XXVIII. *A Historical and Critical Introduction to an Enquiry into the Revival of the Greek Literature in Italy, after the Dark Ages.* By PATRICK FRASER TYTLER, Esq.
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(Read 21st Feb. 1826.)

A HISTORY of the revival of literature in Europe, after its extinction in the middle ages, has been long a desideratum in the annals of human knowledge; and from the wide, and almost untravelled field, which such a history would embrace, and the recondite sources of information which must be consulted, it will perhaps be long before any individual is found with sufficient learning to estimate its difficulties, and yet hardy enough to attempt to overcome them. Lord BACON* has presented us with an eloquent and comprehensive sketch of the subjects which ought to be included in a general history of learning. “The task is none other (says he) than that of extracting, from every possible source of information, a history of the sciences and the arts, and marking the different æras, and the various regions in which they have flourished. In this must be pointed out their earliest origin, their progress to perfection, their travels throughout different climes, and amid various tribes of people; for we know well that the sciences are migratory like nations. The historian must mark them in their declension, in their somnolency, in their revival. In his attention to individual arts, he must

* De Augmen. Scient. B. ii. c. ix.

explain not only their origin, but the causes to which they owe their invention, the manner in which they have been transmitted, the peculiar discipline, and the particular institutions under which they have been improved and perfected. But the task is not concluded. It is moreover the business of such a moral historian, to note the most celebrated sects and controversies which have sprung from the opinions of learned men, the persecutions they have suffered, the glories and the honours they have won. The most celebrated authors, the best books, the most learned academies, schools, endowments, associations of philosophic spirits, in short, every thing which regards the state and history of literature, must be carefully described." Such is a feeble translation from the energetic latinity of the original, presenting us with an outline, which, as has been remarked * by a later author, is the most perfect which a scholar could devise, but which no scholar can hope to complete. Dr JOHNSON, as we learn from his delightful biographer BOSWELL, "would have a history of the revival of learning contain an account of whatever contributed to the restoration of literature, such as controversies, printing, the destruction of the Greek empire, the encouragement of great men, with the lives of the most eminent patrons and professors of all kinds of learning in different countries." To the execution of this plan, which, although sufficiently vast, is but a corner of the mighty design of BACON, the works of TIRABOSCHI, of BRUCKER, of MORHOFF, of BAILLET, and, latterly, of GUINGENE' and SISMONDI, present us with materials, both of a philosophical and of a critical nature, which are in the highest degree valuable. The original volumes of the great restorers themselves, the now

* Preface to "An Introduction to the Literary History of the 14th and 15th Centuries," p. 5.; an anonymous but able and elegant work, published by CADELL and DAVIES, 1798.

neglected folios of FICINUS, of ERASMUS, of POLITIAN, of BUDAËUS, of the SCALIGERS, of CASAUBON, and their fellow-labourers in the same field, compose a mine in the present day almost unworked, yet full of the richest ore. But it is out of this very circumstance, the voluminousness and the value of the materials, that the embarrassments of the undertaking arise ; and the mind which had courageously sketched out the plan of the edifice, may find, when it comes to struggle with the difficulties of execution, how wide is the difference between the reveries of literary ambition, and the realities of literary labour.

When we glance over the various branches of this great subject, there is perhaps no one division which is more interesting and important than the revival of the Greek language, and with it the Greek literature in Italy, during the latter part of the fourteenth century. For more than seven hundred years it had been almost wholly lost ; and in the ages which elapsed between the fall of the Western Empire, in the close of the fifth, and the incursions of the Turks upon Europe in the fourteenth century, not only Italy, but Greece itself had been covered by successive swarms of barbarians. To trace the causes which led to the revival of the language and literature of Greece, after the dark ages, and to give some account of the lives and writings of the eminent scholars to whom we owe their restoration, is the object of the following historical enquiry ; But, before immediately proceeding to this subject, there are two preliminary questions, upon which it will be necessary to give a short introductory disquisition. These are, I. What was the brightest period of the Grecian language and literature in its own soil, and to what extent does it appear to have been cultivated in Italy, after Greece had become a part of the Roman Empire ? II. What were the effects produced by the inundation of the barbarous

nations ; and what was the period of the total extinction of the Greek language and literature in Italy ?

The Grecian language appears to have reached its highest perfection in that long and bright period, of almost six centuries, which extended from the days of HOMER till the death of ALEXANDER the Great. HESIOD, the great lyrists TYRTÆUS, ALCÆUS, SAPPHO, ANACREON, and PINDAR, the dramatic giants ÆSCHYLUS, EURIPIDES, and SOPHOCLES, the historians HERODOTUS and THUCYDIDES, the orators LYSIAS, ISOCRATES and DEMOSTHENES, the fathers of philosophy PLATO and ARISTOTLE, and the historian, soldier, philosopher, and accomplished man of letters XENOPHON,—all these high and gifted spirits, whose names and works have survived the calamities of more than two thousand years, were born, and wrote and died in this brilliant division of time.

This, says HARLES, was the æra of the youth and manhood of the Greek language. “ It was the æra of its poetry, which at first flourished in solitary excellence ; the æra of its eloquence, which was created and encouraged by the constitution of the Athenian Government, by the manners of that remarkable people, their forms of judicial administration, the distribution of public honours, and the liberty of thought and discussion which was permitted in Athens. It was an æra full of talent in almost every branch of human knowledge, and fertile in minds of the most splendid genius,—in poets, orators, philosophers and historians,—and these all, or chiefly, belonging to that wonderful little republic of Athens *.’

The decay of Grecian literature is to be dated from the destruction of Grecian liberty. In the three succeeding centuries which intervened between the death of ALEXANDER and the

* HARLES, *Literaturæ Græcæ Notitia brevior*, p. 25.

reign of AUGUSTUS, although the deterioration of the Grecian language was at first scarcely discernible, yet the seeds of change were but too surely sown. Greece itself was now occupied by the Romans, that new and mighty nation which had already acted so grand a part in the history of the world, and the Attic muses, as if attracted and dazzled by the Roman triumphs, deserted their native valleys, and fixed their seats in the beautiful fields of Italy. THEOCRITUS and MENANDER, the first in the sweetness of his pastorals, and the second in the playful elegance of dramatic poetry, shed, indeed, an auspicious ray over the commencement of this period. POLYBIUS, too, published his admirable Commentaries; and a crowd of philosophers, sophists, and rhetoricians, preserved, in their works of controversy and criticism, some shadowy traces of the perfection of this noble language. But, with metaphysical subtilties, there crept in new forms of expression. A mixture of foreign nations, and a familiarity with less perfect and polished tongues, polluted gradually its ancient purity; and, to use the words of HARLES, those symptoms of decay were visible, which told too surely that the freshness and vigour of manhood were past, and the infirmities of age approaching*.

If such was the state of Grecian literature and philosophy upon the death of AUGUSTUS, under whose reign the Roman muses were destined to enjoy their highest triumph, it will readily be believed that the three succeeding centuries, which filled up the interval from the accession of TIBERIUS to the reign of CONSTANTINE the Great †, brought only increasing decay and corruption to the pure and nervous language of DEMOSTHENES and XENOPHON. Works of talent, and even of genius, were not wanting. The geographical labours of STRABO ‡, PTOLEMY ||,

* HARLES, p. 209.

† From A. D. 14 to 306.

‡ STRABO died A. D. 25.

|| PTOLEMY, A. D. 161.

and PAUSANIAS; the multifarious and amusing compilations of PLUTARCH *; in philosophy, the amiable and original meditations of the Emperor ANTONINUS †, are, of themselves, sufficient to vindicate this age from any imputations as to deficiency in enterprise, or imbecility in thought and reasoning. Nor ought the moral historian to forget, that the same era was illuminated by the brilliant satyric wit of LUCIAN ‡, and instructed by the criticism of LONGINUS §. Some few historians also, yet of inferior note, (ÆLIAN, DIO CASSIUS, and HERODIAN), put forth their feeble efforts; but, with the single exception of the philosophic soldier ARRIAN ¶, nothing was produced in history in any degree worthy of the better days of Greece. If, however, even in the most favourable instances, we turn from the works themselves to the language in which they are written, the change is at once* apparent and mortifying. The “undefiled well of Attic purity,” the clear, strong, various, yet simple language of Greece, in its better days, had become insensibly but deeply polluted. The Roman conquests, the mixture of strangers, the incursions of the barbarians, the controversies between the Christians and the supporters of the ancient philosophy, were the chief causes which contributed to produce this deterioration; and if, at the conclusion of the second period, and in the days of AUGUSTUS, the approach of age was distinctly visible upon the fabric of this once noble language, in the days of CONSTANTINE these symptoms were not only confirmed, but increasing in strength, and hastening to their consummation. “Flos Atticæ elegantiaæ atque eloquentiæ (says HARLES) magis magisque deflorescere cœpit, et sensim periit ¶.”

* PLUTARCH died A. D. 120.

† ANTONINUS, A. D. 161.

‡ LUCIAN, uncertain, probably in 170.

§ LONGINUS, slain A. D. 275.

¶ ARRIAN lived under HADRIAN,
A. D. 147.

¶ HARLES, p. 303.

Such being a slight sketch of the revolutions of Grecian literature, from the age of HOMER till the era of CONSTANTINE, it will not be unimportant to consider for a few moments the second part of our first preliminary question, namely, To what extent does Grecian literature appear to have been cultivated in Italy after Greece itself was incorporated as a part of the Roman empire? And, in the *first* place, It is evident that the Roman people had no opportunities of becoming familiar with the poetry or literature of Greece during its first and most brilliant period. At the death of ALEXANDER the Great, the Romans were a brave but yet an infant people, or rather tribe, engaged in an obstinate struggle with the Samnites, obliged to defend their territories against the invasion of PYRRHUS, and, after the subjugation of both these rivals, embroiled in a most fierce and lengthened war with the Carthaginians. Immediately after the commencement of the third Punic War *, their legions, for the first time, entered Asia, and, with that overwhelming impetuosity which characterizes the progress of their arms at this period, overturned the ancient kingdom of Macedon, reduced the Achæans, and soon became masters of Greece. It is at this period of the third Punic War, that the earliest traces of a literary spirit are to be discerned in the history of the Republic,—that PLAUTUS, ENNIUS and TERENCE began to imitate the masterpieces of Greece. From this period of the dawn of Latin poetry, till the days of AUGUSTUS, the literature and the language of Greece, if not completely familiar to the nation in general, as some writers have erroneously supposed, were certainly well known to the poets, the orators, and the historians of Italy. It may even be asserted, that, down to a much later period in

* An. C. 149.

the history of the Western Empire, the literature of the Roman people, and the education of the Roman youth, evinced not, indeed, an acquaintance with the purest Grecian writers, but at least a knowledge of the language and philosophy of Greece, such as they then existed, polluted indeed, and obscured, but still retaining distinct traces of their original brightness. The proofs of this assertion are certain and multifarious. The few noble fragments which remain to us of ENNIUS, the father of the Latin epic school, his study of the great Grecian models; the well-known popularity of MENANDER; the translations of many parts of XENOPHON, PLATO and DEMOSTHENES, by CICERO; the fact that this great Orator could declaim in Greek*; the assertions of SÆTONTIUS concerning the profound knowledge of this language, which had been attained by CLAUDIUS; its cultivation under some of the succeeding Emperors; and the injunctions of QUINCTILIAN, who recommends that his youthful pupils should be introduced to an acquaintance with this noble language, even prior to the study of their own; all these facts very clearly show, that the study of Greek letters was pursued not only by the Poets and Orators, who there sought for their highest models of imitation, but that it formed at Rome an important branch in the education of its youth.

If such was the universality of the knowledge of the Grecian language and literature in the days of AUGUSTUS and his successors, an acquaintance with these great sources of beauty and wisdom became still more prevalent in the reigns of HADRIAN, ANTONINUS PIUS and MARCUS AURELIUS. In the commencement of the second century, HADRIAN was an enthusiastic and unwearyed patron of the Greeks and their language. The temples of Athens were rebuilt by his munificence, the public games re-

* Palæoromaica, p. 26, 33.

stored, and a noble library, and new gymnasium, provided for the instruction and exercise of youth. Education, says CHANDLER, now flourished in all its branches at Athens. The Roman world resorted to the schools, and reputation and riches awaited the able professor. At this period Athens abounded in philosophers. It swarmed, according to LUCIAN, with cloaks, and staves and satchels; you beheld every where a long beard, a book in the left hand, and the walks full of companies discoursing and reasoning. The enthusiasm of HADRIAN was seconded by the efforts of his successors ANTONINUS and MARCUS AURELIUS, both of them philosophic Emperors, and both deeply smit with the love of Grecian literature. After the death of AURELIUS, for more than a hundred years of crime and bloodshed, the Greek language presents in its fate and fortunes a striking contrast to the more melancholy destinies of its sister the Latin. It was preserved, certainly not in its original purity, yet in a state far removed from decay, in the works of LUCIAN, DIO CASSIUS, HERODIAN and LONGINUS. CONSTANTINE the Great, although himself little of a Grecian scholar, yet by the removal of the seat of empire from Rome to Constantinople, promoted the more general study of this language. It is well known, that to the Emperor JULIAN, even from the days of his earliest youth, the religion and philosophy of Greece were subjects of peculiar predilection, and that this extraordinary man considered the Greek language as his native tongue, and the language of Rome as a foreign and less familiar dialect *. A. D. 363

Such is a slight sketch of the fate and fortune of Greek literature in Italy, down to the momentous period when the northern nations, by partial inroads upon the frontiers, began to threaten the empire, which they finally destroyed.

* *Palæoromaica*, p. 40.

Towards the middle of the third century, some indications of an irruption of the northern nations were discernible ; but these formidable enemies may be said to have contained themselves within their original settlements, until, in the fourth century, an inundation of the Huns drove the northern tribes from the countries where they had hitherto led a warlike and migratory life, and compelled them to seek permission of the Emperor VALENS to settle in Thrace. This was granted, probably it could not have been prudently denied, and the historians of these times affirm, that the whole of Thrace was almost instantly covered by successive waves of this living flood of men. Macedonia and Pannonia soon became entirely occupied by the multitudes of stranger emigrants ; their tents were even pitched upon the classic borders of Thessaly ; and war, as was to be expected from the proximity of such formidable neighbours, was almost instantly commenced with the Roman Empire. At the head of his Goths ALARIC penetrated to the borders of Italy, and the pusillanimity of the Emperor ARCADIUS was content to purchase an ignominious peace, by ceding to him the whole of Greece. His next object was the conquest of Italy, which, after his army had been reinforced by a new inundation of the Suevi, Alani and Vandals, he concluded by the sack of Rome, in the commencement of the fifth century. It is well known that he died when meditating the conquest of Sicily and Africa. Every successive year now more effectually confirmed the dominion of the northern nations over the wide extent of the Western and Eastern Empire.

Rome, as we see, was taken in the beginning of the fifth century. In the same period the Vandals had established their monarchy in Spain. Carthage soon after fell, and the Roman provinces in Africa became subject to the same victorious people. ATTILA, the scourge of the human race, next appeared, to act his terrible part in the extermination of ancient nations ; and, lead-

ing his armies of Huns, overran and desolated the Roman provinces of Dacia, Thrace, Mysia, and Syria. It would be tedious and unnecessary to enumerate all the triumphs of the north, and all the defeats of the once illustrious Romans. Rome herself, the mistress of the world, was successively taken by GENSERIC king of the Vandals, ODOACER chief of the Heruli, and THEODORIC prince of the Ostro-Goths, who, from this period acknowledged by the eastern Emperor ZENO as king of the country which he had subdued, commenced an able and glorious reign. The brave and unfortunate BELISARIUS retrieved, for a while, by his victories, the ebbing honours of the Western Empire, and TOTILA the Goth, who, in the middle of the sixth century, had again ravaged Italy, and twice become master of Rome, was defeated and put to death by the eunuch NARSES. But these temporary triumphs only paved the way for the final and conclusive victories of the Lombards, another swarm from the northern hive, who, towards the conclusion of the sixth century, invited into Italy by NARSES, to revenge his individual injuries, succeeded in reducing to subjection the greatest part of the country. Their empire continued to flourish from the end of the sixth till the middle of the eighth century, when it was finally overturned by CHARLEMAGNE, who, in the city of Pavia, was crowned King of the Lombards, in the year 744.—Let us pause for a few moments, to consider the effects of these barbarian inundations upon the literature of that great country in which they took place.

The conquests of ALARIC, in the fifth century, did not materially affect Italy. It was evacuated by the barbarians, and, although governed by ADOLPHUS, a relation of ALARIC, it was governed by Roman laws, and the institutions and manners of the Roman people remained unchanged till the second conquest of the country by ODOACER, the first barbarian king of the West. Yet although the Roman laws and language remained, the race

of this ancient people was even at this period fast approaching to extinction. Immense multitudes of Romans, who had formerly enjoyed dignity and fortune, were reduced to the state of captives in the barbarian armies, or slaves who cultivated their lands. Multitudes were driven, and multitudes voluntarily retired, into exile, consenting to drag on a dependent existence in the remotest provinces of the empire. Want and famine, which, in the exhausted state of the provinces, were not unfrequent visitants, carried off the victims which had been spared by the ravages of war, many of those who remained, intermarried with the barbarian families, and all these co-operating circumstances began at this time to have a strong effect in producing that physical and moral degradation of this once illustrious people, which, in the course of the succeeding century, and shortly after the settlement of the Lombard princes, concluded in the total disappearance of the Roman race. For although still the names of Roman families remained, nothing but the name was left. All else was "second childishness and mere oblivion."

THEODOSIUS the Great * succeeded to the empire in the latter part of the fourth century; and, during his reign, although the highest qualities of a soldier were successfully and brilliantly exerted, yet the accumulated difficulties which on every side threatened the Western Empire, left little leisure for the princely patronage of literature, or the peaceful acquisitions of knowledge. The death of THEODOSIUS sealed the fate of the Roman Empire, which, after lingering through the feeble reigns of his unremembered successors, closed its mighty history of twelve centuries, in the sack of Rome by ODOACER king of the Heruli †.

The Herulian dominion in Italy, which lasted only for seventeen years, was concluded, and the empire of the Ostrogoths

* A. D. 379.

+ A. D. 476.

established, by the taking of Ravenna at the termination of the fifth century. THEODORIC, although of barbarian extraction, had been educated at the Court of Constantinople, and not only himself, but his secretary CASSIODORUS, and his minister BOETIUS, were familiarly acquainted with the language and literature both of Rome and of Greece, the cultivation of which appears to have been a very general passion amongst the learned statesmen who surrounded his Court. But Grecian literature, as we have already seen, had, at this period, fallen into a state of melancholy weakness, even on its own soil, and the beautiful language of Attica was now no longer what it once had been.

In those dark ages, when beneath the loss of civil liberty, the decay of ancient nations, and the inundation of barbarian hordes, the cause of knowledge and of science was too speedily losing ground; the noble stand which was made for it by the Fathers of the Christian Church ought not to be forgotten. Infinitely superior to their pagan opponents, in the ardour with which they devoted themselves to literary pursuits, and philosophical studies: the sublimity of their doctrines, and the excellence of their moral precepts, acquired additional strength from the classical purity of their style. In the department of Grecian literature, a lustre is thrown over the third century by the single name of ORIGEN, the theologian *, the philosopher, the grammarian, the adamantine pillar of the Church. Among the Latin Fathers, and in the same century, names of no common eminence are to be found. The dialogue of MINUCIUS FELIX †, a Roman lawyer and Christian convert, is remarkable for the elegance of its Latinity, and for the interesting picture which it presents to us of

* ORIGEN was born at Alexandria in the year 186. ; HARLES, p. 644. ; SPANHEIM, p. 248. ; CAVE, *Historia Literaria Eccles.* p. 112. vol. i.

† CAVE, *Hist. Literaria*, p. 101. vol. i.

the manners of the early Christians ; and there are few to whom the history of their religion is a subject of interest, who have not heard of CYPRIAN Bishop of Carthage, of his unwearied labours, his unshaken piety, his eloquence, his misfortunes, and his martyrdom *.

If the cause of letters was so deeply indebted to the Christian Fathers in the third century, the exertions of the same enthusiastic and learned scholars become still more brilliant during the fourth and fifth centuries, when contrasted with the increasing darkness of paganism. GREGORY NAZIANZENE †, whose mind, although engrossed in his labours as a Christian orator, had imbibed in the schools of Athens the love of the ancient philosophy ; and CHRYSOSTOM, whose studious and abstemious youth, nursed for six years in the solitude of the desert ‡, ripened into a manhood of unremitting toil, and almost unrivalled eloquence ; these two great men were sufficient of themselves to oppose a very successful barrier against the inroads of ignorance and barbarism. The compositions of CHRYSOSTOM are celebrated not only by contemporary critics, but by the fastidious philologists of the sixteenth century, as admirable for their Attic purity of style ¶ ; and, in the West, the writings of LACTANTIUS, HILARY of Poitiers, JEROME and AUGUSTINE, were serviceable not only in their zealous, though sometimes ill directed endeavours for the protection of the infant Church from heresy, but in the preservation of the purity of the Latin language.

I may briefly advert to two remaining causes, which at this period had a powerful effect in preserving from total extermination the relics of the learning of Greece and Rome ; and one of

* CYPRIAN was slain in the year 258. CAVE, Hist. Literar. p. 126. vol. i.

† CAVE, Hist. Literar. p. 246. GREGORY flourished in the year 370.

‡ CAVE, Hist. Literar. p. 300.

¶ CHRYSOSTOM was born in 354.

which was destined to be eminently effectual in the restoration of letters. The first of these is to be found in the writings of the civilians ; the second in the rise of monastic establishments in the fourth century. SALVUS JULIANUS, by order of the Emperor ADRIAN (says that learned author formerly quoted) framed the perpetual edict, or a standing code to extract the essence of preceding institutes, and exhibit an authentic body of salutary laws. His successors distinguished themselves by industry and learning. Proficients in philology, from the necessity of a close application to the most ancient writers, they employed their knowledge to correct and refine their language. Well versed in the fashionable philosophy of Greece, they did not amuse themselves with the investigation of metaphysical subtleties, or the involution of moral precepts, but devoted their acquirements to define the rights, and protect the property, of their fellow-citizens. It need not be insisted how much such a body of writers have done for the cause of learning, in counteracting the earlier affectation, and the later barbarisms of cotemporary authors. Even when the day of destruction came, they still furnished the most essential services. It was the diffusion of their writings over the provinces, and the use of the Roman jurisprudence in legal “ decisions, that served to preserve the memory, and almost to embalm the purity of the Latin tongue*.”

In this passage the important effects ascribed to the pleadings and the writings of the Roman lawyers, throughout the period of four hundred years, which elapsed from the reign of ADRIAN till that of JUSTINIAN, in the beginning of the sixth century, are not overrated ; and the three Emperors, to whose encouragement we mainly owe this preservation of the Latin language, are ADRIAN, THEODOSIUS and JUSTINIAN.

* Introduction to the Literary History of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries, p. 23, 24.

The obligations which the cause of letters owes to monastic establishments, were different in their nature, but equal in their importance. During the persecutions of the Christians in the fourth century, which at this period were carried forward with unremitting barbarity, a convert to the new religion, to escape the terrors of death or torture, concealed himself in the desert of Egypt. His life of abstinence and solitary piety caused many devout persons to repair to the desert; and, during the continuance of the persecution, the love of life, combined, with the ardour of devotion, to increase the numbers who flocked to the cave of this holy man; and, either in emulation of his austerity, or perhaps under the idea of imitating the Divine Author of their religion, betook themselves to prayer and seclusion in the caves and mountains*.

The passion for the monastic life increased in an almost incalculable degree during the succeeding centuries. The different orders established by these recluses, soon spread their ramifications not only throughout the East, but over the greatest part of Europe, and, fortunately for the interests of human knowledge, an eager love of learning, such as it then existed, induced the monks to found libraries, to establish schools, to transcribe ancient manuscripts, and to preserve at least, if they could not appretiate, the invaluable volumes of antiquity.

But, upon the conquest of Italy by the Lombards, a darker and more melancholy spectacle succeeds. Their dominion in Italy continued for two centuries, and, under their iron yoke, the literature both of Greece and of Rome became entirely extinguished. Hitherto the barbarian tribes had respected the conquered people. The Gothic race under THEODORIC had become amalgamated with the Roman. The luxury and enervating influence of Italian wealth, of the manners and the climate of this

* SPANHEIM, *Epitom. ad Hist. Nov. Testam.* p. 273.

voluptuous country, had tamed the pride, and softened the barbarity, of the northern invaders. But the Lombards were in every respect a different people. They broke into Italy from their native settlements in Pannonia, while all the vigour and savage freedom of barbarism was yet fresh and unworn upon them, and in their conquest of that kingdom, they treated the degenerate Romans with cruelty and contempt.

“ This ferocious nation,” says St GREGORY, “ is come upon us
“ like a tempest, and, thundering on our defenceless heads, has
“ ravaged our cities, levelled our fortresses, destroyed our mona-
“ steries, and almost exterminated the inhabitants. Our fertile
“ fields have no longer cultivators or proprietors, and places once
“ populous are occupied and defiled by beasts of prey *.”

Greece was now the only country where the light of science and of literature still remained unextinguished, and where the knowledge of the works of antiquity was still cultivated with enthusiasm ; but Italy could not profit by this circumstance ; for, to fill up the cup of her misery, an almost perpetual war subsisted between the Lombards and the Greeks, and all hopes of a second dawn from this wonderful country, in whose literary history there seems to have been no middle age of darkness, were thus completely extinguished.

The works of the philosophic BOETIUS, composed about the beginning of the sixth century, independent of their own intrinsic beauty, acquire thus a reflected interest from the gloomy period in which they were written, and, in their perusal, we truly seem to listen to the latest sighs of the expiring literature of Greece and Rome.

* St GREGORY in his Exposition of the Prophet EZEKIEL. See BARONIUS *apud* HOWELS, vol. 3. The Translation is by the author of the Dissertation.

This moral eclipse of all that was excellent in human knowledge, continued for nearly six centuries, during which period the country of VIRGIL successively presents to the eye of the historian a confused assemblage of different races of men, Franks, Normans and Saracens; and when at length, after a long period of war and bloodshed, the light of civilization breaks in upon the scene, we find that out of this living chaos, there had arisen the infant nations, and the unformed language of modern Italy.

The irruption of the Lombards into Italy, is the gloomy period from which we may date the total extinction of the Greek language and literature in the West*; nor do we find any distinct traces of a spirit of revival until the middle of the fourteenth century, the age of PETRARCH and BOCACCIO.

* BALDELLI Vita di BOCACCIO, p. 223.