

come forward. In the year 1500, after the fall of Lodovico il Moro, when a similar outbreak of popular feeling took place, Ercole ordered a series of nine processions, in which there were 4,000 children dressed in white, bearing the standard of Jesus. He himself rode on horseback, as he could not walk without difficulty. An edict was afterwards published of the same kind as that of 1496. It is well known how many churches and monasteries were built by this ruler. He even sent for a live saint, the Suor Colomba, shortly before he married his son Alfonso to Lucrezia Borgia (1502). A special messenger fetched the saint with fifteen other nuns from Viterbo, and the Duke himself conducted her on her arrival at Ferrara into a convent prepared for her reception. We shall probably do him no injustice if we attribute all these measures very largely to political calculation. To the conception of government formed by the House of Este, this employment of religion for the ends of statecraft belongs by a kind of logical necessity.

Religion and the Spirit of the Renaissance.

But in order to reach a definite conclusion with regard to the religious sense of the men of this period, we must adopt a different method. From their intellectual attitude in general, we can infer their relation both to the divine idea and to the existing religion of their age.

These modern men, the representatives of the culture of Italy, were born with the same religious instincts as other mediaeval Europeans. But their powerful individuality made them in religion, as in other matters, altogether subjective, and the intense charm which the discovery of the inner and outer universe exercised upon them rendered them markedly worldly. In the rest of Europe religion remained, till a much later period, something given from without, and

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in practical life egotism and sensuality alternated with devotion and repentance. The latter had no spiritual competitors) as in Italy, or only to a far smaller extent.

Further, the close and frequent relations of Italy with Byzantium and the Mohammedan peoples had produced a dispassionate tolerance which weakened the ethnographical conception of a privileged Christendom. And when classical antiquity with its men and institutions became an ideal of life) as well as the greatest of historical memories, ancient speculation and skepticism obtained in many cases a complete mastery over the minds of Italians. Since, again, the Italians were the first modern people of Europe who gave themselves boldly to speculations on freedom and necessity, and since they did so under violent and lawless political circumstances, in which evil seemed often to win a splendid and lasting victory, their belief in God began to waver, and their view of the government of the world became fatalistic. And when their passionate natures refused to rest in the sense of uncertainty, they made a shift to help themselves out with ancient, Oriental, or medieval superstition. They took to astrology and magic.

Finally, these intellectual giants, these representatives of the Renaissance, show, in respect to religion, a quality which is common in youthful natures. Distinguishing keenly between good and evil, they yet are conscious of no sin. Every disturbance of their inward harmony they feel themselves able to make good out of the plastic resources of their own nature, and therefore they feel no repentance. The need of salvation thus becomes felt more and more dimly, while the ambitions and the intellectual activity of the present either shut out altogether every thought of a world to come, or else caused it to assume a poetic instead of a dogmatic form.

When we look on all this as pervaded and often perverted by the

all-powerful Italian imagination, we obtain a picture of that time which is certainly more in accordance with truth than are vague declarations against modern paganism. And closer investigation often reveals to us that underneath this outward shell much genuine religion could still survive.

The fuller discussion of these points must be limited to a few of the more essential explanations.

That religion should again become an affair of the individual and of his own personal feeling was inevitable when the Church became corrupt in doctrine and tyrannous in practice, and is a proof that the European mind was still alive. It is true that this showed itself in many different ways. While the mystical and ascetical sects of the North lost no time in creating new outward forms for their new modes of thought and feeling, each individual in Italy went his own way, and thousands wandered on the sea of life without any religious guidance whatever. All the more must we admire those who attained and held fast to a personal religion. They were not to blame for being unable to have any part or lot in the old Church, as she then was; nor would it be reasonable to expect that they should all of them go through that mighty spiritual labor which was appointed to the German reformers. The form and aim of this personal faith, as it showed itself in the better minds, will be set forth at the close of our work.

The worldliness, through which the Renaissance seems to offer so striking a contrast to the Middle Ages, owed its first origin to the flood of new thoughts, purposes, and views, which transformed the mediaeval conception of nature and man. The spirit is not in itself more hostile to religion than that 'culture' which now holds its place, but which can give us only a feeble notion of the universal ferment which the discovery of a new world of greatness then called forth. This worldliness was not frivolous, but earnest, and was ennobled by

art and poetry. It is a lofty necessity of the modern spirit that this attitude, once gained, can never again be lost, that an irresistible impulse forces us to the investigation of men and things, and that we must hold this inquiry to be our proper end and work. How soon and by what paths this search will lead us back to God, and in what ways the religious temper of the individual will be affected by it, are questions which cannot be met by any general answer. The Middle Ages, which spared themselves the trouble of induction and free inquiry, can have no right to impose upon us their dogmatical verdict in a matter of such vast importance.

To the study of man, among many other causes, was due the tolerance and indifference with which the Mohammedan religion was regarded. The knowledge and admiration of the remarkable civilization which Islam, particularly before the Mongol inundation, had attained, was peculiar to Italy from the time of the Crusades. This sympathy was fostered by the half-Mohammedan government of some Italian princes, by dislike and even contempt for the existing Church, and by constant commercial intercourse with the harbors of the Eastern and Southern Mediterranean. It can be shown that in the thirteenth century the Italians recognized a Mohammedan ideal of nobleness, dignity, and pride, which they loved to connect with the person of a Sultan. A Mameluke Sultan is commonly meant; if any name is mentioned, it is the name of Saladin. Even the Osmanli Turks, whose destructive tendencies were no secret, gave the Italians only half a fright, and a peaceable accord with them was looked upon as no impossibility.

The truest and most characteristic expression of this religious indifference is the famous story of the Three Rings, which Lessing has put into the mouth of his Nathan, after it had been already told centuries earlier, though with some reserve, in the 'Hundred Old

Novels' (nov. 12 or 73), and more boldly in Boccaccio (*Decamerone*, i, nov. 3). In what language and in what corner of the Mediterranean it was first told can never be known; most likely the original was much more plain-spoken than the two Italian adaptations. The religious postulate on which it rests, namely Deism, will be discussed later on in its wider significance for this period. The same idea is repeated, though in a clumsy caricature, in the famous proverb of the 'three who have deceived the world, that is, Moses, Christ, and Mohammed.' If the Emperor Frederick II, in whom this saying is said to have originated, really thought so, he probably expressed himself with more wit.

Ideas of the same kind were also current in Islam. At the height of the Renaissance, towards the close of the fifteenth century, Luigi Pulci offers us an example of the same mode of thought in the 'Morgante Maggiore.' The imaginary world of which his story treats is divided, as in all heroic poems of romance, into a Christian and a Mohammedan camp. In accordance with the medieval temper, the victory of the Christian and the final reconciliation among the combatants was attended by the baptism of the defeated Islamites, and the Improvisatori, who preceded Pulci in the treatment of these subjects, must have made free use of this stock incident. It was Pulci's object to parody his predecessors, particularly the worst among them, and this he does by the invocations of God, Christ, and the Madonna, with which each canto begins; and still more clearly by the sudden conversions and baptisms, the utter senselessness of which must have struck every reader or hearer. This ridicule leads him further to the confession of his faith in the relative goodness of all religions, which faith, notwithstanding his profession of orthodoxy, rests on an essentially theistic basis. In another point, too, he departs widely from mediaeval conceptions. The alternatives in past centuries

were: Christian, or else Pagan and Mohammedan; orthodox believer or heretic. Pulci draws a picture of the Giant Margutte who, disregarding each and every religion, jovially confesses to every form of vice and sensuality, and only reserves to himself the merit of having never broken faith. Perhaps the poet intended to make something of this — in his way — honest monster, possibly to have led him into virtuous paths by Morgante, but he soon got tired of his own creation, and in the next canto brought him to a comic end. Margutte has been brought forward as a proof of Pulci's frivolity; but he is needed to complete the picture of the poetry of the fifteenth century. It was natural that it should somewhere present in grotesque proportions the figure of an untamed egotism, insensible to all established rule, and yet with a remnant of honorable feeling left. In other poems sentiments are put into the mouths of giants, fiends, infidels, and Mohammedans which no Christian knight would venture to utter.

Antiquity exercised an influence of another kind than that of Islam, and this not through its religion, which was but too much like the Catholicism of this period, but through its philosophy. Ancient literature, now respected as something incomparable, is full of the victory of philosophy over religious tradition. An endless number of systems and fragments of systems were suddenly presented to the Italian mind, not as curiosities or even as heresies, but almost with the authority of dogmas, which had now to be reconciled rather than discriminated. In nearly all these various opinions and doctrines a certain kind of belief in God was implied; but taken altogether they formed a marked contrast to the Christian faith in a Divine government of the world. And there was one central question, which mediaeval theology had striven in vain to solve, and which now urgently demanded an answer from the wisdom of the ancients,

namely, the relation of Providence to the freedom or necessity of the human will. To write the history of this question even superficially from the fourteenth century onwards, would require a whole volume. A few hints must here suffice.

If we take Dante and his contemporaries as evidence, we shall find that ancient philosophy first came into contact with Italian life in the form which offered the most marked contrast to Christianity, that is to say, Epicureanism. The writings of Epicurus were no longer preserved, and even at the close of the classical age a more or less one-sided conception had been formed of his philosophy. Nevertheless, that phase of Epicureanism which can be studied in Lucretius, and especially in Cicero, is quite sufficient to make men familiar with a godless universe. To what extent his teaching was actually understood, and whether the name of the problematic Greek sage was not rather a catchword for the multitude, it is hard to say. It is probable that the Dominican Inquisition used it against men who could not be reached by a more definite accusation. In the case of sceptics born before the time was ripe, whom it was yet hard to convict of positive heretical utterances, a moderate degree of luxurious living may have sufficed to provoke the charge. The word is used in this conventional sense by Giovanni Villani, when he explains the Florentine fires of 1115 and 1117 as a Divine judgement on heresies, among others, 'on the luxurious and gluttonous sect of Epicureans.' The same writer says of Manfred, 'His life was Epicurean, since he believed neither in God, nor in the Saints, but only in bodily pleasure.'

Dante speaks still more clearly in the ninth and tenth cantos of the 'Inferno.' That terrible fiery field covered with half-opened tombs, from which issued cries of hopeless agony, was peopled by the two great classes of those whom the Church had vanquished or expelled in the

thirteenth century. The one were heretics who opposed the Church by deliberately spreading false doctrine; the other were Epicureans, and their sin against the Church lay in their general disposition, which was summed up in the belief that the soul dies with the body. The Church was well aware that this one doctrine, if it gained ground, must be more ruinous to her authority than all the teachings of the Manichaeans and Paterines, since it took away all reason for her interference in the affairs of men after death. That the means which she used in her struggles were precisely what had driven the most gifted natures to unbelief and despair was what she naturally would not herself admit.

Dante's loathing of Epicurus, or of what he took to be his doctrine, was certainly sincere. The poet of the life to come could not but detest the denier of immortality; and a world neither made nor ruled by God, no less than the vulgar objects of earthly life which the system appeared to countenance, could not but be intensely repugnant to a nature like his. But if we look closer, we find that certain doctrines of the ancients made even on him an impression which forced the biblical doctrine of the Divine government into the background unless, indeed, it was his own reflection, the influence of opinions then prevalent, or loathing for the injustice that seemed to rule this world, which made him give up the belief in a special Providence His God leaves all the details of the world's government to a deputy, Fortune, whose sole work it is to change and change again all earthly things, and who can disregard the wailings of men in unalterable beatitude. Nevertheless, Dante does not for a moment fail to insist on the moral responsibility of man; he believes in free will. The belief in the freedom of the will, in the popular sense of the words, has always prevailed in Western countries. At all times men have been held responsible for their actions, as though this freedom were a matter of

course. The case is otherwise with the religious and philosophical doctrine, which labors under the difficulty of harmonizing the nature of the will with the laws of the universe at large. We have here to do with a question of more or less, which every moral estimate must take into account. Dante is not wholly free from those astrological superstitions which illumined the horizon of his time with deceptive light, but they do not hinder him from rising to a worthy conception of human nature. 'The stars,' he makes his Marco Lambert say ('Purgatorio,' xvi, 73), 'the stars give the first impulse to your actions, but a light is given you to know good and evil, and free will, which, if it endure the strain in its first battlings with the heavens, at length gains the whole victory, if it be well nurtured.'

Others might seek the necessity which annulled human freedom in another power than the stars, but the question was henceforth an open and inevitable one. So far as it was a question for the schools or the pursuit of isolated thinkers, its treatment belongs to the historian of philosophy. But inasmuch as it entered into the consciousness of a wider public, it is necessary for us to say a few words respecting it.

The fourteenth century was chiefly stimulated by the writings of Cicero, who, though in fact an eclectic, yet, by his habit of setting forth the opinions of different schools, without coming to a decision between them, exercised the influence of a skeptic. Next in importance came Seneca, and the few works of Aristotle which had been translated into Latin. The immediate fruit of these studies was the capacity to reflect on great subjects, if not in direct opposition to the authority of the Church, at all events independently of it.

In the course of the fifteenth century the works of antiquity were discovered and diffused with extraordinary rapidity. All the writings of the Greek philosophers which we ourselves possess were now, at least in the form of Latin translations, in everybody's hands. It is a

curious fact that some of the most zealous apostles of this new culture were men of the strictest piety, or even ascetics. Fra Ambrogio Camaldolese, as a spiritual dignitary chiefly occupied with ecclesiastical affairs, and as a literary man with the translation of the Greek Fathers of the Church, could not repress the humanistic impulse, and at the request of Cosimo de' Medici, undertook to translate Diogenes Laertius into Latin. His contemporaries, Niccolo Niccoli, Giannozzo Manetti, Donato Acciaiuoli, and Pope Nicholas V, united to a many-sided humanism profound biblical scholarship and deep piety. In Vittorino da Feltre the same temper has been already noticed. The same Maffeo Vegio, who added a thirteenth book to the Aeneid, had an enthusiasm for the memory of St. Augustine and his mother, Monica, which cannot have been without a deeper influence upon him. The result of all these tendencies was that the Platonic Academy at Florence deliberately chose for its object the reconciliation of the spirit of antiquity with that of Christianity. It was a remarkable oasis in the humanism of the period.

This humanism was in fact pagan, and became more and more so as its sphere widened in the fifteenth century. Its representatives, whom we have already described as the advance guard of an unbridled individualism, display as a rule such a character that even their religion, which is sometimes professed very definitely, becomes a matter of indifference to us. They easily got the name of atheists, if they showed themselves indifferent to religion and spoke freely against the Church; but not one of them ever professed, or dared to profess, a formal, philosophical atheism. If they sought for any leading principle, it must have been a kind of superficial rationalism — a careless inference from the many and contradictory opinions of antiquity with which they busied themselves, and from the discredit into which the Church and her doctrines had fallen. This was the sort

of reasoning which was near bringing Galeotto Martio to the stake, had not his former pupil, Pope Sixtus IV, perhaps at the request of Lorenzo de' Medici, saved him from the hands of the Inquisition. Galeotto had ventured to write that the man who lived uprightly, and acted according to the natural law born within him, would go to heaven, whatever nation he belonged to.

Let us take, by way of example, the religious attitude of one of the smaller men in the great army. Codrus Urceus was first the tutor of the last Ordelafo, Prince of Forli, and afterwards for many years professor at Bologna. Against the Church and the monks his language is as abusive as that of the rest. His tone in general is reckless to the last degree, and he constantly introduces himself in all his local history and gossip. But he knows how to speak to the edification of the true God-Man, Jesus Christ, and to commend himself by letter to the prayers of a saintly priest. On one occasion, after enumerating the follies of the pagan religions, he thus goes on: 'Our theologians, too, quarrel about "the guinea-pig's tail," about the Immaculate Conception, Antichrist, Sacraments, Predestination, and other things, which were better let alone than talked of publicly.' Once, when he was not at home, his room and manuscripts were burnt. When he heard the news he stood opposite a figure of the Madonna in the street, and cried to it: 'Listen to what I tell you; I am not mad, I am saying what I mean. If I ever call upon you in the hour of my death, you need not hear me or take me among your own, for I will go and spend eternity with the devil.' After which speech he found it desirable to spend six months in retirement at the home of a woodcutter. With all this, he was so superstitious that prodigies and omens gave him incessant frights, leaving him no belief to spare for the immortality of the soul. When his hearers questioned him on the matter, he answered that no one knew what became of a man, of

his soul or his spirit, after death, and the talk about another life was only fit to frighten old women. But when he came to die, he commended in his will his soul or his spirit to Almighty God, exhorted his weeping pupils to fear the Lord, and especially to believe in immortality and future retribution, and received the Sacrament with much fervor. We have no guarantee that more famous men in the same calling, however significant their opinions may be, were in practical life any more consistent. It is probable that most of them wavered inwardly between incredulity and a remnant of the faith in which they were brought up, and outwardly held for prudential reasons to the Church.

Through the connexion of rationalism with the newly born science of historical investigation, some timid attempts at biblical criticism may here and there have been made. A saying of Pius II has been recorded, which seems intended to prepare the way for such criticism: 'Even if Christianity were not confirmed by miracles, it ought still to be accepted on account of its morality.' The legends of the Church, in so far as they contained arbitrary versions of the biblical miracles, were freely ridiculed, and this reacted on the religious sense of the people. Where Judaizing heretics are mentioned, we must understand chiefly those who denied the Divinity of Christ, which was probably the offence for which Giorgio da Novara was burnt at Bologna about the year 1500. But again at Bologna in the year 1497 the Dominican Inquisitor was forced to let the physician Gabriele da Salo, who had powerful patrons, escape with a simple expression of penitence, although he was in the habit of maintaining that Jesus was not God, but son of Joseph and Mary, and conceived in the usual way; that by his cunning he had deceived the world to its ruin; that he may have died on the cross on account of crimes which he had committed; that his religion would soon come

to an end; that his body was not really contained in the sacrament, and that he performed his miracles, not through any divine power, but through the influence of the heavenly bodies. This latter statement is most characteristic of the time: Faith is gone, but magic still holds its ground.

With respect to the moral government of the world, the humanists seldom get beyond a cold and resigned consideration of the prevalent violence and misrule. In this mood the main works 'On Fate,' or whatever name they bear, are written. They tell of the turning of the wheel of Fortune, and of the instability of earthly, especially political, things. Providence is only brought in because the writers would still be ashamed of undisguised fatalism, of the avowal of their ignorance, or of useless complaints. Gioviano Pontano ingeniously illustrates the nature of that mysterious something which men call Fortune by a hundred incidents, most of which belonged to his own experience. The subject is treated more humorously by Aeneas Sylvius, in the form of a vision seen in a dream. The aim of Poggio, on the other hand, in a work written in his old age, is to represent the world as a vale of tears, and to fix the happiness of various classes as low as possible. This tone became in future the prevalent one. Distinguished men drew up a debit and credit of the happiness and unhappiness of their lives, and generally found that the latter outweighed the former. The fate of Italy and the Italians, so far as it could be told in the year 1510, has been described with dignity and almost elegiac pathos by Tristan Caracciolo. Applying this general tone of feeling to the humanists themselves, Pierio Valeriano afterwards composed his famous treatise. Some of these themes, such as the fortunes of Leo X, were most suggestive. All the good that can be said of him politically has been briefly and admirably summed up by Francesco Vettori; the picture of Leo's pleasures is given by Paolo Giovio and in

the anonymous biography; and the shadows which attended his prosperity are drawn with inexorable truth by the same Pierio Valeriano.

We cannot, on the other hand, read without a kind of awe how men sometimes boasted of their fortune in public inscriptions. Giovanni II Bentivoglio, ruler of Bologna, ventured to carve in stone on the newly built tower by his palace that his merit and his fortune had given him richly of all that could be desired — and this a few years before his expulsion. The ancients, when they spoke in this tone, had nevertheless a sense of the envy of the gods. In Italy it was probably the Condottieri who first ventured to boast so loudly of their fortune. But the way in which resuscitated antiquity affected religion most powerfully, was not through any doctrines or philosophical system, but through a general tendency which it fostered. The men, and in some respects the institutions, of antiquity were preferred to those of the Middle Ages, and in the eager attempt to imitate and reproduce them, religion was left to take care of itself. All was absorbed in the admiration for historical greatness. To this the philologists added many special follies of their own, by which they became the mark for general attention. How far Paul II was justified in calling his Abbreviators and their friends to account for their paganism, is certainly a matter of great doubt, as his biographer and chief victim, Platina, has shown a masterly skill in explaining his vindictiveness on other grounds, and especially in making him play a ludicrous figure. The charges of infidelity, paganism, denial of immortality, and so forth, were not made against the accused till the charge of high treason had broken down. Paul, indeed, if we are correctly informed about him, was by no means the man to judge of intellectual things. It was he who exhorted the Romans to teach their children nothing beyond reading and writing. His priestly narrowness of views reminds us of