

such a galaxy of artists, poets, and philosophers. Blair, in his Lectures upon Rhetoric and the Belles-Lettres, has adopted the same division, and to the general reader it is familiar as household words. These four are distinguished from the present and the last in this grand and essential difference—that in all of them learning and literature were confined to the *few*, and forbidden and unknown to the *many*. The volume once sealed, is now unclasped and open. In the sublime manifestations of genius—in the refinement and concentrated energy of single minds, they may have surpassed us—but the filars upon which their votive offerings were hung, were hallowed only by their own presence, and a few chosen and appointed worshippers.

There is no modern epic, not even excepting Milton's Paradise Lost, which can match the Odyssey of Homer—no Orations in latter times could kindle the latent fires of the heart, whether of patriotism or indignant feeling, like the eloquent phillippics of Demosthenes, or the appeals of Cicero. Have we a Satirist equal to Horace in his knowledge of human character, graceful pleasantry, or barbed wit? Pope's essay on Man can bear no comparison with the Ars Poetica. The Eneid of Virgil has no competitor, and philosophy never produced a name of more deserved reverence than the divine Plato. And yet we know that in the era in which these, the illustrious, those truly 'illustrious dead,' flourished, the mass of the people were unlettered, and sunk in the lowest state of irreligious and social barbarism. The art of printing did not then exist, and the works of these men, the school boy books of the age—the cottage library of the peasantry of Iceland, Scotland, and the south west coast of Ireland, were elaborated upon ponderous tablets of wax, or engraved upon costly rolls of papyrus, known and accessible only to a few. The Grecian and Roman authors published their works by public readings at the Olympic Games in Greece, and in the Forum at Rome—they were comparatively unknown beyond their precincts, unheard of in the provinces, and their illumination, instead of brightening the general mind, shed an intense and brilliant light upon a narrow circle of admirers.

The learning of the middle ages had an influence upon the people scarcely more comprehensive or effective. The Goths and Vandals, when they issued from their northern fastnesses, and invaded the territories of the South, trampling down in their march every trace of civilization, temples, triumphal arches, the noblest specimens of Sculpture, mutilating the architectural glories of Athens, and sacking even Imperial Rome herself, expelled philosophy, literature and the arts, to Asia Minor and the countries of the East. There they were preserved and cherished. When their barbarous dominion had passed away—when Italy rose into a body of Republics—when the spirit

of the Crusades and of Commerce created a closer intercourse between Europe and Asia, the sciences and arts were recalled; and when planted again upon a congenial soil, they rapidly advanced to their former excellence. In this era we have Ariosto, Tasso, Erasmus, Michael Angelo, Raphael and Titian, but these men produced rather inheritances for posterity than any fountain of intellectual wealth at which the people drank freely. Learning then was shut up in the cell and college. The ancient authors, treasured up in costly manuscripts, were familiar only to the fathers, the *litterarum docti*. The finest talents of the age were devoted to the metaphysical subtleties of the schools, or to the profound, though perplexing investigations of theological controversy.—These were investigations far above the reach of the common mind. The feudal system reigned in all its plenitude and rigour. The peasantry were called villains or slaves. They were adscripti glebæ. Michaeliavel wrote then his 'Prince.' The benefit of Clergy was introduced into the English code of Criminal law as an inducement that the monks and the laity might learn to read; and if such were the humble qualification required for the Teacher, it is apparent the primer could not be common amongst his flock.

The fourth era alluded to in this division, the age of Louis the XIV. of France, and Queen Anne and William in England, exhibited indications of improvement. Louis, although ignorant himself, though so little indebted to the schools that he could scarce subscribe his own name, and certainly could neither have dictated a state paper, nor written a letter correct in its orthography, was a magnificent patron of learning and the arts, and held out that encouragement to genius, which, divine as it is, is not without its effect. France never was more distinguished for her Poets, Philosophers, and Generals—for by military authors it is doubted whether even the trained Marshals of Buonaparte, Soult, Junot, or McDonald, were superior to the Conde, or Turenne, of Louis Le Grand. There were Corneille, Richilieu, Moliere, Racine, Fenelon, Massillon, Bourdaloue, all names who stand in the van of talented men. In England the glories of the age were founded upon the reputation of men to whom even these were not superior. There were Newton and Boyle in philosophy—Milton and Pope in verse—Burnett in the church—Temple and Addison in general literature—Hale and Holt in the law—Clarendon and Bolingbroke, as Statesmen. To Englishmen no recollections can furnish food for nobler pride, and yet if we refer to the contemporary historians of the period, it will be seen, that the *peasans* of France in these days were a simple, untaught race, chained in the deepest ignorance, and alive to the grossest superstition. The peasantry of England in their order of intelligence, were scarcely more advanced. I might quote,