

ENCYCLOPÆDIA OF GEOGRAPHY.

BOOK I.—PART III.—Continued.

CHAPTER XI.

ITALY.

ITALY is an extensive region in the south of Europe, one of the finest in the world as to soil and climate, and noted as the theatre of many of the greatest events in history. It is now in a state of degradation and decline, but is filled with grand monuments, and scenes calculated to awaken the most lofty recollections.

SECT. I.—General Outline and Aspect.

Italy is bounded on the north, and partly on the west, by the vast and continuous range of the highest Alps, which separate her from what she disdainfully terms the ultramontane regions of France, Italy, and Switzerland. All the rest of her circuit is enclosed by the Mediterranean and its great gulfs, of which the Adriatic, in the east, separates her from the opposite shores of Greece and Illyria. On the west she borders on the broadest basin of the Mediterranean, beyond which are the shores of France and Spain. On the extreme south she almost approaches the African coast. The greatest length is north and south from about 36° 40' to 47°, or 700 English miles; the extreme breadth, between the Rhone in Savoy and the Isonzo, lies between 6° and 13° east longitude, and may comprehend 350 English miles. This applies only to the broad belt of Northern Italy, as all the rest of the territory stretches obliquely in the form of a long narrow boot, the average breadth of which does not exceed 100 miles. The whole extent may be reckoned at 127,000 square miles, including Sicily and Sardinia.

The surface of Italy is the most finely diversified of perhaps any country in the globe. It has the loftiest mountains, and the most beautiful plains in Europe. All the chains of the Alps, the Cottian, the Pennine, the Lepontine, the Rhetian, the Julian, which belong only in part to other kingdoms, range along her frontier. Some of their proudest pinnacles, Mont Blanc, St. Bernard, Mont Rosa, are within the Italian territory, and their white summits are seen amid the clouds in continuous grandeur along the whole extent of the plains of Lombardy and Piedmont. The Apennines is a chain purely Italian. It branches off first from the

332



Apennines in Calabria.

Maritime Alps on the western frontier, and runs for a long space eastward, leaving on the south only a narrow plain between it and the Mediterranean; while on the north it forms the boundary of Piedmont and Lombardy. On the Tuscan border it gradually bends round to the south and south-east, following, or rather prescribing the form of the Peninsula, of which it occupies the centre, in one unbroken line. It does not aspire to the awful height, or wrap itself in the perpetual snows, of the Alps. Its highest pinnacle in the Abruzzo, called the great rock of Italy, does not rise much above 9500 feet. These mountains are consequently, in this climate, throughout, covered with luxuriant foliage; on the lower slopes are the vine and the olive, higher up, the various forest trees, among which the chestnut affords copious food to the inhabitants. They enclose finely cultivated valleys, and