

ON THE REVIVAL OF LITERATURE

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On the Revival of Literature by Anonymous

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"Nec verò clarorum virorum post mortem honores permanerent, si nihil eorum ipsorum *Animi* efficerent quò diutius memoriam sui teneremus." Cicero.

"L'histoire des Empires est celle de la misère des hommes. L'histoire des Sciences est celle de leur grandeur et de leur bonheur. Si mille considérations doivent rendre ce genre d'étude précieux aux yeux du philosophe, cette réflexion doit le rendre bien cher à tout amateur de l'humanité." Gibbon.

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LONGMAN, ORME, BROWN, GREEN, AND LONGMANS.

GODALMING : RICHARD STEDMAN.

1838.

782.

The following Essay was written for a Literary Society established some years back in London. It was read, and by general consent obtained the prize in that year.

April, 1838.

ON THE
REVIVAL OF LITERATURE.

CHAPTER I.

ABOUT seven hundred and fifty years before the Christian Era, a robber and a savage, by erecting a few rude huts, laid the foundation of Rome. Three hundred years after the birth of Christ, we find her the mistress of the world, her armies myriads, and her provinces empires. Italy, Spain, Africa, Gaul, Germany, and Great Britain, Macedonia, Thrace, and Asia Minor, had submitted to her power, and were governed by her laws. Never before within the knowledge of man, has there existed so great an empire—never since! In the space of one thousand years she had risen to this magnificence; the valor and poverty of the

founders had contributed to her early acquisitions; the patriotism, genius, and virtues of the citizens of the commonwealth continued, without interruption to add to the number and splendor of her conquests; and when luxury and faction had overthrown the republic, she still continued, even under the power of the emperors, to preserve the valor of her armies, and to spread the terror of her name; nor till she had subdued the limits of the known world, did she cease to fight and to conquer. For the loss of their savage liberty, the nations, now become provinces, received the arts, sciences, language, and manners of Rome, and Europe began again to flourish under the banners of the empire, and to recover from the numerous calamities which she had undergone; population increased, agriculture was encouraged, cities were founded, and civilization carried so far, that we find the distant provinces enjoying, or aping the luxuries and customs, and piquing themselves on correctly speaking the language of the capital.*

But this wonderful and overgrown empire was visibly decaying, and the forests of Northern Europe contained swarms of barbarians, who no

* Tacitus. *J. Agricolaë vitâ*. Juvenal. *Sat. XIV. v. 110.*

sooner perceived than they took advantage of this decline. At once fearing and hating the Roman name, they rushed out in myriads from their recesses, to fight and overcome the numerous, but feeble armies, which the emperors successively sent against them ; and in a period of two hundred years from their first appearance, they had completely demolished the superb structure it had taken so many centuries to erect. This fact may perhaps astonish, but history, or rather reflection on history, gives us a solution of the difficulty. We know by what means the poor village of Latium advanced with such rapid strides to a proud, rich, and mighty republic ; but in order to preserve the empire, it was absolutely necessary to have carefully preserved the means by which it was acquired, and this, at the period of the irruption was far from being the case. The state had lost its energy, its armies their valor, and its citizens their patriotic pride and virtue. The removal of the imperial court to Byzantium, had greatly weakened the government, the distant provinces groaned under the extortion of rapacious governors, and the emperors, who had embraced christianity, had alienated the affections of their subjects, by their severe and illjudged edicts against paganism, and the harassing persecution of its followers. Luxury, and the

most enormous wealth† had corrupted and debased the Romans of the capital; and long success in war, and undisputed empire, had rendered them arrogant and careless to a degree, which made them look down on the first attempts of their future conquerors, with the most absolute contempt. Upon this rotten constitution, the Goths & Vandals made their furious and frequent attacks; a people, celebrated for their military valor, strength of body, and the virtuous simplicity of their lives. That valor, of no avail, so long as the ancient discipline and art existed, now took full and tremendous effect. They fought, and the empire gave way; they redoubled their attack; and the empire fell. The affrighted Greeks fled in all directions; and the few who escaped the vigilance, or vengeance of the enemy, retired within the comparatively small districts of Macedonia and Thrace; from whence, we see them seldom advance, till the siege of Constantinople, and the extinction of the Roman empire. Meanwhile, the Goths pursued the war with the most unrelenting fury, laying waste the most fertile provinces, and committing the most unheard of cruel-

† It is said, when Alaric arrived at the Gates of Rome, many families possessed incomes amounting to £4,000,000. sterling.

ties. Literature, arts, and science, were all swept away, or buried amidst the universal desolation. The very name, and language of Rome were destroyed; and in this manner, did these fierce people take possession of Italy, Spain, Gaul, and Germany. When the Romans conquered the various provinces, they did not seek to destroy the natives, but endeavoured as much as possible, to encourage civilization by mixing with them, giving them laws, and literature, and admitting all to the rights and privileges of citizens. The barbarians, having neither the same views, or means, poured out in hordes, one after another, exterminating the millions they vanquished; and as one tribe moved on to future conquest, another took its place, and peopled the territories they passed over with their own race. Annihilation, and the gratification of their favorite passions, gain and vengeance, seemed all they sought. Thus, Europe became a barbarous country, nor can any one effectually describe the melancholy state of the western world under the yoke of these barbarians. War, fire, and sword, desolation, and utter darkness, are the characteristics of an age, whose gloom history does not attempt to penetrate, and which affords no one interesting subject to the student, or artist; and it may again be repeated, that if a man were called