

convey a distinct meaning to any but the learned in these two countries. So also in Italy, the modern Italian cannot be traced back much beyond the time of Dante, or some six centuries before our time. Even in Rome, where there had been no permanent intrusion of foreigners, such as the Lombard settlers of German origin in the plains of the Po, the common people of the year 1000 spoke quite a distinct language from that of their Roman ancestors or their Italian descendants, as is shown by the celebrated chronicle of the monk Benedict, of the convent of St. Andrea on Mount Soracte, written in such barbarous Latin, and with such strange grammatical forms, that it requires a profoundly skilled linguist to decipher it.*

Having thus established the preliminary fact, that none of the tongues now spoken were in existence ten centuries ago, and that the ancient languages have passed through many a transitional dialect before they settled into the forms now in use, the philologist might bring forward proofs of the great numbers both of lost and living forms of speech.

Strabo tells us that in his time, in the Caucasus alone (a chain of mountains not longer than the Alps, and much narrower), there were spoken at least seventy languages. At the present period the number, it is said, would be still greater, if all the distinct dialects of those mountains were reckoned. Several of these Caucasian tongues admit of no comparison with any known living or lost Asiatic or European language. Others which are not peculiar are obsolete forms of known languages, such as the Georgian, Mongolian, Persian, Arabic, and Tartarian. It seems that as often as conquering hordes swept over that part of Asia, always coming from the north and east, they drove before them the inhabitants of the plains, who took refuge in some of the retired

* See G. Pertz, *Monumenta Germanica*, vol. iii.