Abelard and the Universities

Abelard and the Origin and Early History of Universities. By Gabriel Compayré. $1. Charles Scribner's Sons.

THIS BOOK, though written by a Frenchman, was prepared expressly for the Great Educators series, and is first published in English. The subject of it is one of the most important in the whole range of educational history, but at the same time one of the most difficult to treat. The universities are now the main agencies of the higher education—a fact which makes their beginnings of great historic interest and importance; and though the universities of the present day differ widely in organization, in spirit and in aim from those that this book treats of, they are none the less their lineal descendants and logical outcome. Yet the origin of the earliest universities, such as Bologna, Paris and Oxford, is shrouded in much obscurity, and the causes that led to their establishment are difficult to trace. There can be no doubt, however, that the principal cause was the demand for higher instruction which resulted in part from the growth of order and civilization and in part from the revival of interest in the Roman law, but mainly from the influence imparted to European thought by the Arabs. The foundation of the universities was not due to any one man, and we can see no propriety in placing the name of Abelard at the head of this book; for he was never connected with any university, and

certainly did no more to prepare the way for them than did Irnerius, who may justly be styled the founder of the earliest one, that of Bologna. M. Compayré, indeed, seems to regard Abelard's connection with the University of Paris as somewhat shadowy; for he devotes only one chapter to Abelard's life and work, and then proceeds with the rest of the history as if Abelard had never existed.

As for the history itself, it is in the main well done, though it does not add much to the literature we already had on the subject in English. M. Compayré, with the patriotic ardor of a Frenchman, gives too much prominence, we think, to the University of Paris; for the Italian universities were the earliest, and Prof. Laurie goes so far as to say that Bologna had more influence in France than Paris had. However, the University of Paris was not only of great importance in itself as the chief school of theology and philosophy, but had also great influence on the universities of England and Germany, some of which were avowedly organized on the Parisian model; hence it is fitting that its constitution and its courses of study should be carefully described. The other universities, however, are not neglected by M. Compayré; and, as the mode of government, the privileges accorded the professors and students and also the methods of instruction were much alike in all cases, a description of one university is to a great extent a description of all. Our author gives a chapter to each of the four faculties—those of arts, theology, medicine and law—with some account of the courses of study in each department. The conditions of graduation and the relations between professors and students are also set forth, and the book closes with an estimate of the influence of the universities on their own age and on subsequent times. Altogether, M. Compayré's work is well worthy of a place in the series to which it belongs.