

Hence their histories are too often mere barren chronological details, or fulsome panegyrics on their princes, unenlivened by a single spark of philosophy or criticism.

Although the Spanish Arabs are not entitled to the credit of having wrought any important revolution in intellectual or moral science, they are commended by a severe critic, as exhibiting in their writings "the germs of many theories, which have been reproduced as discoveries in later ages,"⁴² and they silently perfected several of those useful arts, which have had a sensible influence on the happiness and improvement of mankind. Algebra, and the higher mathematics, were taught in their schools, and thence diffused over Europe. The manufacture of paper, which, since the invention of printing, has contributed so essentially to the rapid circulation of knowledge, was derived through them. Casiri has discovered several manuscripts of cotton paper in the Escorial as early as 1009, and of linen paper of the date of 1106;⁴³ the origin of which latter fabric Tiraboschi has ascribed to an Italian of Trevigi, in the middle of the fourteenth century.⁴⁴ Lastly, the application of gunpowder to military science, which has wrought an equally important revolution, though of a more doubtful complexion, in the condition of society, was derived through the same channel.⁴⁵

Useful discoveries.

⁴² Degerando, *Hist. de la Philosophie*, tom. iv. ubi supra.

⁴³ *Bibliotheca Escorialensis*, tom. ii. p. 9. — Andres, *Letteratura*, part. 1, cap. 10.

⁴⁴ *Letteratura Italiana*, tom. v. p. 87.

⁴⁵ The battle of Crecy furnishes the earliest instance on record of the use of artillery by the Euro-

PART

I.

The impulse
given by
them to
Europe.

The influence of the Spanish Arabs, however, is discernible not so much in the amount of knowledge, as in the impulse, which they communicated to the long dormant energies of Europe. Their invasion was coeval with the commencement of that night of darkness, which divides the modern from the ancient world. The soil had been impoverished by long, assiduous cultivation. The Arabians came like a torrent, sweeping down and obliterating even the land-marks of former civilization, but bringing with it a fertilizing principle, which, as the waters receded, gave new life and loveliness to the landscape. The writings of the Saracens were translated and diffused throughout Europe. Their schools were visited by disciples, who, roused from their lethargy, caught somewhat of the generous enthusiasm of their masters; and a healthful action was given to the European intellect, which, however ill directed at first, was thus prepared for the more judicious and successful efforts of later times.

Their elegant literature.

It is comparatively easy to determine the value

pean Christians; although Du Cange, among several examples which he enumerates, has traced a distinct notice of its existence as far back as 1338. (*Glossarium ad Scriptores Mediæ et Infimæ Latinitatis*, (Paris, 1739,) and *Supplément*, (Paris, 1766,) voce *Bombarda*.) The history of the Spanish Arabs carries it to a much earlier period. It was employed by the Moorish king of Granada at the siege of Baza, in 1312 and 1325. (Conde, *Dominacion de los Arabes*, tom. iii. cap. 18. — Casiri, *Bibliotheca Escorialensis*, tom. ii. p. 7.)

It is distinctly noticed in an Arabian treatise as ancient as 1249; and, finally, Casiri quotes a passage from a Spanish author at the close of the eleventh century, (whose MS., according to Nic. Antonio, though familiar to scholars, lies still entombed in the dust of libraries,) which describes the use of artillery in a naval engagement of that period between the Moors of Tunis and of Seville. Casiri, *Bibliotheca Escorialensis*, tom. ii. p. 8. — Nic. Antonio, *Bibliotheca Vetus*, tom. ii. p. 12.

of the scientific labors of a people, for truth is the same in all languages ; but the laws of taste differ so widely in different nations, that it requires a nicer discrimination to pronounce fairly upon such works as are regulated by them. Nothing is more common than to see the poetry of the east condemned as tumid, over-refined, infected with meretricious ornament and conceits, and, in short, as every way contravening the principles of good taste. Few of the critics, who thus peremptorily condemn, are capable of reading a line of the original. The merit of poetry, however, consists so much in its literary execution, that a person, to pronounce upon it, should be intimately acquainted with the whole import of the idiom in which it is written. The style of poetry, indeed of all ornamental writing, whether prose or verse, in order to produce a proper effect, must be raised or relieved, as it were, upon the prevailing style of social intercourse. Even where this is highly figurative and impassioned, as with the Arabians, whose ordinary language is made up of metaphor, that of the poet must be still more so. Hence the tone of elegant literature varies so widely in different countries, even in those of Europe, which approach the nearest to each other in their principles of taste, that it would be found difficult, if not impossible, to effect a translation of the most admired specimens of eloquence from the language of one nation into that of any other. A page of Boccaccio or Bembo, for instance, done into literal English, would have an air of intolerable artifice and verbiage. The choicest

PART
I.

morsels of Massillon, Bossuet, or the rhetorical Thomas, would savour marvellously of bombast; and how could we in any degree keep pace with the magnificent march of the Castilian! Yet surely we are not to impugn the taste of all these nations, who attach much more importance, and have paid (at least this is true of the French and Italian) much greater attention to the mere beauties of literary finish, than English writers.

Whatever may be the sins of the Arabians on this head, they are certainly not those of negligence. The Spanish Arabs, in particular, were noted for the purity and elegance of their idiom; insomuch that Casiri affects to determine the locality of an author by the superior refinement of his style. Their copious philological and rhetorical treatises, their arts of poetry, grammars, and rhyming dictionaries, show to what an excessive refinement they elaborated the art of composition. Academies, far more numerous than those of Italy, to which they subsequently served for a model, invited by their premiums frequent competitions in poetry and eloquence. To poetry, indeed, especially of the tender kind, the Spanish Arabs seem to have been as indiscriminately addicted as the Italians in the time of Petrarch; and there was scarcely a doctor in church or state, but at some time or other offered up his amorous incense on the altar of the muse.⁴⁶

Poetical
character.

⁴⁶ Petrarch complains in one of his letters from the country, that "jurisconsults and divines, nay his own valet, had taken to rhyming; and he was afraid the very cattle might begin to low in verse;" apud De Sade, Mémoires pour La Vie de Pétrarque, tom. iii. p. 243.

With all this poetic feeling, however, the Arabs never availed themselves of the treasures of Grecian eloquence, which lay open before them. Not a poet or orator of any eminence in that language seems to have been translated by them.⁴⁷ The temperate tone of Attic composition appeared tame to the fervid conceptions of the east. Neither did they venture upon what in Europe are considered the higher walks of the art, the drama and the epic.⁴⁸ None of their writers in prose or verse show much attention to the developement or dissection of character. Their inspiration exhaled in lyrical effusions, in elegies, epigrams, and idyls. They sometimes, moreover, like the Italians, employed verse as the vehicle of instruction in the grave and recondite sciences. The general character of their poetry is bold, florid, impassioned, richly colored with imagery, sparkling with conceits and metaphors, and occasionally breathing a deep tone of moral sensibility, as in some of the plaintive effusions ascribed by Conde to the royal poets of Cordova. The compositions of the golden age of the Abasides, and of the preceding period, do not seem to have been infected with the taint of exaggeration,

⁴⁷ Andres, *Letteratura*, part. 1, cap. 11. — Yet this popular assertion is contradicted by Reinesius, who states, that both Homer and Pindar were translated into Arabic by the middle of the eighth century. See Fabricius, *Bibliotheca Græca*, (Hamb. 1712-38,) tom. xii. p. 753.

⁴⁸ Sir William Jones, *Traité sur la Poésie Orientale*, sec. 2. —

Sismondi says that Sir W. Jones is mistaken in citing the history of Timour by Ebn Arabschah, as an Arabic epic. (*Littérature du Midi*, tom. i. p. 57.) It is Sismondi who is mistaken, since the English critic states that the Arabs have no heroic poem, and that this poetical prose history is not accounted such even by the Arabs themselves.

PART
I.Influence on
the Castil-
ian.

so offensive to a European, which distinguishes the later productions in the decay of the empire.

Whatever be thought of the influence of the Arabic on European literature in general, there can be no reasonable doubt that it has been considerable on the Provençale and the Castilian. In the latter especially, so far from being confined to the vocabulary, or to external forms of composition, it seems to have penetrated deep into its spirit, and is plainly discernible in that affectation of stateliness and oriental hyperbole, which characterizes Spanish writers even at the present day; in the subtleties and conceits with which the ancient Castilian verse is so liberally bespangled; and in the relish for proverbs and prudential maxims, which is so general that it may be considered national.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ It would require much more learning than I am fortified with, to enter into the merits of the question, which has been raised respecting the probable influence of the Arabian on the literature of Europe. A. W. Schlegel, in a work of little bulk, but much value, in refuting with his usual vivacity the extravagant theory of Andres, has been led to conclusions of an opposite nature, which may be thought perhaps scarcely less extravagant. (Observations sur la Langue et la Littérature Provençales, p. 64.) It must indeed seem highly improbable, that the Saracens, who, during the middle ages, were so far superior in science and literary culture to the Europeans, could have resided so long in immediate contact with them, and in those very countries indeed which gave birth to the most cultivated poetry of that period, without exerting some perceptible influence

upon it. Be this as it may, its influence on the Castilian cannot reasonably be disputed. This has been briefly traced by Conde in an "Essay on Oriental Poetry," *Poesia Oriental*, whose publication he anticipates in the Preface to his "History of the Spanish Arabs," but which still remains in manuscript. (The copy I have used is in the library of Mr. George Ticknor.) He professes in this work to discern in the earlier Castilian poetry, in the *Cid*, the *Alexander*, in *Berceo's*, the arch-priest of *Hita's*, and others of similar antiquity, most of the peculiarities and varieties of Arabian verse; the same cadences and number of syllables, the same intermixture of assonances and consonances, the double hemistich and prolonged repetition of the final rhyme. From the same source he derives much of the earlier rural minstrelsy of Spain, as well as the measures of its romances and se-

A decided effect has been produced on the romantic literature of Europe by those tales of fairy enchantment, so characteristic of oriental genius, and in which it seems to have revelled with uncontrolled delight. These tales, which furnished the principal diversion of the East, were imported by the Saracens into Spain; and we find the monarchs of Cordova solacing their leisure hours with listening to their *rawis*, or novelists, who sang to them

“Of ladye-love and war, romance, and knightly worth.”⁵⁰

The same spirit, penetrating into France, stimulated the more sluggish inventions of the *trouvère*, and, at a later and more polished period, called forth the imperishable creations of the Italian muse.⁵¹

It is unfortunate for the Arabians, that their literature should be locked up in a character and idiom so difficult of access to European scholars. Their

Circumstances prejudicial to their reputation.

guidillas; and in the Preface to his History, he has ventured on the bold assertion, that the Castilian owes so much of its vocabulary to the Arabic, that it may be almost accounted a dialect of the latter. Conde's criticisms, however, must be quoted with reserve. His habitual studies had given him such a keen relish for oriental literature, that he was, in a manner, *denaturalized* from his own.

⁵⁰ Byron's beautiful line may seem almost a version of Conde's Spanish text, “*sucesos de armas y de amores con muy estraños lances y en elegante estilo.*” — *Dominacion de los Arabes*, tom. i. p. 457.

⁵¹ Sismondi, in his *Littérature du Midi* (tom. i. pp. 267 et seq.), and more fully in his *Républiques Italiennes* (tom. xvi. pp. 448 et seq.), derives the jealousy of the sex, the ideas of honor, and the deadly spirit of revenge, which distinguished the southern nations of Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, from the Arabians. Whatever be thought of the jealousy of the sex, it might have been supposed, that the principles of honor and the spirit of revenge might, without seeking further, find abundant precedent in the feudal habits and institutions of our European ancestors.

PART
I.

wild, imaginative poetry, scarcely capable of trans-
fusion into a foreign tongue, is made known to us
only through the medium of bald prose translation ;
while their scientific treatises have been done into
Latin with an inaccuracy, which, to make use of a
pun of Casiri's, merits the name of perversions
rather than versions of the originals.⁵² How obvi-
ously inadequate, then, are our means of forming
any just estimate of their literary merits ! It is un-
fortunate for them, moreover, that the Turks, the
only nation, which, from an identity of religion and
government with the Arabs, as well as from its
political consequence, would seem to represent
them on the theatre of modern Europe, should be a

⁵² " Quas *perversiones* potius, Bibliotheca Escorialensis, tom. i.
quam *versiones* merito dixeris." p. 266.

Notices of
Casiri, Con-
de, and
Cardonne.

Notwithstanding the history of
the Arabs is so intimately con-
nected with that of the Spaniards,
that it may be justly said to form
the reverse side of it, and not-
withstanding the amplitude of au-
thentic documents in the Arabic
tongue to be found in the pub-
lic libraries, the Castilian writers,
even the most eminent, until the
latter half of the last century,
with an insensibility which can be
imputed to nothing else but a
spirit of religious bigotry, have
been content to derive their nar-
ratives exclusively from national
authorities. A fire, which occur-
red in the Escorial in 1671, having
consumed more than three quarters
of the magnificent collection of
eastern manuscripts which it con-

tained, the Spanish government,
taking some shame to itself, as it
would appear, for its past supine-
ness, caused a copious catalogue
of the surviving volumes, to the
number of 1850, to be compiled by
the learned Casiri ; and the result
was his celebrated work, " Biblio-
theca Arabico-Hispana Escuria-
lensis," which appeared in the
years 1760-70, and which would
reflect credit from the splendor of
its typographical execution on any
press of the present day. This
work, although censured by some
later orientalist as hasty and su-
perficial, must ever be highly val-
ued as affording the only complete
index to the rich repertory of Ara-
bian manuscripts in the Escu-
rial, and for the ample evidence

race so degraded ; one which, during the five centuries, that it has been in possession of the finest climate and monuments of antiquity, has so seldom been quickened into a display of genius, or even condescended to avail itself of the literary treasures descended from its ancient masters. Yet this people, so sensual and sluggish, we are apt to confound in imagination with the sprightly, intellectual Arab. Both indeed have been subjected to the influence of the same degrading political and religious institutions, which on the Turks have produced the results naturally to have been expected ; while the Arabians, on the other hand, exhibit the extraordinary phenomenon of a nation, under all these embarrassments, rising to a high degree of elegance and intellectual culture.

The empire, which once embraced more than half of the ancient world, has now shrunk within its original limits ; and the Bedouin wanders over

which it exhibits of the science and mental culture of the Spanish Arabs. Several other native scholars, among whom Andres and Masdeu may be particularly noticed, have made extensive researches into the literary history of this people. Still their political history, so essential to a correct knowledge of the Spanish, was comparatively neglected, until Señor Conde, the late learned librarian of the Academy, who had given ample evidence of his oriental learning in his version and illustrations of the Nubian Geographer, and a Dissertation on Arabic Coins published in the fifth volume of the Memoirs of the Royal Academy of History, compiled

his work entitled " *Historia de la Dominacion de los Arabes en España.*" The first volume appeared in 1820. But unhappily the death of its author, occurring in the autumn of the same year, prevented the completion of his design. The two remaining volumes, however, were printed in the course of that and the following year from his own manuscripts ; and, although their comparative meagreness and confused chronology betray the want of the same paternal hand, they contain much interesting information. The relation of the conquest of Granada, especially, with which the work concludes, exhibits some important particulars in a totally different point of view

PART
I.

his native desert as free, and almost as uncivilized, as before the coming of his apostle. The language, which was once spoken along the southern shores of the Mediterranean and the whole extent of the Indian ocean, is broken up into a variety of discordant dialects. Darkness has again settled over those regions of Africa, which were illumined by the light of learning. The elegant dialect of the Koran is studied as a dead language, even in the birth-place of the prophet. Not a printing-press at this day is to be found throughout the whole Arabian Peninsula. Even in Spain, in Christian Spain, alas! the contrast is scarcely less degrading. A death-like torpor has succeeded to her former intellectual activity. Her cities are emptied of the population with which they teemed in the days of the Saracens. Her climate is as fair, but her fields no longer bloom with the same rich and variegated husbandry. Her most interesting monuments are

from that in which they had been presented by the principal Spanish historians.

The first volume, which may be considered as having received the last touches of its author, embraces a circumstantial narrative of the great Saracen invasion, of the subsequent condition of Spain under the viceroys, and of the empire of the Omeyyades; undoubtedly the most splendid portion of Arabian annals, but the one, unluckily, which has been most copiously illustrated in the popular work compiled by Cardonne from the oriental manuscripts in the Royal Library at Paris. As this author, however, has followed the Spanish and the latter author-

ities, indiscriminately, no part of his book can be cited as a genuine Arabic version, except indeed the last sixty pages, comprising the conquest of Granada, which Cardonne professes in his Preface to have drawn exclusively from an Arabian manuscript. Conde, on the other hand, professes to have adhered to his originals with such scrupulous fidelity, that "the European reader may feel that he is perusing an Arabian author"; and certainly very strong internal evidence is afforded of the truth of this assertion, in the peculiar national and religious spirit which pervades the work, and in a certain florid gasconade of style, common with the oriental writers. It