

among several other instances, Theophrastus having said that the plane-tree is in Italy rare,¹¹ Pliny, misled by the similarity of the Greek word (*spanian*, rare), says that the tree occurs in Italy and Spain.¹² His work has, with great propriety, been called the Encyclopædia of Antiquity; and, in truth, there are few portions of the learning of the times to which it does not refer. Of the thirty-seven Books of which it consists, no less than sixteen (from the twelfth to the twenty-seventh) relate to plants. The information which is collected in these books, is of the most miscellaneous kind; and the author admits, with little distinction, truth and error, useful knowledge and absurd fables. The declamatory style, and the comprehensive and lofty tone of thought which we have already spoken of as characteristic of the Roman writers, are peculiarly observable in him. The manner of his death is well known: it was occasioned by the eruption of Vesuvius, A.D. 79, to which, in his curiosity, he ventured so near as to be suffocated.

Pliny's work acquired an almost unlimited authority, as one of the standards of botanical knowledge, in the middle ages; but even more than his, that of his contemporary, Pedanius Dioscorides, of Anazarbus in Cilicia. This work, written in Greek, is held by the best judges¹³ to offer no evidence that the author observed for himself. Yet he says expressly in his Preface, that his love of natural history, and his military life, have led him into many countries, in which he has had opportunity to become acquainted with the nature of herbs and trees.¹⁴ He speaks of six hundred plants, but often indicates only their names and properties, giving no description by which they can be identified. The main cause of his great reputation in subsequent times was, that he says much of the medicinal virtues of vegetables.

We come now to the ages of darkness and lethargy, when the habit of original thought seems to die away, as the talent of original observation had done before. Commentators and mystics succeed to the philosophical naturalists of better times. And though a new race, altogether distinct in blood and character from the Greek, appropriates to itself the stores of Grecian learning, this movement does not, as might be expected, break the chains of literary slavery. The Arabs

¹¹ Theoph. iv. 7. Ἐν μὲν γὰρ τῷ Ἀδρία πλατάνων οὐ φασὶν εἶναι πλὴν περὶ τὸ Διομήδους, ἱερὸν, σπανία δὲ καὶ ἐν Ἰταλίᾳ πάση.

¹² Plin. *Nat. Hist.* xii. 3. Et alias (platanos) fuisse in Italia, ac nominatim *Hispania*, apud auctores invenitur.

¹³ Mirbel. 510.

¹⁴ Sprengel, i. 136.