

Persians—who probably were included in the ancient Assyrian Empire. Which of these subdivisions, China or India, is the oldest, it is difficult to determine; but that all of these nations, along with the other nations of antiquity, did cultivate literature at some period of their existence is beyond dispute.

*China*—Much has been said of the antiquity, literature, and complicated language of China; but with what degree of truth it is difficult at this distant day to determine. Little is known of this country previous to the reign of Confucius, their first king, who lived six centuries previous to the Christian era; and little is known of his reign beyond the composition of their religious code, which is ascribed to him. The mind of the mass of the people appears to have been grossly ignorant of elementary instruction.

*India*—on the other hand, claims to have made some proficiency in the kindred sciences of arithmetic, algebra, geometry, and astronomy—and also in navigation and geography.

*Persia and Arabia*.—The early history of these nations seems to be enveloped in obscurity; that from the traces of civilization, and some ancient manuscripts that have been discovered, it is asserted that they must have possessed a knowledge of some of the sciences which were cultivated by their national neighbors—but to what extent is unknown.

*Egypt and Venetia* have been claimed as the birthplace of learning among the heathen nations; the origination and cultivation of astronomy, land surveying, and hence geometry, along with several departments of useful knowledge have been attributed to them; a knowledge of these sciences have been conveyed to other nations.

A knowledge of astronomy formed an important part of the education of the ancients; the study of this subject, along with some of the other occult sciences, seemed to suit the state of society which followed. The lofty and sublime nature of astronomical science only tended to fill the mind of the ignorant with more fabulous and irrational ideas, both of religion and science.

The destruction of the Alexandrian Library has deprived the world of much valuable information, concerning oriental literature.

During the fabulous and succeeding times of Grecian history, there arose a number of men, eminent for scholastic attainments, who exercised a kind of intellectual despotism over the understandings and opinions of the vulgar; their proverbial sayings were handed down from age to age with a sort of religious veneration; their commands were obeyed; and after their death divine honors were in some instances paid to their memory.

Through the great number of wise men and philosophical sects which arose in Greece, numerous schools of philosophy were established throughout the land, which eventually extended to and spread over the Roman empire and the greater part of the civilized world.

Thales, the chief of the seven muses of Greece—born 640 years before Christ—originated the *Ionic* schools; and Pythagoras originated the *Italic* sect. These sects, multiplied in number until they formed seventeen prominent bodies, each headed by some eminent philosopher.

The subjects principally taught were physical science, logic, metaphysics and ethics. To these sects the world is indebted for many of the best works on mathematical and other sciences. The system of communicating instruction in the schools of Greece appears to have been oral. Socrates adopted the interrogative mode of communicating information.

But as the Grecian empire began to decay, and the Roman empire become divided, these schools lost their former worth, and ultimately in the lapse of time, through political and social changes, ever common to the heathen nations, the mass of society sunk deeper and deeper into ignorance and barbarism.

The result of our findings, so far as we have been able to discover truth is, that the number who could read and write during the first two ages of the world were very few—the mass remaining in ignorance—and those few who possessed a knowledge of alphabetical writing were generally employed in an official capacity, and were looked upon by the uncultivated mass as so many oracles.

Although the nations of antiquity were distinguished for the magnitude of their cities, their massive walls, elevat-