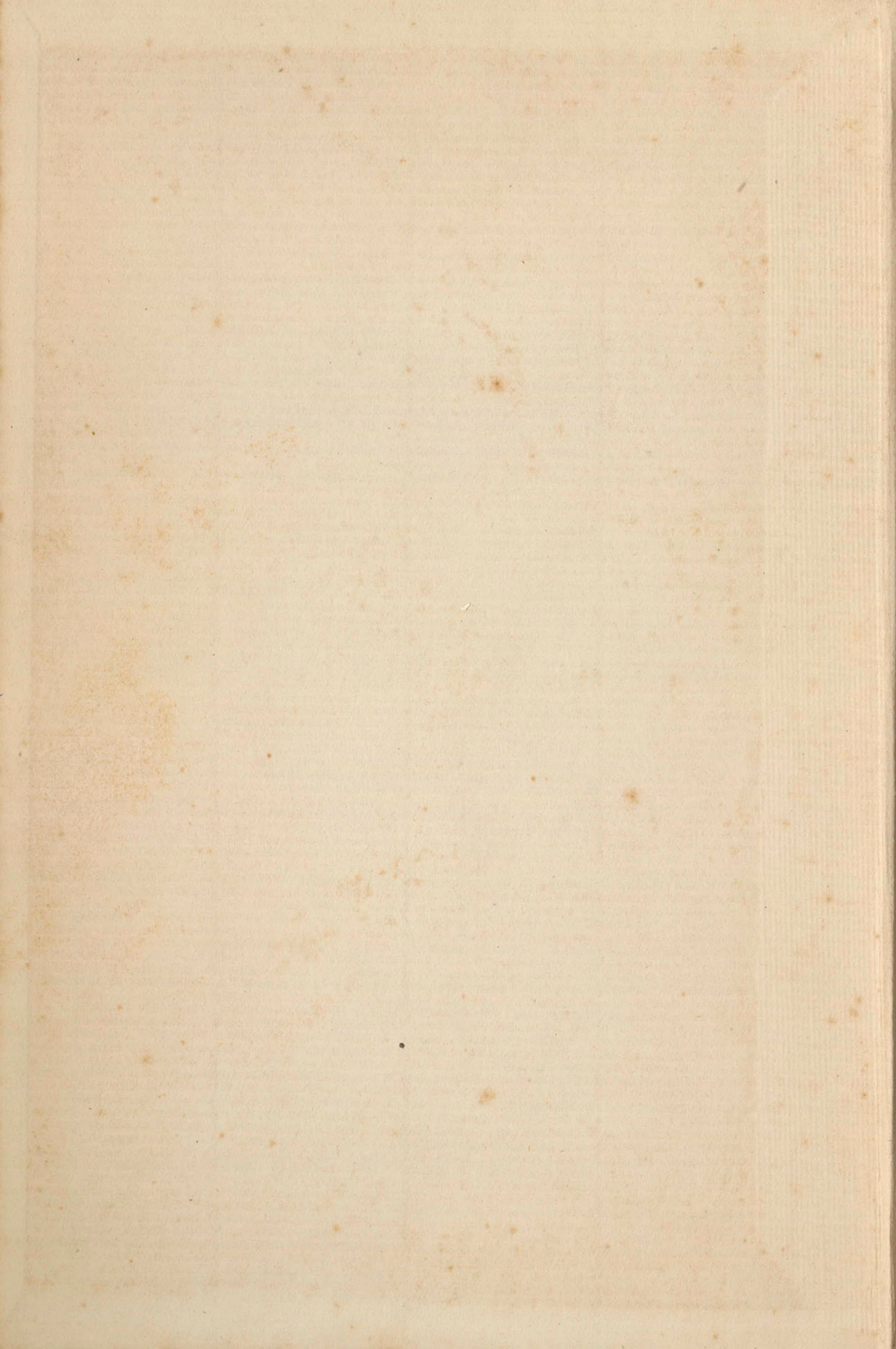


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THE LITERATURE OF THE  
FRENCH RENAISSANCE.



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THE LITERATURE  
OF THE  
FRENCH RENAISSANCE.

AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY.

BY

ARTHUR TILLEY,

FELLOW AND TUTOR OF KING'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

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1885

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## PREFACE.

HISTORIES of literature are apt to be confined to biography and criticism. The writers of them concern themselves, not so much with the broad main stream of a nation's literary developement, as with the rivers, sometimes indeed with the tiniest rivulets, which feed it. Thus they produce works, which however interesting and instructive they may be, are hardly entitled to be called histories. For a history, I take it, should have at any rate two features. It should be a continuous story, and it should deal with causes and effects. Into the vexed question of what is the province of History *par excellence*, whether it should confine itself to an account of the organisation of states, or whether it should more fully deserve its preeminence by dealing with the whole life of a nation, I need not happily enter. I will only venture to assert that to every history alike, whether it be a history of politics, or a history of painting, or a history of literature, the



same principle applies. It should present a connected and intelligible story of growth and development.

There are few periods of literature that seem to lend themselves better to historical treatment than that of the French Renaissance. Though it is illustrated by two of the greatest names on the roll of French literature, Rabelais and Montaigne, the general aspect that it presents to us is the record rather of a great national literary movement than of individual men of letters. Moreover this movement was a faithful reflexion of a corresponding change in the whole social and intellectual life of the people. At all times I believe the literature of a nation to be more or less of an index to its moral and intellectual state. It is especially so in times of great stress and fermentation. It was preeminently so in the time of the Renaissance.

Now in order rightly to understand the meaning of any new movement we must first know what was the old state of things which it replaced. To understand the French Revolution we must know something of the *Ancien Régime*. To understand the Renaissance we must know something of the Middle Ages. I have therefore considered that a necessary prelude to a historical account of the literature of the French Renaissance is a sketch of French mediæval literature, and of the education and thought upon which that literature was based. To



give such a sketch is the purport of the present volume. I have tried to be both clear and accurate, but I am well aware that the subject is too wide, and my knowledge of it far too limited, to make perfect accuracy possible, even while keeping, as I have done, to the broadest outline.

The appearance of this introduction by itself perhaps requires explanation. The greater part of it was already written more than two years ago. But since I exchanged the leisure of a briefless barrister for the duties of a college tutor and lecturer I have only been able to work at it by snatches. Though a few chapters of the main portion of my undertaking are written, a considerable time must necessarily elapse before even the first part, which is intended to deal with the reign of Francis I, can be completed. I have therefore preferred to let this introductory volume appear by itself rather than to keep it back for others which may possibly never be ready. I heartily thank the Syndics of the University Press for enabling me to give effect to this desire.

I must also express my best thanks to my friend Mr F. J. H. Jenkinson, Fellow of Trinity College, for going through the whole of the proof-sheets, and correcting various faults of obscurity and bad English; to my friend, the Rev. H. R. Luard, Registry of the University, for reading through chapter IV., and making some useful suggestions which I have gladly



adopted; to Mr George Saintsbury for similar good offices with regard to chapter III.; and, above all, to my friend Mr Henry Bradshaw, University Librarian, for much encouragement, and much advice, especially as to chapters IV., VI. and VII., the whole of which he kindly read through in manuscript.

KING'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

*May 18, 1885.*



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# THE CHARACTER OF THE RENAISSANCE IN FRANCE.

## CHAPTER I.

### THE RENAISSANCE IN GENERAL.

IT is the privilege, or rather, it is the duty of the historian, to divide the past history of the world into epochs. Such divisions are most helpful, indeed are almost indispensable to the study of history. So we have the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Revolution and so forth. Only let us bear in mind that they are merely relative divisions, that is to say, relative to the point of view at which we stand and from which we contemplate the past, and that possibly an historian in the enlightened future may from his high watch-tower discern no such marked difference between even the nineteenth century and what we call the dark ages as to justify him in excepting it from that category.

So long however as the critical study of history continues, we may rest secure against this ignominy.



The new historical spirit which dates from the beginning of this century has taught historians to distinguish lights and shadows where formerly they saw nothing but uniform dimness, to recognise elevations and depressions in what once seemed a long dreary flat. The tendency therefore of the modern historian is to multiply, rather than to obliterate, epochs, to add to, rather than to decrease, the number of epoch-making events. His difficulty is to determine the limits of these epochs. Occasionally there comes such an event as the French Revolution, which like a swollen mountain-torrent breaks down all barriers, and leaves a distinct landmark between two ages. But as a general rule there is no such crisis in the affairs of men; one age melts gradually and imperceptibly into another.

This is the case with the change from the mediæval to the modern world. It was gradual and imperceptible. The word indeed which is used to denote this change—Renaissance, that is to say, a new birth—bears the impress of an age in which it was regarded as a sudden awakening from a long and profound sleep<sup>1</sup>. But we may be sure that the people who lived in those times were unconscious of any such sudden metamorphosis; that they went about their daily business and bought and sold and gossiped without being in the least

<sup>1</sup> Hegel, for instance, speaks of 'the long eventful and terrible night of the Middle Ages.'



aware that 'the glorious Renaissance sun' had turned their night into day. Thus the term Renaissance which etymologically denotes a momentary event, has come to signify an epoch, the epoch during which this gradual change from the mediæval to the modern world was taking place<sup>1</sup>.

But can we assign any limits to this epoch? Is it possible for historical purposes to say that the Renaissance began at such and such a date and ended at such and such a date? For the beginning indeed of the Renaissance dates, more or less precise, have been selected by historians, which vary according to the point of view from which the particular writer approaches history. Thus the political historian has chosen the conquest of Granada (1492), the invasion of Italy by Charles VIII. (1494), and the Diet of Worms (1495) as the events which for him mark the beginning of a new era. A similar result, though by a different process of thought, is arrived at by the philosophical historian, the historian whose chief aim is to trace the progress of thought and civilisation. Michelet for instance has fixed upon the discovery of America by Columbus (1492) as the decisive epoch-making event. On the other hand those writers who approach the subject from the point of view of literature have chosen a somewhat earlier date. The fact

<sup>1</sup> See the opening sentences of Mr Symonds' *Renaissance in Italy*, the first chapter of which is an admirable exposition of the scope and meaning of the Renaissance.



that the fall of Constantinople with its undeniable, though often exaggerated, influence upon the spread of Greek learning over Western Europe, almost coincides with the invention of printing in Europe (November 15, 1454) seems conclusive for them that this is the true beginning of the Renaissance. There is much to be said in favour of each of these results: there is no obvious reason for preferring one to the other. But does not this very fact forcibly suggest to us the impossibility of fixing a date at all? Moreover we are met by the additional difficulty that the same date will not suit every country. The Renaissance in Italy preceded the Renaissance in France and England and Germany by nearly a hundred years. Must we not then content ourselves with expanding the definition that the Renaissance denotes the transition from the mediæval to the modern world into something like the following:

The Renaissance denotes that transition from the mediæval to the modern world which took place during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but which in different countries began to make itself felt at different dates, and under different aspects, determined by differences either of race or of geographical position or of the existing state of civilisation.

This is not a very precise definition, but greater precision is not, I think, compatible with accuracy. The definition however, such as it is, has only been



arrived at by comparing the conclusions of accredited historians. It will be useful to examine the matter for ourselves and test the result by an inquiry into the causes and nature of the Renaissance.

We are often told that the distinctive feature which differentiates the modern from the mediæval world is the spirit of free inquiry<sup>1</sup>. This is no doubt in a general sense true. It is true that the mediæval world was characterised by an exaggerated regard for tradition, as for instance in the sphere of politics by an exaggerated regard for the tradition of the Roman Empire, and in the sphere of religion and art by an exaggerated regard for the tradition of the Roman Church. It is true also that the whole system of mediæval education was based upon an exaggerated regard for tradition, upon the entire absence of the critical spirit. This then being the case, it would seem that in order to determine the superior limit of the Renaissance we must first ascertain when this spirit of free inquiry began to make itself felt.

At first sight our evidence seems to point to a result wholly at variance with any of the dates above mentioned. From the twelfth century onwards we meet with men in whom the spirit of free inquiry reigned supreme. Abélard, Roger Bacon,

<sup>1</sup> "Liberty of thought, the denial of authority, the right of private judgment, call it what you will, is the principle which has been the main agent in the progress of human events during the last three hundred years."—*Quarterly Review*, July, 1882 (on Mr Symonds' *Renaissance in Italy*).



Frederick II., Dante, Petrarch, Wiclif, were all men of singular independence of thought, and with the exception perhaps of Dante and Petrarch were all distinguished by their disregard for tradition and authority. Can we say then that an age which produced such men was characterised by the absence of the spirit of free inquiry? The answer is, that these men stood by themselves; that the very fame which has gathered round their names is partly owing to their isolation, to their conspicuous pre-eminence over their fellows. Moreover, unless we except Abélard, whose teaching was in a large measure carried on by the Schoolmen, none of these men left immediate successors<sup>1</sup>. Frederick II. passed like a splendid vision, and the very title, 'the wonder of the world,' (*stupor mundi*) which his admiring contemporaries bestowed upon him expresses their utter inability to comprehend his work or to follow in his footsteps. Roger Bacon had no successor till his great namesake appeared three centuries later. Even Wiclif, for whose work the times were more ripe, had to wait more than a century for Luther to complete what he had begun.

No, just as one swallow does not make a summer, so one man does not make an epoch. He may be a sign of the coming epoch, as the swallow is the sign of the coming summer; but so long as he is alone, or

<sup>1</sup> "Les efforts des héros, des hardis précurseurs, sont restés individuels, isolés, impuissants. Le peuple n'est pas né, qui eût pu les soutenir."—Michelet.



nearly alone, it cannot be said that the new epoch has come.

The philosophical historians would seem on the whole to be right in their conclusions. The spirit of free inquiry can hardly, indeed, be said to have made itself generally felt till at least the latter half of the sixteenth century. Even then, and even in the next century we need not look far for signs that superstition was dying hard. It was in 1634 that Galileo was imprisoned for holding that the earth moved round the sun; it was in 1587 that Bodin, the founder of modern political philosophy and one of the ablest thinkers of his time, published his defence of astrology and witchcraft; it was as late as 1665 that Sir Matthew Hale, one of the most philosophical lawyers that ever sat on the English bench told the jury that 'that there were such creatures as witches he made no doubt at all'.<sup>1</sup> But still in an age in which Columbus overthrew the tradition of mediæval geography by discovering America, in which Copernicus attacked the tradition of mediæval astronomy by discovering the solar system<sup>2</sup>, and Luther shook to its foundations the tradition of the Roman Church by discovering the Bible, it may fairly be said that

<sup>1</sup> Referred to by Coleridge in *Confessions of an inquiring Spirit*, p. 45. The last execution for witchcraft in England is said to have been in 1712.

<sup>2</sup> Though Copernicus had satisfied himself of the truth of his discovery in 1507, he did not publish it to the world till just before his death in 1543.



the spirit of free inquiry was abroad, that the emancipation of the human reason had begun.

If then we regard the spirit of free inquiry as the chief characteristic of the Renaissance, we shall not be far wrong in taking the close of the fifteenth century for its superior limit. But there is another obvious characteristic of the Renaissance, which in Italy at least was the dominant impulse throughout the whole movement. I mean, the delight in beauty. It is after all but another side of the same impulse as the spirit of free inquiry. For while the latter spirit is an assertion of the freedom of man's intellect, the delight in beauty is an assertion of the freedom of his senses<sup>1</sup>. Now the antithesis of this delight in beauty is the ascetic spirit, the spirit which forbids all indulgence, however innocent, of the senses. It is this ascetic spirit, and consequent on it, the toleration and even positive enjoyment of various forms of ugliness, that is one characteristic of mediævalism<sup>2</sup>. The

<sup>1</sup> I need hardly say that I use freedom in its proper sense, and not in the sense of license.

<sup>2</sup> With his usual profound insight Goethe has made this a leading idea of the *Helena*, that great episode of the second part of *Faust*, which is primarily an allegory of the union of Classic and Romantic Art. It will be remembered that while *Faust*, as Romantic Art, is striving towards the ideal Beauty of Classic Art, typified by *Helena*, *Mephistopheles*, in accordance with his negative character, assumes the mask of one of the *Phorkyds*, that hideous sisterhood of ancient mythology, who, grey-haired from their birth, and with but one eye and one tooth between them, fitly represent the idea of Ugliness. See for the whole idea of the *Helena* Bayard Taylor's excellent translation and notes.



frequent choice of the Last Judgment as a subject for painting, and the copiousness of hideous detail with which it was invariably executed, the almost exclusive representation of the Redeemer in agony rather than in loving majesty<sup>1</sup>, the stunted and emaciated forms of Byzantine art, witchcraft, demonology, dances of death, are all signs of the same slavish superstition, of that dark and gloomy feeling, which substitutes the worship of ugliness for the worship of beauty, and a religion of fear for a religion of love.

I am far from wishing to imply that there was no feeling for beauty in the Middle Ages. Our own Cathedrals, and those of the land with whose literature I am now concerned—Durham, Salisbury, Lincoln, Canterbury, Amiens, Chartres, Bourges, Rheims—are living witnesses to the contrary. Italian painters and sculptors, Giotto and Fra Angelico, Ghiberti and Donatello, patient illuminators from their quiet monasteries, Provençal troubadours, German Minnesingers, the countless lyric singers of mediæval France, Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Chaucer, all join their protest. But if we look into the matter more closely, we shall see that, just as it was with the spirit of free inquiry, it is only in a few isolated individuals that the feeling for beauty has altogether free play, that it emancipates itself entirely from the

<sup>1</sup> See Mr Lecky on the tradition of the deformity of Our Lord. *Rationalism in Europe*, i. 257.



bondage of ugliness and asceticism. There is little art in the Middle Ages that is wholly free from the taint. Even in architecture the artist pays habitual tribute to the enemy in the shape of hideous gurgoyles and grinning devils. In no poem do we find such purity of beauty accompanied by so much that is physically repulsive as in the *Divina Commedia*.

Still the manifestations of beauty that we meet with in Italy from the thirteenth century onwards were no mere solitary effulgences like Frederick II. They are part of a continuous current flowing in an ever widening channel to the Renaissance sea. The first intimations of the revival of the feeling for beauty proceeded from Niccola Pisano, the artist of the Pisan pulpit<sup>1</sup>. Giotto, born about the time of Pisano's death<sup>2</sup>, carried on with the brush the work which his predecessor had begun with the chisel. During the latter half of the fourteenth century indeed there was little visible progress; but with the fifteenth century dawned a new movement, inaugurated by Masaccio<sup>3</sup> and carried on by that famous line of Florentines, which brought painting into closer relationship with human life and made it the free and untrammelled expression of human joys and aspirations.

If then we look at the Renaissance from the

<sup>1</sup> "From him we date the dawn of the æsthetical Renaissance with the same certainty as from Petrarch that of humanism." Symonds, *The Renaissance in Italy*.

<sup>2</sup> Giotto was born in 1276.

<sup>3</sup> Masaccio, born 1402, died 1428.



æsthetic side, we shall be disposed to assign an earlier date for its commencement than the one arrived at by regarding it from the intellectual side. We may with some plausibility make a distinction between the earlier period of Italian art when both painting and sculpture were exclusively religious both in form and spirit, and the days of Donatello and Filippo Lippi and Ghirlandajo when art though still ostensibly confined to religious subjects was thoroughly realistic and secular in feeling, and by the help of this distinction, which after all is by no means a well-marked one, we may say that the Renaissance began early in the fifteenth century.

But the Renaissance has yet a third characteristic, an inquiry into which will perhaps lead us to a different result. This third characteristic is the revival of classical learning, and for our purpose it has a distinct advantage over the two characteristics before mentioned, in that its manifestations are much easier to note. It is impossible to say with any precision when a spirit of free inquiry, or a feeling for beauty first begins to make itself felt in a nation, but a movement like the revival of classical learning can be traced without difficulty and with tolerable certainty from its earliest appearance.

The revival of classical learning began in Italy early in the twelfth century with the revival of the study of Roman Law. When in the year 1143, Rome at the bidding of Arnold of Brescia declared



herself a republic, and elected a senate, it was an  
 unmistakable sign of the spell which ancient Rome  
 was beginning to exercise over Italy. In the *Divina  
 Commedia*, not only is the great Roman poet  
 chosen by Dante as his guide through the *Inferno*  
 and *Purgatorio*, but the whole poem is full of allu-  
 sions to events in Roman history<sup>1</sup>. The Italian  
 however who first stimulated his countrymen with a  
 zeal for classical literature—for law-treatises are not  
 properly literature—and who is justly regarded as  
 the father of Italian humanism, is Petrarch. But  
 Petrarch was solely a Latin scholar. Though he fully  
 recognised the importance of Greek to the cause  
 of humanism, he never learnt it himself. In his  
 day Greek was unknown in Italy. Even Boccaccio  
 who may claim to be the first student of Greek in  
 Western Europe, and who succeeded in translating  
 Homer, had, owing to the ignorance of his sole  
 teacher, a very limited knowledge of the language.  
 But though these Latin studies, this Roman Re-  
 naissance, as Mr Bryce aptly calls the movement, were  
 but an earlier wave of the current that was setting  
 in towards the whole of classical literature, it must be  
 remembered that the actual Renaissance was born  
 of Greece rather than of Rome. It is true that the

<sup>1</sup> Especially the 6th canto of the *Paradiso* in which the history  
 of the Roman Eagle is traced. In the *De vulgari eloquio* (c. vi.),  
 Dante speaks of his familiarity with the writings of Cicero, Livy,  
 Pliny, Frontinus, and Orosius.

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name of Rome continued to exercise too potent a spell over the mind of mediæval Europe and especially over the mind of Italy, not to have a considerable share in determining the course of the Renaissance; it is true that Latin literature, being in a large measure derived from and imitative of her elder sister, went with her hand in hand towards the same result: still the Renaissance on the whole must be regarded as a reaction from the influence of Rome to the influence of Greece.

The contrast between the two influences is well drawn out in a passage in Mommsen's *History of Rome* in which he speaks of *That Hellenic character which sacrificed the whole to its individual elements, the nation to the single state, and the single state to the citizen...which gave free scope to thought in all its grandeur and in all its awefulness;—and that Roman character, which solemnly bound the son to reverence the father, the citizen to reverence the ruler, and all to reverence the gods...which deemed every one a bad citizen who wished to be different from his fellows*<sup>1</sup>. Rome in short sacrificed the individual to the State, Greece the State to the individual; and so far as the Renaissance was the assertion of the freedom of man, of the rights of the individual, it was a reaction from Rome to Greece<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> English Translation (1872, 8vo), i. 24.

<sup>2</sup> For 'Individualism' as a note of the Renaissance see Burckhardt *Die Cultur der R. in Italien* (3rd ed. Leipsic, 1877) i. 159—215.

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N. In the first place, Greece possessed in an extraordinary degree the double spirit which we have seen was characteristic of the Renaissance movement, the spirit of free inquiry, and the delight in beauty. Secondly, all ancient art, and all ancient learning, with the single exception of ancient law, is Greek in origin. In architecture indeed and in some forms of literature the Romans worked out an independent development, but the basis is none the less Greek; while in most branches of learning, in philosophy, in natural science, in medicine, they are content to be mere transcribers. It is much the same with theology. Not only is the Vulgate, so far as regards the New Testament, a translation from the Greek, but the greater and more important part of patristic literature is Greek. In order therefore to become acquainted with the knowledge, thought, and art of the ancients at the fountain-head, it is necessary to go to Greece. It is therefore the revival of Greek learning in Italy that, if we look at the Renaissance from the point of view of humanism, must be regarded as its true starting-point.

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The revival of the study of Greek in Italy dates from the appointment of Manuel Chrysoloras to the Chair of Greek at the Florence University in 1396. From this time it was pursued with unremitting ardour, so that the first half of the fifteenth century has been called, after the leader of the movement, the age of Poggio. Cosimo de' Medici, Palla degli



Strozzi, Niccolo de' Niccoli, Pope Nicholas V., and Cardinal Bessarion vied with one another in sending agents to ransack Europe and the East for manuscripts. Learned Greeks following in the wake of Chrysoloras found a ready welcome. The fall of Constantinople (1453) gave fresh impulse to the work of collecting manuscripts and brought a fresh supply of scholars to Italy, but it must be regarded rather as a stimulus to a movement which had long been in existence, than as the primary cause of a movement which had not yet begun<sup>1</sup>. Inasmuch however as it gave an undoubted stimulus, and moreover was but the final consummation of that dissolution of the Eastern Empire which had been taking place during the preceding half century, the eloquent phrase of a modern Italian, that *by the fall of Constantinople Italy became sole heir and guardian of the ancient civilisation*<sup>2</sup>, is hardly an exaggerated statement of the importance of the event.

<sup>1</sup> In 1423 Aurispa brought back 238 Greek MSS. to Italy, and not long afterwards Filelfo and Guarino da Verona arrived with a further supply. The library of Niccolo de' Niccoli, who died in 1437, consisted of 800 MSS., many of which were Greek copies imported by him from the East. Bessarion's collection, which became the nucleus of the library of St Mark's at Venice, and a great part of that of Nicholas V. the nucleus of the Vatican library, and of that of Cosimo de' Medici, which with 400 of Niccolo de' Niccoli's MSS. forms the oldest portion of the present Laurentian library, were collected before the fall of Constantinople. After that event the chief importations of the fifteenth century were those made by John Lascaris for Lorenzo de' Medici.

<sup>2</sup> Carducci, *Angelo Poliziano*, xiv.

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Moreover the fall of Constantinople, as I have said, almost coincides with the invention of printing in Europe, without which the store-house of Greek learning would have been opened to Western Europe in vain. Mr Draper in his *History of the Intellectual Development of Europe*, suggests that the supply of manuscripts in the middle ages was probably equal to the demand, but they were costly and ill-copied, and thus though this method of multiplying books may have sufficed in an age in which the only libraries were those of princes and monasteries, and which was too uncritical to care about accuracy, the revival of learning demanded a cheaper, a more expeditious, a more accurate method. For the purposes of serious study it was necessary that men should have books of their own, and that these books should be faithful transcripts of the original text. Even in the fourteenth century we find Petrarch complaining most bitterly of the inaccuracy with which manuscripts were copied<sup>1</sup>. During the first half of the fifteenth century indeed the zeal with which the work of collecting and multiplying manuscripts was carried on in Italy, when the greatest scholars attracted by the munificent payment of their patrons did not disdain to become copyists, satisfied in some measure the requirements of students.

<sup>1</sup> *De remediis utriusque fortunæ*, lib. 1 dial. 43 *De librorum copia*. See Von Reumont, *L. de' Medici* (Leipsic, 1874) B. iv. Abs. i. and iv. and Symonds, ii. pp. 127—131.



Even after the introduction of printing the work of copying still continued. For the wealthy scorned to make use of the new process. It was too cheap, too democratic. *There was not a printed book*, says Vespasiano da Bisticci, himself renowned as a copyist, *in the Duke of Urbino's library: he would have been ashamed of having one*<sup>1</sup>.

But though the old method might suffice for the wealthy few, the great mass of students, men who, like Erasmus, bought *books first, and then clothes*, or, like Ramus, began their University career as college servants, could never have collected their stores of learning, had it not been for the new art.

This is the real secret of the importance of printing. It is essentially a popular and anti-oligarchic art. Before printing, learning was confined to the rich and great or to the few ardent scholars, an Edmund Rich, a Grosseteste, a Roger Bacon, whose courage and intellect were high enough to surmount the obstacle of their poverty. But the invention of printing broke down the barriers of patrician exclusiveness. It threw open the right to hold office in the commonwealth of letters to the lowest plebeian.

Moreover not only did it stimulate the spirit of free inquiry by making the means of inquiry more accessible, but by substituting the study of books

<sup>1</sup> *Vite di uomini illustri* (Florence, 1859), p. 99. Vespasiano lived from 1421 to 1498.



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middle age of humanism marked ?

for oral teaching it struck at the root of the whole system of mediæval education, the blind adherence to tradition, the slavish dependence of the taught on the teacher. It is hardly too much to say that the whole higher education of the Middle Ages was carried on by means of two time-honoured text-books, the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard and the *Summulæ* of Petrus Hispanus. The *Sentences* represented theology, the *Summulæ* Aristotle's logic. The former was a collection of theological propositions compiled from the Fathers; the latter was an abridgement of the *Organon*: but the propositions of the *Sentences* were arranged and analysed in uniformity with the ideas of scholastic philosophy, while the *Summulæ* contained matter of which only hints are to be found in Aristotle. Thus neither was a faithful epitome of what it professed to represent. But such as they were, they formed the principal intellectual food of both professor and student in the Universities of the Middle Ages. The professor dictated commentaries on them, which the students, with more or less fidelity, accumulated in their note-books. Thus when the student in his turn became a professor, he had a goodly store of commentary, to serve as a basis for his own labours. To criticise what he had received, he neither had the means nor the desire. It was no wonder if in the long course of tradition the original text became completely buried beneath the successive strata of



commentary. The same method prevailed in all branches of knowledge. Law fared no better than theology or philosophy. It was a method which stimulated both industry and ingenuity, but to the spirit of free inquiry it was fatal. To the whole method of oral teaching, printing and the necessary consequence of printing, cheap books, dealt the death blow. Henceforth students began to read and to think for themselves. With an enthusiasm for learning which the world has never seen before or since, they flung themselves upon the wealth of literature that poured in upon them. *I shall buy Greek books first, and then clothes,* says Erasmus. *The very women and children have aspired to this glory and celestial manna of good learning,* says Gargantua in his well-known letter to Pantagruel.

In the preceding remarks I am far from wishing to imply that the revival of classical learning was in any sense the cause of the Renaissance<sup>1</sup>. Had men's intellects still remained chained by a slavish regard for tradition, had the ascetic spirit still prevented them from indulging their natural craving for beauty, the precious Greek manuscripts would have been left undisturbed in the monasteries. But the new learning, as it was called, was a most valuable stimulus to

<sup>1</sup> Green's remark that "the disclosure of the stores of Greek literature had wrought the revolution of the Renaissance" (*Hist. of the English People*, iii. 11), is, I think, far too strongly put.



the new ideas and aspirations. If it is true that without the new ideas the new learning would have remained untasted, it is equally true that without the new learning the new ideas would have been in danger of perishing for want of food.

The very name which was given to the new learning,—*litteræ humaniores*, humanism—clearly indicates the light in which it was regarded. It indicates that men found in classical literature a powerful advocate of the long-denied claims of humanity, that they welcomed it as a supporter of their protest against mediæval theology, which, carrying to an exaggerated extreme the doctrine of St Augustine, insisted that all human action and human aspiration was sinful; that they listened to it, as a responsive echo to the new feeling that was growing up in their hearts, the awakening to a sense of their birthright, of their right to the free exercise of the faculties with which the Divine Giver of all good things had endowed them, the right to satisfy their intellectual and emotional cravings, the right to think and to love. The oration of Pico della Mirandola *On the dignity of Man* is the eloquent expression of this common feeling<sup>1</sup>.

But as all human impulses have in them something of excess, so the Renaissance movement in its

N ( <sup>1</sup> Cf. Mr Lecky's *Rationalism in Europe*, ii. 221. "The sense of human dignity was the chief moral agent of antiquity, and the sense of sin of mediævalism."



revolt from the shackles and swaddling clothes of monastic theology swung too far in the opposite direction. In its eagerness to assert the humanity of man it forgot his divinity; in its reaction from the exclusive worship of the spirit it became material; in its disgust at the corruption of the Christian Church it became pagan. In short, the men of the Renaissance in their passionate yearning after truth and beauty forgot that there was a third aspect of the Divine Perfection—goodness.

This was more especially the case in Italy. The annals of the Italian Renaissance teem with records of lust and crime. For seventy years the Chair of St Peter was filled by a succession of Pontiffs who, with hardly an exception, were notorious for their personal vices<sup>1</sup>. To find a fit comparison for the court of Alexander VI. one must go back to the days of ancient Rome, to the court of Caligula, or Nero, or Elagabalus. The temporal princes were, if possible, more cruel and more licentious than the spiritual. *Isolated, crime-haunted, and remorseless, at the same time fierce and timorous, the despot not unfrequently made of vice a fine art for his amusement, and openly defied humanity. Inordinate lust and refined cruelty sated his irritable and jaded appetites. He destroyed pity in his soul, and fed his dogs with living men, or*

<sup>1</sup> From 1464 to 1534. The only exceptions were Pius III. who was Pope for only a few days and Adrian VI. who was Pope for two years.

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*spent his brains upon the invention of new torture*<sup>1</sup>. The people were not so bad as their rulers, but their open profligacy was a matter of amazement to men of other nations. *I was once in Italy myself*, writes Roger Ascham, *but I thank God my abode there was but nine days; and yet I saw in that little time, in one city, more liberty to sin than ever I heard tell of in our noble city of London in nine years*<sup>2</sup>. And this immorality, this *liberty to sin* is reflected in the whole literature of the Italian Renaissance. No one can read its two most notable productions, *The Prince*, and *Orlando Furioso*, without being oppressed by the cynical indifference to virtue which they display.

As I have said, this excessive *liberty to sin* by which the Renaissance was disfigured was not peculiar to Italy. In all the countries in which the Renaissance movement flourished we find traces of the same spirit of misrule and wantonness. In England it is reflected in the lives of such men as Greene and Marlowe<sup>3</sup>, and in Marlowe's play *Dr Faustus*. In France the courts of the last kings of the house of Valois vied with those of the Renaissance Popes in

<sup>1</sup> Symonds' *Renaissance in Italy*, i. 114.

<sup>2</sup> *Renaissance in Italy*, i. 481. The chapter in which this quotation from Ascham occurs is a temperate and impartial account of the state of Italian morality at the time of the Renaissance.

<sup>3</sup> For a graphic account of Greene and Marlowe see Green's *Hist. of the English People*, ii. 470—471.



wickedness, and the camp of the Huguenot leader was too often a scene of license and violence. But, for all this, the northern countries were greatly superior to Italy in point of general morality. Granted that Puritanism in this country was a reaction against the undue license of the Renaissance spirit, its very existence shews that the license was not universal. It is from regarding the Renaissance too exclusively as an Italian product and shutting our eyes to the manifestations of it in other countries that we are sometimes led to consider the Reformation as a reaction from the Renaissance. To some extent no doubt the Reformation was a moral regeneration, and men like Calvin embraced and spread its doctrines as a protest against the wickedness of an age in which the foundations of morality had been dangerously loosened. But this was not its dominant characteristic: it was primarily an intellectual rather than a moral reform. In Germany many of the leading reformers, men like Ulrich von Hutten, were of anything but pure morals. In England the Reformation did not prevent Marlowe and his companions from flaunting their debauchery and impiety before the world, nor John Hawkins from inaugurating the slave trade.

A far truer view is to regard the Reformation not as a reaction from, but as a developement of the Renaissance, as the spirit of free inquiry carried into the domain of theology. For it is the spirit of free



N ( inquiry that after all is the real keynote of the Renaissance. If we confine our attention to Italy, we are tempted to look upon the Renaissance as a purely sensuous growth, as the enfranchisement of the senses only, and not also of the intellect. But though we must not leave out of account the æsthetic side, nor forget that, according to the law of human developement, the craving for liberty affected the imaginative nature of man before his intellectual nature, yet our conclusion must be that it was the enfranchisement of the intellect which was the chief work of the Renaissance. And if this be so, it must be to the northern countries, especially to France and to England, that we must look for the Renaissance in its most complete form, for the transition from the mediæval to the modern world in its fullest and freest developement.

N. We must not however underrate the debt that civilisation owes to Italy. As Mr Symonds says, *it must never be forgotten that as a matter of history the true Renaissance began in Italy.* Yes, it was Italy, alone and single-handed, who began the Renaissance; and that portion of the work which more particularly fell to her, the emancipation of the senses, the developement of the imagination, could nowhere else have been done with such brilliancy or with such completeness. The works of her great artists, with which her cities, beautiful by natural position, are made still more beautiful—Giotto's tower, and



Brunelleschi's dome crowning the fair city by the Arno, tender Bellinis and glowing Tintorets rivalling the beauty of Venetian lagoons and skies, Raphael's frescoes adding one more imperishable glory to the eternal city—all these are witnesses to Italy's services in the cause of civilisation that cannot easily be forgotten.

It was Italy too who began the other and higher phase of the Renaissance movement, the enfranchisement of the intellect. But here she only began, she could not complete the work. Her too exclusive devotion to beauty, her indifference to morality, and above all the enslavement of her land, were fatal obstacles to the growth of intellectual freedom. The work was left for other countries to finish. How this was done in one of these countries, France, I shall endeavour to point out in the next chapter.

This inquiry has led us to the following results. We have seen that if we look at the Renaissance solely with reference to its most important characteristic, the spirit of free inquiry, the revolt against tradition, we shall be disposed to put its commencement at the close of the fifteenth century, certainly not earlier than the second half of that century; but we have also seen that there is another characteristic of it, which, though less important, must still not be neglected, and that is the aspiration towards beauty, the revolt against asceticism; and that taking this into account we must correct our former result,

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and make the Renaissance begin, in that country at least in which it first appeared, Italy, at the beginning, instead of at the close of the fifteenth century. This result, which, it will be remembered, was arrived at by rather an arbitrary distinction between two phases of Italian art, was in a great measure confirmed by reference to a third characteristic which was the outward sign of the other two, namely the revival of classical learning.

We have thus obtained a roughly calculated date for the beginning of the Renaissance, for the time when the transition from the mediæval to the modern world began to take place. But how long did this period of transition last? When was the process finally completed? It need hardly be said that this question can be answered with as little accuracy as the question when did the Renaissance begin. But for historical purposes it may be taken that by the close of the sixteenth century the process of transition was at an end, and that the modern world had begun. It was then that France after the long disorders of her religious wars settled down under the strong government of Henry IV., and that England passed from the high imaginings and tumultuous passions of the Elizabethan era to the prosaic soberness of James I.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "The death of Elizabeth is one of the turning-points of English history. The age of the Renaissance and of the New Monarchy passed away with the Queen." Green, *Hist. of the English People*, iii. p. 5.



For historical purposes therefore we may rest content with the limits assigned to the Renaissance in our definition, namely the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. But again I would impress upon the reader that this limitation is made solely for historical convenience, and has no existence in the essence of things. As Maitland has so well pointed out in his *Dark Ages*, with special reference to the ninth and three succeeding centuries, there is no real demarcation between one age and another. The growth of civilisation is as gradual and imperceptible as that of an oak-tree: it does not suddenly pass from night to day, nor even from night to twilight. Even in these latter days of the nineteenth century, separated as we are from what is called the Renaissance not only by three centuries but by the great upheaval of the French Revolution, we are in some things still in mid-Renaissance; can it even be said that we have wholly put off mediævalism<sup>1</sup>?

<sup>1</sup> It is not so very long since Matthew Arnold spoke of Oxford as *the last stronghold of mediævalism*.



## CHAPTER II.

### THE RENAISSANCE IN FRANCE.

THE first point of difference to be noted between the Renaissance in France and the Renaissance in Italy is one of time. Roughly speaking it may be said that France was a hundred years behind Italy. It was exactly a hundred years after the arrival of Manuel Chrysoloras in Italy that France received her first competent teacher of Greek in Janus Lascaris (1495). The first half of the sixteenth century in France with its passionate and somewhat disorderly enthusiasm for the study of classical antiquity corresponds to the first half of the fifteenth century in Italy. Ronsard, the first French poet whose work bears a strong impress of the influence of classical studies, was nearly three-quarters of a century later than Poliziano<sup>1</sup>. Descartes' *Discours de la Méthode*, which is generally regarded as the first modern French prose work, did not appear till more than a hundred and twenty years after Machiavelli's *Il Principe*<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Ronsard, 1524—1585. Poliziano, 1454—1494.

<sup>2</sup> The respective dates of the two books are 1513 and 1637.



The *Cid* comes at about the same distance of time after the *Orlando Furioso*<sup>1</sup>, and Corneille's hand is stiff, his verses halt, compared with the master-touch, the divine numbers of Ariosto. In short the force of the Renaissance wave had well nigh spent itself in Italy, before more than the first ripple had made itself felt in France. The *Orlando Furioso* is not only the brightest, it is also the latest blossom of the Italian Renaissance literature. It was published but a year after the accession of Francis I., the event which best marks the beginning of the Renaissance in France.

The causes of Italy's precocity need only be rapidly indicated here. In the first place she was in civilisation far in front of her neighbours. At the close of the twelfth century, when her communes, invigorated by their successful struggle with Frederick Barbarossa, had reached the high-water mark of their developement, she was politically a hundred years ahead of France, and there can be no doubt but that the freer political life, the deeper sense of individuality on the part of her citizens which she thus gained, was a powerful agent in the production of that harmonious civilisation, that many-sided culture, by which from that time down to the loss of her political freedom she was so eminently distinguished<sup>2</sup>. It is

<sup>1</sup> *Orlando Furioso*, 1516; *Cid*, 1636.

<sup>2</sup> Readers will remember Macaulay's brilliant sketch of the Italian mediæval world in his essay on Machiavelli. *Works* v. pp. 49—54.



true that in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries France could boast of a greater and more varied literature than Italy, but this superiority soon passed away. For France the thirteenth century ends in decline, for Italy it ends in Dante. At the very moment that Dante's master Brunetto Latini was paying his celebrated tribute to the literary headship of France<sup>1</sup>, the sceptre was passing from her hands. It was passing to his own country, to the country of his great pupil.

The name of Dante suggests another cause besides her superior civilisation for Italy being so much earlier than France in awaking from mediævalism. Dante gave Italy a language. In place of the numerous dialects in which Italian writers had hitherto been content to express themselves, he forged a national literary language, he set up a common standard of literary excellence. His successors carried on the work. Petrarch added a finished grace, Boccaccio a supple harmony. The one made it popular with scholars and princes, the other carried it into the homes and hearts of the people. Thus, although for nearly a century after Boccaccio's death native literature languished by reason of the too engrossing claims of antiquity, Lorenzo de' Medici

<sup>1</sup> "Et se aucuns demandait por quoi cist livres est ecriz en romans, selons le langage des Francois, puisque nos somes Ytaliens, je diroie que ce est per ij raisons ; l'une car nos somes en France : et l'autre porce que la parleure est plus delitable et plus commune à toutes gens." *Li livres dou tresor* (Documents Inédits).



and Poliziano, when they essayed once more a native melody, found that the instrument, though long neglected, was of almost perfect mechanism.

It is idle to speculate on what might have happened had a Dante arisen in France, had the *Chanson de Roland* and the romances of King Arthur, which have so much of what may be called epic promise, but yet miss the true epic elevation, been crowned by a great national epic poem, at once the symbol and the result of national unity. The great poet, the great poem, were not forthcoming. It is not too much to say that France did not possess a common literary language till far into the seventeenth century. Till then, every prose writer at least, even Rabelais, even Montaigne, shews decided traces of the *patois* of his own province.

But Italy had other advantages besides her superior civilisation and her common literary language. Her soil was not only more highly cultivated than her neighbour's, it was in a more favourable situation for the reception of the Renaissance seed. It was Italy whose shores lay nearest to Greece, the repository of the ancient civilisation; it was to Italy that the Greek exiles naturally first turned in their flight.

Of more moment than this geographical relationship of Italy to Greece was the great fact that Italy was the lineal descendant of ancient Rome. The memories of Roman institutions, and of the



Roman tongue, though they had grown dim during the six centuries which succeeded the break-up of the Roman Empire in the West, had never been wholly extinguished. They had been kept alive by two agencies, the Church and the Law<sup>1</sup>. Italy therefore was quick to assimilate the sap of classical learning and literature because it was already in her system. She hailed the re-discovery of the great writings of antiquity because in part at least they were the writings of her ancestors.

Thus everything combined to give Italy the start in the race of civilisation, to make her passage through that phase of it which we call the Renaissance, at once earlier and more brilliant than that of France. But if the French Renaissance was a later and less rapid growth, it was infinitely hardier. The Renaissance literature in Italy was succeeded by a long period of darkness, which remained unbroken, save by fitful gleams of light, till the days of Alfieri. The Renaissance literature in France was the prelude to a literature, which, for vigour, variety, and average excellence, has in modern times rarely, if ever, been surpassed.

The reason for this superiority on the part of France, for the fact that the Renaissance produced there more abiding and more far-reaching results, may be ascribed partly to the natural law that precocious and rapid growths are always less hardy

<sup>1</sup> Bryce, *The Holy Roman Empire*, p. 31 and p. 172 (7th ed.).



than later and more gradual ones, partly to the character of the French nation, to its being at once more intellectual and less imaginative than the Italian, and therefore more influenced by the spirit of free inquiry than by the worship of beauty; partly to the greater unity and vitality of its political life, but in a large measure to the fact that in France the Renaissance came hand in hand with the Reformation.

By some writers, as I have already noticed, the Renaissance and the Reformation are treated as wholly distinct movements; they speak of the Renaissance as purely an æsthetic revival, which hardly penetrated beyond the Alps, and which had no share in producing the Reformation. But if the view expressed in the former chapter, that the central idea of the Renaissance was the spirit of free inquiry, the spirit of revolt against traditional authority, be the correct one, it follows, as I have said, that we must look upon the Reformation as but a fresh developement of the Renaissance movement, as the result of the spirit of free inquiry carried into theology, as a revolt against the authority of the Roman Church. Now the Renaissance in Italy preceded the Reformation by more than a century. There is no trace in it of any desire to criticise the received theology. The Popes of the Renaissance, though notorious evil livers, were jealous upholders of orthodoxy. The scholars and



the men of letters, though they openly scoffed at a religion upon which the evil practices of its hierophants had brought contempt, had neither sufficient interest nor sufficient courage to question its doctrines. They had flung aside religion, but they could not shake off superstition. They lived sensual and godless lives, but they died in the arms of the Church and in the odour of sanctity<sup>1</sup>. The nobler spirits among them, such as Vittorino da Feltre, Guarino da Verona, Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, sought in the writings of the ancients that moral and religious support which their Church refused them. When Cosmo de' Medici lay dying, it was on the authority of Socrates, not of Jesus Christ, that Ficino encouraged him with the prospect of a world beyond the grave.

But until some authority that could commend itself more universally to a modern and a Christian world than the teaching of Socrates or Marcus Aurelius was substituted for the authority of the Church, the Reformation was impossible. That was why Savonarola with all his fiery enthusiasm, and soul-stirring eloquence, with all his passionate love of virtue and hatred of vice failed to make more than a passing impression. He denounced the corruptions of the Romish Church, but he did not attempt to set up anything in her place: he preached repentance,

<sup>1</sup> In Benvenuto Cellini's autobiography we have a most characteristic picture of an Italian of the sixteenth century.



but he offered his hearers no guide that would lead them into the right path. It was the translation of the Bible into the vulgar tongue which made the Reformation possible.

In France on the other hand the new learning and the new religion, Greek and heresy, became almost controvertible terms. Lefèvre d'Étaples, the *doyen* of French humanists, translated the New Testament into French in 1524: the Estiennes, the Hebrew scholar François Vatable, Turnèbe, Ramus, the great surgeon Ambroise Paré, the artists Bernard Palissy and Jean Goujon were all avowed protestants; while Clement Marot, Budé, and above all Rabelais, for a time at least, looked on the reformation with more or less favour. In fact so long as the movement appeared to them merely as a revolt against the narrowness and illiberality of monastic theology, as an assertion of the freedom of the human intellect, the men of letters and culture with hardly an exception joined hands with the reformers. It was only when they found that it implied a moral as well as an intellectual regeneration, that it began to wear for some of them a less congenial aspect.

This close connexion between the Reformation and the revival of learning was, on the whole, a great gain to France. It was not as in Germany where the stronger growth of the Reformation completely choked the other. In France they met



er. on almost equal terms, and the result was that the whole movement was thereby strengthened and elevated both intellectually and morally.

This is especially noticeable in the spirit in which the study of antiquity was pursued. It was the beauty, the exquisite literary form of the ancient masterpieces that captivated the sensuous Italians. It was their wealth of knowledge, their record of experience, their application to the intellectual problems of the day, that attracted the more thoughtful Frenchmen. Ciceronianism, or the clothing of trifles—often filthy trifles—in Latinity which Cicero would have condescended to father, became the loftiest ambition of the Italian scholars. But this phase of scholarship never found favour in France<sup>1</sup>. The French scholars wrote in Latin because Latin was the international language of scholarship, but they wrote to be understood and not to be admired. It was therefore not for the style but for the matter that they read the great writers of antiquity. They read like men thirsting for knowledge. They saw that this mighty ancient civilisation had something more to teach them than how to turn a phrase or polish an epigram. They saw that there was a world of thought to be mastered, a wealth of ideas

<sup>1</sup> In the *Ciceronianus* the claims of five or six French scholars to the proud title of a Ciceronian are considered and rejected. One of the speakers says of Budé: *Qui tribuam quod ille nec ambit, nec agnosceret si tribuero.* Erasmus, Works (Leyden 1703—6) i. 1011 ff.



to be acquired; from Hippocrates and Galen new ideas on medicine, from the Pandects new ideas on law, from the patristic writings new ideas on theology. For the Vulgate was to be substituted the sacred text itself; for the jurisprudence of the glossators, the jurisprudence of Rome; for the Aristotle of the Schoolmen, Aristotle as he really was.

It is true that, like their neighbours, their enthusiasm led them into a few absurdities, such as latinising their names, but on the whole it must be admitted that they brought to the study of antiquity a sober and intelligent spirit, with the result that their classical knowledge, instead of being frittered away in vain efforts to rival Virgil or Cicero, not only became the foundation of serious and fruitful study in many departments of learning, but penetrated and moulded the whole literature and thought of the country.

Morally too the French scholars were far superior to their Italian predecessors. Among the Italian scholars virtue was rare, even decency was exceptional. But French humanism can boast of a long roll of names honourable not only for their high attainments, but also for their integrity and purity of life. Robert Estienne, Turnèbe, Ramus, Cujas, the Chancellor de l'Hôpital, Estienne Pasquier, Thou, are men whom any country would be proud to claim for her sons.

And as with the humanists, so it was with the



Renaissance generally in France. On the whole it was a manly and intelligent movement. There was much evil no doubt, much 'liberty to sin,' especially in high places. France no more than other countries escaped the excesses which the spirit of revolt engendered. The memoirs of the time present us with a terrible picture of licentiousness and blood-thirstiness both in court and camp. But much of this was due partly to the pernicious influence of the combined houses of Valois and Medici, partly to the social and moral disorganisation which a civil war inevitably engenders. In spite of these excesses the well of national life remained uncontaminated. There was plenty of vigour, and freedom and good sense; there was confidence in the present, and hope for the future. This is faithfully reflected in the literature of the period. The literature of the French Renaissance, though in point of form it is far below that of the Italian Renaissance, in manliness and vigour and hopefulness is far superior to it. It is in short a literature, not of maturity, but of promise. One has only to compare its greatest name, Rabelais, with the greatest name of the Italian Renaissance, Ariosto, to see the difference. How formless! how crude! how gross! how full of cumbersome details and wearisome repetitions is Rabelais! How limpid! how harmonious is Ariosto! what perfection of style, what delicacy of touch! He never wearies us, he never



offends our taste. And yet one rises from the reading of Rabelais with a feeling of buoyant cheerfulness, while Ariosto in spite of his wit and gaiety is inexpressibly depressing. The reason is that the one bids us hope, the other bids us despair; the one believes in truth and goodness and in the future of the human race, the other believes in nothing but the pleasures of the senses, which come and go like many-coloured bubbles and leave behind them a boundless *ennui*. Rabelais and Ariosto are true types of the Renaissance as it appeared in their respective countries.

Of course no more of France than of any other country can it be said that the Renaissance began or ended there at any particular date. But here as elsewhere it is possible for historical purposes to select certain limits which adequately embrace the chief activity of the movement. The accession of Francis I. (1515) seems to mark the beginning of a new era, an era of unrest and brilliancy which sufficiently contrasts with the repose and commonplace of the reign of Louis XII. Moreover the name of Francis is closely connected in popular thought with the Renaissance. Nor is this undeserved. In spite of his many vices, and the pitiful flashiness of his character, he was—whether from vanity or from genuine sympathy is no matter—a munificent patron of art and letters, and especially of the two movements—the study of Greek and printing—upon



which, as I have said, the Renaissance, as a literary regeneration, in so large a manner rests.

The accession of Francis I. will therefore be the best date to take for the beginning of the Renaissance in France. The other limit is a more difficult matter to determine.

Strictly speaking what is called modern French literature does not begin till at least the fourth decade of the seventeenth century. The earlier part of the century is from a literary point of view still a period of transition. The close of the sixteenth century however is generally taken by French writers to represent the close of the Renaissance, and there is no doubt that it fairly well represents it. The reign of Henry IV. is another period of repose in politics and of commonplace in literature following a period of political disturbance and more or less of literary brilliance. It practically begins in 1594 with his entry into Paris, and this date I shall take as the inferior limit of the Renaissance in France. It will be found to have a certain amount of literary propriety, for it just includes both Montaigne, the greatest French name of the second half of the sixteenth century, who died in 1592, and the famous *Satire Ménippée* which did so much to secure the triumph of Henry IV. and which was published in 1593. It does not indeed include Brantôme, who lived till 1614 and did not begin to write his *Mémoires* till about 1594; nor does it



include Regnier who lived till 1613. But both Brantôme and Regnier are in spirit so thoroughly of the Renaissance, so utterly opposed to the correct and pedantic spirit which pervaded French literature during the reign of Malherbe, that I shall not feel myself precluded from treating of them by the limit I have somewhat arbitrarily chosen.

The Renaissance then in these pages will begin with the year 1515 and end with the year 1594. But this period of seventy-nine years naturally falls into two well-defined divisions, the one more or less coinciding with the reign of Francis I. (1515—1547), the other with those of the remaining princes of the house of Valois. The first period is the age of Rabelais and Marot, the second of the Pléiade and Montaigne. The first period is one of feverish activity, of bold speculation and patient learning, but it is not a period of great literary production. Besides Rabelais, Marot and perhaps Calvin, who had considerable influence upon the style of French prose, there is not a single name of permanent literary importance. Marguélite of Navarre and Bonaventure des Périers are highly interesting figures, but their real literary value is not very great. Then there are Louise Labé, a graceful poetess, and Mellin de St Gelais, who is credited with having introduced the sonnet into France, and that is almost literally all. The real importance of the period, besides the great central figure of Rabelais, and the poetical



improvements of Marot, consists in the labours of the scholars and the printers, in the collection of manuscripts, in the formation of libraries, in the translation of the Bible and the masterpieces of classical antiquity, and in the dissemination by the printing-press of literature, both classical and national, throughout the length and breadth of the land. The period therefore, regarded from the point of view of literary production, is truly described by many French writers as 'the preparation for the Renaissance' rather than as the Renaissance itself<sup>1</sup>.

The second period, from 1547 to 1594, lands us in the full flood of Renaissance literature. There is no longer any stint of literary production. Ronsard and the whole company of the Pléiade, Amyot the first of French translators, who almost turned Plutarch into a Frenchman, Bodin the founder of modern political science, a host of memoir-writers from Montluc to Brantôme, d'Aubigné, Regnier, the writers of the *Satire Ménippée* and above all Montaigne, make this period one of the most important in French literature.

These then are the two parts into which I propose to divide my subject, the first part dealing with the reign of Francis I., the second with the

<sup>1</sup> M. d'Héricault (Crépet, *Les poètes français* i. 498) puts this view rather too strongly:—"Car il ne faut pas s'y tromper, quoi qu'en aient pu dire jusqu'ici les historiens, le règne de François I. n'est pas la Renaissance, il n'en est que la préface."



period from his death to the entry of Henry IV. into Paris in 1594.

Before however entering upon the main course of my narrative, I must, by way of further introduction, give some account of mediæval literature and learning. It is impossible clearly to understand the nature of the change which the Renaissance brought about in French literature without some knowledge of the state of things previously existing. I therefore propose first of all to attempt a brief sketch of French mediæval literature, and then to give some account of mediæval learning, describing the two chief agencies by which that learning was fostered and in which the new movement found the strongest resistance, the Paris University and the Religious Orders. Finally I shall conclude this volume of introduction with an account of the various intimations by which, before 1515, the coming Renaissance was foreshadowed.



# THE ANTECEDENTS OF THE RENAISSANCE IN FRANCE.

## CHAPTER III.

### MEDIÆVAL LITERATURE<sup>1</sup>.

IT is the proud and just boast of French literature that it can look back upon a long and uninterrupted descent of eight centuries. Like other literatures it has had its ebbing and its flowing tides, but from the *Chanson de Roland* to the latest rhapsody of Victor Hugo the great stream has never run dry. It is only however within comparatively recent years that France has found and recognised her literary ancestors. Boileau made French poetry begin with Villon, but even Villon was nothing to him but a name. A century later nearly the whole of French literature before Malherbe was practically unknown, save to a few learned antiquarians. It was the Romantic move-

<sup>1</sup> For this sketch of French mediæval literature I have consulted the following guides: the *Histoire Littéraire*; Aubertin, *Histoire de la langue et de la littérature françaises au moyen âge*, 2 tt. 8vo. (1878); Crépet, *Les poètes français*, (1861), t. 1; Saintsbury, *A short history of French literature* (1882), pp. 1—154.



ment of the early part of this century which turned the attention of Frenchmen to the earlier literature and revealed to them a store of unsuspected riches. Since then they have applied themselves to the task of recovering their lost ancestors with unceasing and loving diligence ; and if their present veneration seem somewhat excessive, it may surely be pardoned, as in men who have found a long-missing heirloom.

French mediæval literature divides itself with sufficient distinctness into two periods, a period of brilliancy, of creation, of originality, and a period of commonplace, of criticism, of imitation. Roughly speaking, what may be called the creative period extends from the close of the eleventh century, the probable date of the *Chanson de Roland*, to the beginning of the reign of Philip the Fair (1285). It almost exactly corresponds with the epoch of the Crusades (1096—1291). This period again may be subdivided into two halves, which it is convenient to denote by the names of the two centuries to which they roughly correspond. To the twelfth century belong the three earliest forms of French poetical romance—or, as it is sometimes called, French epic—the *Chansons de Gestes*, or romances which treat of French history, the Breton or Arthurian romances, and the classical romances<sup>1</sup>; the rhymed

<sup>1</sup> Ne sont que trois matières à nul homme entendant :  
De France, de Bretagne et de Rome la Grant.

Jean Bodel (13th century)



chronicles of Gaymar and Wace; a few anonymous songs, of which the best known is *Bele Erembors* with its refrain of *E Raynaut amis!*; the *Bestiaire* (a species of didactic poem on natural history) of Philippe de Thaun, and the mystery of *Adam*.

The period called the thirteenth century, which begins with the reign of Philip Augustus (1180), is one of the most noteworthy epochs in the whole history of French literature. It is true that it produced nothing of quite so high a quality of inspiration as the *Chansons de Gestes*, but in general productiveness and variety it greatly surpassed the twelfth century; and although during the last thirty years traces of decay are plainly visible, a high standard of excellence was maintained to the close<sup>1</sup>. There are few branches of literature which have not their representative in this remarkable period. Narrative poetry is represented by the *Romans d'Aventures*, a new and inferior developement of the poetical romances, closely resembling in form those of the Arthurian cycle, and by the *Lais* of Marie de France; lyric poetry by a crowd of singers with Audefroy le Bastard, Thibaut de Champagne, and Quesnes or Coësnes de Béthune<sup>2</sup> at their head; and the drama, though in a far ruder stage, by miracle-plays and mysteries and by the earliest

<sup>1</sup> See M. Moland's eloquent panegyric on the 13th century. Crépet, i. 75—77.

<sup>2</sup> He was an ancestor of Sully.



form of French comedy, the *Jeu*. Even the comic opera, in which the French genius has proved itself so great an adept, has its representative in Adam de la Halle's pastoral drama of *Robin et Marion*<sup>1</sup>. Then we have the peculiarly French growth of the *fabliaux* with the satires of Rutebœuf to represent satirical poetry, while another form of poem, which like the *fabliau* found its most consummate artist in La Fontaine—the beast-poem—is represented by the *Ysopet* of the aforesaid Marie de France. Finally there is the great *Roman de Renart*, both beast-poem and *fabliau* in one, and the first part of the equally famous *Roman de la Rose*.

The prose too of the thirteenth century, though inferior to the poetry, is far from unimportant. For history we have Ville-hardouin's *Conqueste de Constantinoble* and Joinville's *Histoire de St Louis*<sup>2</sup>, while various original tales, of which the best known is the charming story of *Aucassin et Nicolette*, mark the beginnings of the modern novel.

Nor was this activity confined to literature. The thirteenth century in France was the age

<sup>1</sup> Adam de la Halle was also the author of the earliest comedy *li Jus Adam* or *de la Feuillie*, written about 1262.

<sup>2</sup> Ville-hardouin, though his book was written between 1207 and 1213, is sometimes reckoned as belonging to the 12th century. Joinville, whose history was not completed till 1309, both by his life (he was born in 1224) and by the character of his work belongs to the 13th century.



of speculative thought, of Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas, who, though not Frenchmen by birth, made Paris the scene of their teaching and the Paris University the first in Christendom; it was the age of pulpit eloquence, which did not again reach so high a pitch till the days of Bossuet; and it was the golden age of Gothic architecture, the age of Notre-Dame and of Rheims and Chartres and Amiens<sup>1</sup>.

There are two features of this thirteenth century literature to which, before passing on to the period of decline, I would briefly call attention.

In the first place it is notable for the first appearance of that peculiarly French characteristic known as the *esprit gaulois*. The literature of the preceding century, the *Chansons de Gestes* and the Arthurian romances, was a courtly literature: it was the product of men who lived in a courtly atmosphere and who were well satisfied with the world which they portrayed, with chivalry and crusading and church discipline. But in the thirteenth century there begins to be heard a murmur of voices from a rival camp, from the camp of those who are more prone to see evil than good in the world, who criticise rather than admire, who doubt rather than believe. To these persons, living as they did for the most part in anything but a courtly atmosphere,

<sup>1</sup> Notre-Dame was completed about 1214, Rheims 1241, Chartres 1260, Amiens 1272.



mediæval society seemed by no means a perfect arrangement. It might seem so to gay knights, fat abbots, and sleek *trouvères*, but for the villein it wore a different aspect. It is his voice which now for the first time begins to be heard in French literature and to infuse into it this *esprit gaulois*. It appears then that the *esprit gaulois* is a species of that general spirit of mutiny which is more inclined to dwell upon the dark than upon the light side of human nature. But it is neither the serious moral indignation of a Savonarola, nor the savage satire of a Juvenal, nor the sympathetic laughter of a Cervantes. M. Lenient has defined it as *malice enveloppée de bonhomie*<sup>1</sup>, a definition upon which it would be difficult to improve. It should however be added that it is distinguished by a lively freedom of utterance, which too often degenerates into irreverence or coarseness.

The *race gauloise* then, as French writers love to call it, which numbers among its members so many distinguished names in French literature, above all Rabelais and La Fontaine, may be said to have made its first appearance in the thirteenth century; and the forefathers of the race are the writers of the *fabliau* or tale in verse, that one species of early French literature, which, as Mr Saintsbury points out, is of purely native origin<sup>2</sup>. For while in the

<sup>1</sup> *La Satire en France au moyen âge* (nouv. éd. 1877), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Hist. of French Literature*, 47. For the *fabliaux* and the *esprit gaulois* see Crépet, *Intr.* p. xx. xxi. (by Sainte-Beuve); Lenient, c. v; *Hist. Litt.* xxiii. 69—88 (by Leclerc).



*Chansons de Gestes* a Teutonic influence is apparent, and the Arthurian romances and the *lais* are Breton, the *fabliau* is the special product of Picardy and the *Ile de France*. From the *fabliau* the *esprit gaulois* spread to the kindred forms of literature. The *Roman de Renart*, with its mocking cynicism, is the counterpart to the *Romans d'Aventures*, the representation of the reverse side of feudal society. The courtly songs of Thibaut and Béthune are supplemented by the rude satires of Rutebœuf.

The name of Rutebœuf brings me to the second feature of the thirteenth century literature to which I would call attention. It is that now for the first time literature ceases to be anonymous. The few songs that we possess of the twelfth century are all anonymous; so for the most part are the *Chansons de Gestes* and the Arthurian Romances. But in the thirteenth century we have not only a great literature but well-known names—Adam or Adenès le Roi<sup>1</sup>, Thibaut de Champagne, Adam de la Halle, Marie de France, Guillaume Lorris, Ville-hardouin, Joinville, Rutebœuf. But of all these Rutebœuf perhaps has the most distinct personality<sup>2</sup>. Few facts indeed of

<sup>1</sup> Author of the *Roman d'Aventures* of *Cléomadès*, and of three refashioned *Chansons de Gestes*, of which the best known is *Berte aux grans piés*. He was doubtless called 'le Roi' because he was king of the minstrels at the court of the Duke of Brabant.

<sup>2</sup> For Rutebœuf see *Hist. Litt.* xx. 719—731 (by P. Paris); *Crépet*, i. 249—257 (by L. Moland), and the preface to the edition of his works by A. Jubinal (2 vols. 1839).

very  
really  
the best  
of a  
literature



his life are known—none but what he tells us himself—but his writing is distinctly personal; he tells us about himself with the egoism—only that it is more naïve—of a modern poet<sup>1</sup>. It is sometimes said that modern French poetry begins with Villon because he is the first poet who has this note of personality; but according to this theory it should begin not with Villon, but with Rutebœuf.

Rutebœuf, in fact, the poor nameless outcast<sup>2</sup>, is the most conspicuous figure of the latter half of this thirteenth-century literature. It is a sure sign that the decay had begun. Other signs indeed are not wanting, such as the recasting in prose of the old poetical romances or the allegorising and scholastic spirit of the first part of the *Roman de la Rose*, but it is Rutebœuf's satires and *fabliaux* which speak more forcibly than anything of a society in a state of dissolution, and corresponding to it a decaying literature.

One of Rutebœuf's best known satires, written between 1267 and 1270, represents a dispute between a crusader and a cavalier who had not taken the

<sup>1</sup> M. Moland says of him: "Il offre en effet la première individualité à peu près distincte de l'histoire de notre poésie. Nous commençons à entrevoir en lui, derrière le poète, l'homme dont la vie sert jusqu'à un certain point à expliquer les œuvres". (Crépet, i. 272).

<sup>2</sup> He had no Christian name. Rutebœuf of course is only a nickname.



cross, on the merits of crusading<sup>1</sup>. The anti-crusader finally professes himself converted by his opponent, but he has so much the best of the argument that, whatever Rutebœuf's intention may have been, the poem is a remarkable testimony to the decline of the crusading spirit. In fact it had already received a rude shock in the defeat and captivity of St Louis in 1250, and in 1270 the very crusade, the preparation for which was going on when Rutebœuf's poem was written, ended in a second disaster and the death of the last crusading monarch. With the conquest of Acre, the last Christian possession in Palestine, in 1291, the epoch of the Crusades comes to an end. But in France the crusading spirit had utterly died out somewhat earlier. The accession of Philip the Fair (1289) marks the beginning of a new social and political era, and this date, almost coinciding, as it does, with the last appearance of Rutebœuf as a writer, may also be taken to mark the close of the creative period of French mediæval literature<sup>2</sup>.

It is followed, as I have said, by a period of decline. It is true that in some forms of literature

<sup>1</sup> *La desputizons dou croisié et dou descroizié*. (Œuvres de Rutebœuf, i. 124). The *desputizons* or *débat* or *bataille* was a variety in dialogue of the *dit* or monologue, a name which was applied to *fabliaux* as well as to purely satirical pieces.

<sup>2</sup> See Crépet, i. 255, where M. Moland says of Rutebœuf "Les derniers vers qu'il a écrits, *la Complainte de sainte Église*, qu'on peut dater de 1286 environ, sont véritablement les *novissima verba*



there still is evidence of considerable vigour and developement, and there are two or three great names. But these signs of activity are of the future rather than of the past; they are the precursors of the next creative period rather than a survival of that which had passed away. It must always be so in the history of literature. There must from time to time recur periods, which are at once periods of decline and periods of preparation, when by the side of a literature, which, having lost all vitality, is slowly passing away with the phase of civilisation which gave birth to it, there is silently springing up a new growth, weakly at first and stunted, but destined one day to shoot up into a mighty tree, the emblem of a new order of civilisation. In literature, as in everything else in this world, the law of perpetual flux holds good.

The fourteenth century, as a period of French literature, may be said to open with the second part of the *Roman de la Rose*, the work of Jean de Meun<sup>1</sup>. Its enormous popularity, which lasted

du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle." The second stanza quoted by M. Moland is as follows :

Puisque justice cloce, et drois pent et incline,  
 Et verités cancelle, et loiautés decline,  
 Et carités refroide, et fois faut et define,  
 Iou dit qu'il n'a ou monde fondement ne racine.

<sup>1</sup> The mention of Charles of Anjou as King of Sicily,

Qui par devine porvéance,

Est ores de Sesile rois, l. 7379 (ed. F. Michel),

fixes the date of these lines as being certainly earlier than January



down to the close of the sixteenth century, and the extravagant admiration with which its author was regarded, testify to the deep impression which it made. We could hardly have stronger evidence of the moral as well as of the literary decadence of the nation. The satire of Jean de Meun is not, like that of Rutebœuf, inspired by the hard and loveless life of the writer, neither is it tempered, like his, by a genuine appreciation of the good side of feudal society. It is the shameless cynicism of an avowed sensualist who views with disgust any restraint upon his desires, and is therefore the enemy alike of law and religion and the social code. Indeed such is the effrontery of the cynicism that one hardly wants external testimony to shew that the work was written in comparative youth. We therefore wonder less at what must be regarded as the bravado of a young man eager for notoriety, than at the corruption of an age which could receive his performance with enthusiasm, and look upon him with almost superstitious reverence<sup>1</sup>.

1285, the date of Charles' death, and probably earlier than 1282, the date of the Sicilian vespers, to which otherwise we should expect some allusion to have been made. We have also strong evidence that the work was complete before the author's translation of Vegetius, one of the MSS. of which bears the date of 1284. See *Hist. Litt.* xxviii. 391—435 (by Paulin Paris).

<sup>1</sup> See for the influence of the *Roman de la Rose*, Crépet, i. 299 (L. Moland). Jean de Meun's other works were of a more serious description, such as translations of Vegetius, Boethius, and the letters of Abélard and Héloïse.



But it is with the literary and not with the moral point of view that I am concerned, and, clever though Jean de Meun's work is, as an artistic production it is wholly bad. In the first place he continues the allegorising spirit of his predecessor Guillaume de Lorris. The new personages whom he introduces on the scene are still pale abstractions instead of living flesh and blood. Faux-Semblant is sometimes compared with Tartuffe, but Faux-Semblant is a mere voice, a mere bundle of ideas and sentiments. Secondly, the superabundance of political allusion, the ostentatious parade of learning, the obvious purpose of the whole work, shew how far the writer was from being possessed by any artistic aim. The work is not a poem but a pamphlet. Thirdly, its very length, and the fatal facility with which it was evidently written, are incontestable signs of an overblown and decaying literature.

These three faults, love of allegory, writing with a didactic and not an artistic purpose, and inordinate prolixity, are traceable in nearly the whole literature of the fourteenth century. In *Renart le Novel*, which appeared in 1288, we have an example of the love of allegory. The didactic and moralising spirit is shewn by such poems as the *Métamorphoses d'Ovide moralisées* of Philippe de Vitry, bishop of Meaux, whom Petrarch called 'the sole poet of France': while the same poem, which reaches



71,000 lines, and *Renart le Contrefait*, the latest addition to the cycle of Reynard, with over 50,000 lines, are instances of the terrible prolixity of the period.

The lyric poets of this age are not less voluminous than their brethren. Guillaume de Machault and his pupil Eustache Deschamps have left between them nearly 200,000 verses, while Froissart found time, before he devoted himself to history, to throw off some 50,000. The facility, which this copiousness implies, is also visible in the form of their verse. The freshness and simplicity of the earlier songs have been exchanged for the polished, but somewhat pedantic, art of the *ballade* and the *rondeau*, and other fixed forms of verse. Much graceful poetry was written in these fixed forms, but too often ingenuity took the place of inspiration, and art degenerated into artificiality.

In short the literature of the fourteenth century is characterised by that unfailing sign of decadence, want of originality. Writers were content to work in the old lines, making no attempt to strike out new paths; and they almost invariably altered for the worse what they imitated. Thus the old poetical romances were either parodied, as in *Hugues Capet*, which is a *Chanson de Gestes* transformed into a heroi-comic poem, or they were refashioned, with change of rhythm and spelling and the introduction of long episodes, to suit the



taste of the age, as in the latest poetical form of *Huon de Bordeaux*; or thirdly, a new poem was formed by piecing together extracts from various old ones<sup>1</sup>.

In the midst however of this general decay of literary taste, we can discover, as I said above, some signs of life, some promise of future excellence. In the first place the secular drama, the germ of which I have noticed as existing in the *Jeu de la Feuillie* of Adam de la Halle, continued slowly to develope. The formation of the Paris lawyers' clerks into a society, under the name of the *Clercs de la Bazoche*, which dates from about 1302, gave considerable impulse to play-acting, and though very few of the *farces*<sup>2</sup> (as their plays were called) that have come down to us belong to the fourteenth century, there can be no doubt that many were already written and played during this period. About 1380 the dramatic company of the *Enfans sans souci*, composed of young men of good family, was authorised by letters patent.

Secondly we may note a decided improvement in the style of French prose, which in the hands of Froissart attained, for descriptive and narrative purposes, a high degree of grace and vigour. It

<sup>1</sup> For the decadence of the poetical romances see Aubertin i. 260—263.

<sup>2</sup> The *farces* were often dramatised *fabliaux*. See *Hist. Litt.* xxiv. 453.