

when the barbarians commenced their invasions : continuing to arrive in successive swarms, tribe pressed on tribe to conquest and to plunder, and, in about two centuries, overwhelmed Europe with their numbers :—among the *first* that fell a prey, and among the most resistless of that prey, was the great Roman empire, which had formerly aggrandized to itself the military glory of the world !

The character of these invaders was fierce bravery—bravery untinged with the least degree of softness of nature, but inspired by high spirit and daring independence. Their revenge was relentless to the last degree,—they employed neither stratagem nor treachery—but these were unnecessary where everything was at their mercy. They seemed to possess no idea but that of carnage,—their passions were, without doubt, more ferocious than those of the most blood-thirsty animals,—and their progress, in its effects, might well bear comparison with the history of the deluge. Tribe succeeded tribe, as wave succeeded wave,—and that which one left but partially destroyed, was utterly swept away by its successor. From depopulating Europe they turned against each other,—and the scene of bloodshed, unequalled by any other in the history of mankind, known as the most calamitous period in human existence since the days of Noah, was only closed by the north being drained of its inhabitants, and Italy, and the countries beyond the Alps, peopled with new races, distinguished by manners and habits from their former inhabitants, not more observable than those which separate the panther and the leopard from the dog or the horse. All former institutions had been swept away,—new languages and names appeared,—in fact, the change observed by a traveller who should visit in succession France and New Zealand, would not be greater, than the total alteration which had taken place in the aspect of Europe, occasioned by the inroads of the barbarians.

The principle on which these nations made conquests was essentially different from that of the Romans—though, as warriors, they served under a leader, they made war for themselves, and enjoyed the fruits of their victories. In consequence of this principle, on the settlement of these tribes in the various countries of Europe, their conquests were divided among the invaders, and this new state of affairs was the celebrated Feudal System. It consisted in parcelling out the lands to the invading army, who kept possession on the understanding that they were to combine for the defence of the country, acknowledging, at the same time, a leader or king of whom they

held. The evils of this system soon began to appear, and were confirmed in the independent establishment of the nobles, separately,—the loss of all power by the sovereign,—the continual petty contests of rival barons,—and the subjugation of the people to a state of gross slavery. To little less wickedness, perhaps, than distinguished the Roman rule, was now added universal and profound ignorance,—every trace of literature and science and law had been swept away,—and the barbarians brought with them no hitherto unknown arts with which to supply their place. The bare fact of their ignorance was not so unfortunate as the evil circumstances by which it was surrounded. The mind was in that state when it was incapable of exertion : from being at first roused to indignation by flagrant injustice, it sunk to abject and degrading obedience—the spirit of independence and inquiry were crushed—and the habits of those ages were similar to those of the wild animals of the forest. “A greater number of those atrocious actions which fill the mind of man with horror and astonishment, occur in the history of the centuries under review, than in that of the same extent in the annals of Europe. If we open the history of Gregory of Tours, or of any contemporary author, we meet with a series of deeds of cruelty, perfidy and revenge, so wild and enormous as almost to exceed belief.” This was the state of Europe from the seventh to the eleventh century—upwards of four centuries after the invading hordes had taken complete possession of their conquests.

From the seventh century may be dated the gradual return of civilization, and the causes mentioned by an eminent historian are the following :

*First*,—The Crusades, by which the human mind was roused from its lethargy to intense action, and a stimulant to improvement given, by observing the advance of other countries in the arts.

*Second*,—The forming of cities into communities, to which were granted the privileges of municipal jurisdiction. This practice commenced in Italy, and speedily spread throughout Europe. It arose from a prospective view of the advantages of commerce,—the distance which separated rulers from their Italian subjects,—the employment of the lords in their petty feuds,—the weakness which the constant recurrence of these had naturally produced in the order, inasmuch that they accepted gladly sums of money for immunities,—and the combination of the people to seize these advantages.

*Third*,—The acquisition of civil liberty and