

The Italian Renaissance and Popes of Avignon

pancy of Avignon the Vicars of Christ enriched the library of the Holy See with numerous copies of the works of the Latin and Greek writers—now the works of Seneca, Pliny, Sallust, Suetonius and Cicero, now the Ethics of Aristotle and the Poems of Virgil.

As to theological works written in Greek, it was most natural that at a time when theology reigned incontestably as the chief of the sciences the Papal Library was well supplied.

It is true that the great masterpieces of Greek literature, such as the works of Homer, Hesiod and Pindar, the great tragedies, and the Latin writers, Horace and Tacitus, were not as yet well represented in the Papal Library at Avignon, but it is equally true that on the eve of the great schism the Popes had collected together an important number of manuscripts in which Latin literature was well represented, so that in the number and quality of the volumes the Apostolic Library was second only to the ancient libraries of the Sorbonne and Canterbury.

In several of his letters the poet Petrarch has shown himself very severe towards the Popes of the fourteenth century, who, in his eyes, were guilty of the double crime of being French and of having left Italy. Meanwhile the very literary reputation and glory which Petrarch loved so much were due in no small