

Unde habeas, querit nemo, sed oportet habere.*
None car'd what way he gain'd, so gain were his.

"The more they discoursed about right, the greater their enormities. Those who were called justiciaries, were the head of all injustice. The sheriffs and magistrates, whose immediate duty was justice and judgment, were more atrocious than the very thieves and robbers; and were more cruel than even the cruellest of other men! The king himself, when he had leased his domains as dear as was possible, transferred them immediately to another that offered him more; and then again to another, neglecting always his former agreement; and still labouring for bargains that were greater and more profitable."†

I have observed that in the midst of this long and gloomy night a few bright and splendid stars shot occasionally a solitary gleam athwart the horizon; and, in one or two corners of it, a radiance at times poured forth like the dawn of the morning. Several of the Arabian caliphs, as soon as the first paroxysm of their violence was exhausted, returned to that general love of literature which had immemorially been characteristic of their country. And hence, when Europe was plunged into its thickest midnight, the eastern and western caliphats, or courts of Bagdad and Cordova (by far the most illustrious in Saracenic history), evinced a lustre and a liberality that were nowhere else to be met with, and opened asylums to the learned of every country.‡ "It was then," says Abulfeda, who was himself one of the brightest gems that adorned the former court, "it was then that men of learning were esteemed luminaries that dispel darkness, lords of human kind, destitute of whom the world becomes brutalized."§ And from the account of the Arabic manuscripts of the Escorial, drawn up by the learned Casiri, it appears, that the public libraries in Spain, when under the Arabian princes, were not fewer than seventy; a wonderful patronage of literature, when copies of books were peculiarly scarce and enormously expensive.

The tie, however, between science and Islamism was unnatural, and could not continue long. The religion of Mahomet is, of itself, a choak-damp to every generous purpose of the soul; no moral harvest can flourish under it; and the few instances that it can boast of to the contrary are only exceptions to the general rule: scarce and scattered oases, or plots of verdure, that unexpectedly peep forth in the vast ocean of its sandy desert. All Mohammedan patronage of learning, therefore, has long since died away; and Arabia, which once shed so splendid a light on the rest of the world, is now sunk in darkness, while all the rest of the world is beaming with light around it. "Those vast regions," observes M. Sismondi, with a just feeling of regret, "where Islamism rules, or has ruled, are dead to all the sciences. Those rich fields of Fez and Morocco, made illustrious through five centuries by so many academies, so many universities, so many libraries, are now nothing more than deserts of burning sands, where tyrants dispute with tigers. All the laughing and fruitful coast of Mauritania, where commerce, arts, and agriculture were raised to the highest prosperity, are at present mere retreats for pirates, who spread terror, and resign their toils for abominable indulgences, as soon as the plague returns every year to make victims of them, and to avenge offended humanity. Bagdad, formerly the seat of luxury, of power, of knowledge, is in ruins. The far-famed universities of Cufa and Bassora are closed for ever. That immense literary wealth of the Arabians, which we have only had a glimpse of, exists no more in any region where Arabians or Mussulmans govern. We are no longer to seek there for the fame of their great men, or for their writings. Whatever has been preserved is entirely in the hands of their enemies, in the convents of monks, or the libraries of European princes. Yet these extensive countries have never been conquered: it is no stranger that has plundered them of their

* Juv. xiv. 207.

† Harris, ii. 515.

‡ Leo Afric. De Vir. Illustr. apud Arab. Bibl.

§ Abulphar. Dynast. p. 160.

riches; that has annihilated their population; that has destroyed their laws, their manners, and their national spirit. The poison has sprung from themselves; it has risen indigenously, and has destroyed every thing."*

Of the little genuine learning that appeared in Christendom, to temper the gross ignorance of the times, it is to the praise of the Church that by far the greater part of it, both in the eastern and western empire, was the rare boast of ecclesiastics. And it is especially to the praise of our own country, and peculiarly to that of our very ancient universities, both which can lay claim to an origin coeval with the middle period of the Anglo-Saxon octarchy, that more than half the most celebrated scholars of the times were of British birth and education. Such were Aldhelm, Bede, and Alcuin, the three great Anglo-Saxon luminaries of the eighth century, and the last of whom was the tutor and confidential friend of Charlemagne. Such was Ingulph of the eleventh century, made abbot of Croyland by William the Conqueror, and to whose history we are indebted for much that has descended to us of the era we are now surveying. Such, too, were John of Salisbury, Girald the Cambrian, and the monks Adelard and Robert of Reading; the two last of whom had travelled into Egypt and Arabia, and had studied mathematics at Cordova; and the former of whom translated Euclid out of Arabic into Latin; a clear proof, however, that Greek, the language in which Euclid himself wrote, was but little known at this time among men of letters in England. Such also was Roger Bacon, of the thirteenth century, whose knowledge of physics had so far outstripped that of all his contemporaries that, like Petrarch some ages afterward, his wonderful attainments were ascribed to magic, and his holding an intercourse with the Devil. And such, to close the list, was Wyckliff, in the fourteenth century, the bright and splendid phosphor of the glorious Reformation.

These, and as many more, had I time to enumerate them, were furnished from the Church. Nor has the laity any reason to be ashamed of its contributions: Sir John Fortescue brilliantly adorned the fifteenth century, Sir John Mandeville the fourteenth; which was also enlightened by the combined and powerful talents of Gower and Chaucer, of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio. Henry I. and Henry II. are nearly equally celebrated in the twelfth century, for their patronage of learning and learned men, and especially for their promoting the purest taste in Gothic architecture; during whose reigns, the most sumptuous and admired of our national buildings of this kind were erected. The eleventh century is peculiarly signalized by the splendid talents and learning of Egitha, queen of Edward the Confessor, who, in the language of Ingulph, was equally admired for her beauty, her literary accomplishments, and her virtue. Let us ascend a century higher, and close the whole with the sacred name of Alfred; a name, no Englishman ought to pronounce without homage: equally tried and equally triumphant in adversity and prosperity; as a legislator and philosopher; as a soldier and politician; a king and a Christian; the pride of princes; the flower of history; and the delight of mankind.

We have thus rapidly travelled over a wide and dreary desert, that, like the sandy wastes of Africa, to which we have just referred, has seldom been found refreshed by spots of verdure, or embellished by plants that should naturally belong to the country:—and what is the upshot of the whole?—the moral that the survey inculcates?—Distinctly this;—a moral of the utmost moment, and imprinted on every step we have trodden;—that ignorance is ever associated with wretchedness and vice, and knowledge with happiness and virtue. These connexions are indissoluble; they are inwoven in the very texture of things, and constitute the only substantial difference between man and man. For, if we except these distinctions, "all men," observes one of the most enlightened writers of this dark period, to whom I have already adverted, John of Salisbury, who was contemporary with Stephen and Henry II., and whose classical Latin I shall put into literal English, "all

* De la Littérature du Midi de l'Europe, tom. i. Paris, 4 tom. 1813.

men throughout the world proceed from a like beginning; consist of, and are nourished by like elements, draw from the same principle the same vital breath, enjoy the same care of heaven, pass through life alike, and alike die."*

To which I shall only add, that, as Christianity is the most perfect kind of knowledge, it must essentially produce the most perfect kind of happiness. It is the golden everlasting chain let down from heaven to earth; the ladder that appeared to the patriarch in his dream; when he beheld Jehovah at its top, and the angels of God ascending and descending with messages of grace to mankind. *o! - shit*

LECTURE XIII.

ON THE REVIVAL OF LITERATURE.

In the last lecture, we continued our progress through that general history of science and literature, which we had commenced in the lecture that preceded it; and having, in the first of these studies, brought down the subject from the most celebrated times of Athens and Rome to the decline of the Roman empire, we waded, in the second, through the barren and cheerless period of the dark or middle ages, extending from the fall of Rome before the barbarous arms of the Goths, in the fifth century, to the fall of Constantinople before the no less barbarous arms of the Turks, in the fifteenth century;—exploring our way as well as we were able, by the occasional guidance of a few transitory and uncertain beacons, amid the desolate realms of mental darkness and chaos by which we were surrounded, till we reached the auspicious hour in which the voice of the Almighty once more exclaimed throughout the dead and dreary waste, "LET THERE BE LIGHT!—AND THERE WAS LIGHT!" *and Humboldt*

The period of the revival of letters in Christendom is, in many respects, one of the most brilliant eras in human history. Without the intervention of a miracle we behold a flood of noonday bursting all at once over every quarter of the horizon, and dissipating the darkness of a thousand years; we behold mankind in almost every quarter of Europe, from the Carpathian mountains to the Pillars of Hercules, from the Tiber to the Vistula, waking as from a profound sleep to a life of activity and bold adventure; ignorance falling prostrate before advancing knowledge; brutality and barbarism giving way to science and polite letters; vice and anarchy to order and moral conduct; and idolatry, hypocrisy, and superstition to the pure simplicity of Christian truth. Hence, in some places, we trace the fall of feudal slavery and vassalage—in others of popish tyranny and imposition—and in every place a juster sense of relative duties and of the real dignity of man. Hence the origin of those important inventions, paper and clock-making, printing, telescopes, and gunpowder; and hence, too, the first insight into the modern doctrine of the circulation of the blood; and the wonderful discoveries of the mariner's compass, the sphericity of the earth's surface, and the revolution of the planets around the sun. Hence, Portugal, with a bold and adventurous canvass, doubled the Cape of Good Hope, and realized a maritime passage to India; Spain explored and established herself in a new world; and England, in the person of the intrepid Drake, for the first time circumnavigated the globe; while Galileo, by the marvellous invention and application of his telescope, unfolded to us not another world alone, but systems of worlds upon worlds in endless succession throughout the heavens; all which astonishing series of splendid facts and transactions, together with various others of nearly equal importance, crowd upon each other within the short period to which we are now confining our

* De Nugis Curialium; Harris, ii. 525.

attention, extending from the beginning of the fourteenth to about the middle of the sixteenth century. The heart of man seemed to beat with a new and more vigorous pulsation, and all the energies of the soul to be roused to the proudest darings of adventure.

In contemplating the causes of that wonderful change in the character and pursuits of civilized Europe, which this extraordinary combination of circumstances indicates, the following may, perhaps, be regarded as among the principal.

First, the natural spring or elasticity of the human mind, by means of which, though it may for a time be borne down by a weight of ignorance or oppression, it at length rouses from its torpitude, resumes its innate energy, and shakes off the vampire burden with a recoil proportioned to the pressure that subdued or stifled it.

Secondly, the sudden flight and dispersion of the best and almost the only literary characters of the age from the walls of Constantinople, upon the capture of this elegant and renowned city by the Turks, under the victorious banners of Mahomet II.

Thirdly, the taste for literature which, at this very period, was reviving in many of the Italian states, and more particularly at Florence under the illustrious family of the Medici; and especially the election of the celebrated Giovanni de' Medici to the pontificate, under the name of Leo X.

Fourthly, the facility afforded by the art of printing, discovered at the very period of the fall of Constantinople, to the diffusion of useful and polite learning in every direction.

And, fifthly, and, perhaps, chiefly, the general attention and spirit of inquiry which were excited throughout every country in Christendom, by the grand and eventful drama of the Reformation at this time exhibiting in Germany.

Let us attend to each of these causes in the order in which I have stated them.

I. Vice and ignorance are the necessary companions of each other: such is the immutable law of nature; and we can no more reverse it, than we can reverse the stars in their courses; and nothing can exceed the extreme to which both were carried during the period of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; and to which the whole texture of the feudal system, and the abominations of the Vatican tyranny, equally contributed.

When the barbarous and intermixed tribes of Goths, Huns, and Vandals poured down in successive streams from the north, and overran the different provinces of the Roman empire, the conquered lands distributed by lot, and thence called *allotted* or *allodial*, were held in entire sovereignty by the different chieftains, without any other obligation existing between them than that of uniting on great occasions to defend the community. Additional tribes still succeeded:—wider tracts of country were subdued, and many individuals occupied land to a very considerable extent; while the king or captain-general, who led on his respective tribe to conquest, naturally acquired by far the largest portion of territory as his own share. These lands he found it convenient, in order to maintain his influence, to divide among his principal followers, merely subjecting them, for the grant, to certain aids and military services.

His example was imitated by his courtiers, who distributed, under similar conditions, portions of their estates to their dependants. Thus a feudal kingdom became a military establishment, and had the appearance of a victorious army, subordinate to command, and encamped under its officers in different parts of the country; every captain or baron considering himself independent of his sovereign, except during a period of national war. Possessed of wide tracts of country, and residing at a distance from the capital, they erected strong and gloomy fortresses in places of difficult access; and not only oppressed the people, and slighted whatever happened to be the civil magistracy of the state, but were often in a condition to set the authority of the crown itself at defiance.

As the tenure by which the lands were held was military; as there was no art or science to occupy the mind; as reading was seldom cultivated,