. par. i. 211 and 224, where the passage from John Rous is quoted, Henry's History of Great Britain, ii. 353.

@@@*i* Mr Hallam, who, in his View of the Middle Ages (vol. iii. 524), states that, if the opinion of its foundation by Alfred cannot be main­tained as a truth, it “ contains no intrinsic marks of error,” acknowledges in bis last work (Introduction to the Literature of Europe, vol. i. p. 21, note †) that be had there given more credence to it than after further consideration he believed it entitled to. Bologna, as well as Paris was full of English students about 1200. Meiners, ii. 428. Conringius, Dissert, iii. sect. 7.

@@@s Chalmers’s History of the University of Oxford, p. 11. Hallam's Literature of Europe, i. 21.

@@@4 Hallam, Mid. Ages, iii. 524.

@@@5 Malden on the Origin of Universities, p. 72. Ayliffe, i. 30, &c. ; who alleges that Pulein’s influence at Rome obtained for the university bulls and privileges, since lost. Conringius, Dissert., iii. sect. 7.

@@@β Geschichte des Römischen Rechts im Mittelalter, iv. chap. 36. Wenk, Magister Vacarius. Lips. 1820, 8vo. Ayliffe, i. 33.

@@@7 It can scarcely be doubted that these last were introduced from Paris ; and it may be suspected that Wood is a little too enrly in claiming for Oxford the title of doctor, no such distinction being at that time known in the Parisian school. Of course the appellation, when first used, signified merely a teacher, and was not a technical degree. Hallam’s Introduction, &c. i. 21, note.

@@@• Hist. Litt, de la France, t. ix. p. 216, as quoted by Mr Hallam, Mid. Ages, in. 525. Dyer’s History, 1. pp. 143, 218.

@@@9 Wood's Hist, and Antiq. of the University of Oxford, p. 177.

@@@i0 Dyer’s Privileges of the University of Cambridge, i. 412, note.