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# 1. The Renaissance in Italy

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# 1. The Renaissance in Italy

## Abstract

Italian wealth in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was a fertile seedbed in which Renaissance civilization flowered. We have already noted how Italy led the way in the development of commercial capitalism. This flourishing economy placed in the hands of a vigorous class of self-made men sufficient wealth to give Italian civilization a gilding of luxury and display such as the Western World had not seen since the fall of Rome.

[excerpt]

## Keywords

Contemporary Civilization, Italy, Renaissance, Capitalism, Economic Growth, City-State

## Disciplines

Cultural History | Economic History | History

## Comments

This is a part of [Section VI: Renaissance Humanism](#). The [Contemporary Civilization](#) page lists all additional sections of *Ideas and Institutions of Western Man*, as well as the [Table of Contents](#) for both volumes.

## More About Contemporary Civilization:

From 1947 through 1969, all first-year Gettysburg College students took a two-semester course called Contemporary Civilization. The course was developed at President Henry W.A. Hanson's request with the goal of "introducing the student to the backgrounds of contemporary social problems through the major concepts, ideals, hopes and motivations of western culture since the Middle Ages."

Gettysburg College professors from the history, philosophy, and religion departments developed a textbook for the course. The first edition, published in 1955, was called *An Introduction to Contemporary Civilization and Its Problems*. A second edition, retitled *Ideas and Institutions of Western Man*, was published in 1958 and 1960. It is this second edition that we include here. The copy we digitized is from the Gary T. Hawbaker '66 Collection and the marginalia are his.

## Authors

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## 1. The Renaissance in Italy

Italian wealth in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was a fertile seedbed in which Renaissance civilization flowered. We have already noted how Italy led the way in the development of commercial capitalism. This flourishing economy placed in the hands of a vigorous class of self-made men sufficient wealth to give Italian civilization a gilding of luxury and display such as the Western World had not seen since the fall of Rome.

If the economic basis of the Italian Renaissance was capitalism, its political basis was the city-state. The very names of Italian units of government (Venice, Milan, Florence) usually derived from some urban center which dominated satellite towns and a rural hinterland. Unlike northern Europe, where the rise of a money economy often assisted the unifying efforts of the central monarchies, in Italy commercial competition accentuated



the rivalry between city-states. The intense civic pride of the citizenry of these states encompassed little outside the town walls. Within the gates, guilds and religious confraternities vied with each other in staging elaborate public pageants and entertainments. Such civic monuments as town halls and churches were embellished by wealthy merchants whose patronage supported the efforts of the great creative artists of the period.

Feudalism, which had never taken firm root in Italy, was brushed aside by the cities, whose troubled political history is a dramatic story of internal unrest, feuds, and revolutions. Concentration of the new wealth in the hands of the few led to something like modern class war between the haves and have-nots which rent asunder the republican town constitutions. In Venice a merchant oligarchy seized and retained power. In many other towns an individual, often a condottiero (mercenary captain), grabbed control, generally with the connivance of those desiring order at any price. His continuance in power depended on his own skill and the tacit consent of the predominant part of public opinion. Consequently such despots brought to public life something of the same calculating approach associated with the competitive business community. Unhampered by feudal concepts of law, they recognized as their sole standard of conduct "reason of state," with the state its own justification and with public morality distinguished from private. A reflection of this attitude in the works of Machiavelli has already been noted. Perhaps the very ruthlessness of the despots, who could count on neither traditional loyalties nor the protection of a constitution, encouraged them to court public opinion and cloak their regimes with an air of permanence and prosperity by lavish display, patronage of the arts, and public benefactions. Thus, the Sforzas in Milan built hospitals, dug canals, and gathered about them a brilliant court of artists and intellectuals.

Socially the Renaissance in Italy was dominated by an elite which was secular-minded and individualistic. Although this group contained members of the aristocracy of birth who had made their peace with changing times, and although it was recognized that a well-born person inherited valuable incentives and opportunities, gentle birth was not a prerequisite for moving in the charmed circle of leaders. Noblemen tended to blend into an elite whose characteristics were power and achievement as evidenced by wealth, political influence, intellectual eminence, or artistic talent. It was a society of new, self-conscious, self-confident, and largely self-made men who were unlikely to accept domination by any institution. To such individualists glorification of the common man would have been incomprehensible. He was to be courted where necessary in politics; he might enjoy the artistic creations which beautified his city; but the uncommon men who personified the Italian Renaissance saw no particular virtue in counting noses.



The interests of this elite were focused on the increase and enjoyment of the goods of this world -- were, in short, secular. It was difficult for Renaissance Italians to think of this world as a vale of tears. So intoxicating was their sense of discovery and achievement that there was little disposition to entertain sobering thoughts of sin, hell, or even heaven. However, outright paganism seems never to have been more than a literary pose. Attacks on the Church were less antireligious than anticlerical, a distinction often made in the Middle Ages as well. Nevertheless, there was a tendency to push certain traditional aspects of religion into the background, and to savor with zest, if not abandon, the wonders of God's creation. Even Italian churchmen became so imbued with Renaissance attitudes that the exposure and punishment of heresy were not pursued with vigor.

In the medieval world the fine arts had been handmaidens of the Church and learning had been a clerical monopoly. This was no longer true in Renaissance Italy, where laymen had both the opportunity and the inclination to patronize the arts. Letters and learning fell increasingly into lay hands. Those churchmen who did participate in Renaissance culture often wore their spiritual office lightly. The late fifteenth century papacy is a classic example of this state of affairs. Alexander VI (1492-1503) worked tirelessly to enhance the power of his family, aided by his unscrupulous son, Caesar Borgia. Julius II (1503-1513) was a subtle politician and a general who took personal command of his troops in the course of his successful drive to consolidate papal temporal power. He was also patron of three of the great figures in the art world: Michelangelo, Bramante, and Raphael. Leo X (1513-1521), of the great Florentine banking house of Medici, was a sophisticate who collected books and manuscripts and gathered around him a brilliant circle of writers. He is reported to have said, "Let us enjoy the papacy since God has given it to us." There were popes who were ambitious self-seekers, or skilled statesmen, or cultivated gentlemen, but it would be difficult to find one in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries whose outstanding characteristic was a dynamic spiritual life.

Clergymen and laymen, merchant princes and despots, artists and courtiers in the Italian Renaissance exhibited an individualism which was certainly quantitatively greater than was usual in the medieval world. In the Middle Ages there had been, of course, striking personalities, like King John and Gregory VII, but in almost every case their sphere of activity had been circumscribed by custom, caste, and corporation. The weakening of these restraints was now accompanied by the opening of new fields for self-expression in public service, business, the arts, and letters. Moreover, individualism now boasted a theoretical justification in the concept of virtue. Virtu shares with our word virtue a common Latin root (vir, man), but it meant something much broader. It embodied two ideas: the infinite capacity of man for creative endeavor in all fields, and the identification of the good life with the realization of the individual's



potentialities. The man of virtu, the ideal of this cult of personality, was a type much less specialized than the medieval knight or cleric. He was an individual with a personality of his own, a "universal man" in whom vigor, capability, good manners, taste, and knowledge were blended. Avid for fame, he sought for recognition from both contemporaries and posterity. In an age of great artists, he endeavored to make living a fine art.

An excellent example of the many-sided Renaissance man was Lorenzo de Medici (1449-1492), known to history as Lorenzo the Magnificent: head of his family's international banking firm, gentleman farmer, statesman, first citizen and political boss of the Florentine Republic, poet, playwright, patron of the arts who discovered Michelangelo, and participant in the discussions of the Platonic Academy. Despite these many interests, he yet found time on occasion to withdraw for contemplation to the cell that he retained in a nearby monastery. In the very busy life of this man of virtu is embodied much of what is most attractive in the Italian Renaissance.

That this ideal was widely admired is evident from the contents of the handbooks on education and deportment then much in vogue. One of the most famous was The Book of the Courtier (1528) by Baldassare Castiglione (1478-1529). The author was himself a perfect courtier, familiar with Greek, Latin, and Italian, the arts, and military science. His happiest years were spent at the renowned court of the duke of Urbino, whom he served on diplomatic missions and on the field of battle. In the selection given below a group of contemporary notables hold a fictitious discussion on the qualities which distinguish the true courtier. The reader may compare and contrast these qualities with those of the medieval knight and with his own conception of a gentleman.

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Having examined the economic, political, and social characteristics of Renaissance Italy, it is now possible to touch upon the learning, the education, and the visual arts which flourished in this setting.

Although the Italian peninsula never achieved political unity during the Renaissance, it did achieve a degree of cultural unity. An important and early step in this direction was the development of a national language and literature. That the Tuscan dialect spoken around Florence should become the basis of the national language was largely the work of three writers in that tongue: Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio. A study of this triumvirate illustrates the progressive dilution of medieval attitudes.

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\* Count Baldesar Castiglione, The Book of the Courtier, trans. Leonard Eckstein Opdycke (New York: Horace Liveright, 1929), pp. 7, 21-22, 23-24, 25-26, 30-31, 44-46, 58-59, 62, 64, 65, 243-244, 247-248.



The works of Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) have been hailed as both the summation of the medieval world and a foretaste of the Renaissance. His defense of that thoroughly medieval institution, the Holy Roman Empire, was written in Latin, as was his treatise on the value of the vernaculars. His love poetry, composed in his native Tuscan, harks back to the troubadours of medieval Provence rather than to the pagan raptures of his Renaissance successors. In the same language Dante wrote his masterpiece, The Divine Comedy, an epic survey of the human soul in hell, purgatory, and heaven. Therein the author, himself a layman and politician, infused the teachings of medieval philosophy and theology with a Renaissance vitality and individualism which help to account for his remarkable contemporary popularity, even, it is said, among ordinary workmen.

In the works of Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374), better known to us as Petrarch, the medieval element is less striking, although occasionally an ascetic impulse breaks through. Typical of the Renaissance was his zeal in searching for the manuscripts of Greek and Roman classics, his reverence for those models, and his passion for fame. Typical also were his vernacular lyric poems to his beloved Laura, a warm and living human being unlike Dante's idealized Beatrice.

Still more worldly was Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375), a banker's son who did for Italian prose what Dante and Petrarch did for poetry. Less profound than the other triumvirs, he nonetheless skilfully portrayed the secular side of Florentine life in the Decameron (1353). The book is set in the year 1348, when a group of ladies and gentlemen fled from the plague ravishing Florence. In the garden of a country villa they pass the time for ten days (whence the title) amusing themselves by telling stories. Just as Boccaccio adopted most of his hundred tales from contemporary popular stories, so later writers have mined the Decameron for plots. The sample given below should remind the reader of a number of aspects of the Italian Renaissance which have already been touched upon. This naughty pleasantry should not obscure the fact that Boccaccio was an able and enthusiastic scholar in Latin and Greek who compiled learned classical dictionaries and could boast that he had brought Homer to Tuscany.

#### The First Day. The First Story

It is a seemly thing, dearest ladies, that whatsoever a man doth, he give it beginning from the holy and admirable name of Him who is the maker of all things. Wherefore, it behoving me, as the first, to give commencement to our story-telling, I purpose to begin with one of His marvels, to the end, that, this being heard, our hope in Him, as in a thing immutable, may be confirmed and His name be ever praised of us. It is manifest that, like as things temporal are all transitory and mortal, even so both within and without are they full of annoy and anguish and travail and subject to infinite perils, against which it is indubitable that we, who live enmingled therein and who are indeed part and parcel thereof, might avail neither to endure nor to defend ourselves, except God's

*Transition from Middle Ages. (Dante, Petrarch, to Boccaccio)*



especial grace lent us strength and foresight, which latter, it is not to be believed, descendeth unto us and upon us by any merit of our own, but of the proper motion of His own benignity and the efficacy of the prayers of those who were mortals even as we are and having diligently ensued His commandments, what while they were on life, are now with Him become eternal and blessed and unto whom we, -- belike not daring to address ourselves unto the proper presence of so august a judge, -- proffer our petitions of the things which we deem needful unto ourselves, as unto advocates informed by experience of our frailty. And this more we discern in Him, full as He is of compassionate liberality towards us, that, whereas it chanceth whiles (the keenness of mortal eyes availing not in any wise to penetrate the secrets of the Divine intent), that we peradventure, beguiled by report, make such an one our advocate unto His majesty, who is outcast from His presence with an eternal banishment, -- nevertheless He, from whom nothing is hidden, having regard rather to the purity of the suppliant's intent than to his ignorance or to the reprobate estate of him whose intercession he invoceth, giveth ear unto those who pray unto the latter as if he were in very deed blessed in His aspect. The which will manifestly appear from the story which I purpose to relate; I say manifestly, ensuing, not the judgment of God, but that of men.

It is told, then, that Musciatto Franzesi, being from a very rich and considerable merchant in France become a knight and it behoving him thereupon go into Tuscany with Messire Charles Sansterre, brother to the King of France, who had been required and bidden thither by Pope Boniface; found his affairs in one part and another sore embroiled (as those of merchants most times are), and was unable lightly or promptly to disentangle them; wherefore he be-thought himself to commit them unto diverse persons and made shift for all, save only he abode in doubt whom he might leave sufficient to the recovery of the credits he had given to certain Burgundians. The cause of his doubt was that he knew the Burgundians to be litigious, quarrelsome fellows, ill-conditioned and disloyal, and could not call one to mind, in whom he might put any trust, curst enough to cope with their perversity. After long consideration of the matter, there came to his memory a certain Master Ciapperello da Prato, who came often to his house in Paris and whom, for that he was little of person and mighty nice in his dress, the French, knowing not what Cepparello meant and thinking it be the same with Cappello, to wit, in their vernacular, Chaplet, called him, not Capello, but Ciappelletto, and accordingly as Ciappelletto he was known everywhere, whilst few knew him for Master Ciapperello.

Now this said Ciappelletto was of this manner life, that, being a scrivener, he thought very great shame whenas any of his instruments was found (and indeed he drew few such) other than false; whilst of the latter he would have drawn as many as might be required of him and

*respectable people pulling a trick on the Church and laughing at it. Depict to the clergy (Church) as galleable.*



these with a better will by way of gift than any other for a great wage. False witness he bore with especial delight, required or not required, and the greatest regard being in those times paid to oaths in France, as he recked nothing of forswearing himself, he knavishly gained all the suits concerning which he was called upon to tell the truth upon his faith. He took inordinate pleasure and was mighty diligent in stirring up troubles and enmities and scandals between friends and kinsfolk and whomsoever else, and the greater the mischiefs he saw ensue thereof, the more he rejoiced. If bidden to manslaughter or whatsoever other naughty deed, he went about it with a will, without ever saying nay thereto; and many a time of his proper choice he had been known to wound men and do them to death with his own hand. He was a terrible blasphemer of God and the saints, and that for every trifle, being the most choleric man alive. To church he went never and all the sacraments thereof he flouted in abominable terms, as things of no account; whilst, on the other hand, he was still fain to haunt and use taverns and other lewd places. Of women he was as fond as dogs of the stick; but in the contrary he delighted more than any filthy fellow alive. He robbed and pillaged with as much conscience as a godly man would make oblation to God; he was a very glutton and a great wine bibber, insomuch that bytimes it wrought him shameful mischief, and to boot, he was a notorious gamester and a caster of cogged dice. But why should I enlarge in so many words? He was belike the worst man that ever was born. His wickedness had long been upheld by the power and interest of Messer Musciatto, who had many a time safeguarded him as well from private persons, to whom he often did a mischief, as from the law, against which he was a perpetual offender.

This Master Ciappelletto, then, coming to Musciatto's mind, the latter, who was very well acquainted with his way of life, bethought himself that he should be such an one as the perversity of the Burgundians required and accordingly, sending for him, he bespoke him thus:

'Master Ciappelletto, I am, as thou knowest, about altogether to withdraw hence, and having to do, amongst others, with certain Burgundians, men full of guile, I know none whom I may leave to recover my due from them more fitting than thyself, more by token that thou dost nothing at this present; wherefore, and thou wilt undertake this, I will e'en procure thee the favor of the Court and give thee such part as shall be meet of that which thou shalt recover.'

Dan Ciappelletto, who was then out of employ and ill provided with the goods of the world, seeing him who had long been his stay and his refuge about to depart thence, lost no time in deliberation, but, as of necessity constrained, replied that he would well. They being come to an accord, Musciatto departed and Ciappelletto, having gotten his patron's procuration and letters commendatory

*If he died in their house unshining, the local people might take up a cause against the merchants.  
Purely a business matter.*



from the king, betook himself into Burgundy, where well nigh none knew him, and there, contrary to his nature, began courteously and blandly to seek to get in his payments and do that wherefor he was come thither, as if reserving choler and violence for a last resort. Dealing thus and lodging in the house of two Florentines, brothers, who there lent at usance and who entertained him with great honor for the love of Messer Musciatto, it chanced that he fell sick, whereupon the two brothers promptly fetched physicians and servants to tend him and furnished him with all that behoved unto the recovery of his health.

But every succor was in vain, for that, by the physicians' report, the good man, who was now old and had lived disorderly, grew daily worse, as one who had a mortal sickness; wherefore the two brothers were sore concerned and one day, being pretty near the chamber where he lay sick, they began to take counsel together, saying one to the other, 'How shall we do with yonder fellow? We have a sorry bargain on our hands for this affair, for that to send him forth of our house, thus sick, were a sore reproach to us and a manifest sign of little wit on our part, if the folk, who have seen us first receive him and after let tend and medicine him with such solicitude, should now see him suddenly put out of our house, sick unto death as he is, without it being possible for him to have done aught that should displease us. On the other hand, he hath been so wicked a man that he will never consent to confess or take any sacrament of the church; and he dying without confession, no church will receive his body; nay, he will be cast into a ditch, like a dog. Again, even if he do confess, his sins are so many and so horrible that the like will come of it, for that there is nor priest nor friar who can or will absolve him thereof; wherefore, being unshriven, he will still be cast into the ditches. Should it happen thus, the people of the city, as well on account of our trade, which appeareth to them most iniquitous and of which they missay all day, as of their itch to plunder us, seeing this, will rise up in riot and cry out, "These Lombard dogs, whom the church refuseth to receive, are to be suffered here no longer;" -- and they will run to our houses and despoil us not only of our good, but may be of our lives, to boot; wherefore in any case it will go ill with us, if yonder fellow die.'

Master Ciappelletto, who as we have said lay near the place where the two brothers were in discourse, being quick of hearing, as in most times the case with the sick, heard what they said of him and calling them to him, bespoke them thus: 'I will not have you anywise misdoubt of me nor fear to take any hurt by me. I have heard what you say of me and am well assured that it would happen even as you say, should matters pass as you expect; but it shall go otherwise. I have in my lifetime done God the Lord so many an affront that it will make neither more nor less, and I do Him yet another at the point of death;

*Confesses minor things, after he dies he is declared a saint.  
(secular - anti-clerical view) To Medieval man the church offered security. In this period people interested in the opportunities of this world. People finding other interests than the Church.*



wherefore do you make shift to bring me the holiest and worthiest friar you may avail to have, if any such there be, and leave the rest to me, for that I will assuredly order your affairs and mine own on such wise that all shall go well and you shall have good cause to be satisfied.'

The two brothers, albeit they conceived no great hope of this, nevertheless betook themselves to a brotherhood of monks and demanded some holy and learned man to hear the confession of a Lombard who lay sick in their house. There was given them a venerable brother of holy and good life and a past master in Holy Writ, a very reverent man, for whom all the townsfolk had a very great and special regard, and they carried him to their house; where, coming to the chamber where Master Ciappelletto lay and seating himself by his side, he began first tenderly to comfort him and after asked him how long it was since he had confessed last; whereto Master Ciappelletto, who had never confessed in his life, answered, 'Father, it hath been my usance to confess every week once at the least and often more; it is true that, since I fell sick, to wit, these eight days past, I have not confessed, such is the annoy that my sickness hath given me.' Quoth the friar. 'My son, thou hast done well and so must thou do henceforward. I see, since thou confessest so often, that I shall be at little pains either of hearing or questioning.' 'Sir,' answered Master Ciappelletto, 'say not so; I have never confessed so much nor so often, but I would still fain make a general confession of all my sins that I could call to mind from the day of my birth to that of my confession; wherefore I pray you, good my father, question me as punctually of everything, nay, everything, as if I had never confessed; and consider me not because I am sick, for that I had far liefer displease this my flesh than, in consulting its ease, do aught that might be the perdition of my soul, which my Saviour redeemed with His precious blood.'

These words much pleased the holy man and seemed to him to argue a well-disposed mind; wherefore, after he had much commended Master Ciappelletto for that his usance, he asked him if he had ever sinned by way of lust with any woman. 'Father,' replied Master Ciappelletto, sighing, 'on this point I am ashamed to tell the truth, fearing to sin by way of vain-glory.' Quoth the friar, 'Speak in all security, for never did one sin by telling the truth, whether in confession or otherwise.' 'Then,' said Master Ciappelletto, 'since you certify me of this, I will tell you; I am yet a virgin, even as I came forth of my mother's body.' 'O blessed be thou of God!' cried the monk. 'How well hast thou done! And doing thus, thou hast the more deserved, inasmuch as, and thou wouldst, thou hadst more leisure to do the contrary than we and whatsoever others are limited by any rule.'

After this he asked him if he had ever offended against

*Change of attitude toward business institutions*



God in the sin of gluttony; whereto Master Ciappelletto answered sighing, 'Ay had he, and that many a time; for that, albeit, over and above the Lenten fasts that are yearly observed of the devout, he had been wont to fast on bread and water three days at the least in every week, -- he had oftentimes (and especially whenas he had endured any fatigue, either praying or going apilgrimage) drunken the water with as much appetite and as keen a relish as great drinkers do wine. And many a time he had longed to have such homely salads of potherbs as women make when they go into the country; and whiles eating had given him more pleasure than himseemed it should do to one who fasteth for devotion, as did he. 'My son,' said the friar, 'these sins are natural and very slight and I would not therefore have thee burden thy conscience withal more than behoveth. It happeneth to every man, how devout soever he be, that, after long fasting, meat seemeth good to him and after travail, drink.'

'Alack, father mine,' rejoined Ciappelletto, 'tell me not this to comfort me; you must know I know that things done for the service of God should be done sincerely and with an ungrudging mind; and whoso doth otherwise sinneth.' Quoth the friar, exceeding well pleased, 'I am content that thou shouldst thus apprehend it and thy pure and good conscience therein pleaseth me exceedingly. But, tell me, hast thou sinned by way of avarice, desiring more than befitted or withholding that which it behoved thee not to withhold?' 'Father mine,' replied Ciappelletto, 'I would not have you look to my being in the house of these usurers; I have naught to do here; nay, I came hither to admonish and chasten them and turn them from this their abominable way of gain; and methinketh I should have made shift to do so, had not God thus visited me. But you must know that I was left a rich man by my father, of whose good, when he was dead, I bestowed the most part in alms, and after, to sustain my life and that I might be able to succor Christ's poor, I have done my little traffickings, and in these I have desired to gain; but still with God's poor have I shared that which I gained. converting my own half to my occasions and giving them the other, and in this so well hath my Creator prospered me that my affairs have still gone from good to better.'

'Well hast thou done,' said the friar; 'but hast thou often been angered?' 'Oh,' cried Master Ciappelletto, 'that I must tell you I have very often been! And who could keep himself therefrom, seeing men do unseemly things all day long, keeping not the commandments of God neither fearing His judgments? Many times a day I had liefer been dead than alive, seeing young men follow after vanities and hearing them curse and forswear themselves, haunting the taverns, visiting not the churches and ensuing rather the ways of the world than that of God.' 'My son,' said the friar, 'this is a righteous anger, nor for my part might I enjoin thee any penance therefor. But hath anger at any time availed to move



thee to do any manslaughter or to bespeak any one unseemly or do any other unright?' 'Alack, sir,' answered the sick man, 'you, who seem to me a man of God, how can you say such words? Had I ever had the least thought of doing any one of the things whereof you speak, think you I believe that God would so long have forborne me? These be the doings of outlaws and men of nought, whereof I never saw any but I said still, "Go, may God amend thee."'

Then said the friar, 'Now tell me, my son (blessed be thou of God!), hast thou never borne false witness against any or missaid of another or taken others' good, without leave of him to whom it pertained?' 'Ay, indeed, sir,' replied Master Ciappelletto; 'I have missaid of others; for that I had a neighbor aforetime, who, with the greatest unright in the world, did nought but beat his wife, insomuch that I once spoke ill of him to her kinsfolk, so great was the compassion that overcame me for the poor woman, whom he used as God alone can tell, whenassoever he had drunken overmuch.' Quoth the friar, 'Thou tellest me thou has been a merchant. Hast thou never cheated any one, as merchants do whiles?' 'I' faith, yes, sir,' answered Master Ciappelletto; 'but I know not whom except it were a certain man, who once brought me monies which he owed me for cloth I had sold him and which I threw into a chest, without counting. A good month after, I found that they were four farthings more than they should have been; wherefore, not seeing him again and having kept them by me a full year, that I might restore them to him, I gave them away in alms.' Quoth the friar, 'This was a small matter, and thou didst well to deal with it as thou didst.'

Then he questioned him of many other things, all of which he answered after the same fashion, and the holy father offering to proceed to absolution, Master Ciappelletto said, 'Sir, I have yet sundry sins that I have not told you.' The friar asked him what they were, and he answered, 'I mind me that one Saturday, afternone, I caused my servant sweep out the house and had not that reverence for the Lord's holy day which it behoved me have.' 'Oh,' said the friar, 'that is a light matter, my son.' 'Nay,' rejoined Master Ciappelletto, 'call it not a light matter, for that the Lord's Day is greatly to be honored, seeing that on such a day our Lord rose from the dead.' Then said the friar, 'Well, hast thou done aught else?' 'Ay, sir,' answered Master Ciappelletto; 'once, unthinking what I did, I spat in the church of God.' Thereupon the friar fell a-smiling and said, 'My son, that is no thing to be reckoned of; we who are of the clergy, we spit there all day long.' 'And you do very ill,' rejoined Master Ciappelletto; 'for that there is nought which is so straitly behoveth to keep clean as the holy temple wherein is rendered sacrifice to God.'

Brief, he told him great plenty of such like things and presently fell a-sighing and after weeping sore, as he knew full well to do, whenas as he would. Quote the



holy friar, 'What aileth thee, my son?' 'Alas, sir,' replied Master Ciappelletto, 'I have one sin left, whereof I never yet confessed me, such shame have I to tell it; and every time I call it to mind, I weep, even as you see, and meseemeth very certain that God will never pardon it me.' 'Go to, son,' rejoined the friar; 'what is this thou sayest? If all the sins that were ever wrought or are yet to be wrought of all mankind, what while the world endureth, were all in one man and he repented him thereof and were contrite therefor, as I see thee, such is the mercy and loving-kindness of God that, upon confession He would freely pardon them to him. Wherefore do thou tell it in all assurance.' Quoth Master Ciappelletto, still weeping sore, 'Alack, father mine, mine is too great a sin, and I can scarce believe that it will ever be forgiven me of God, except your prayers strive for me.' Then said the friar, 'Tell it me in all assurance, for I promise thee to pray God for thee.'

Master Ciappelletto, however, still wept and said nought; but, after he had thus held the friar a great while in suspense, he heaved a deep sigh and said, 'Father mine, since you promise me to pray God for me, I will e'en tell it you. Know, then, that, when I was little, I once cursed my mother,' So saying, he fell again to weeping sore. 'O my son,' quoth the friar, 'seemeth this to thee so heinous a sin? Why, men blaspheme God all day long and He freely pardoneth whoso repenteth him of having blasphemed Him; and deemest thou not He will pardon thee this? Weep not, but comfort thyself; for, certes, wert thou one of those who set Him on the cross, He would pardon thee, in favor of such contrition as I see in thee.' Alack, father mine, what say you?' replied Ciappelletto. 'My kind mother who bore me nine months in her body, day and night, and carried me on her neck an hundred times and more, I did passing ill to curse her and it was an exceeding great sin; and except you pray God for me, it will not be forgiven me.'

The friar, then, seeing that Master Ciappelletto had no more to say, gave him absolution and bestowed on him his benison, holding him a very holy man and devoutly believing all that he had told him to be true. And who would not have believed it, hearing a man at the point of death speak thus? Then, after all this, he said to him, 'Master Ciappelletto, with God's help you will speedily be whole; but, should it come to pass that God call your blessed and well-disposed soul to himself, would it please you that your body be buried in our convent?' 'Ay, would it, sir,' replied Master Ciappelletto. 'Nay, I would fain not be buried elsewhere, since you have promised to pray God for me; more by token that I have ever had a special regard for your order. Wherefore I pray you that, whenas you return to your lodging, you cause bring me that most veritable body of Christ, which you consecrate a-mornings upon the altar, for that, with your leave, I purpose (all unworthy as I am) to take it



and after, holy and extreme unction, to the intent that if I have lived as a sinner, I may at the least die like a Christian.' The good friar replied that it pleased him much and that he said well and promised to see it presently brought him; and so was it done.

Meanwhile, the two brothers, misdoubting them sore lest Master Ciappelletto should play them false, had posted themselves behind a wainscot, that divided the chamber where he lay from another, and listening, easily heard and apprehended that which he said to the friar and had whiles so great a mind to laugh, hearing the things which he confessed to having done, that they were like to burst and said, one to another, 'What manner of man is this, whom neither old age nor sickness nor fear of death, whereunto he seeth himself near, nor yet of God, before whose judgment-seat he looketh to be ere long, have availed to turn from his wickedness nor hinder him from choosing to die as he hath lived?' However, seeing that he had so spoken that he should be admitted to burial in a church, they recked nought of the rest.

Master Ciappelletto presently took the sacrament and growing rapidly worse, received extreme unction, and a little after evensong of the day he had made his fine confession, he died; whereupon the two brothers, having, of his proper monies, taken order for his honorable burial, sent to the convent to acquaint the friars therewith, bidding them come thither that night to hold vigil, according to usance, and fetch away the body in the morning, and meanwhile made ready all that was needful thereunto.

The holy friar, who had shriven him, hearing that he had departed this life, betook himself to the prior of the convent and letting ring to chapter, gave out to the brethren therein assembled that Master Ciappelletto had been a holy man, according to that which he had gathered from his confession, and persuaded them to receive his body with the utmost reverence and devotion, in the hope that God should show forth many miracles through him. To this the prior and brethren credulously consented and that same evening, coming all whereas Master Ciappelletto lay dead, they held high and a solemn vigil over him and on the morrow, clad all in albs and copes, book in hand and crosses before them, they went, chanting the while, for his body and brought it with the utmost pomp and solemnity to their church, followed by well nigh all the people of the city, men and women.

As soon as they had set the body down in the church, the holy friar, who had confessed him, mounted the pulpit and fell a-preaching marvellous things of the dead man and of his life, his fasts, his virginity, his simplicity and innocence and sanctity, recounting, amongst other things, that which he had confessed to him as his greatest sin and how he had hardly availed to persuade him that God would forgive it him; thence passing on to reprove the folk who harkened, 'And you, accursed that you are,' quoth



he, 'for every waif of straw that stirreth between your feet, you blaspheme God and the Virgin and all the host of heaven.' Moreover, he told them many other things of his loyalty and purity of heart; brief, with his speech, whereto entire faith was yielded of the people of the city, he so established the dead man in the reverent consideration of all who were present that, no sooner was the service at an end, than they all with the utmost eagerness flocked to kiss his hands and feet and the clothes were torn off his back, he holding himself blessed who might avail to have never so little thereof; and needs must they leave him thus all that day, so he might be seen and visited of all.

The following night he was honorably buried in a marble tomb in one of the chapels of the church and on the morrow the folk began incontinent to come and burn candles and offer up prayers and make vows to him and hang images of wax at his shrine, according to the promise made. Nay, on such wise waxed the fame of his sanctity and men's devotion to him that there was scarce any who, being in adversity, would vow himself to another saint than him; and they styled and yet style him Saint Ciappelletto and avouch that God through him hath wrought many miracles and yet worketh them every day for whoso devoutly commendeth himself unto him.

Thus, then, lived and died Master Cepperello de Prato and became a saint, as you have heard; nor would I deny it to be possible that he is beatified in God's presence, for that, albeit his life was wicked and perverse, he may at his last extremity have shown such contrition that peradventure God had mercy on him and received him into His kingdom; but for that this is hidden from us, I reason according to that which is apparent and say that he should rather be in the hands of the devil in perdition than in Paradise. And if so it be, we may know from this how great is God's loving-kindness towards us, which, having regard not to our error, but to the purity of our faith, whenas we thus make an enemy (deeming him a friend) of His our intermediary, giveth ear unto us, even if we had recourse unto one truly holy, as intercessor for His favor. Wherefore, to the end that by His grace we may be preserved safe and sound in this present adversity and in this so joyous company, let us, magnifying His name, in which we have begun our diversion, and holding Him in reverence, commend ourselves to Him in our necessities, well assured of being heard." And with this he was silent. \*

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\* Stories of Boccaccio (The Decameron), trans. Leopold Flameng (London: Published for the Trade), pp. 17-27.



With the death of Petrarch and Boccaccio the fruitful development of Italian vernacular literature faltered. For two generations most of the best minds in Italian literary circles deserted the vulgar tongue in favor of classical Latin and Greek. The devotees of this, the New Learning, gloried in the name of humanists.

As applied to the Renaissance, humanism had both a general and a more restricted meaning. In the broad sense it exalted the potentialities of man as man and reveled in his achievements. It depicted man as not merely a part of nature, but as a unique being, more than animal and little less than angel. The cultivation of humane values, particularly in a literary form, was to the humanists a matter of consummate interest. They were quite conscious, perhaps overly conscious, of making a break with the God-centered world of the Middle Ages and at their worst exhibited the vanity and quarrelsomeness of some pioneers. Their man-centered outlook was clearly compatible with both the concept of virtue and the individualism of contemporary capitalism. Under this definition both Petrarch and Boccaccio, and to some extent even Dante, were humanists.

The narrower meaning of humanism equates it with the New Learning, the glorification of the artistic and literary monuments of Greek and Roman Civilization as the supreme embodiment of humane values. Because they felt that their own era was brushing aside the cobwebs of medieval obscurantism, the humanists generally preened themselves for living (in the words of one of their number, Ficino) in "a golden age which has restored to the light the liberal arts which had almost been destroyed." For contrast, they spoke of their medieval predecessors as having lived in "the Dark Ages." The phrase "Revival of Learning," meaning the revival of classical learning, which is also applied to Renaissance humanism, reflects this same attitude.

Actually, the humanists were less than fair to their medieval precursors. As we have seen, many of their revered Greek and Latin writers were preserved for them only in manuscripts copied during the Dark Ages. Medieval scholars had studied some of these writers for lessons in philosophy and grammar. To the scholastics, Aristotle had been "The Philosopher." In addition, although the humanists scoffed at the reverence with which the scholastic philosophers were regarded in the universities, they themselves tended to honor the classics as authorities just as slavishly. Nevertheless, there was a large measure of truth in the humanist position. Medieval scholars had studied available classical learning selectively, picking out what was congenial. Instead of seeing these works as the products of unique civilizations, they had read them through thoroughly medieval eyes. Virgil, for example, had been admired at least partly because one of his poems was interpreted as foretelling the coming of Christ.

The humanists had a somewhat better historical sense. They made a real effort to place the Latin classics in their proper



historical setting, but at the same time they drew from them standards of eternal validity. Classic canons of taste were exalted. To reproduce the measured cadence of Ciceronian prose became the mark of taste. One humanist (Valla) spoke of classical Latin as "our language," and another (Bruni) called Cicero "the father of our language and our literature." The story of the humanist cleric who washed out his mouth after saying mass in Church Latin, if true, illustrates this attitude. Petrarch was much prouder of his epic (now rightly ignored except by specialists) written in imitation of Virgil than of his love poetry, the product of idle moments to which posterity still turns with pleasure. In fields other than literary style, in architecture and philosophy for example, the same imitative process can be observed.

The humanists' glorification of the Revival of Learning must not be taken to mean that the rediscovery of the classics caused the economic, social, and political developments which characterized their age. The truth would seem to be more nearly the reverse. These developments and the new outlook which accompanied them demanded new modes of formulation and expression. The Greek and Latin classics were appropriated as models for this purpose, and, in use, helped shape the thought of their users.

That vigorous Renaissance Italians should copy so avidly the styles of the long-dead antique civilizations becomes more understandable when it is remembered that the cultivated Greek and Roman of ancient times had an outlook similar in many ways to that of a cultivated Italian of the fifteenth century. In each case the setting was an urban society which fed on international trade. In each case the emphasis was on the rational appreciation and understanding of this world rather than the next. In Greece, as in Renaissance Italy, the individual was exalted. Many a Renaissance man would agree with a Greek philosopher's statement that "man is the measure of all things."

*Protagoras as quoted by Plato in the Theaetetus.*  
Yet, despite this resemblance, Renaissance Italy was not a carbon copy of the Greco-Roman world. In their way the humanists were just as selective in their borrowing from the classics as the maligned medievalists. Greek drama, for example, was largely ignored. So difficult was it to confine Renaissance exuberance that a Renaissance imitation of a classical model in the arts, despite its antique elements, generally bears the unmistakable stamp of its own age. Alongside those Renaissance critics who justified contemporary literary practices by classical precedents must be placed others who rallied to the trumpet call of Pico della Mirandola: "We are greater than the ancients in my opinion."

The humanists' work as conservers of classical culture was no mean achievement. Special papal officials were appointed to superintend the preservation of ancient Roman monuments in the Eternal City, although their work met with only limited success.

*Greek city state looked a lot like Italian city states.*



Cultivated princes and prelates sent agents to ransack the monastic libraries of Europe for long-lost manuscripts of the classics. Each find was greeted with delirious joy, and each evidence of neglect intensified their scorn for the Middle Ages. Boccaccio tells us that he sat down and wept at the sight of the debris of neglected manuscripts in the abbey of Monte Cassino. Some of the world's great libraries were founded at this time as depositories for collections thus amassed, among them the world-renowned Vatican library. Cosimo de Medici maintained forty-five copyists to stock his three libraries in Florence.

The early Renaissance emphasis on classical Latin was gradually extended to Greek, causing a busy search for Greek manuscripts among the ruins of the Byzantine Empire. During the Middle Ages knowledge of Greek had all but died out in the West. Owing to the lack of competent instructors, what Greek works had been known were available only in Latin translations, often imperfect. Petrarch was the proud possessor of Greek manuscripts whose verses he could chant but not translate. The revival of Greek in the West can be dated from the end of the fourteenth century when a Byzantine Greek, Manuel Chrysoloras (c. 1355-1415), spent a few years in Florence. He was the author of the first Greek grammar used in Western Europe. Other Byzantine scholars came to the same city in 1438-1439 to attend a church council. Then, in 1453, the Turkish capture of Constantinople dispersed a number of Greek-speaking refugees through the West, where many earned their bread copying, translating, and teaching. Nevertheless, the humanists were never as much at home in Greek as in Latin.

The humanists' work of conservation went beyond the mere preservation of books. By the end of the fifteenth century virtually all the Greek works we have were in their hands. Already scholars had set to work on the Greek and Latin texts, purging them of medieval interpolations and copyists' errors, comparing readings, translating, and compiling commentaries. In the course of this activity, much of the apparatus of present-day scholarship was developed. For example, dictionaries arranged on the alphabetical principle date from this period. If at their worst the humanists were often pedantic and slavish imitators, at their best they were hard-working pioneers of scholarship.

Whatever blind spots marred the humanists' vision, their systematic study of ancient manuscripts was at once a sign of, and an encouragement to, the development of a critical spirit. The classics could be guides as well as models. Even though one set of authorities was exchanged for another, the shift in perspective brought new insights into old materials. It was but a short step from the application of critical techniques to ancient Greek and Latin texts to the application of the same fruitful techniques to the study of ecclesiastical documents.

A famous illustration of this process is found in the work of Lorenzo Valla (c. 1405-1457). This cantankerous philologist



*pope's right to rule in the West.*

undertook a study of the Donation of Constantine, a document which purported to record a gift made in the fourth century by the Roman Emperor Constantine to Pope Sylvester and his successors "of the city of Rome and Italy and of the regions of the West." For centuries it had been cited to support papal claims to territorial power. By showing that it contained references and language impossible for the supposed date of its composition Valla proved conclusively that it was a forgery (of about the eighth or ninth century). For example, when the Donation (called the "privilege" below) mentioned Constantinople as the seat of a patriarch, Valla commented:

How in the world -- this is much more absurd, and impossible in the nature of things -- could one speak of Constantinople as one of the patriarchal sees, when it is not yet a patriarchate, nor a see, nor a Christian city, nor named Constantinople, nor founded, nor planned! For the 'privilege' was granted, so it says, the third day after Constantine became a Christian; when as yet Byzantium, not Constantinople, occupied the site.... \*

*Constantinople had not yet been founded.*

In another work Valla attacked the accuracy of the Vulgate, St. Jerome's Latin translation of the Scriptures which had long enjoyed ecclesiastical sanction. A footnote on the temper of the times is the fact that Valla, far from being condemned as a heretic, subsequently received patronage from a humanist pope.

Some Italian humanists went beyond the conservation, imitation, and criticism of the classical writers to attempt a synthesis of Greco-Roman and other elements with portions of the medieval heritage. Much of this effort was centered around the works of Plato whose rediscovery in the original by the humanists was an intoxicating experience, if only as a reaction against the late medieval vogue of Aristotelian scholasticism. Some of the best known products of the synthesizing movement came from the informal circle of humanists known as the Platonic Academy, founded at Florence under the patronage of Cosimo de Medici and with Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) as its animating spirit.

Actually, the Florentine Platonists were Neoplatonists who, looking at Plato through the eyes of some of his followers, saw him as a religious teacher. Man's intelligence, they believed, enabled him to comprehend that reality, hidden behind things, which is ultimately God. Although accepting the necessity of dogmatic religion for the untutored masses unable to see through the material world which obscures the light of the spirit, for the enlightened elite they advocated a religious philosophy, reminiscent of Bonaventura's "journey of the mind to God."

Since their studies convinced them that men of intellect existed

\* Reprinted with permission from Treatise of Lorenzo Valla on the Donation of Constantine, trans. Christopher B. Coleman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1922), p. 95.



in all civilizations, the Florentine Neoplatonists taught that religious truth could be found outside Christianity. Consequently, they tried to reconcile Greek pagan and Arabic philosophers, Jewish mystics, and Zoroaster of Persia with the Hebrew prophets, New Testament apostles, and Church fathers. This Neoplatonic synthesis was too esoteric to be popular, but nevertheless it deserves an honored place in the histories of comparative religion and philosophy, and its influence was felt in such fields as painting, poetry, and natural science, as well as theology and metaphysics.

One of the most spectacular members of the Platonic Academy was Giovanni Pico, Count of Mirandola (1463-1494). This brilliant young nobleman, who knew Arabic and Hebrew as well as the more conventional Greek and Latin, aspired to nothing less than complete wisdom. After studying in French and Italian universities, he settled in Rome (1486), where he publicly proclaimed his willingness to dispute with all comers a list of 900 questions and propositions in practically every field of knowledge. This potentially interesting exercise was prohibited by the pope. Later Pico was forced to defend some of these theses against a charge of heresy, but he was supported by Pope Alexander VI. Three years before his death, he gave up his ancestral wealth and proposed to travel barefoot throughout the world preaching. An untimely death cut short his meteoric career. In the same year that he descended upon Rome, Pico wrote a brief Oration on the Dignity of Man, a portion of which is given below. To the reader it offers an excellent example, not only of the eclectic interests of the Florentine Platonists, but also of a number of other features of Italian Renaissance humanism:

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## Copyrighted Material Removed

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Just what type of education would best enable a man to realize his potentialities was a subject to which numerous humanists devoted considerable thought. All agreed that a sound grounding in virtue and good literature was essential. The virtues stressed were, in the words of one humanist, those of "the complete citizen:" public spirit, wisdom, morality, and integrity. Knowledge of the classics and other liberal studies

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\* Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, "Oration on the Dignity of Man," trans. Elizabeth Livermoore Forbes in the Journal of the History of Ideas, III (1942), 347-350. Used with permission.



were regarded as simply the other side of the same coin, for it was believed that they led to virtue. Dignity and grace in deportment and language were sought after as the outward signs of an inner completeness. Although the humanists differentiated between education and mere training, they believed that the former was practical in a very real sense because it developed the whole man. A few went even further and recommended a related, but less rigorous, program for the education of women. The careers of two queens, Marguerite of Navarre (who wrote stories modeled on Boccaccio) and Elizabeth I of England (who knew Latin, Italian, and some Greek) attest that, in aristocratic circles, such recommendations were not without effect.

One of the most widely read of the books published in the Revival of Learning was De ingenuis moribus (On Good Manners), a selection from which is given below. This educational treatise was written about 1404 by Pietro Paolo Vergerio (1349-1419), a professor at the universities of Padua and Florence. The humanistic program contained in this and similar works was until recent times the common experience of all educated Westerners. Thanks to this heritage, and the citizenship in a common world of letters that resulted from it, the divisive effect of growing nationalism was considerably reduced. Even today the student in a liberal arts college, particularly in one with general education courses, finds his college life influenced by the humanist blending of instruction in morality, the knightly disciplines, and Greek dignity and grace:

We call those studies liberal which are worthy of a free man; those studies by which we attain and practise virtue and wisdom; that education which calls forth, trains and develops those highest gifts of body and of mind which ennoble men, and which are rightly judged to rank next in dignity to virtue only. For to a vulgar temper gain and pleasure are the one aim of existence, to a lofty nature, moral worth and fame. It is, then, of the highest importance that even from infancy this aim, this effort, should constantly be kept alive in growing minds. For I may affirm with fullest conviction that we shall not have attained wisdom in our later years unless in our earliest we have sincerely entered on its search. Nor may we for a moment admit, with the unthinking crowd, that those who give early promise fail in subsequent fulfilment. This may, partly from physical causes, happen in exceptional cases. But there is no doubt that nature has endowed some children with so keen, so ready an intelligence, that without serious effort they attain to a notable power of reasoning and conversing upon grave and lofty subjects, and by aid of right guidance and sound learning reach in manhood the highest distinction. On the other hand, children of modest powers demand even more attention, that their natural defects may be supplied by art.... Not that education, in the broad sense, is exclusively the concern of youth. Did not Cato

*Type of education to be sought by all.*



think it honourable to learn Greek in later life? Did not Socrates, greatest of philosophers, compel his aged fingers to the lute?...

...How many are the gaps which the ignorance of past ages has wilfully caused in the long and noble roll of writers! Books -- in part or in their entirety -- have been allowed to perish. What remains of others is often sorely corrupt, mutilated, or imperfect. It is hard that no slight portion of the history of Rome is only to be known through the labours of one writing in the Greek language: it is still worse that this same noble tongue, once well nigh the daily speech of our race, as familiar as the Latin language itself, is on the point of perishing even amongst its own sons, and to us Italians is already utterly lost, unless we except one or two who in our time are tardily endeavouring to rescue something -- if it be only a mere echo of it -- from oblivion.

We come now to the consideration of the various subjects which may rightly be included under the name of 'Liberal Studies.' Amongst these I accord the first place to History, on grounds both of its attractiveness and of its utility, qualities which appeal equally to the scholar and to the statesman. Next in importance ranks Moral Philosophy, which indeed is, in a peculiar sense, a 'Liberal Art,' in that its purpose is to teach men the secret of true freedom. History, then, gives us the concrete examples of the precepts inculcated by philosophy. The one shews what men should do, the other what men have said and done in the past, and what practical lessons we may draw therefrom for the present day. I would indicate as the third main branch of study, Eloquence, which indeed holds a place of distinction amongst the refined Arts. By philosophy we learn the essential truth of things, which by eloquence we so exhibit in orderly adornment as to bring conviction to differing minds. And history provides the light of experience -- a cumulative wisdom fit to supplement the force of reason and the persuasion of eloquence. For we allow that soundness of judgment, wisdom of speech, integrity of conduct are the marks of a truly liberal temper.

We are told that the Greeks devised for their sons a course of training in four subjects: letters, gymnastic, music and drawing. Now, of these drawing has no place amongst our liberal studies; except in so far as it is identical with writing, (which is in reality one side of the art of Drawing), it belongs to the Painter's profession: the Greeks, as an art-loving people, attached to it an exceptional value.

The Art of Letters, however, rests upon a different footing. It is a study adapted to all times and to all circumstances, to the investigation of fresh knowledge or to the re-casting and application of old. Hence the importance of grammar and of the rules of composition must be recognised at the outset, as the foundation on which the whole study of Literature must rest: and closely



associated with these rudiments, the art of Disputation or Logical argument. The function of this is to enable us to discern fallacy from truth in discussion. Logic, indeed, as setting forth the true method of learning, is the guide to the acquisition of knowledge in whatever subject. Rhetoric comes next, and is strictly speaking the formal study by which we attain the art of eloquence; which, as we have just stated, takes the third place amongst the studies specially important in public life. It is now, indeed, fallen from its old renown and is well nigh a lost art. In the Law-Court, in the Council, in the popular Assembly, in exposition, in persuasion, in debate, eloquence finds no place now-a-days: speed, brevity, homeliness are the only qualities desired. Oratory, in which our forefathers gained so great glory for themselves and for their language, is despised: but our youth, if they would earn the repute of true education, must emulate their ancestors in this accomplishment.

After Eloquence we place Poetry and the Poetic Art, which though not without their value in daily life and as an aid to oratory, have nevertheless their main concern for the leisure side of existence.

As to Music, the Greeks refused the title of 'Educated' to anyone who could not sing or play. Socrates set an example to the Athenian youth, by himself learning to play in his old age; urging the pursuit of music not as a sensuous indulgence, but as an aid to the inner harmony of the soul. In so far as it is taught as a healthy recreation for the moral and spiritual nature, music is a truly liberal art, and, both as regards its theory and its practice, should find a place in education.

Arithmetic, which treats of the properties of numbers, Geometry, which treats of the properties of dimensions, lines, surfaces, and solid bodies, are weighty studies because they possess a peculiar element of certainty. The science of the Stars, their motions, magnitudes and distances, lifts us into the clear calm of the upper air. There we may contemplate the fixed stars, or the conjunctions of the planets, and predict the eclipses of the sun and the moon. The knowledge of Nature -- animate and inanimate -- the laws and the properties of things in heaven and in earth, their causes, mutations and effects, especially the explanation of their wonders (as they are popularly supposed) by the unravelling of their causes -- this is a most delightful, and at the same time most profitable, study for youth. With these may be joined investigations concerning the weights of bodies, and those relative to the subject which mathematicians call 'Perspective.'

I may here glance for a moment at the three great professional Disciplines: Medicine, Law, Theology. Medicine, which is applied science, has undoubtedly much that makes it attractive to a student. But it cannot be described as a Liberal study. Law, which is based upon moral philosophy, is undoubtedly held in high respect. Regarding Law as a



subject of study, such respect is entirely deserved: but Law as practised becomes a mere trade. Theology, on the other hand, treats of themes removed from our senses, and attainable only by pure intelligence.

The principal 'Disciplines' have now been reviewed. It must not be supposed that a liberal education requires acquaintance with them all: for a thorough mastery of even one of them might fairly be the achievement of a lifetime. Most of us, too, must learn to be content with modest capacity as with modest fortune. Perhaps we do wisely to pursue that study which we find most suited to our intelligence and our tastes, though it is true that we cannot rightly understand one subject unless we can perceive its relation to the rest. The choice of studies will depend to some extent upon the character of individual minds. For whilst one boy seizes rapidly the point of which he is in search and states it ably, another, working far more slowly, has yet the sounder judgment and so detects the weak spot in his rival's conclusions. The former, perhaps, will succeed in poetry, or in the abstract sciences; the latter in real studies and practical pursuits. Or a boy may be apt in thinking, but slow in expressing himself; to him the study of Rhetoric and Logic will be of much value. Where the power of talk alone is remarkable I hardly know what advice to give. Some minds are strong on the side of memory: these should be apt for history. But it is of importance to remember that in comparison with intelligence memory is of little worth, though intelligence without memory is, so far as education is concerned, of none at all. For we are not able to give evidence that we know a thing unless we can reproduce it.

...it is of greatest importance that boys should be trained from childhood in feats of courage and endurance. The Lacedaemonian discipline was indeed severe. The boys were trained to be of such a temper that in their contests they could not yield nor confess themselves vanquished; the severest tests produced no cry of pain, though blood might flow and consciousness itself give way. The result was that all antiquity rehearses the deathless courage of the Spartans in the field; their arms were to them part of their very selves, to be cast away, or laid down, only with their lives. What else than this same early and most diligent training could have enabled the Romans to shew themselves so valiant, so enduring, in the campaigns they fought? Wherefore, whether a boy be trained in Arms or in Letters (for these are the two chief liberal Arts and fittest therefore for a prince), so soon as he be able to use his limbs let him be trained to Arms: so soon as he can rightly speak let him be trained to Letters. Further, it will be easy and it will be of great benefit to a boy to alternate the study of letters with bodily exercises: and, indeed, at whatever age he may be, the same practice is to be commended. Theodosius, we are told, spent the day in martial exercises, or in the business of the state; the evening he devoted to books.



In choice of bodily exercises those should be adopted which serve to maintain the body in good health and to strengthen the limbs: and thus it will be necessary to consider to some extent the case of each individual boy. For some boys are of a soft and humid bodily habit: they will need to be dried and hardened by vigorous exercises; or those whose blood mounts too readily will be best practised in restraint if they be exercised in the full heat of the sun. In childhood much care must be taken lest the growth be hindered, or the nerves of the body be strained, by severe exertion; but as youth develops this may be slowly increased. The order, perhaps, to be observed in this: in childhood, learning first; in youth, morals; with physical exercises, varying in degree, for all....

But as we are not so constituted that we are able to bestow ourselves all day long upon our ordered tasks, I will now set forth the true place of recreation. First of all, it imports that boys engage in no debasing games, or such as cannot develop bodily gifts or powers of Will. We cannot, therefore, accord a high place to that practice which found favour with Scipio and Laelius, namely, of seeking rest for exhausted minds in aimless walks along the shore, picking up pebbles and shells as they went. Scaevola, on the other hand, was wiser: he spent wearisome days in the Courts, and found in the sharp exertion of ball-play the best refreshment alike for jaded spirits and for bodily fatigue. So, too, others seek recreation in hunting, hawking, or fishing; and so keen is their enjoyment, that the severe efforts which these pursuits demand are cheerfully borne.

"The labour we delight in physicks pain" so to render the well known line of Horace. If these be too strenuous a relaxation for those who are exhausted by study, it may suffice to seek it in quiet repose, in gentle riding, or in pleasant walks. Wit and comely humour may find a place, as Lycurgus allowed. Nor will it be unbecoming to have recourse to music and to song. Did not the Pythagoreans approve this? nay, Homer himself shews us Achilles refreshing his spirit after the fight by singing, though his songs were not of love but of heroic deeds. Then we may choose such measures as shall be best suited to our moods. The Sicilian measures conduce most to restful calm; the Gallic, on the other hand, stir us to energy and movement; the Italian hold a middle place. (To accompany oneself in singing is less dignified than to sing to the accompaniment of another; whilst to watch dancing girls, or to dance ourselves to music, is altogether unworthy; though some may defend the latter as a form of exercise in spite of its tendency to lasciviousness and vain conceit.) The game of "tabulae" which Palamedes is said to have invented during the Trojan war to keep his soldiers occupied during wearisome inaction, is free from all such objections. Dice-playing is to be utterly condemned. It is either a base form of money-getting, or an



effeminate excitement; though a game of skill, in which chance plays but a small part, is allowable. Claudius, the Emperor, wrote a book on dice-playing, which the vicious have found a useful argument for their indulgence.

Those whose time is occupied in Letters may find sufficient relaxation in change of subject. But it must not be forgotten that it is sometimes needful, in the interests of our work, to do absolutely nothing for a while.

(For the string ever stretched will end by breaking.) I know, indeed, that to the wise man nothing is so laborious as doing nothing. We know of some who divide their day into three parts, one of which is given to sleep, one to recreation and to meals, one to liberal studies. On such a point I cannot pronounce: but this at least I can safely say, (that the larger the place we can allot to learning, the richer, the fuller, is the life we thereby secure to ourselves.)

Lastly, I must add a word upon attention to personal habits. In this matter we must not be neglectful: for whilst we may not bestow too much thought upon our outward appearance, which is effeminacy, we must have due regard to our dress, and its suitability to time, place, and circumstance. (Perhaps we ought not to be too severe if a young man verging on manhood seem to spend undue care upon his person; something may be forgiven him, provided he does not carry his foible into the more serious years of life.)

In offering this Treatise to you, Ubertinus, I end as I began. You do not need my insistence; follow the instincts of your best self, and you will be found worthy. If I seem to flatter you, it is that I look confidently to see you fulfil the promise of your youth. Should you prove me a true prophet, you will reap the praise of men, not of your own day alone, but, if my pen avail, of days far distant. Should you, however, disappoint my hopes, there is one, at least, who will be forced to admit, with sorrow, that nothing was lacking to you but yourself. \*

Just as the new humanistic learning and a new educational program were developed to reflect the outlook of the Renaissance, so in the visual arts there was a revolution both in the form and content of the works themselves and in the character and status of the artist. The medieval artist had been essentially a craftsman who worked within the traditions and rules of his craft. His individualism was further limited by the demands of his principal patron, the Church, (for art that was traditional and conventionalized.) If there is any one characteristic of the arts and artists of the Italian Renaissance, it is their versa-

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\* William Harrison Woodward, Vittorino da Feltre and other Humanist Educators: Essays and Versions... (Cambridge: at the University Press, 1912), pp. 102, 106-109, 113-114, 116-118. Used with permission.

*Classical forms (St. Peter Basilica).  
Not as much Roman & Greek in painting (not anything to copy)*



tility, a quality which was encouraged by the changed conditions of patronage. Patrons were now often laymen with worldly interests, a lessened respect for tradition, and the resources to indulge their cultivated tastes. Even contemporary ecclesiastical patrons frequently exhibited the same characteristics.

An artist was now freer than before to experiment with new ways to express his own sense of beauty. In what has been called the Age of the Hero the artist ceased to be merely a craftsman and became, or aspired to become, a genius. He did not merely produce; he created. He was placed on a par with the scholar and the philosopher and, like them, was expected to be well-grounded in the liberal arts. He was known by the works bearing his name and style. Competition for the services of recognized artists was brisk and the rewards of genius were often handsome. The virtuosity of some of the greatest of the Renaissance artists is striking indeed. Michelangelo (1475-1564) was painter, sculptor, poet, and architect, all on a heroic scale. Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) went even further and to these careers added those of engineer, physicist, anatomist, geologist, and musician. It was as if all human activity barely sufficed for self-expression. Even in their personal lives artists began to assume some of that freedom from established codes of conduct which we associate with the word "bohemian."

New media and techniques were both a sign of and an aid to Renaissance versatility. Sculptors made use of bronze as well as the traditional stone. Painters learned to work in oil. They tried to make their work more lifelike by the study of perspective, the mastery of anatomy, and the blending of light and shadow. Mathematics was summoned to the aid of the artist seeking laws of perspective as the intellectual element in the arts became stronger.

A variety of styles was now acceptable. Many artists, paralleling the humanists, drew inspiration from classical antiquity. Renaissance architects borrowed Greek and Roman motifs, as in the magnificent new basilica of St. Peter's, erected in Rome in the sixteenth century. Often in Renaissance painting the gods and goddesses of mythology enact their age-old roles, sometimes in the costumes of the Renaissance against a background of fifteenth century Italy, sometimes nude or with classic drapery in a proper Olympian setting.

In yet other cases the treatment is more realistic, with an awareness of this world that again recalls a humanistic attitude. "That picture is most praiseworthy which most closely conforms to the thing it imitates," wrote the great Leonardo. In some of the paintings of his contemporary, Botticelli (c. 1444-1510), the foliage can be identified as precisely as in a botanical study. However, mere photographic realism was not the artist's goal. Within the limits of the natural he strove to depict also the inner reality, beauty, and harmony. Many a Renaissance patron was immortalized in stone or on canvas, with



every perfection and blemish of feature and character set down with penetrating imagination.

Along with awareness of this world went a sensuous enjoyment of its riches. Never had the beauty of the human body been portrayed more lovingly, or with a keener eye for anatomical detail. Renaissance mansions and churches -- for equal care was lavished on the construction of houses for man and God -- are obviously the product of an age which delighted in worldly display. They tended to be monumental, fit settings for men who aspired to display themselves in heroic roles on the stage of life.

Still other Renaissance artists were noted for their ability to express profound religious emotions. Of course, the continuing patronage of the Church frequently dictated the choice of a religious subject, but the treatment of the subject varied with the artist. If one Renaissance madonna is merely an Italian lady of fashion with her bambino, another conveys a calm sense of ethereal religious beauty.

To find a document to illustrate a world of art which was by turn classical, realistic, imaginative, worldly, and religious is not easy. A look at the works themselves is the preferred solution. However, an incident in the life of Paolo Veronese (1528-1588), a Venetian painter known for his historical and mythological scenes, catches some of the spirit in which a Renaissance painter approached his work. Dominican friars commissioned him to paint a Feast in the House of Simon (Matthew 26:6-13). The result was both skilfully and sumptuously executed, but it displeased the friars. Not only did it lack the figure of Mary Magdalene, necessary for the story, but the treatment offended religious sensibilities. Veronese was hauled before the Inquisition, which required him to remove some of the offensive features and change the title to Feast in the House of Levi (Luke 5:27-32). The following selection is taken from the report of the trial:

Report of the Sitting of the Tribunal of the  
Inquisition on Saturday, July Eighteenth, 1573

This day, July eighteenth, 1573. Called to the Holy Office before the sacred tribunal, Paolo Galliari Veronese, residing in the parish of Saint Samuel, and being asked as to his name and surname replied as above.

Being asked as to his profession:

Answer. I paint and make figures.

Question. Do you know the reasons why you have been called here?

A. No.

Q. Can you imagine what those reasons may be?

A. I can well imagine.

Q. Say what you think about them.

A. I fancy that it concerns what was said to me by

*Not only irrelevant but also irreligious  
monks wanted the picture to be a lesson to people.  
Veronese wanted it to be beautiful, story didn't have too much meaning*



the reverend fathers, or rather by the prior of the monastery of San Giovanni e Paolo, whose name I did not know, but who informed me that he had been here, and that your Most Illustrious Lordships had ordered him to cause to be placed in the picture a Magdalen instead of the dog; and I answered him that very readily I would do all that was needful for my reputation and for the honour of the picture; but that I did not understand what this figure of the Magdalen could be doing here.

Q. In this Supper...what signifies the figure of him whose nose is bleeding?

A. He is a servant who has a nose-bleed from some accident.

Q. What signify those armed men dressed in the fashion of Germany, with halberds in their hands?

A. It is necessary here that I should say a score of words.

Q. Say them.

A. We painters use the same license as poets and madmen, and I represented those halberdiers, the one drinking, the other eating at the foot of the stairs, but both ready to do their duty, because it seemed to me suitable and possible that the master of the house, who as I have been told was rich and magnificent, should have such servants.

Q. And the one who is dressed as jester with a parrot on his wrist, why did you put him into the picture?

A. He is there as an ornament, as it is usual to insert such figures.

Q. Who are the persons at the table of Our Lord?

A. The twelve apostles.

Q. What is Saint Peter doing, who is the first?

A. He is carving the lamb, in order to pass it to the other table.

Q. What is he doing who comes next?

A. He holds a plate to see what Saint Peter will give him.

Q. Tell us what the third is doing.

A. He is picking his teeth with his fork.

Q. And who are really the persons whom you admit to have been present at this Supper?

A. I believe that there was only Christ and his apostles; but when I have some space left in a picture I adorn it with figures of my own invention.

Q. Did some person order you to paint Germans, buffoons, and other similar figures in this picture?

A. No, but I was commissioned to adorn it as I thought proper.

\* \* \* \* \*

The judges pronounced that the aforesaid Paolo should be obliged to correct his picture within three months from the date of the reprimand, according to the judgments and the decision of the Sacred Court, and altogether at the expense of the said Paolo. \*

\* W. F. Reddaway, Select Documents of European History... (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1930), pp. 75-77. Used with permission.

*Individualism (sign their name, their own work, the way they saw it).*

*taking liberty in their work*



Before taking leave of Renaissance Italy a few words must be said about what may be called the other side of the picture. Most Italians were not humanists, or courtiers, or artists. The ceremonies of the Church still provided comfort, inspiration, and meaning as they had for centuries. A vein of medieval asceticism persisted in all levels of society. Near the end of the fifteenth century a Dominican friar, Girolamo Savonarola (1452-1498), became briefly the unofficial dictator of Florence through the power of his preaching against secularism. "An old woman," he proclaimed, "knows more about the Faith than Plato." At his urging, penitent citizens threw on bonfires of "vanities" in the town square those of their possessions which smacked of worldliness. Even the artist Botticelli, it is said, consigned some of his paintings to the flames. Eventually, Savonarola's enemies secured his excommunication and execution.

Half a century later the waning of the Italian Renaissance was well under way. Geniuses gave way to imitators. The Age of Discovery opened up new trade routes which deprived Italy of her favored geographical position and halted the expansion of her wealth. Once again foreign invaders -- Frenchmen, Spaniards, Germans -- fished in the muddy waters of Italian diplomacy. Many of the once-proud city-states lost their independence. The accumulated wealth of centuries was dissipated in warfare and tribute. The titanic struggle between the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation imposed a rigorous orthodoxy on intellectual life. By 1600 the center of gravity of European Civilization had shifted once again north of the Alps. Only in science and architecture did Renaissance creativity persist in Italy until the end of the seventeenth century. In the eighteenth century the peninsula was a backwater, dotted with the monuments of a submerged but glorious past.