

INTRODUCTION.

THE glory of the ancient Greeks, their proficiency in the arts of war and peace, and the profound misery and degradation of their modern descendants, are historical facts so well known and established, that any attempts to prove or dilate upon them, might justly be considered a waste of words: nevertheless, in order properly to introduce our subject, we may be allowed to take a short retrospect of the different phases which that celebrated and unfortunate people has presented, from the beginning of history to our own time, a space of two thousand five hundred years.

Placed, as it is, at the south-eastern extremity of Europe, it was through Greece that the first rays of light and civilisation penetrated the darkness of our continent, and there it was that the seeds of knowledge, imparted from Asia and Africa, found an intellectual soil, so admirably fitted to receive them, that the Greeks, but just emerged from a savage life, vastly surpassed their Phœnician and Egyptian instructors, and stationed themselves at the head of the human race. At the very commencement of their career, when tradition is taken up by regular history, we see that this restless and enterprising people (after pro-

ducing a Homer and a Hesiod) had, although poor and divided at home, covered with flourishing colonies the shores of Asia Minor, Sicily, Italy, Thrace, and Northern Africa, thus extending the domain of their name and language, and had even planted some advanced posts of civilisation on the remote and barbarous coasts of Gaul, Spain, and Scythia. Next comes the most splendid page of their annals, when the military skill, and enthusiastic love of liberty, evinced by a part of their nation, overthrew in a series of brilliant exploits the brute force of despotism, and the gigantic might of Persia; when their patriotic warriors acquired in the immortal battles of Marathon, Thermopylæ, Salamis, and Plataea, laurels which the voice of fame has kept, and will ever keep fresh and verdant; when the most complete victory crowned the justest cause.

Well had it been for Greece, if the unquiet spirit of her sons, their romantic fondness for adventure, and overweening ambition, could have fully vented themselves in contests with the surrounding mass of barbarism; for some consolation may be derived amidst the miseries of war, when each triumph of a polished people adds to the sphere of light and letters. But unfortunately the Greeks, however much inclined to roam abroad in quest of wealth and martial renown, to subdue and pillage their ruder neighbours, had a still stronger disposition to oppress their own countrymen—to engage in civil broils—and to assert the pre-eminence of their petty republics and jarring factions. Hence sprung a deplorable succession of political crimes, domestic turmoil, discord, and hostility; the leading

states, such as Athens, Sparta, Thebes, Argos, and Syracuse, exerting all their energies in a fruitless struggle for permanent superiority, and drawing the lesser communities into the vortex; while in every city, either individual tyrants, or oligarchical and democratical factions, not less tyrannical, were aiming to subvert the existing constitution, and to destroy the lives and fortunes of their fellow-citizens; so that the face of the country was overspread with devastation, and the number of exiles almost equalled those residing at home. For a century and a half, however, the soil of Hellas was untrodden by the foot of a foreign invader; but the colonies, besides being afflicted by the same intestine disorders, had to make head against the Persians, Carthaginians, and the barbarians of Italy and Thrace. In spite of their unrivalled qualities as soldiers, the successful campaigns of Agesilaus in Asia, and some memorable victories of the Sicilian Greeks, the bounds of Hellenic domination rather receded, until the first Philip, skilfully availing himself of the balance of parties, and the weakness to which continual revolutions had reduced the principal republics, gave to the rising kingdom of Macedonia a clear ascendancy over the whole confederation. So confused and calamitous a period seems ill fitted for the cultivation of learning and the fine arts; but this is not the only instance where the energy of men naturally ingenious and aspiring, being called into action by all that was passing around them, hath, under the influence of liberty, shot forth branches in many different directions; and it was precisely betwixt the epoch of the Persian invasions and the reign of Alexander, that the most cele-

brated poets, historians, orators, and philosophers of Greece flourished, and that painting, sculpture, and architecture, attained a pitch that has never been surpassed.

The conquests of Alexander, wonderful alike for their extent and the rapidity with which they were effected, the partition of his empire, and the long wars of his successors, gave fresh scope to the ambition and active talents of the nation; an unceasing stream of adventurers poured into the East, where wealth and honours, such as before they had hardly conceived in imagination, were offered as a ready prize to their valour and ability. For another century, Macedonians and Greeks ruled over all Western Asia, Syria, and Egypt, and, establishing colonies in every province, rooted there their own language, manners, and institutions. But that same buoyant and restless character, which had led them by so many paths to the temple of glory, displayed itself in yet more striking colours on a larger theatre, and, banishing peace and repose, involved the conquered countries in perpetual convulsions. Corrupt as the victors were before, their native vices were aggravated by Oriental softness, and by mingling with subjects still more corrupt than themselves; and it would be difficult to find any portion of history so deformed by the blackest villainy, as that of Alexander's successors. The treasures that were at the disposal of those princes, enabled them to form parties, and interfere in the domestic affairs of the republics; while the flower of the European Greeks, whose courage and prowess were in the highest repute, left their homes to serve in the armies of Syria and

Egypt; and those circumstances caused the parent country to decline more and more, enfeebled first by domestic wars, and then by the shock of the Macedonians.

Even Macedon, when left to itself, was a kingdom possessing but moderate resources. Its sovereigns, aware, therefore, that force alone could not maintain their influence, took advantage of that factious spirit and proneness to division which some ancient authors * considered as a natural and incurable malady belonging to the Grecian temperament, and embraced the policy of supporting the petty tyrants, who, under their protection, set themselves up in almost every state. Some generous attempts were indeed made to retrieve their independence, and check the torrent of abuses. The union of Peloponnesian cities, called the League of Achaia, held out a hope of improvement, blasted by the jealousy and rapacity of the Spartans and Etolians. In this uneasy and troubled condition the Hellenic nation † was found by the Romans, who,

* Pausanias and Herodian.

† Polybius clearly sets forth the distress and poverty to which Peloponnesus was reduced during the Macedonian ascendancy, by civil war, anarchy, and the depredations of robbers and pirates, especially the Illyrians and Etolians. He states, that the whole property of the peninsula, of every description, excepting only the bodies of its inhabitants, if sold into slavery, did not at the time he wrote (when things were better than they had been) amount to the sum of 6000 talents; that is to say, did not equal the value of Attica at the beginning of the Peloponnesian war; and yet, what comparison could ever be instituted between the extent and fertility of Attica and Peloponnesus?

The prosperity of Greece appears to have augmented at first after its conquest by the Romans; we deduce, however, sufficient proof from Strabo and Pausanias that it soon declined again. Nero's enthusiasm

far behind the Greeks in taste and genius, vastly excelled them in cool judgment and steady policy. The maxims of the former tended to knit together and consolidate their acquisitions, while the levity of the latter led to eternal division and subdivision. Had it been possible for Greece and Macedonia, following the advice of Agelaus of Naupactus, to combine a resistance to Italian encroachment, the issue of the contest might have been doubtful; but the Romans had no such hard trial, for the republics that were then most considerable, Rhodes, Etolia, and Achaia, joined their standard, and lent very efficacious aid, first in overthrowing the monarchies, and then in subjugating each other. Before the era of Augustus, the Roman world had swallowed up Hellas, its colonies, and the last fragments of Alexander's empire, previously impaired and shaken by the barbarians of Parthia, Pontus, and Armenia, who, through the quarrels and imbecility of the later Macedonian princes, had been able to form new and powerful dynasties. For several hundred years after the period to which we have just alluded, Greece is lost to political history; but she continued to reign pre-eminent over the departments of art and science, and from the schools of Athens and Alexandria, to extend the peaceful conquests of her language and literature both in the East and West, as well amongst her masters, as the ruder nations her companions in servitude. Meanwhile the wheel of fortune was accomplishing its revolution, and Rome herself,

went so far, that he allowed its states to govern themselves; but their old dissensions broke out anew, and Vespasian was forced to revoke the boon of liberty.

yielding to a foreign enemy, shared that lot which she had inflicted on the inhabitants of half the earth. Upon the fall of the Western empire, the Eastern might be looked upon as wholly a Grecian monarchy ; all vestige of the Latin tongue and manners gradually disappeared from the court of Constantinople ; and in the list of its Themes, we can hardly find one where Greek had not entirely, or to a great degree, supplanted the original dialects of the people.

Six centuries of despotism had now, however, fully done their work ; instead of the aspiring though ill-regulated vigour of ancient Greece, history displays to us only Greekicized Asia, torpid, effeminate, and weighed down by tyranny and monastic superstition : genius, neither cherished by liberty, nor fostered by patronage, could no longer bear up against public calamity ; and learning, if not altogether lost, became at least silent and unprofitable. As invariably happens, arts and arms kept pace with it in decline, and a love of intrigue, and of vain and noisy disputation, was all the Byzantines retained of the Hellenic character. The inert mass of the empire stood, nevertheless, for a thousand years, hated and contemning, hated and despised by the rest of the human race : one service, indeed, it rendered to the world, in preserving some seeds of classic lore, which, being scattered over Europe, when Constantinople sunk before the Turks, ultimately produced a glorious harvest.

From the chronicles of those dark and gloomy ages, we can extract but little information regarding the country to which our attention is more immediately directed. We only know that proper Greece was re-

peatedly and cruelly wasted by Goths, Saracens, and Bulgarians, that her cities were mostly ruined, great part of the population exterminated, and that to fill up the void, the emperors planted there, at various periods, colonies of Mardaites and Slavonians. In 1202, the French and Venetian crusaders took Constantinople, and dismembered the western provinces of the empire. Peloponnesus was conquered by a brother of the Count of Champagne; other adventurers again, of Frankish race, seized several districts of the mainland, while Venice occupied the Archipelago; and a Greek prince set up an independent sovereignty in Epirus. Before, however, a century had elapsed, the Latins were chased from Byzantium, and the second Greek empire recovered Thrace, Etolia, some of the islands, and Peloponnesus, which last remained attached to it until its final catastrophe. Pressed by the Ottoman Sultans on their eastern border, the later Byzantine monarchs could never perfectly regain their ascendancy in the wide region betwixt the Adriatic and Egean seas, and this served as a bone of contention, and a field of battle for Greeks, Franks, Slavonians, and Albanians. These last sprung from the Illyrians, rose into notice during that epoch of confusion, and pushed their predatory bands over the adjacent countries. Received into the Morea, at first as auxiliaries, they committed dreadful ravages there, and would probably have taken entire possession of the peninsula, if the Turks, under Mohammed the Second, had not crushed alike all the competitors who disputed with each other a precarious dominion over those few fragments of Constantine's heritage, that still hung together by a thread. But neither

were the Moslems long allowed the undisturbed enjoyment of their new acquisitions. Venice courageously asserted her claim, and sustained reiterated contests, with varying result, for above two hundred years; being sometimes mistress of the best parts of Greece, and at other periods nearly expelled from the whole, until, in 1717, the banner of St Mark, driven finally from the Morea and the Archipelago, continued henceforth to float in the Ionian islands alone. The Greeks, oppressed by both parties, and turned over like cattle from one to the other, as suited the circumstances of the moment, do not seem to have felt much interest in the Venetian cause, nor to have regretted its defeat. The maxims of the republic towards them were ill calculated to gain their affection; her policy consisted in keeping them debased and ignorant; and the bigotry of the Catholic priests was little less displeasing to those zealous sectarians than Mohammedan fanaticism.*

Leaving for an instant the subject of Greece, now sunk to the nadir of her fortunes, we shall briefly consider that infidel state, whose sudden rise and dazzling progress seriously threatened the religion and liberties of Europe. The foundations of Ottoman power were laid in the 13th century, by Ortogrul, the chief of a Turkoman tribe, residing in tents, not far from Dorylæum, in Phrygia, at a time when the Moghols of Jenghiz and his successors had, by continual inroads, overturned the Seljukian dynasty, the first Mussulman lineage that subdued and ruled a large portion of Asia

* "Feed a negro well, and flog him well," is the maxim of the Arab slave-merchants; that of the Venetians, in regard to their Greek subjects, was "a little bread, and abundant use of the stick;" the same measure the Austrians now mete to themselves.

Minor. His son, Osman, assumed the title of Sultan, and reducing, in 1300, the city of Prusa, in Bithynia, made it the capital of his dominions, which he extended daily, at the expense of the Byzantine emperors.

The Sultans that followed for some generations, almost all men of vigour and talent, passed the Hellespont, conquered Thrace, and the countries as far as the Danube, defeating at Nicopolis, Cossova, and Varna, the efforts of the Poles, Hungarians, and the Sclavonic princes of Bulgaria, Servia, Bosnia, &c. ; and, in 1453, Mohammed the second, by storming Constantinople, extinguished the last vestige of the Roman world, and before his death gave to European Turkey nearly the same limits that bounded it in 1821. When we seek for the causes that led to so brilliant a career, we find them partly in the qualities of the victorious nation, and still more in the defects of its adversaries, the dotage and rottenness of the Byzantine empire, and the anarchical irregularity of the bordering kingdoms.

The Turkish armies that achieved such exploits, under the early Sultans, were formed purely on the Asiatic model, and as ignorant of tactics as those of Darius and Xerxes: like them, they would have failed if brought into contact with Grecian or Macedonian troops, commanded by a Miltiades or an Alexander. But they were numerous, intoxicated with the double enthusiasm of success and fanaticism, blindly obedient to their chiefs, and sure of pay and plunder; while the European states could only oppose to them, soldiers as undisciplined, raised by the voluntary service of the nobility, incapable of subordination, and always ready to disband themselves at the end of a short campaign.