The life of Cardinal Mezzofanti

by

Charles William Russell

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THE LIFE

OF

CARDINAL MEZZOFANTI;

WITH

AN INTRODUCTORY MEMOIR

OF

EMINENT LINGUISTS, ANCIENT AND MODERN.

BY

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PREFACE.

The following Memoir had its origin in an article on Cardinal Mezzofanti, contributed to the Edinburgh Review in the year 1855. The subject appeared at that time to excite considerable interest. The article was translated into French, and, in an abridged form, into Italian; and I received through the editor, from persons entirely unknown to me, more than one suggestion that I should complete the biography, accompanied by offers of additional information for the purpose.

Nevertheless, the notices of the Cardinal on which that article was founded, and which at that time comprised all the existing materials for a biography, appeared to me, with all their interest, to want the precision and the completeness which are essential to a just estimate of his attainments. I felt that to judge satisfactorily his acquaintance with a range of languages so vast as that which fame ascribed to him, neither sweeping statements founded on popular reports, however confident, nor general assertions from individuals, however distinguished and trustworthy, could safely be regarded as sufficient. The proof of his familiarity with any particular language, in order to be satisfactory, ought to be specific, and ought to rest on the testimony
either of a native, or at least of one whose skill in the language was beyond suspicion.

At the same time the interest with which the subject seemed to be generally regarded, led me to hope that, by collecting, while they were yet recent, the reminiscences of persons of various countries and tongues, who had known and spoken with the Cardinal, it might be possible to lay the foundation of a much more exact judgment regarding him than had hitherto been attainable.

A short inquiry satisfied me that, although scattered over every part of the globe, there were still to be found living representatives of most of the languages ascribed to the Cardinal, who would be able, from their own personal knowledge, to declare whether, and in what degree, he was acquainted with each; and I resolved to try whether it might not be possible to collect their opinions.

The experiment has involved an extensive and tedious correspondence; many of the persons whom I have had to consult being ex-pupils of the Propaganda, residing in very distant countries; more than one beyond the range of regular postal communication, and only accessible by a chance message transmitted through a consul, or through the friendly offices of a brother missionary.

For the spirit in which my inquiries have been met, I am deeply grateful. I have recorded in the course of the narrative the names of many to whom I am indebted for valuable assistance and information. Other valued friends whom I have not named, will kindly accept this general acknowledgment.
There is one, however, to whom I owe a most special and grateful expression of thanks—his Eminence the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster. From him, at the very outset of my task, I received a mass of anecdotes, recollections, and suggestions, which, besides their great intrinsic interest, most materially assisted me in my further inquiries; and the grace of the contribution was enhanced by the fact, that it was generously withdrawn from that delightful store of Personal Recollections which his Eminence has since given to the public; and in which his brilliant pen would have made it one of the most attractive episodes.

Several of the autographs, also, which appear in the sheet of fac-similes, I owe to his Eminence. Others I have received from friends who are named in the Memoir.
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CORRIGENDA.

Page 35, Line 6, for "yards" read "feet."
82, last, after "(1794)," supply "who."
87, 81, for "Bournoif," read "Bournoif."
99, 8, for "John and," read "and John."
76, 2nd last, for "Beobbling," read "Beobbling."
117, 4th last, and three other places, for "marvelous," read "marvellous."
119, 2nd last, for "months," read "years."
131, 2nd last, for "Hall," read "Hill."
205, 83, for "Grune," read "Gruden."
283, 17, for "Bulbinical," read "Bulbinical."
215, 10, for "unable," read "able."
636, 4th last, for "sneep," read "sneep;" also interchange; and !
MEMOIRS

OF

EMINENT LINGUISTS.

In the Life of Cardinal Mezzofanti I have attempted to ascertain, by direct evidence, the exact number of languages with which that great linguist was acquainted, and the degree of his familiarity with each.

Eminence in any pursuit, however, is necessarily relative. We are easily deceived about a man's stature until we have seen him by the side of other men; nor shall we be able to form a just notion of the linguistic accomplishments of Cardinal Mezzofanti, or at least to bring them before our minds as a practical reality, until we shall have first considered what had been effected before him by other men who attained to distinction in the same department.

I have thought it desirable, therefore, to prefix to his Life a summary history of the most eminent linguists of ancient and modern times. There is no branch of scholarship which has left fewer traces in literature, or has received a more scanty measure of justice from history. Viewed in the light of a curious but unpractical pursuit, skill in languages is admired for a time, perhaps indeed enjoys an exaggerated popularity; but it passes away like a nine days' wonder, and seldom finds an exact or permanent record. Hence, while the literature of every country abounds with memoirs of distinguished poets, philosophers, and historians, few, even among professed antiquarians, have directed their attention to the history of eminent linguists, whether in ancient or in modern times. In all the ordinary repositories of curious learning—Pliny, Aulus Grlius, and Athenaeus, among the ancients; Bayle, Gibbon, Freyjoo, Diarrael, and Vulpius, among the moderns—this interesting chapter is entirely overlooked; nor does it appear to have engaged the attention even of linguists or philologers themselves.
The following Memoir, therefore, must claim the indulgence due to a first essay in a new and difficult subject. No one can be more sensible than the writer of its many imperfections; —of the probable omission of names which should have been recorded; —of the undue prominence of others with inferior pretensions; and perhaps of still more serious inaccuracies of a different kind. It is only offered in the absence of something better and more complete; and with the hope of directing to what is certainly a curious and interesting subject, the attention of others who enjoy more leisure and opportunity for its investigation.

The diversity of languages which prevails among the various branches of the human family, has proved, almost equally with their local dispersion, a barrier to that free intercommunion which is one of the main instruments of civilization. "The confusion of tongues, the first great judgment of God upon the ambition of man," says Bacon, in the Introductory Book of his "Advancement of Learning," "bath chiefly imbarred the open trade and intercourse of learning and knowledge." Perhaps it would be more correct to say that these two great impediments to intercourse have mutually assisted each other. The divergency of languages seems to keep pace with the dispersion of the population. Adelung lays it down as the result of the most careful philological investigations, that where the difficulties of intercourse are such as existed among the ancients and as still prevail among the less civilized populations, no language can maintain itself unchanged over a space of more than one hundred and fifty thousand square miles.†

It might naturally be expected, therefore, that one of the earliest efforts of the human intellect would have been directed towards the removal of this barrier, and that one of the first sciences to invite the attention of men would have been the knowledge of languages. Few sciences, nevertheless, were more neglected by the ancients.

It is true that the early literatures of many of the ancient nations contain legends on this head which might almost throw into the shade the greatest marvels related of Mezzofanti. In one of the Chinese stories regarding the youth of Buddha,

* Works I., p. 42.
† Mithridates, Vol. II. Einleitung, p. 7.
translated by Klapproth, it is related that, when he was ten
years old, he asked his preceptor, Babourenou, to teach him
all the languages of the earth, seeing that he was to be an
apostle to all men; and that when Babourenou confessed his
ignorance of all except the Indian dialects, the child himself
taught his master "fifty foreign tongues with their respective
characters."* A still more marvellous tale is told by one of
the Rabbinical historians, Rabbi Eliezer, who relates that
Mordechai, (one of the great heroes of Talmudic legend), was
acquainted with seventy languages; and that it was by means
of this gift he understood the conversation of the two cunning
who were plotting in a foreign tongue the death of the king.†
Nor is the Koran without its corresponding prodigy. When
the Prophet was carried up to Heaven, before the throne
of the Most High, "God promised that he should have the
knowledge of all languages."‡

But when we turn to the genuine records of antiquity, we
find no ground for the belief that such legends as these
have even that ordinary substructure of truth which commonly
underlies the fables of mythology. Neither the Sacred
Narratives, nor those of the early profane authors, contain
a single example of remarkable proficiency in languages.

It is true that in the later days of the Jewish people,
interpreters were appointed in the synagogues to explain
the lessons read from the Hebrew Scriptures for the benefit
of their foreign brethren; that in all the courts of the Eastern
monarchs interpreters were found, through whom they com-
municated with foreign envoys, or with the motley tribes of
their own empire; and that professional interpreters
were at the service of foreigners in the great centres of commerce
or travel.§ who, it may be presumed, were masters of

* See the whole legend in Huc's Chinese Empire, II. p. 187-8.
† Auszahl Historischer Stücke aus Hebräischen Schriftstellern,
von zwei Jahrhundert bis auf die Gegenwart. Berlin, 1840.
p. 10. The book is entitled Parch Rabbi Eliezer; "The chapters of
Rabbi Eliezer." Its date is extremely uncertain. See Morey's Dict.
Hist. VII. p. 361.
‡ See Frideaus's Life of Mahomet, p. 66.
§ According to the account of Pliny, Dioscuras, a city of Colchis
the present Ikurish, was frequented for commercial purposes by
no less than three hundred different races; and he adds that a hundred
and thirty interpreters were employed there under the Romans
(Hist. Nat. VI, 5. Miller's Ed. II. 176.) The Arabian writers,
Ibn Haukal and Musadi, mention seventy-two languages which
were spoken at Derbent. Strabo speaks of twenty-six in the Eastern
Caucasus alone. See The Tribes of the Caucasus, p. 14, also p. 32.
several languages. The philosophers, too, who traversed remote countries in pursuit of wisdom, can hardly be supposed to have returned without some acquaintance with the languages of the nations among whom they had voyaged. Solon and Pythagoras are known to have visited Egypt and the East; the latter also sojourned for a considerable time in Italy and the islands; the wanderings of Plato are said to have been even more extensive. Nay, in some instances these pilgrims of knowledge extended their researches beyond the limits of their own ethnographical region. Thus, on the one hand, the Scythian sages, Anacharsis and Zamoelis, themselves most probably of the Mongol or Tartar tongue, sojourned for a long time in countries where the Indo-European family of languages alone prevailed; on the other, the merchants of Tyre were in familiar and habitual intercourse with the Italo-Pelasgic race; and the Phoenician explorers, in their well-known circumnavigation of Africa described by Herodotus, must have come in contact with still more numerous varieties both of race and of tongue. Nevertheless it may fairly be doubted whether these or similar opportunities among the ancients, resulted in any very remarkable attainments in the department of languages. The absence of all record furnishes a strong presumption to the contrary; and there is one example, that of Herodotus, which would almost be in itself conclusive. This acute and industrious explorer devoted many years to foreign travel. He visited every city of note in Greece and Asia Minor, and every site of the great battles between the Greeks and Barbarians. He explored the whole line of the route of Xerxes in his disastrous expedition. He visited in succession all the chief islands of the Egean, as well as those of the western coast of Greece. His landward wanderings extended far into the interior. He reached Babylon, Ecbatana, and Susa, and spent some time among the Scythian tribes on the shores of the Black Sea. He resided long in Egypt, from which he passed southwards as far as Elephantine, eastwards into Arabia, and westwards through Libya, at least as far as Cyrene. And yet Dahlmann is of opinion that, with all his industry, and all the spirit of inquiry which was his great characteristic, Herodotus never became acquainted even with the language of Egypt, but contented himself with the service of an interpreter.*

* Dahlmann, p. 47. It would be presumptuous to differ from so ingenious a writer, and so profound a master of the subject which he treats; but I may observe that there are some passages of Herodotus
In like manner, it would be difficult to shew, either from the Cyropædis, or the Expedition of Cyrus, that Xenophon, during his foreign travel, became master of Persian or any kindred Eastern tongue. Nor am I aware that there has ever been discovered in the writings of Plato any evidence of familiarity with the language of those Eastern philosophers from whose science he is believed to have drawn so largely.

It is strange that the two notable exceptions to this barrenness of eminent linguists which characterizes the classic times, Mithridates and Cleopatra, should both have been of royal rank. The former, the celebrated king of Pontus, long one of the most formidable enemies of the Roman name, is alleged to have spoken fluently the languages of all the subjects of his empire; an empire so vast, and comprising so many different nationalities as to throw an air of improbability over the story. According to Aulus Gellius, he "was thoroughly conversant" (percussit) with the languages of all the nations (twenty-five in number) over which his rule extended.† The other writers who relate the circumstance—Valerius Maximus, Pliny,§ and Solinus—make the number only twenty-two. Some commentators have regarded the story as a gross exaggeration; and others have sought to diminish its marvellousness by explaining it of different dialects, rather than of distinct languages. But there does not appear in the narrative of the original writers any reason whether for the doubt or for the restriction. Pliny declares that "it is quite certain," and the matter-of-fact tone in which they all relate it, makes it clear that they wished to be understood literally. It was the king's invariable practice, they tell us, to communicate with all the subjects of his polyglot empire directly and in person, and "never through an interpreter," and Gellius roundly affirms that he was able to

which seem to imply a certain degree at least of acquaintance with Egyptian (for instance II. 79, II. 99), and with the ancient language of Persia, as IX. 100, &c. It must be admitted, however, that a very superficial knowledge of either language would suffice to explain these allusions.

† XVII. 17.
§ Hist. Nat. VII. 7.
† Deipnosoph, Book X., p. 415.
† VII. 7.

— Athenæus, Deipnosoph.
converse in each and every one of these tongues "with as much correctness as if it were his native dialect."

The attainments of Cleopatra, although far short of what is reported of Mithridates, are nevertheless described by Plutarch as very extraordinary. He says that she "spoke most languages, and that there were but few of the foreign ambassadors to whom she gave audience through an interpreter." The languages which he specifies are those of the Éthiopius, of the Troglydyes (probably a dialect of Coptic), of the Hebrews, of the Arabs, the Syrians, the Medes, and the Persians; but he adds that this list does not comprise all the languages which this extraordinary woman understood.

Now the very prominence assigned to these examples, and the absence of all allusion to any other which might be supposed to approximate to them, may afford a presumption that they are almost solitary. Valerius Maximus, in his well-known chapter De Studio et Industria, cites the case of Mithridates as a very remarkable example "of study and industry." It is highly probable therefore, that, if he knew any other eminent linguists, he would have added their names. Yet the only cases which he instances are those of Cato learning Greek in his old age, of Themistocles acquiring Persian during his exile, and of Publius mastering all the five dialects of Greece during the time of his Praetorship. In like manner, Ausus Gallus has no more notable linguist to produce, in contrast with Mithridates, than the old poet Ennius, who used to boast that he had three hearts, because he could speak Greek, Latin, and his rude native dialect, Oscon. And Pliny, with all his love of parallels, is even more meagre:—he does not recite a single name in comparison with that of Mithridates.

The Romans, especially under the early Republic, appear to have been singularly indifferent or unsuccessful in cultivating languages; and the bad Greek of the Roman ambassadors to Tarentum, for their ridicule of which the Tarentines paid so dearly, is almost an average specimen of the accomplishments of the earlier Romans as linguists. Nor can this circumstance fail to appear strange, when it is remembered over how many different races and tongues the wide domain of Rome extended. The very multiplicity of languages submitted to her government

† It was probably by some such fanciful analogy that Cœrops obtained the name Κόρος, because he knew both Greek and Egyptian.
would seem to have imposed upon her public men the necessity of familiarizing themselves, even for the discharge of their public office, with at least the principal ones among them. But, on the contrary, for a long time they steadily pursued the policy of imposing, as far as practicable, upon the conquered nationalities the Latin language, at least in public and official transactions.†

And, so far as regards the Eastern and Northern languages, this exclusion was successfully and permanently enforced at Rome. The slave population of the city comprised almost every variety of race within the limits of the Empire. The very names of the slaves who are introduced in the plays of Plautus and Terence—Syra, Phenicium, Afer, Geta, Dorias, &c. (which are but their respective gentile appellatives)—embrace a very large circle of the languages of Asia, Africa, and Northern Europe. And yet, with the exception of a single scene in the Pannus of Plautus, in which the well-known Punic speech of Hanno the Carthaginian is introduced,† there is nothing in either of these dramatists from which we could infer that any of the manifold languages of the slave population of Rome effected an entrance among their haughty masters. They were all as completely ignored by the Romans, as is the vernacular Celtic of the Irish agricultural servants in the midland counties of England.

But it was not so for Greek. From the Augustan age onwards, this polished language began to dispute the mastery with Latin, even in Rome itself.

"Graecia capta ferum cepit capere, et ares
Intulis agresti Latio—"

applies to the language, even more than to the arts. In the days of the Rhetorician, Molon, (Cicero’s master in eloquence,) Greek had obtained the entree of the Senate. In the time of Tiberius, its use was permitted even in forensic pleadings. With the emperors who succeeded,† the triumph of Greek was still more complete. From Pliny downwards, there is hardly an author of eminence in the Roman Empire who did

* See a long list of examples cited by Bayle, Dict. Histor. i. 943. The legislation on the subject, however, was not uniform; nor is it easy to reconcile some parts of it with each other, or to understand any general principles on which they can be founded.

† Pannus, act v, sec. 1.

‡ With the exception of Tacitus, who claimed to be of the family of the great historian, and made a vigorous but unsuccessful effort for the revival of declining Latinity.
not write in that language,—Pausanias, Dion, Galen, even
the Emperor Marcus Aurelius himself, with all the traditional
Roman associations of his name.

It was so also with the Christian population and the Christian
literature of Rome. Almost all the Christian writings of the
first two centuries are in Greek. The early Roman liturgy
was Greek. The population of Rome was in great part a
Greek-speaking race. A large proportion of the inscriptions in
the Roman Catacombs are Greek, and some even of the Latin
ones are engraved in Greek characters. Nay, the early
Christian churches in Gaul, Vienne, Lyons, and Marseilles,
and the few remains of their literature which have reached us,
are equally Greek.*

In a word, during the first two centuries of the Christian
era, making due allowance for the difference of the periods,
Greek and Latin held towards each other in Rome the same
relation which we find between Norman-French and Saxon in
England after the Conquest; and we may safely say that, during
those centuries, a knowledge of both languages was the ordinary
accomplishment of all educated men, and was shared by
many of the lowest of the population.

Beyond this limit, however, we read of no remarkable
linguists even among the accomplished scholars of the Augustan
age. No one will doubt that the two Varro's may fairly be
taken as, in this respect, the most favourable specimens of
the class. Now neither of them seems to have gone further
than a knowledge of Greek. Out of the four hundred and
ninety books which Marcus Terentius Varro wrote, there is
not one named which would indicate familiarity with any other
foreign language.

The Neo-Platonists of the second and third centuries, whose
researches in Oriental Philosophy must have brought them into
contact with some of the Eastern languages, may possibly form
an exception to this general statement; but, on the whole, in
the absence of positive and exact information on the subject,
it may not unreasonably be conjectured that, among the
Christian scholars of the second, third, and fourth centuries,
we might find a wider range of linguistic attainments than
among their Gentile contemporaries. The critical study of the
Bible itself involved the necessity of familiarity, not only with
Greek and Hebrew, but with more than one cognate oriental
dialect besides. St. Jerome, besides the classic languages and

* See Milman's Latin Christianity, I., 28-9.
his native Illyrian, is known to have been familiar with several of the Eastern tongues; and it is not improbable that some of the earlier commentators and expositors of the Bible may be taken as equally favourable specimens of the Christian linguists.* Origen's Hexapla is a monument of his scholarship in Hebrew, and probably in Syriac and Samaritan. St. Clement of Alexandria was perhaps even a more accomplished linguist; for he tells that of the masters under whom he studied, one was from Greece, one from Manna Gracia, a third from Coele-Syria, a fourth from Egypt, a fifth an Assyrian, and a sixth a Hebrew.† And St. Gregory Nazianzen expressly relates of his friend St. Basil, that, even before he came to Athens to commence his rhetorical studies, he was already well-versed in many languages.‡

From the death of Constantine, however, the study began rapidly to decline, even among ecclesiastics. The disruption of the Empire naturally tended to diminish the intercourse between East and West, and by consequence the interchange of their languages. It would appear, too, as if the barbarian conquerors adopted, in favour of their own languages, the same policy which the Romans had pursued for Latin. Attila is said to have passed a law prohibiting the use of the Latin language in his newly conquered kingdom,§ and to have taken pains, by importing native teachers, to procure the substitution of Gothic in its stead. At all events, in whatever way the change was brought about, a knowledge of both Greek and Latin, which in the classic times of the Empire had been the ordinary accomplishment of every educated man, became uncommon and almost exceptional. Pope Gregory the Great, who, bitterly as he has been assailed as an

* In some congregations, as early as the first and second century, there were official interpreters [Eupanæus], whose duty it was to translate into the provincial tongues what had been read in the church. They resembled the interpreters of the Jewish synagogue.

† Stromata, I. 270 (Paris, 1641.)

‡ Opp. I. 326 (Paris, 1609.) Hom. in Laudem St. Basili.

§ See Bajle, Dict. Historique, I. 468. It is curious that the victorious Musulmen at Jerusalem enacted the very opposite. No Christian was permitted to speak the sacred language of the Koran. See Milman's "Latin Christianity," II. 42, and again III. 223. It would be interesting to examine the history of enactments of this kind, and their effects upon the languages which they were intended to suppress,—the Norman efforts against English, those of the English against Celtic, Joseph II's against Magyar, and others of the same kind.
enemy of letters, must be confessed to have been the most eminent Western scholar of his day, spoke Greek very imperfectly; he complains that it was difficult, even at Constantinople, to find any one who could translate Greek satisfactorily into Latin;* and a still earlier instance is recorded, in which a pope, in other respects a man of undoubted ability, was unable to translate the letter of the Greek patriarch, much less to communicate with the Greek ambassadors, except through an interpreter.†

More than one, indeed, of the early theological controversies was embittered through the misunderstandings caused between the East and West by mutual ignorance of each other’s language. Pelagius succeeded in obtaining a favourable decision from the Council of Jerusalem in 415, chiefly because, while his Western adversary, Orosius, was unable to speak Greek, the fathers of the Council were ignorant of Latin. The protracted controversy on the Three Chapters owed much of its inveteracy to the ignorance of the Western† of the original language of the works whose orthodoxy was impugned; and it is well known that the condemnation of the decree of the sixth council on the use of sacred images issued by the fathers of Francfort, was based exclusively on a strangely erroneous Latin translation of the acts of the council, through which translation alone they were known in Germany and Gaul §.

The foundation of the Empire of Charlemagne consummated the separation between the Greek and Latin races and their languages. The venerated names of Bede and of Alcuin in the Western Church, and the more questionable celebrity of the Patriarch Photius in the Eastern, constitute a passing exception. But it need hardly be added that they stand almost

* Ep. VI. 27.
† When the Patriarch Nestorius wrote to Pope Celestine his account of the controversy now known under his name, the latter was obliged, before he could reply, to wait till Nestorius’s letter had been translated into Latin. Erat enim in Latinius sermo vertendus. This letter, together with those of Cyril of Alexandria, form part of an interesting correspondence which illustrates very strikingly the pre-eminence then enjoyed in the Church by the Roman bishop, and is found in Hardouin’s Concilia, I. 1392. See also Walch’s Historie der Ketzerereyen, V. 701.
‡ Even Pope Vigilius himself professes his want of familiarity with the Greek language. See his celebrated Constitutum in Hardouin’s Coll. Concill. III. col. 39.
§ See the original in Labbe’s Concilia, VIII. 885. Both the original and the translation will be found in Leibnitz’s “System of Theology,” p. 53, note.
entirely alone; and it will readily be believed that, amid the Barbarian irruptions from without, and the fierce intestine revolutions, of which Europe was the theatre during the rest of the earlier mediaeval period, even that familiarity with the Greek and oriental languages which we have described, entirely disappeared in the West.

The wars of the Crusades, and the reviving intellectual activity in which this and other great events of the second mediaeval period originated, gave a new impulse to the study of languages. Frederic II., a remarkable example of the union of great intellectual gifts with deep moral perversity, spoke fluently six languages, Latin, Greek, Italian, German, Hebrew, and even Arabic.\* The Moorish schools in Spain began to be visited by Christian students. In this manner Arabic found its way into the West; and the intermixture of learned Jews in the European kingdoms afforded similar opportunities for the cultivation of Hebrew, which were turned to account by many, especially among biblical scholars. On the other hand, notwithstanding the contempt for profane learning which breathes through the Koran, the Saracen scholars began to direct their attention to the learning of other creeds, and the languages of other races. Ibn Wasiil, who came into Italy in 1250 as ambassador to Manfred, the son of Frederic II., was reported to be familiar with the Western tongues. The Spanish Moors, too, began sedulously to cultivate Greek. The works of Aristotle, of Galen, of Dioscorides, and many other Greek writers, chiefly philosophical, were translated into Arabic by Averroes, Ibn Djoldjol and Avicenna. And the Jewish scholars of that age were equally assiduous in the cultivation of Greek. The learned Rabbi Maimonides, born in Cordova in the early part of the 12th century, was not only master of many Eastern tongues, but was also thoroughly familiar with the Greek language.

It would be a mistake, however, to imagine that it was among the Moors or the Hebrews that the revival of the study of languages first commenced. Alcuin, in addition to the modern languages with which his sojourn in various kingdoms must have made him acquainted, was also familiar with Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. Hermann, the Dalmatian, the first translator of the Koran, was well acquainted with Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and Arabic. The celebrated Raymond Lilly, who was a native of Majorca, was able to lecture in Latin

\* See Milman's Latin Christianity, IV. p. 56, and again 367.
Greek, Arabic, and perhaps Hebrew;—an accomplishment especially wonderful in one who was among the most laborious and prolific writers of his age, and who left after him, according to some authorities, (though this, no doubt, is a great exaggeration), not less than a thousand* works on the most diversified subjects. At the instance of this eminent orientalist, the council of Vienne directed that professorships should be founded in all the great Universities, for the Hebrew, Chaldee, and Arabic languages.†

An example of, for the period, very remarkable proficiency in modern languages is recorded in the history of the Fourth Lateran Council, 1215. Roderigo Ximenes,‡ Archbishop of Toledo in the early part of the thirteenth century, a native of Navarre, but a scholar of the University of Paris, was one of the representatives of the Spanish Church at that Council. A controversy regarding the Primacy of Spain had arisen between the Sees of Toledo and Compostella, which was referred for adjudication to the bishops there assembled. Ximenes addressed to the council a long Latin oration in defence of the claim of Toledo; and, as many of his auditors, which consisted both of the clergy and the laity, were ignorant of that language, he repeated the same argument in a series of discourses addressed to the natives of each country in succession; to the Romans, Germans, French, English, Navarrese, and Spaniards,§ each in their respective tongues. Thus the number of languages in which he spoke was at least seven, and it is highly probable that he had others at his disposal, if his auditory had been of such a nature as to render them necessary.

The taste for the languages and literature of the East received a further stimulus from the foundation of the Christian principalities at Antioch and Jerusalem, from the establishment of the Latin Empire at Constantinople, and in general from the long wars in the East, to which the enthusiasm of the age attracted the most enterprising spirits of European

* The titles of nearly two hundred of his works are still preserved.
† Rohrbacher Hist. de l’Eglise, XIX., 569.
‡ He is the author of a History of Spain, in nine books; and besides his very remarkable attainments as a linguist, was reputed among the most learned scholars of his age.
§ See the account in Labbe, Collect. Concil. VII. 79. The writer observes; Cum ab apostolorum tempore auditum non sit nec scriptum reperitur, quemque ad populum eandem conceptionem habuisse tot ac tam diversis linguis euncta exponendo. The fact is also related by Feyjoo, Teatro critico, IV, p. 400. An interesting account of this remarkable scholar will be found in the Bibliotheca Hispanica Vetus, II. pp. 149-50.
chivalry. The pious pilgrimages, too, contributed to the same result. Many of the knights or paladins, on their return from the East, brought with them the knowledge, not only of Greek, but of more than one of the oriental languages besides. The long imprisonments to which, during the holy wars, and the Latin campaigns against the Turks, they were often subjected, supplied another occasion of familiarity with Arabic, Syriac, Turkish, or Persian.

The commercial enterprise of the Western Nations, and especially of the Venetians and Genoese, was a still more powerful instrument of the interchange of languages. Few modern voyagers have possessed more of that spirit of travel which is the best aid towards the acquisition of foreign tongues, than the celebrated Marco Polo. It is hard to suppose that he can have returned from his extensive wanderings in Persia, in Tartary, in the Indian Archipelago, and in China and Tibet, without some tincture of their languages. Still less can this be supposed of his countryman, Josaphat Barbaro, who sojourned for sixteen years among the Tartar tribes.* It was in the commercial settlements of the Venetians in the Levant that the profession of interpreters, of which I shall have to speak hereafter, and which has since become hereditary in certain families, was originated or brought to perfection.†

It is only, however, from the revival of letters, properly so called, that the history of linguistic studies can be truly said to commence.

The attention of Scholars, in the first instance, was chiefly directed towards the classical languages and the languages of the Bible. The Greek scholars who were driven to the West by the Moslem occupation of Constantinople brought their language, in its best and most attractive form, to the Universities

* The Family of Barbaro produced many distinguished linguists, according to the opportunities of the time. Francesco Barbaro, born in 1398, was one of the earliest eminent Greek scholars of Italy. Ermolao, the commentator on Aristotle, was said by the wits of his time to have been such a purist in Greek, that he did not stop at consulting the devil when he was at a loss for the precise meaning of a word—the much disputed 

† Venice was long remarkable for her encouragement of skill in living languages. It was a necessary qualification for most of her diplomatic appointments; and, while Latin, in Europe, was still the ordinary medium of diplomatic intercourse, we find a Venetian ambassador to England, in 1509, Badoer, capable of conversing like a native in English, French, and German. See an interesting paper, "Venetian Dispatches," in the Quarterly Review, vol. xcvii. p. 369.
of Italy. In the Council of Florence, in 1438, more than one Italian divine, especially Ambrogio Traversari, was found capable of holding discussions with the Greek representatives in their native tongue. In like manner, the Jews and Moors, who were exiled from Spain by the harsh and impolite measures of Ferdinand and Isabella, deposited through all the schools of Europe the seeds of a solid and critical knowledge of Hebrew and Arabic and their cognate languages. The fruits of their teaching may be discerned at a comparatively early period in the biblical studies of the time. Antonio de Lebrixa published, in 1481, a grammar of the Latin, Castilian and Hebrew languages: and I need only allude to the mature and various oriental learning which Cardinal Ximenes found ready to his hand, in the very first years of the sixteenth century, for the compilation of the Complutensian Polyglot. Although some of the scholars whom he engaged, as for instance, Demetrius Ducas, were Greeks; and others, as Alfonso Zamora or Pablo Coronell,* were converted Jews; yet, the names of Lopez de Zuniga, Nunez de Guzman, and Vargas† are a sufficient evidence of the success with which the co-operation of native scholars was enlisted in the undertaking.‡

From this period the number of scholars eminent in the department of languages becomes so great, and the history of many among them presents so frequent points of resemblance, that it may conduce to the greater distinctness of the narrative to classify separately the most distinguished linguists of each among the principal nations.

§ I. LINGUISTS OF THE EAST.

Although the inquiry must of course commence with the East, the cradle of human language, unfortunately the materials for this portion of the subject are more meagre and imperfectly preserved than any other.

In the East indeed, the faculty of language appears, for the most part, in a form quite different from what we shall find among the scholars of the West. The Eastern linguists, with a few exceptions, have been eminent as mere speakers of languages, rather than scholars even in the loosest sense of the word.

* McErie's Reformation in Spain, I. p. 61. See also Hallam's Literary History, I. p. 197.
† See the Bibliotheca Hispana, vol. I. pref. p. viii.
‡ See Hefelin's Der Cardinal Ximenes: one of the most interesting and learned biographies with which I am acquainted, p. 124.
As it is in the East that the office of Dragoman or "interpreter" first rose to the dignity of a profession, so all the most notable Oriental linguists have belonged to that profession. A very remarkable specimen of this class occurs in the reign of Soliman the Magnificent, and flourished in the early part of the sixteenth century. A most interesting account is given of him, under his Turkish name of Genus Bey, by Thvet, in that curious repertory—his *Cosmographie Universelle.* He was the son of a poor fisherman, of the island of Corfu; and while yet a boy, was carried away by pirates and sold as a slave at Constantinople. Thence he was carried into Egypt, Syria, and other Eastern countries; and he would also seem to have visited most of the European kingdoms, or at least to have enjoyed the opportunity of intercourse with natives of them all. His proficiency in the languages both of the East and West, drew upon him the notice of the Sultan, who appointed him his First Dragoman, with the rank of Pasha. Thvet (who would seem to have known him personally during his wanderings) describes him in his quaint old French, as "the first man of his day for speaking divers sorts of languages, and of the happiest memory under the Heavens." He adds, that this extraordinary man "knew perfectly no fewer than sixteen languages, viz.: Greek, both ancient and modern, Hebrew, Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Moorish, Tartar, Armenian, Russian, Hungarian, Polish, Italian, Spanish, German, and French." Genus Bey, was, of course, a renegade; but, from a circumstance related by Thvet, he appears to have retained a reverence for his old faith, though not sufficiently strong to be proof against temptation. He was solicited by some bigoted Moelmans to remove a bell, which the Christians had been permitted to erect in their little church. For a time he refused to permit its removal; but at last he was induced by a large bribe, to accede to the demand. Thvet relates that, in punishment of his sacrilegious weakness, he was struck with that loathsome disease which smote King Herod, and perished miserably in nine days from the date of this inauspicious act.

In Naima's "Annals of the Turkish Empire," another renegade, a Hungarian by birth, is mentioned, who spoke fourteen languages, and who, in consequence of this accomplishment, was employed during a siege to carry a message through the lines of the blockading army.†

† Naima's Annals of the Turkish Empire, translated by M. Frazer, for the Oriental Translation Society. For this fact I am indebted to the kindness of Mr. Watts, of the British Museum, but I am unable to refer to the passage.
A still more marvellous example of the gift of languages is 
mentioned by Duret, in his *Tresor des Langues* (p. 964)—that of 
Jonadab, a Jew of Morocco, who lived about the same period. 
He was sold as a slave by the Moors, and lived for twenty-six 
years in captivity in different parts of the world. With more 
constancy to his creed, however, than the Corfu Christian, he 
withstood every attempt to undermine his faith or to compel 
its abjuration; and, from the obduracy of his resistance, received 
from his masters the opprobrious name *Albanar,* "the serpent" 
or "viper." Duret says that Jonadab spoke and wrote twenty-
eight different languages. He does not specify their names, 
however, nor have I been able to find any other allusion to 
the man.

It would be interesting, if materials could be found for the 
inquiry, to pursue this extremely curious subject through the 
sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and especially in the 
military and commercial establishments of the Venetians in 
the Morea and the islands. The race of Dragomans has never 
ceased to flourish in the Levant. M. Antoine d’Abbadie 
informed me that there are many families in which this office, 
and sometimes the consular appointment for which it is an 
indispensable qualification, have been hereditary for the last two 
or three centuries; and that it is very common to find among 
them men and women who, sufficiently for all the ordinary 
purposes of conversation, speak Arabic, Turkish, Greek, Italian, 
Spanish, English, German, and French, with little or no 
accent. This accomplishment is not confined to one single nation. 
Mr. Burton, in his "Pilgrimage to Medina and 
Meccah," mentions an Afghan who "spoke five or six languages."*
He speaks of another, a Koord settled at Medina, who 
"spoke five languages in perfection." The traveller, reassures 
us; "may hear the Cairene donkey-boys shouting three or four 
European dialects with an accent as good as his own," and he 
"has frequently known Armenians (to whom, among all the 
Easterns, he assigns the first place as linguists) speak, 
besides their mother tongue, Turkish, Arabic, Persian, and 
Hindostanee, and at the same time display an equal aptitude 
for the Occidental languages."†

But of all the Eastern linguists of the present day the most 
notable seem to be the ciceroni who take charge of the pilgrims 
at Mecca, many of whom speak fluently every one of the 
numerous languages which prevail over the vast region of the 
Moslem. Mr. Burton fell in at Mecca with a one-eyed Hadji,

* Pilgrimage to El Medinah, II. p. 368.
† Ibid. I. p. 179.
who spoke fluently and with good accent Turkish, Persian, Hindostani, Pushu, Armenian, English, French, and Italian.

In the "Turkish Annals" of Naïma, already cited, the learned Yankuli Mohammed Effendi, a contemporary of Sultan Murad Khan, is described as "a perfect linguist." Many similar instances might, without much difficulty, be collected; nor can it be doubted that, among the numerous generations which have thus flourished and passed away in the East, there may have been rivals for Genus Bey, or even for "the Serpent" himself. But unhappily their fame has been local and transitory. They were admired during their brief day of success, but are long since forgotten; nor is it possible any longer to recover a trace of their history. They are unknown.

Curent quia vato sacro.‡

It would be a great injustice, however, to represent this as the universal character of the Eastern linguists. On the contrary, it has only needed intercourse with the scholars of the West in order to draw out what appears to be the very remarkable aptitude of the native Orientals for the scientific study of languages. Thus the learned Portuguese Jew, Rabbi Menasseh Ben Israel (1604-1657), was not only a thorough master of the Oriental languages, but was able to write with ease and exactness several of the languages of the West, and published almost indifferently in Hebrew, Latin, Spanish, and English.§ I allude more particularly, however, to those bodies of Eastern Christians, which, from their commonity of creed with the Roman Church, have, for several centuries, possessed ecclesiastical establishments in Rome and other cities of Europe.

* Burton's Pilgrimage to El Medinah and Meecah. III., 308.
† Annals of the Turkish Empire, p. 45.
‡ A melancholy instance of the capriciousness of this sort of reputation, and of the unhappiness by which, in common with many other gifts, it is often accompanied, is recorded in the Paris journals of the early part of this year. A man apparently about fifty years old, named Tincorn, a native of Constantinople, was found dead at his lodgings in the Rue des Vieux Augustins, having perished, as it afterwards appeared, of hunger. This ill-fated man was possessed of an ample fortune, and had held high diplomatic appointments; and, besides being well-versed in ancient and modern literature, he spoke not fewer than ten languages, and knew several others! Yet almost the only record of his varied accomplishments is that which also tells the story of his melancholy end!
§ See his life by Pococke, prefixed to the translation of his work De Termino Vitae. 1690.
The Syrians had been remarkable, even from the classic times,* for the patient industry with which they devoted themselves to the labour of translation from foreign languages into their own. Many of the modern Syrians, however, have deserved the still higher fame of original scholarship.

The Maronite community of Syrian Christians has produced several scholars of unquestioned eminence. Abraham Chellenis was one of the chief assistants of Le Jay, at Paris, in the preparation of his Polyglot. His services in a somewhat similar capacity at Rome are familiar to all Oriental scholars. But it is to the name of Assemani that the Maronite body owes most of its reputation. For a time, indeed, literature would seem to have been almost an inheritance in the family of Assemani. It has contributed to the catalogue of Oriental scholars no less than five of its members—Joseph Simon, who died in 1768; his nephews, Stephen Evodius and Joseph Lewis; Joseph Aloysius, who died at Rome in 1782; and Simon, who died at Padua in 1821. The first of them is the well-known editor of the works of St. Ephrem, and author of the great repertory of Oriental ecclesiastical erudition, the Bibliotheca Orientalis.

The Greeks, with greater resources, and under circumstances more favourable, are less distinguished as linguists. John Matthew Caryophilos, a native of Corfu, who was archbishop of Iconium and resided at Rome in the early part of the seventeenth century, was a learned Orientalist, and, besides several literary works of higher pretension, published some elementary books on the Chaldee, Syriac, and Coptic languages. But he has few imitators among his countrymen. Leo Allatius (Allazzi), although a profound scholar, and familiar with every department of the literature of the West, whether sacred or profane, † can hardly be considered a linguist in the ordinary

* See Dr. Paul De Lagarde's learned dissertation, "De Geoponica Com Versione Syriaca" (p. 2, Leipzig, 1855). This dissertation is an account of a hitherto unknown Syriac version of the "Scriptores Rei Rusticae" which Dr. De Lagarde discovered among the Syriac MSS. of the British Museum. He has also transcribed from the same collection many similar remains of Syriac literature, partly sacred, partly profane, which he purposes to publish at intervals. Some of the former especially, as referring to the Ante-Nicene period, are, like those already published by Mr. Cureton, of great interest to students of Christian antiquity, although the same drawback—doubt as to their age and authorship—must affect the doctrinal value of them all.

† This laborious and prolific writer, whose works fill nearly 30
sense of the word. The same may be said of the many Greek students, as, for instance, Metaxa, Meletius Syrius, and others, who, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, repaired to the universities of Italy, France, and even England. It can hardly be doubted, of course, that many of them acquired a certain familiarity with the languages of the countries in which they sojourned, but no traces of this knowledge appear to be now discoverable. By far the most notable of them, Cyril Lucaris, the well-known Calvinistic Patriarch of Constantinople, spoke and wrote fluently Arabic, Greek, Latin, and Italian; but, if his Latinity be a fair sample of his skill in the other languages, his place as a linguist must be held low indeed. It should be added, however, that as polyglot speakers, the Greeks have long enjoyed a considerable reputation. The celebrated Panagiotis Nicusius (better known by his Italianized name Panagiotii) obtained, despite all the prejudices of race, the post of First Dragoman of the Porte, about the middle of

volumes, is said to have used the same pen for no less than forty years, and to have been thrown almost into despair upon its accidental destruction at the end of that period.

Some of these visited the English universities. Of one among the number, named Metrophanes Crispulus, who was sent by Cyril Lucaris to be indoctrinated in Anglican Theology, and who lived at Oxford at the charge of archbishop Abbott, a very amusing account is given by the disappointed prelate in a letter quoted by Neale (History of Alexandria, II., 413–5). He turned out "an unworthy fellow," "far from ingenuity or any grateful respect," "a rogue and beggar," and in other ways disappointed the care bestowed on him.

One specimen may suffice, which is furnished by Mr. Neale: "Cyllius (I have collected) sua notata cum textu Bellarmini." Neale, II., p. 402. The Easterns seldom seem at home in the languages of Europe; Italian, and still more French orthography, is their great puzzle. I have seen specimens of Oriental Italian which, for orthography, might rival "Jeanes's" English, or the French of Augustus the Young.

Panagiotis was a native of Scio, and was known in his later life under the sobriquet of "the Green Horse," in allusion to a local proverb, that "it is easier to find a green horse than a wise man in Scio." The appellation was the highest tribute that could be rendered to the prudence and ability of Panagiotis; but it is also a curious confirmation of the evil repute, as regards honesty, in which the islanders of the Aegean were held from the earliest times. The reader will probably remember the satirical couplet of Theoclyides about the honesty of the Lorians, which Porson applied, in a well-known English parody, to the Greek scholarship of Herrmann.

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Λένω πάντως ὃν ἐὰν μὴν ἐξέρχομαι
Πάντως πᾶν Πελοπόννησε καὶ Πελοπόννησος Λένως
the seventeenth century; and, from his time forward, the office
was commonly held by a Greek, until the separation of Greece
from the Ottoman Empire.

Mr. Burton’s observation that no natives of the East seem
to possess the faculty of language in a higher degree than the
Armenians, is confirmed by the experience of all other travellers;
and the commercial activity which has long distinguished
them, and has led to their establishing themselves in almost
all the great European centres of commerce, has teaded very
much to develop this national characteristic. A far higher
spirit of enterprise has led to the foundation of many religious
establishments of the Armenians in different parts of Europe,
which have rendered invaluable services, not only to their own
native language and literature, but to Oriental studies generally.
Among these the fathers of the celebrated Mechatist order
have earned for themselves, by their manifold contributions to
sacred literature, the title of the Benedictines of the East.
The publications of this learned order (especially at their prin-
cipal press in the convent of San Lazzaro, Venice,) are too well
known to require any particular notice. Most of their
publications regard historical or theological subjects; but
many also are on the subject of language, as grammars,
dictionaries, and philological treatises. A little series of
versions, the Prayers of St. Nerses in twenty-four languages,
printed at their press, is one of the most beautiful specimens
of polyglot typography with which I am acquainted. Among
the scholars of the order the names of Somal, Rhedeston,
Ingigian, Avedichian, Minaos, and, above all, of the two
Auchers, are the most prominent. One of the latter is best
known to English readers as the friend of Byron, his instructor
in Armenian, and his partner in the compilation of an Anglo-
Armenian grammar. The fathers of this order generally,
however, both in Vienna and in Italy, have long enjoyed the
reputation of being excellent linguists. Visitors of the
Armenian convent of St. Lazzaro at Venice cannot fail to be
struck by the accomplishment among its inmates. Besides

* An elaborate account of them will be found in Neumann’s
Versuch einer Geschichte der Armenischen Literatur. Leipzig, 1836.
On the exceeding importance of the Armenian language for the
general study of the entire Indo-Germanic family, see the extremely
learned essay, Urgeschichte der Armenier, ein Philologischer
Versuch. (Berlin, 1864.) It is published anonymously, but is be-
lieved to be from the pen of the distinguished Orientalist named in
page 92.