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Author: Vernon Lee

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EUPHORION:

BEING STUDIES OF THE ANTIQUE AND THE MEDIÆVAL IN THE RENAISSANCE

BY

VERNON LEE

Author of "Studies of the 18th Century in Italy," "Belcaro" etc.

VOL. I.

WALTER PATER,

IN APPRECIATION OF THAT WHICH, IN EXPOUNDING THE
BEAUTIFUL THINGS OF THE PAST, HE HAS ADDED TO
THE BEAUTIFUL THINGS OF THE PRESENT.

TABLE OF CONTENTS.

[Introduction](#)

[The Sacrifice](#)

[The Italy of the Elizabethan Dramatists](#)

The Outdoor Poetry

[Symmetria Prisca](#)

INTRODUCTION.

Faustus is therefore a parable of the impotent yearnings of the Middle Ages—its passionate aspiration, its conscience-stricken desire, its fettered curiosity amid the tramping limits of imperfect knowledge and irrational dogmatism. The indestructible beauty of Greek art,—whereof Helen was an emblem, became, through the discovery of classic poetry and sculpture, the possession of the modern world. Mediævalism took this Helen to wife, and their offspring, the Euphorion of Goethe's drama, is the spirit of the modern world.—J.A. Symonds, "Renaissance In Italy," vol. ii. p. 54.

Euphorion is the name given by Goethe to the marvellous child born of the mystic marriage of

Faust and Helena. Who Faust is, and who Helena, we all know. Faust, of whom no man can remember the youth or childhood, seems to have come into the world by some evil spell, already old and with the faintness of body and of mind which are the heritage of age; and every additional year of mysterious study and abortive effort has made him more vacillating of step and uncertain of sight, but only more hungry of soul. Postponed and repressed by reclusion from the world, and desperate tension over insoluble problems; diverted into the channels of mere thought and vision; there boils within him the energy, the passion, of retarded youth: its appetites and curiosities, which, cramped by the intolerant will, and foiled by many a sudden palsy of limb and mind, torment him with mad visions of unreal worlds, mock him with dreams of superhuman powers, from which he awakes in impotent and apathetic anguish. But these often- withstood and often-baffled cravings are not those merely of scholar or wizard, they are those of soldier and poet and monk, of the mere man: lawless desires which he seeks to divert, but fails, from the things of the flesh and of the world to the things of the reason; supersensuous desires for the beautiful and intangible, which he strives to crush, but in vain, with the cynical scepticism of science, which derides the things it cannot grasp. In this strange Faustus, made up of so many and conflicting instincts; in this old man with ever- budding and ever-nipped feelings of youthfulness, muddling the hard-won secrets of nature in search after impossibilities; in him so all-sided, and yet so wilfully narrowed, so restlessly active, yet so often palsied and apathetic; in this Faustus, who has laboured so much and succeeded in so little, feeling himself at the end, when he has summed up all his studies, as foolish as before—which of us has not learned to recognize the impersonated Middle Ages? And Helena, we know her also, she is the spirit of Antiquity. Personified, but we dare scarcely say, embodied; for she is a ghost raised by the spells of Faustus, a simulacrum of a thing long dead; yet with such continuing semblance of life, nay, with all life's real powers, that she seems the real, vital, living one, and Faustus yonder, thing as he is of the present, little better than a spectre. Yet Helena has been ages before Faust ever was; nay, by an awful mystery like those which involve the birth of Pagan gods, she whom he has evoked to be the mother of his only son has given, centuries before, somewhat of her life to make this self-same Faust. A strange mystery of Fate's necromancy this, and with strange anomalies. For opposite this living, decrepit Faust, Helena, the long dead, is young; and she is all that which Faust is not. Knowing much less than he, who has plunged his thoughts like his scalpel into all the mysteries of life and death, she yet knows much more, can tell him of the objects and aims of men and things; nay, with little more than the unconscious faithfulness to instinct of the clean-limbed, placid brute, she can give peace to his tormented conscience; and, while he has suffered and struggled and lashed himself for every seeming baseness of desire, and loathed himself for every imagined microscopic soiling, she has walked through good and evil, letting the vileness of sin trickle off her unhidden soul, so quietly and majestically that all thought of evil vanishes; and the self-tormenting wretch, with macerated flesh hidden beneath the heavy garments of mysticism and philosophy, suddenly feels, in the presence of her unabashed nakedness, that he, like herself, is chaste.

Such are the parents, Faustus and Helena; we know them; but who is this son Euphorion? To me it seems as if there could be but one answer—the Renaissance. Goethe indeed has told us (though, with his rejuvenation of Faustus, unknown to the old German legend and to our Marlowe, in how bungling a manner!) the tale of that mystic marriage; but Goethe could not tell us rightly, even had he attempted, the real name of its offspring. For even so short a time ago, the Middle Ages were only beginning to be more than a mere historical expression, Antiquity was being only then critically discovered; and the Renaissance, but vaguely seen and quite unformulated by the first men, Gibbon and Roscoe, who perceived it at all, was still virtually unknown. To Goethe, therefore, it might easily have seemed as if the antique Helena had only just been evoked, and as if of her union with the worn-out century of his birth, a real Euphorion, the age in which ourselves are living, might have been born. But, at the distance of additional time, and from the undreamed-of height upon which recent historical science has enabled us to stand, we can easily see that in this he would have been mistaken. Not only is our modern culture no child of Faustus and Helena, but it is the complex descendant, strangely featured by atavism from various sides, of many and various civilizations; and the eighteenth century, so far from being a Faustus evoking as his bride the long dead Helen of Antiquity, was in itself a curiously varied grandchild or great-grandchild of such a marriage, its every moral feature, its every intellectual movement proclaiming how much of its being was inherited from Antiquity. No allegory, I well know, and least of all no historical allegory, can ever be strained to fit quite tight—the lives of individuals and those of centuries, their modes of intermixture, genesis, and inheritance are far different; but if an allegory is to possess any meaning at all, we must surely apply it wherever it will fit most easily and completely; and the beautiful allegory prepared by the tradition of the sixteenth century for the elaborating genius of Goethe, can have a real meaning only if we explain Faust as representing the Middle Ages, Helena as Antiquity, and Euphorion as that child of the Middle Ages, taking life and reality from them, but born of and curiously nurtured by the spirit of Antiquity, to which significant accident has given the name of Renaissance. After Euphorion I have therefore christened this book; and this not from any irrational conceit of knowing more (when I am fully aware that I know infinitely less) than other writers about the life and character of this wonderful child of Helena and Faustus, but merely because it is more particularly as the offspring of this miraculous marriage, and with reference to the harmonies and anomalies which therefrom resulted, that Euphorion has exercised my thoughts. The Renaissance has interested and interests me, not merely for what it is, but even more for what it sprang from, and for the manner in which the many things inherited from both Middle Ages and Renaissance, the tendencies and necessities inherent in every special civilization, acted and reacted upon each other, united in concord or antagonism; forming, like

the gases of the chemist, new things, sometimes like and sometimes unlike themselves and each other; producing now some unknown substance of excellence and utility, at other times some baneful element, known but too well elsewhere, but unexpected here. But not the watching of the often tragic meeting of these great fatalities of inherited spirit and habit only: for equally fascinating almost has been the watching of the elaboration by this double-natured period of things of little weight, mere trifles of artistic material bequeathed to it by one or by the other of its spiritual parents. The charm for me—a charm sometimes pleasurable, but sometimes also painful, like the imperious necessity which we sometimes feel to see again and examine, seemingly uselessly, some horrible evil—the charm, I mean the involuntary compulsion of attention, has often been as great in following the vicissitudes of a mere artistic item, like the Carolingian stories or the bucolic element, as it has been in looking on at the dissolution of moral and social elements. And in this, that I have tried to understand only where my curiosity was awakened, tried to reconstruct only where my fancy was taken; in short, studied of this Renaissance civilization only as much or as little as I cared, depends all the incompleteness and irrelevancy and unsatisfactoriness of this book, and depends also whatever addition to knowledge or pleasure it may afford; Were I desirous of giving a complete, clear notion of the very complex civilization of the Renaissance, a kind of encyclopædic atlas of that period, where (by a double power which history alone possesses) you could see at once the whole extent and shape of this historical territory, and at the same time, with all its bosses of mountain and furrows of valley, the exact composition of all its various earths and waters, the exact actual colour and shape of all its different vegetations, not to speak of its big towns and dotting villages;—were I desirous of doing this, I should not merely be attempting a work completely beyond my faculties, but a work moreover already carried out with all the perfection due to specially adapted gifts, to infinite patience and ingenuity, occasionally amounting almost to genius. Such is not at all within my wishes, as it assuredly would be totally without my powers.

But besides such marvels of historic mapping as I have described, where every one can find at a glance whatever he may be looking for, and get the whole topography, geological and botanical, of an historic tract at his fingers' ends, there are yet other kinds of work which may be done. For a period in history is like a more or less extended real landscape: it has, if you will, actual, chemically defined colours in this and that, if you consider this and that separate and unaffected by any kind of visual medium; and measurable distances also between this point and the other, if you look down upon it as from a balloon. But, like a real landscape, it may also be seen from different points of view, and under different lights; then, according as you stand, the features of the scene will group themselves—this ridge will disappear behind that, this valley will open out before you, that other will be closed. Similarly, according to the light wherein the landscape is seen, the relative scale of colours and tints of objects, due to pervading light and to distances—what painters call the values—will alter: the scene will possess one or two predominant effects, it will produce also one or, at most, two or three (in which case co-ordinated) impressions. The art which deals with impressions, which tries to seize the real relative values of colours and tints at a given moment, is what you call new-fangled: its doctrines and works are still subject to the reproach of charlatanry. Yet it is the only truly realistic art, and it only, by giving you a thing as it appears at a given moment, gives it you as it really ever is; all the rest is the result of cunning abstraction, and representing the scene as it is always, represents it (by striking an average) as it never is at all. I do not pretend that in questions of history we can proceed upon the principles of modern landscape painting: we do not know what were the elevations which made perspective, what were the effects of light which created scales of tints, in that far distant country of the past; and it is safer certainly, and doubtless much more useful, to strike an average, and represent the past as seen neither from here nor from there, neither in this light nor that, and let each man imagine his historical perspective and colour value to the best of his powers. Yet it is nevertheless certain that the past, to the people who were in it, was not a miraculous map or other marvellous diagram constructed on the principle of getting at the actual qualities of things by analysis; that it must have been, to its inhabitants, but a series of constantly varied perspectives and constantly varied schemes of colour, according to the position of each individual, and the light in which that individual viewed it. To attempt to reconstruct those various perspective-making heights, to rearrange those various value-determining lights, would be to the last degree disastrous; we should have valleys where there existed mountains, and brilliant warm schemes of colour where there may have been all harmonies of pale and neutral tints. Still the perspective and colour valuation of individual minds there must have been; and since it is not given to us to reproduce those of the near spectator in a region which we can never enter, we may yet sometimes console ourselves for the too melancholy abstractness and averageness of scientific representations, by painting that distant historic country as distant indeed, but as its far-off hill ranges and shimmering plains really appear in their combination of form and colour, from the height of an individual interest of our own, and beneath the light of our individual character. We see only very little at a time, and that little is not what it appeared to the men of the past; but we see at least, if not the same things, yet in the same manner in which they saw, as we see from the standpoints of personal interest and in the light of personal temper. Scientifically we doubtless lose; but is the past to be treated only scientifically? and can it not give us, and do we not owe it, something more than a mere understanding of why and how? Is it a thing so utterly dead as to be fit only for the scalpel and the microscope? Surely not so. The past can give us, and should give us, not merely ideas, but emotions: healthy pleasure which may make us more light of spirit, and pain which may make us more earnest of mind; the one, it seems to me, as necessary for our individual worthiness as is the other. For to each of us, as we watch the past, as we lie passive and let it slowly circulate around us, there must come sights which, in their reality or in their train of associations, and to the mind of each differently, must

gladden as with a sense of beauty, or put us all into a sullen moral ache. I should hate to be misunderstood in this more, perhaps, than in anything else in the world. I speak not of any dramatic emotion, of such egotistic, half-artistic pleasure as some may get from the alternation of cheerfulness and terror, from the excitement caused by evil from which we are as safely separated as are those who look on from the infuriated bulls in an arena. To such, history, and the history especially of the Renaissance, has been made to pander up but too much.

The pain I speak of is the pain which must come to every morally sentient creature with the contemplation of some one of the horrible tangles of evil, of the still fouler intermeshing of evil with good, which history brings up ever and anon. Evil which is past, it is true, but of which the worst evil almost of all, the fact of its having been, can never be past, must ever remain present; and our trouble and indignation at which is holy, our pain is healthy: holy and healthy, because every vibration of such pain as that makes our moral fibre more sensitive; because every immunity from such sensation deadens our higher nature: holy and healthy also because, just as no image of pleasurable things can pass before us without gathering about it other images of some beauty which have long lain by in each individual mind, so also no thought of great injustice of man or of accident, of signal whitewashing of evil or befouling of good, but must, in striking into our soul, put in motion there the salutary thought of some injustice or lying legitimation or insidious pollution, smaller indeed perhaps, but perhaps also nearer to ourselves.

Be not therefore too hard upon me if in what I have written of the Renaissance, there is too little attempt to make matters scientifically complete, and too much giving way to personal and perhaps sometimes irrelevant impressions of pleasure and of pain; if I have followed up those pleasurable and painful impressions rather more than sought to discover the exact geography of the historical tract which gave them. Consider, moreover, that this very cause of deficiency may have been also the cause of my having succeeded in achieving anything at all. Personal impression has led me, perhaps, sometimes away from the direct road; but had it not beckoned me to follow, I should most likely have simply not stirred. Pleasant impression and painful, as I have said; and sometimes the painful has been more efficacious than the other. I do not know whether the interest which I have always taken in the old squabble of real and ideal has enabled me to make at all clearer the different characteristics of painting and sculpture in Renaissance portraiture, the relation of the art of Raphael to the art of Velasquez and the art of Whistler. I can scarcely judge whether the pleasure which I owe to the crowding together, the moving about in my fancy, of the heroes and wizards and hippogriffs of the old tales of Oberon and Ogier; the association with the knights and ladies of Boiardo and Ariosto, of this or that figure out of a fresco of Pinturicchio, or a picture by Dosso, has made it easier or more difficult for me to sum up the history of mediæval romance in Renaissance Italy; nor whether the recollection of certain Tuscan farms, the well-known scent of the sun-dried fennel and mint under the vine-trellis, the droning song of the contadino ploughing or pruning unseen in the valley, the snatches of peasants' rhymes, the outlines of peasants' faces—things all these of this our own time, of yesterday or to-day; whether all this, running in my mind like so many scribbly illustrations and annotations along the margin of Lorenzo dei Medici's poems, has made my studies of rustic poetry more clear or more confused. But this much I know as a certainty, that never should I have tried to unravel the causes of the Renaissance's horrible anomaly of improvement and degradation, had not that anomaly returned and returned to make me wretched with its loathsome mixture of good and evil; its detestable alternative of endurance of vile solidarities in the souls of our intellectual forefathers, or of unjust turning away from the men and the times whose moral degradation paid the price of our moral dignity. I also have the further certainty of its having been this long-endured moral sickening at the sight of this moral anomaly, which enabled me to realize the feelings of such of our nobler Elizabethan playwrights as sought to epitomize in single tales of horror the strange impressions left by the accomplished and infamous Italy of their day; and which made it possible for me to express perhaps some of the trouble which filled the mind of Webster and of Tourneur merely by expressing the trouble which filled my own.

The following studies are not samples, fragments at which one tries one's hand, of some large and methodical scheme of work. They are mere impressions developed by means of study: not merely currents of thought and feeling which I have singled out from the multifold life of the Renaissance; but currents of thought and feeling in myself, which have found and swept along with them certain items of Renaissance lore. For the Renaissance has been to me, in the small measure in which it has been anything, not so much a series of studies as a series of impressions. I have not mastered the history and literature of the Renaissance (first-hand or second-hand, perfectly or imperfectly), abstract and exact, and then sought out the places and things which could make that abstraction somewhat more concrete in my mind; I have seen the concrete things, and what I might call the concrete realities of thought and feeling left behind by the Renaissance, and then tried to obtain from books some notion of the original shape and manner of wearing these relics, rags and tatters of a past civilization. For Italy, beggared and maimed (by her own unthrift, by the rapacity of others, by the order of Fate) at the beginning of the sixteenth century, was never able to weave for herself a new, a modern civilization, as did the nations who had shattered her looms on which such woofs are made, and carried off her earnings with which such things may be bought; and she had, accordingly, to go through life in the old garments, still half mediæval in shape, which had been fashioned for her during the Renaissance: apparel of the best that could then be made, beautiful and strong in many ways, so beautiful and strong indeed as to impose on people for a good long time, and make French, and Germans, and Spaniards, and English believe (comparing these brilliant tissues with the homespun they were providing for themselves) that it must be all brand new, and of the very latest fashion. But the garments left to

Italy by those latest Middle Ages which we call Renaissance, were not eternal: wear and tear, new occupations, and the rough usage of other nations, rent them most sorely; their utter neglect by the long seventeenth century, their hasty patchings up (with bits of odd stuff and all manner of coloured thread and string, so that a harlequin's jacket could not look queerer) by the happy-go-lucky practicalness of the eighteenth century and the Revolution, reduced them thoroughly to rags; and with these rags of Renaissance civilization, Italy may still be seen to drape herself. Not perhaps in the great centres, where the garments of modern civilization, economical, unpicturesque, intended to be worn but a short time, have been imported from other countries; but yet in many places. Yes, you may still see those rags of the Renaissance as plainly as you see the tattered linen fluttering from the twisted iron hooks (made for the display of precious brocades and carpets on pageant days) which still remain in the stained whitewash, the seams of battered bricks of the solid old escutcheoned palaces; see them sometimes displayed like the worm-eaten squares of discoloured embroidery which the curiosity dealers take out of their musty oak presses; and sometimes dragging about mere useless and befouled odds and ends, like the torn shreds which lie among the decaying kitchen refuse, the broken tiles and plaster, the nameless filth and ooze which attracts the flies under every black archway, in every steep bricked lane descending precipitously between the high old houses. Old palaces, almost strongholds, and which are still inhabited by those too poor to pull them down and build some plastered handbox instead; poems and prose tales written or told five hundred years ago, edited and re-edited by printers to whom there come no modern poems or prose tales worth editing instead; half-pagan, mediæval priest lore, believed in by men and women who have not been given anything to believe instead; easy-going, all-permitting fifteenth century scepticism, not yet replaced by the scientific and socialistic disbelief which is puritanic and iconoclastic; sly and savage habits of vengeance still doing service among the lower classes instead of the orderly chicanery of modern justice; —these are the things, and a hundred others besides, concrete and spiritual, things too magnificent, too sordid, too irregular, too nauseous, too beautiful, and, above all, too utterly unpractical and old-fashioned for our times, which I call the rags of the Renaissance, and with which Italy still ekes out her scanty apparel of modern thoughts and things.

It is living among such things, turn by turn delighted by their beauty and offended by their foulness, that one acquires the habit of spending a part only of one's intellectual and moral life in the present, and the rest in the past. Impressions are not derived from description, and thoughts are not suggested by books. The juxtaposition of concrete objects invites the making of a theory as the jutting out of two branches invites the spinning of a spider's web. You find everywhere your facts without opening a book. The explanation which I have tried to give of the exact manner in which mediæval art was influenced by the remains of antiquity, came like a flash during a rainy morning in the Pisan Campo Santo; the working out and testing of that explanation in its details was a matter of going from one church or gallery to the other, a reference or two to Vasari for some date or fact being the only necessary reading; and should any one at this moment ask me for substantiation of that theory, instead of opening books I would take that person to this Sienese Cathedral, and there bid him compare the griffins and arabesques, the delicate figure and foliage ornaments carved in wood and marble by the latter Middle Ages, with the griffins and arabesques, the boldly bossed horsemen, the exquisite fruit garlands of a certain antique altar stone which the builders of the church used as a base to a pillar, and which must have been a never-ceasing object of study to every draughtsman and stoneworker in Siena.

Nor are such everywhere-scattered facts ready for working into theoretic shape, the most which Italy still affords to make the study of the Renaissance an almost involuntary habit. In certain places where only decay has altered things from what they were four centuries ago, Perugia, Orvieto, S. Gimignano, in the older quarters of Florence, Venice, and Verona, but nowhere I think so much as in this city of Siena (as purely mediæval as the suits of rusted armour which its townfolk patch up and bury themselves in during their August pageants), we are subjected to receive impressions of the past so startlingly lifelike as to get quite interwoven with our impressions of the present; and from that moment the past must share, in a measure, some of the everyday thoughts which we give to the present. In such a city as this, the sudden withdrawal, by sacristan or beggar-crone, of the curtain from before an altar-piece is many a time much more than the mere displaying of a picture: it is the sudden bringing us face to face with the real life of the Renaissance. We have ourselves, perhaps not an hour before, sauntered through squares and dawdled beneath porticos like those which we see filled with the red-robed and plumed citizens and patricians, the Jews and ruffians whom Pinturicchio's parti-coloured men-at-arms are dispersing to make room for the followers of Aeneas Sylvius; or clambered up rough lanes, hedged in between oak woods and oliveyards, which we might almost swear were the very ones through which are winding Sodoma's cavalcades of gallantly dressed gentlemen, with their hawks and hounds, and negro jesters and apes and beautiful pages, cantering along on shortnecked little horses with silver bits and scarlet trappings, on the pretence of being the Kings from the East, carrying gold and myrrh to the infant Christ. It seems as if all were astoundingly real, as if, by some magic, we were actually going to mix in the life of the past. But it is in reality but a mere delusion, a deceit like those dioramas which we have all been into as children, and where, by paying your shilling, you were suddenly introduced into an oasis of the desert, or into a recent battle-field: things which surprised us, real palm trunks and Arabian water jars, or real fascines and cannon balls, lying about for us to touch; roads opening on all sides into this simulated desert, through this simulated battle-field. So also with these seeming realities of Renaissance life. We can touch the things scattered on the foreground, can handle the weapons, the furniture, the books and musical instruments; we can see, or think we see, most plainly the

streets and paths, the faces and movements of that Renaissance world; but when we try to penetrate into it, we shall find that there is but a slip of solid ground beneath us, that all around us is but canvas and painted wall, perspectived and lit up by our fancy; and that when we try to approach to touch one of those seemingly so real men and women, our eyes find only daubs of paint, our hands meet only flat and chilly stucco. Turn we to our books, and seek therein the spell whereby to make this simulacrum real; and I think the plaster will still remain plaster, the stones still remain stone. Out of the Renaissance, out of the Middle Ages, we must never hope to evoke any spectres which can talk with us and we with them; nothing of the kind of those dim but familiar ghosts, often grotesque rather than heroic, who come to us from out of the books, the daubed portraits of times nearer our own, and sit opposite us, making us laugh, and also cry, with humdrum stories and humdrum woes so very like our own. No; such ghosts the Renaissance has not left behind it. From out of it there come to us no familiars. They are all faces—those which meet us in the pages of chronicles and in the frames of pictures: they are painted records of the past—we may understand them by scanning well their features, but they cannot understand, they cannot perceive us. Such, when all is said, are my impressions of the Renaissance. The moral atmosphere of those days is as impossible for us to breathe as would be the physical atmosphere of the moon: could we, for a moment, penetrate into it, we should die of asphyxia. Say what we may against both Protestant reformation and Catholic reaction, these two began to make an atmosphere (pure or foul) different from that of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, an atmosphere in which lived creatures like ourselves, into which ourselves might penetrate.

A crotchet this, perhaps, of my own; but it is my feeling, nevertheless. The Renaissance is, I say again, no period out of which we must try and evoke ghostly companions. Let us not waste our strength in seeking to do so; but be satisfied if it teaches us strange truths, scientific and practical; if its brilliant and solemn personalities, its bright and majestic art can give us pleasure; if its evils and wrongs, its inevitable degradation, can move us to pity and to indignation.

Siena, September, 1882.

THE SACRIFICE.

Ihr führt ins Leben uns hinein;
Ihr lasst den armen schuldig werden;
Dann übergiebt Ihr ihm der Pein,
Denn alle Schuld rächt sich auf Erden.

At the end of the fifteenth century, Italy was the centre of European civilization: while the other nations were still plunged in a feudal barbarism which seems almost as far removed from all our sympathies as is the condition of some American or Polynesian savages, the Italians appear to us as possessing habits of thought, a mode of life, political, social, and literary institutions, not unlike those of to-day; as men whom we can thoroughly understand, whose ideas and aims, whose general views, resemble our own in that main, indefinable characteristic of being modern. They had shaken off the morbid monastic ways of feeling, they had thrown aside the crooked scholastic modes of thinking, they had trampled under foot the feudal institutions of the Middle Ages; no symbolical mists made them see things vague, strange, and distorted; their intellectual atmosphere was as clear as our own, and, if they saw less than we do, what they did see appeared to them in its true shape and proportions. Almost for the first time since the ruin of antique civilization, they could show well-organized, well-defined States; artistically disciplined armies; rationally devised laws; scientifically conducted agriculture; and widely extended, intelligently undertaken commerce. For the first time, also, they showed regularly built, healthy, and commodious towns; well-drained fields; and, more important than all, hundreds of miles of country owned not by feudal lords, but by citizens; cultivated not by serfs, but by free peasants. While in the rest of Europe men were floundering among the stagnant ideas and crumbling institutions of the effete Middle Ages, with but a vague half-consciousness of their own nature, the Italians walked calmly through a life as well arranged as their great towns, bold, inquisitive, and sceptical: modern administrators, modern soldiers, modern politicians, modern financiers, scholars, and thinkers. Towards the end of the fifteenth century, Italy seemed to have obtained the philosophic, literary, and artistic inheritance of Greece; the administrative, legal, and military inheritance of Rome, increased threefold by her own strong, original, essentially modern activities. Yet, at that very time, and almost in proportion as all these advantages developed, the moral vitality of the Italians was rapidly decreasing, and a horrible moral gangrene beginning to spread: liberty was extinguished; public good faith seemed to be dying out; even private morality flickered ominously; every free State became subject to a despot, always unscrupulous and often infamous; warfare became a mere pretext for the rapine and extortions of mercenaries; diplomacy grew to be a mere swindle; the humanists inoculated literature with the filthiest refuse cast up by antiquity; nay, even civic and family ties were loosened; assassinations and fratricides began to abound, and all law, human and divine, to be set at defiance.

The nations who came into contact with the Italians opened their eyes with astonishment, with mingled admiration and terror; and we, people of the nineteenth century, are filled with the same feeling, only much stronger and more defined, as we watch the strange ebullition of the Renaissance, seething with good and evil, as we contemplate the enigmatic picture drawn by the puzzled historian, the picture of a people moving on towards civilization and towards chaos. Our first feeling is perplexity; our second feeling, anger; we do not at first know whether we ought to believe in such an anomaly; when once we do believe in it, we are indignant at its existence. We

accuse these Italians of the Renaissance of having wilfully and shamefully perverted their own powers, of having wantonly corrupted their own civilization, of having cynically destroyed their own national existence, of having boldly called down the vengeance of Heaven; we lament and we accuse, naturally enough, but perhaps not justly.

Let us ask ourselves what the Renaissance really was, and what was its use; how it was produced, and how it necessarily ended. Let us try to understand its inherent nature, and the nature of what surrounded it, which, taken together, constitute its inevitable fate; let us seek the explanation of that strange, anomalous civilization, of that life in death, and death in life. The Renaissance, inasmuch as it is something which we can define, and not a mere vague name for a certain epoch, is not a period, but a condition; and if we apply the word to any period in particular, it is because in it that condition was peculiarly marked.

The Renaissance may be defined as being that phase in mediæval history in which the double influence, feudal and ecclesiastic, which had gradually crushed the spontaneous life of the early mediæval revival, and reduced all to a dead, sterile mass, was neutralized by the existence of democratic and secular communities; that phase in which, while there existed not yet any large nations, or any definite national feeling, there existed free towns and civic democracies. In this sense the Renaissance began to exist with the earliest mediæval revival, but its peculiar mission could be carried out only when that general revival had come to an end. In this sense, also, the Renaissance did not exist all over Italy, and it existed outside Italy; but in Italy it was far more universal than elsewhere: there it was the rule, elsewhere the exception. There was no Renaissance in Savoy, nor in Naples, nor even in Rome; but north of the Alps there was Renaissance only in individual towns like Nürnberg, Augsburg, Bruges, Ghent, &c. In the North the Renaissance is dotted about amidst the stagnant Middle Ages; in Italy the Middle Ages intersect and interrupt the Renaissance here and there: the consequence was that in the North the Renaissance was crushed by the Middle Ages, whereas in Italy the Middle Ages were crushed by the Renaissance. Wherever there was a free town, without direct dependence on feudal or ecclesiastical institutions, governed by its own citizens, subsisting by its own industry and commerce; wherever the burghers built walls, slung chains across their streets, and raised their own cathedral; wherever, be it in Germany, in Flanders, or in England, there was a suspension of the deadly influences of the later Middle Ages; there, to greater or less extent, was the Renaissance.

But in the North this rudimentary Renaissance was never suffered to spread beyond the walls of single towns; it was hemmed in on all sides by feudal and ecclesiastical institutions, which restrained it within definite limits. The free towns of Germany were mostly dependent upon their bishops or archbishops; the more politically important cities of Flanders were under the suzerainty of a feudal family; they were subject to constant vexations from their suzerains, and their very existence was endangered by an attempt at independence; Liege was well-nigh destroyed by the supporters of her bishop, and Ghent was ruined by the revenge of the Duke of Burgundy. In these northern cities, therefore, the commonwealth was restricted to a sort of mercantile corporation—powerful within the town, but powerless without it; while outside the town reigned feudalism, with its robber nobles, free companies, and bands of outlawed peasants, from whom the merchant princes of Bruges and Nürnberg could scarcely protect their wares. To this political feebleness and narrowness corresponded an intellectual weakness and pettiness: the burghers were mere self-ruling tradesfolk; their interests did not extend far beyond their shops and their houses; literature was cramped in guilds, and reflection and imagination were confined within the narrow limits of town life. Everything was on a small scale; the Renaissance was moderate and inefficient, running no great dangers and achieving no great conquests. There was not enough action to produce reaction; and, while the Italian free States were ground down by foreign tyrannies, the German and Flemish cities insensibly merged into the vast empire of the House of Austria. While also the Italians of the sixteenth century rushed into moral and religious confusion, which only Jesuitism could discipline, the Germans of the same time quietly and comfortably adopted the Reformation.

The main cause of this difference, the main explanation of the fact that while in the North the Renaissance was cramped and enfeebled, in Italy it carried everything before it, lies in the circumstance that feudalism never took deep root in Italy. The conquered Latin race was enfeebled, it is true, but it was far more civilized than the conquering Teutonic peoples; the Barbarians came down, not on to a previous layer of Barbarians, but on to a deep layer of civilized men; the nomads of the North found in Italy a people weakened and corrupt, but with a long and inextinguishable habit of independence, of order, of industry. The country had been cultivated for centuries, the Barbarians could not turn it into a desert; the inhabitants had been organized as citizens for a thousand years, the Barbarians could not reorganize them feudally. The Barbarians who settled in Italy, especially the latest of them, the Lombards, were not only in a minority, but at an immense disadvantage. They founded kingdoms and dukedoms, where German was spoken and German laws were enacted; but whenever they tried to communicate with their Italian subjects, they found themselves forced to adopt the Latin language, manners, and laws; their domination became real only in proportion as it ceased to be Teutonic, and the Barbarian element was swallowed up by what remained of Roman civilization. Little by little these Lombard monarchies, without roots in the soil, and surrounded by hostile influences, died out, and there remained of the invaders only a certain number of nobles, those whose descendants were to bear the originally German names of Gherardesca, Rolandinghi, Soffredinghi, Lambertazzi, Guidi, and whose suzerains were the Bavarian and Swabian dukes and marquises of Tuscan. Meanwhile the Latin element revived; towns were rebuilt; a new Latin

language was formed; and the burghers of these young communities gradually wrested franchises and privileges from the weak Teutonic rulers, who required Italian agriculture, industry, and commerce, without which they and their feudal retainers would have starved. Feudalism became speedily limited to the hilly country; the plain became the property of the cities which it surrounded; the nobles turned into mere robber chieftains, then into mercenary soldiers, and finally, as the towns gained importance, they gradually descended into the cities and begged admission into the guilds of artisans and tradesfolk. Thus they grew into citizens and Italians; but for a long time they kept hankering after feudalism, and looking towards the German emperors who claimed the inheritance of the Lombard kings. The struggle between Guelphs and Ghibellines, between the German feudal element and the Latin civic one, ended in the complete annihilation of the former in all the north and centre of Italy. The nobles sank definitely into merchants, and those who persisted in keeping their castles were speedily ousted by the commissaries of the free towns. Such is the history of feudalism in Italy—the history of Barbarian minority engulfed in Latin civilization; of Teutonic counts and dukes turned into robber nobles, hunted into the hills by the townfolk, and finally seeking admission into the guilds of wool-spinners or money-changers; and in it is the main explanation of the fact that the Italian republics, instead of remaining restricted within their city walls like those of the North, spread over whole provinces, and became real politically organized States. And in such States having a free political, military, and commercial life, uncramped by ecclesiastic or feudal influence, in them alone could the great revival of human intelligence and character thoroughly succeed. The commune was the only species of free government possible during the Middle Ages, the only form which could resist that utterly prostrating action of later mediævalism. Feudalism stamped out civilization; monasticism warped it; in the open country it was burnt, trampled on, and uprooted; in the cloister it withered and shrank and perished; only within the walls of a city, protected from the storm without, and yet in the fresh atmosphere of life, could it develop, flourish, and bear fruit.

But this system of the free town contained in itself, as does every other institution, the seed of death— contained it in that expanding element which develops, ripens, rots, and finally dissolves all living organisms. A little town is formed in the midst of some feudal state, as Pisa, Florence, Lucca, and Bologna were formed in the dominions of the lords of Tuscany; the elders govern it; it is protected from without; it obtains privileges from its suzerain, always glad to oppose anything to his vassals, and who, unlike them, is too far removed in the feudal scale to injure the commune, which is under his supreme jurisdiction but not in his land. The town can thus develop regularly, governing itself, taxing itself, defending itself against encroaching neighbours; it gradually extends beyond its own walls, liberates its peasantry, extends its commerce, extinguishes feudalism, beats back its suzerain or buys privileges from him; in short, lives the vigorous young life of the early Italian commonwealths. But now the danger begins. The original system of government, where every head of a family is a power in the State, where every man helps to govern, without representation or substitution, could exist only as long as the commune remained small enough for the individual to be in proportion with it; as long as the State remained small enough for all its citizens to assemble in the market-place and vote, for every man to know every detail of the administration, every inch of the land. When the limits were extended, the burgher had to deal with towns and villages and men and things which he did not know, and which he probably hated, as every small community hated its neighbour; witness the horrible war, lasting centuries, between the two little towns of Dinant and Bouvines on the Meuse. Still more was this the case with an important city: the subjugated town was hated all the more for being a rival centre; the burghers of Florence, inspired only by their narrow town interest, treated Pisa according to its dictates, that is, tried to stamp it out. Thence the victorious communes came to be surrounded by conquered communes, which they dared not trust with any degree of power; and which, instead of being so many allies in case of invasion, were merely focuses of revolt, or at best inert impediments. Similarly, when the communes enlarged, and found it indispensable to delegate special men, who could attend to political matters more thoroughly than the other citizens, they were constantly falling under the tyranny of their captains, of the people, of their gonfalonieri, and of all other heads of the State; or else, as in Florence, they were frightened by this continual danger into a system of perpetual interference with the executive, which was thus rendered well-nigh helpless. To this rule Venice forms the only exception, on account of her exceptional position and history: the earliest burghers turning into an intensely conservative and civic aristocracy, while everywhere else the feudal nobles turned into petty burghers, entirely subversive of communal interests. Venice had the yet greater safeguard of being protected both from her victorious enemies and her own victorious generals; who, however powerful on the mainland, could not seriously endanger the city itself, which thus remained a centre of reorganization in time of disaster. In this Venice was entirely unique, as she was unique in the duration of her institutions and independence. In the other towns of Italy, where there existed no naturally governing family or class, where every citizen had an equal share in government, and there existed no distinction save that of wealth and influence, there was a constant tendency to the illegitimate preponderance of every man or every family that rose above the average; and in a democratic, mercantile State, not a day passed without some such elevation. In a systematic, consolidated State, where the power is in the hands of a hereditary sovereign or aristocracy, a rich merchant remains a rich merchant, a victorious general remains a victorious general, an eloquent orator remains an eloquent orator; but in a shapeless, fluctuating democracy like those of Italy, the man who has influence over his fellow-citizens, whether by his money, his soldiers, or his eloquence, necessarily becomes the head of the State; everything is free and unoccupied, only a little superior strength is required to push into it. Cosimo de' Medici has many clients, many correspondents, many debtors; he can bind people by

pecuniary obligations: he becomes prince. Sforza has a victorious army, whom he can either hound on to the city or restrain into a protection of its interests: he becomes prince. Savonarola has eloquence that makes the virtuous start up and the wicked tremble: he becomes prince. The history of the Italian commonwealths shows us but one thing: the people, the only legal possessors of political power, giving it over to their bankers (Medici, Pepoli); to their generals (Della Torre, Visconti, Scaligeri); to their monkish reformers (Fra Bussolaro, Fra Giovanni da Vincenza, Savonarola). Here then we have the occasional but inevitable usurpers, who either momentarily or finally disorganize the State. But this is not all. In such a State every family hate, every mercantile hostility, means a corresponding political division. The guilds are sure to be rivals, the larger wishing to exclude the smaller from government: the lower working classes (the *ciompi* of Florence) wish to upset the guilds completely; the once feudal nobles wish to get back military power; the burghers wish entirely to extirpate the feudal nobles; the older families wish to limit the Government, the newer prefer democracy and Cæsarism. Add to this the complications of private interests, the personal jealousies and aversions, the private warfare, inevitable in a town where legal justice is not always to be had, while forcible retaliation is always within reach; and the result is constant party spirit, insults, scuffles, conspiracies: the feudal nobles build towers in the streets, the burghers pull them down; the lower artisans set fire to the warehouses of the guilds, the magistrates take part in the contest; blood is spilt, magistrates are beheaded or thrown out of windows, a foreign State is entreated to interfere, and a number of citizens are banished by the victorious party. This latter result creates a new and terrible danger for the State, in the persons of so many exiles, ready to do anything, to join with any one, in order to return to the city and drive out their enemies in their turn. The end of such constant upheavings is that the whole population is disarmed, no party suffering its rival to have any means of offence or defence. Moreover, as industry and commerce develop, the citizens become unwilling to fight, while on the other hand the invention of firearms, subverting the whole system of warfare, renders special military training more and more necessary. In the days of the Lombard League, of Campaldino and Montaperti, the citizens could fight, hand to hand, round their carroccio or banner, without much discipline being required; but when it came to fortifying towns against cannon, to drilling bodies of heavily armed cavalry, acting by the mere dexterity of their movements; when war became a science and an art, then the citizen had necessarily to be left out, and adventurers and poor nobles had to form armies of mercenaries, making warfare their sole profession. This system of mercenary troops, so bitterly inveighed against by Machiavelli (who, of course, entirely overlooked its inevitable origin and viewed it as a voluntarily incurred pest), added yet another and, perhaps, the very worst danger to civil liberty. It gave enormous, irresistible power to adventurers unscrupulous by nature and lawless by education, the sole object of whose career it became to obtain possession of States; by no means a difficult enterprise, considering that they and their fellows were the sole possessors of military force in the country. At the same time, this system of mercenaries perfected the condition of utter defencelessness in which the gradual subjection of rival cities, the violent party spirit, and the general disarming of the burghers, had placed the great Italian cities. For these troops, being wholly indifferent as to the cause for which they were fighting, turned war into the merest game of dodges—half-a-dozen men being killed at a great battle like that of Anghiari—and they at the same time protracted campaigns beyond every limit, without any decisive action taking place. The result of all these inevitable causes of ruin, was that most of the commonwealths fell into the hands of despots; while those that did not were paralyzed by interior factions, by a number of rebellious subject towns, and by generals who, even if they did not absolutely betray their employers, never efficiently served them.

Such a condition of civic disorder lasted throughout the Middle Ages, until the end of the fifteenth century, without any further evils arising from it. The Italians made endless wars with each other, conquered each other, changed their government without end, fell into the power of tyrants; but throughout these changes their civilization developed unimpeded; because, although one of the centres of national life might be momentarily crushed, the others remained in activity, and infused vitality even into the feeble one, which would otherwise have perished. All these ups and downs seemed but to stir the life in the country: and no vital danger appeared to threaten it; nor did any, so long as the surrounding countries—France, Germany, and Spain—remained mere vast feudal nebulæ, formless, weightless, immovable. The Italians feared nothing from them; they would call down the King of France or the Emperor of Germany without a moment's hesitation, because they knew that the king could not bring France, nor the emperor bring Germany, but only a few miserable, hungry retainers with him; but Florence would watch the growth of the petty State of the Scaligers, and Venice look with terror at the Duke of Milan, because they knew that there there was concentrated life, and an organization which could be wielded as perfectly as a sword by the head of the State. In the last decade of the fifteenth century the Italians called in the French to put down their private enemies: Lodovico of Milan called down Charles VIII. to rid him of his nephew and of the Venetians; the Venetians to rid them of Lodovico: the Medici to establish them firmly in Florence; the party of freedom to drive out the Medici. Each State intended to use the French to serve their purpose, and then to send back Charles VIII. with a little money and a great deal of derision, as they had done with kings and emperors of earlier days. But Italian politicians suddenly discovered that they had made a fatal mistake; that they had reckoned in ignorance, and that instead of an army they had called down a nation: for during the interval since their last appeal to foreign interference, that great movement had taken place which had consolidated the heterogeneous feudal nebulæ into homogeneous and compact kingdoms.

Single small States, relying upon mercenary troops, could not for a moment resist the shock of

such an agglomeration of soldiery as that of the French, and of their successors the Spaniards and Germans. Sismondi asks indignantly, Why did the Italians not form a federation as soon as the strangers appeared? He might as well ask, Why did the commonwealths not turn into a modern monarchy? The habit of security from abroad and of jealousy within; the essential nature of a number of rival trading centres, made such a thing not only impossible of execution, but for a while impossible of conception; confederacies had become possible only when Burlamacchi was decapitated by the imperialists; popular resistance had become a reality only when Feruccio was massacred by the Spaniards; a change of national institutions was feasible only when all national institutions had been destroyed; when the Italians, having recognized the irresistible force of their adversaries, had ceased to form independent States and larger and smaller guilds; when all the characteristics of Italian civilization had been destroyed; when, in short, it was too late to do anything save theorize with Machiavelli and Guicciardini as to what ought to have been done. We must not hastily accuse the volition of the Italians of the Renaissance; they may have been egotistic and timid, but had they been (as some most certainly were) heroic and self-sacrificing to the utmost degree, they could not have averted the catastrophe. The nature of their civilization prevented not only their averting the peril, but even their conceiving its existence; the very nature of their political forms necessitated such a dissolution of them. The commune grows from within; it is a little speck which gradually extends its circumference, and the further this may be from the original centre, the less do its parts coalesce. The modern monarchy grows from external pressure, and towards the centre; it is a huge mass consolidating into a hard, distinct shape. Thence it follows that the more the commonwealth develops, the weaker it grows, because its tendency is to spread and fall to pieces; whereas the more the monarchy develops, the stronger it becomes, because it fills up towards the centre, and becomes more vigorously knit together. The city ceases to be a city when extended over hundreds of miles; the nation becomes all the more a nation for being compressed towards a central point.

The entire political collapse of Italy in the sixteenth century was not only inevitable, from the essential nature of the civilization of the Renaissance, but it was also indispensable in order that this civilization might fulfil its mission. Civilization cannot spread so long as it is contained within a national mould, and only a vanquished nation can civilize its victors. The Greece of Pericles could not Hellenize Rome, but the Greece of the weak successors of Alexander could; the Rome of Cæsar did not Romanize the Teutonic races as did the Rome of Theodosius; no amount of colonizing among the vanquished can ever produce the effect of a victorious army, of a whole nation, suddenly finding itself in the midst of the superior civilization of a conquered people. Michelet may well call the campaign of Charles VIII. the discovery of Italy. His imaginative mind seized at once the vast importance of this descent of the French into Italy, which other historians have been too prone to view in the same light as any other invasion. It is from this moment that dates the modernisation, if we may so express ourselves, of the North. The barbarous soldiers of Gaston de Foix, of Frundsberg, and of Gonsalvo, were the unconscious bearers of the seeds of the ages of Elizabeth, of Louis XIV, and of Goethe. These stupid and rapacious ruffians, while they wantonly destroyed the works of Italian civilization, rendered possible the existence of a Montaigne, a Shakespeare, and a Cervantes.

Italy was as a vast store-house, sheltered from all the dangers of mediæval destruction; in which, while all other nations were blindly and fiercely working out their national existence, the inheritance of Antiquity and the produce of the earliest modern civilization had been peaceably garnered up. When the store-house was full, its gates had to be torn open and its riches plundered and disseminated by the intellectual starvelings of the North; thus only could the rest of mankind feed on these riches, regain and develop their mental life.

What were those intellectual riches of the Renaissance? What was that strong intellectual food which revived the energies and enriched the blood of the Barbarians of the sixteenth century? The Renaissance possessed the germs of every modern thing, and much that was far more than a mere germ: it possessed the habit of equality before the law, of civic organization, of industry and commerce developed to immense and superb proportions. It possessed science, literature, and art; above all, that which at once produced and was produced by all these—thorough perception of what exists, thorough consciousness of our own freedom and powers: self-cognizance. In Italy there was intellectual light, enabling men to see and judge all around them, enabling them to act wittingly and deliberately. In this lies the immense greatness of the Renaissance; to this are due all its achievements in literature and science, and, above all, in art: that, for the first time since the dissolution of antique civilization, men were free agents, both in thought and in deed; that there was an end of that palsyng slavery of the Middle Ages, slavery of body and of mind, slavery to stultified ideas and effete forms, which made men endure every degree of evil and believe every degree of absurdity. For the first time since Antiquity, man walks free of all political and intellectual trammels, erect, conscious of his own thoughts, master of his own actions; ready to seek for truth across the ocean like Columbus, or across the heavens like Copernicus; to seek it in criticism and analysis like Machiavelli or Guicciardini, boldly to reproduce it in its highest, widest sense like Michael Angelo and Raphael.

The men of the Renaissance had to pay a heavy price for this intellectual freedom and self-cognizance which they not only enjoyed themselves, but transmitted to the rest of the world; the price was the loss of all moral standard, of all fixed public feeling. They had thrown aside all accepted rules and criteria, they had cast away all faith in traditional institutions, they had destroyed, and could not yet rebuild. In their instinctive and universal disbelief in all that had been taught them, they lost all respect for opinion, for rule, for what had been called right and wrong. Could it be otherwise? Had they not discovered that what had been called right had often

been unnatural, and what had been called wrong often natural? Moral teachings, remonstrances, and judgments belonged to that dogmatism from which they had broken loose; to those schools and churches where the foolish and the unnatural had been taught and worshipped; to those priests and monks who themselves most shamefully violated their teachings. To profess morality was to be a hypocrite; to reprobate others was to be narrow-minded. There was so much error mixed up with truth that truth had to share the discredit of error; so many innocent things had been denounced as sins that sinful ones at length ceased to be reprobated; people had so often found themselves sympathizing with supposed criminals, that they soon lost their horror of real ones. Damnation came to be disassociated from moral indignation: it was the retribution, not of the unnatural and immoral, but of the unlawful; and unlawful with respect to a law made without reference to reason and instinct. As reason and instinct were thus set at defiance, but could not be silenced, the law was soon acquiesced in without being morally supported; thus, little by little, moral feeling became warped. This was already the case in Dante's day. Farinata is condemned to the most horrible punishment, which to Dante seems just, because in accordance with an accepted code; yet Dante cannot but admire him and cannot really hate him, for there is nothing in him to hate; he is a criminal and yet respected—fatal combination! Dante punishes Francesca, Pier delle Vigne, and Brunetto Latini, but he shows no personal horror of them; in the one case his moral instinct refrains from censuring the comparatively innocent, in the other it has ceased to revolt from the really infamous. Where Dante does feel real indignation, is most often in cases unprovided for by the religious codes, as with those low, grovelling, timid natures (the very same with whom Machiavelli, the admirer of great villains, fairly loses patience), those creatures whom Dante personally despises, whom he punishes with filthy devices of his own, whom he passes by with words such as he never addresses to Semiramis, Brutus, or Capaneus. This toleration of vice, while acquiescing in its legal punishment, increased in proportion to the development of individual judgment, and did not cease till all the theories of the lawful and unlawful had been so completely demolished as to permit of their being rebuilt on solid bases.

This work of demolition had not yet ceased in the beginning of the sixteenth century; and the moral confusion due to it was increased by various causes dependent on political and other circumstances. The despots in whose hands it was the inevitable fate of the various commonwealths to fall, were by their very position immoral in all their dealings: violent, fraudulent, suspicious, and, from their life of constant unnatural tension of the feelings, prone to every species of depravity; while, on the other hand, in the feudal parts of Italy—which had merely received a superficial Renaissance varnish imported from other places with painters and humanists—in Naples, Rome, and the greater part of Umbria and the Marches, the upper classes had got into that monstrous condition which seems to have been the inevitable final product of feudalism, and which, while it gave France her Armagnacs, her Foix, and her Retz, gave Italy their counterparts in her hideously depraved princelets, the Malatestas, Varanos, Vitelli, and Baglioni. Both these classes of men, despots and feudal nobles, had a wide field for their ambition among the necessarily dissolved civic institutions; and their easy success contributed to confirm the general tendency of the day to say with Commynes, "Qui a le succès à l'honneur," and to confound these two words and ideas. Nor was this yet all: the men of the Renaissance discovered the antique world, and in their wild, blind enthusiasm, in their ardent, insatiable thirst for its literature, swallowed it eagerly, dregs and all, till they were drunk and poisoned.

These are the main causes of the immorality of the Renaissance: first, the general disbelief in all accepted doctrines, due to the falseness and unnaturalness of those hitherto prevalent; secondly, the success of unscrupulous talent in a condition of political disorder; thirdly, the wholesale and unjudging enthusiasm for all that remained of Antiquity, good or bad. These three great causes, united in a general intellectual ebullition, are the explanation of the worst feature of the Renaissance: not the wickedness of numberless single individuals, but the universal toleration of it by the people at large. Men like Sigismondo Malatesta, Sixtus IV., Alexander VI., and Cæsar Borgia might be passed over as exceptions, as monstrous aberrations which cannot affect our judgment of their time and nation; but the general indifference towards their vices shown by their contemporaries and countrymen is a conclusive and terrible proof of the moral chaos of the Renaissance. It is just the presence of so much instinctive simplicity and virtue, of childlike devotion to great objects, of patriarchal simplicity of manners, of all that is loveable in the books of men like Vespasiano da Bisticci and Leon Battista Albert; of so much that seems like the realization of the idyllic home and merchant life of Schiller's "Song of the Bell," by the side of all the hideous lawlessness and vice of the despots and humanists; that makes the Renaissance so drearily painful a spectacle. The presence of the good does not console us for that of the evil, because it neither mitigates nor even shrinks from it; we merely lose our pleasure in the good nature and simplicity of Aeneas Sylvius when we see his cool admiration for a man of fraud and violence like Sforza; we begin to mistrust the purity and integrity of the upright Guarino da Verona when we hear his lenient judgment of the infamous Beccadelli; we require of the virtuous that they should not only be incapable of vice, but abhorrent of it; and this is what even the best men of the Renaissance rarely were.

Such a state of moral chaos there has constantly been when an old effete mode of thought required to be destroyed. Such work is always attended, in greater or less degree, by this subversion of all recognized authority, this indifference to evil, this bold tasting of the forbidden. In the eighteenth century France plays the same part that was played in the fifteenth by Italy: again we meet the rebellion against all that has been consecrated by time and belief, the toleration of evil, the praise of the abominable, in the midst of the search for the good. These two have been the great fever epochs of modern history; fever necessary for a subsequent steady growth. Both gave back truth to man, and man to nature, at the expense of temporary moral

uncertainty and ruthless destruction. The Renaissance reinstated the individual in his human dignity, as a thinking, feeling, and acting being; the Eighteenth Century reconstructed society as a homogeneous free existence; both at the expense of individual degradation and social disorder. Both were moments of ebullition in which horrible things rose to the surface, but after which what remained was purer than it had ever been before. This is no plea for the immorality of the Renaissance: evil is none the less evil for being inevitable and necessary; but it is nevertheless well that we should understand its necessity. It certainly is a terrible admission, but one which must be made, that evil is part of the mechanism for producing good; and had the arrangement of the universe been entrusted to us, benevolent and equitable people of an enlightened age, there would doubtless have been invented some system of evolution and progression differing from the one which includes such machinery as hurricanes and pestilences, carnage and misery, superstition and license, Renaissance and Eighteenth Century. But unfortunately Nature was organized in a less charitable and intelligent fashion; and, among other evils required for the final attainment of good, we find that of whole generations of men being condemned to moral uncertainty and error in order that other generations may enjoy knowledge peacefully and guiltlessly. Let us remember this, and let us be more generous towards the men who were wicked that we might be enlightened. Above all, let us bear in mind, in judging the Renaissance, that the sacrifice which it represents could be useful only in so far as it was complete and irretrievable. Let us remember that the communal system of government, on whose development the Renaissance mainly depended, inevitably perished in proportion as it developed; that the absolute subjugation of Italy by Barbarous nations was requisite to the dissemination of the civilization thus obtained; that the Italians were politically annihilated before they had time to recover a normal condition, and were given up crushed and broken spirited, to be taught righteousness by Spaniards and Jesuits. That, in short, while the morality of the Italians was sacrificed to obtain the knowledge on which modern society depends, the political existence of Italy was sacrificed to the diffusion of that knowledge, and that the nation was not only doomed to immorality, but doomed also to the inability to reform. Perhaps, if we think of all this, and weigh the tremendous sacrifice to which we owe our present intellectual advantages, we may still feel sad, but sad rather with remorse than with indignation, in contemplating the condition of Italy in the first years of the sixteenth century; in looking down from our calm, safe, scientific position, on the murder of the Italian Renaissance: great and noble at heart, cut off pitilessly at its prime; denied even an hour to repent and amend; hurried off before the tribunal of posterity, suddenly, unexpectedly, and still bearing its weight of unexpiated, unrecognized guilt.

THE ITALY OF THE ELIZABETHAN DRAMATISTS.

I.

The chroniclers of the last years of the fifteenth century have recorded how the soldiery of Charles VIII. of France amused the tedious leisure of their sullen and suspicious occupation of Rome, by erecting in the camp a stage of planks, and performing thereon a rude mystery-play. The play thus improvised by a handful of troopers before this motley invading army: before the feudal cavalry of Burgundy, strange steel monsters, half bird, half reptile, with steel beaked and winged helmets and claw-like steel shoes, and jointed steel corselet and rustling steel mail coat; before the infantry of Gascony, rapid and rapacious with their tattered doublets and rag-bound feet; before the over-fed, immensely plumed, and slashed and furbelowed giants of Switzerland, and the starved, half-naked savages of Brittany and the Marches— before this multifaced, many-speached army, gathered from the rich cities of the North and the devastated fields of the South, and the wilds and rocks of the West and the East, alike in nothing save in its wonder and dread and delight and horror at this strange invaded Italy—the play performed for the entertainment of this encamped army was no ordinary play. No clerkly allegorical morality; no mouthing and capering market-place farce; no history of Joseph and his brethren, of the birth of the Saviour, or of the temptations of St. Anthony. It was the half-allegorical, half-dramatic representation of the reigning Borgia pope and his children; it was the rude and hesitating moulding into dramatic shape of those terrible rumours of simony and poison, of lust and of violence, of mysterious death and abominable love, which had met the invaders as they had first set their feet in Italy; which had become louder and clearer with every onward step through the peninsula, and now circulated around them, with frightful distinctness, in the very capital of Christ's vicar on earth. This blundering mystery-play of the French troopers is the earliest imaginative fruit of that first terrified and fascinated glimpse of the men of the barbarous North at the strange Italy of the Renaissance; it is the first manifestation of that strong tragic impulse due to the sudden sight, by rude and imaginative young nations, of the splendid and triumphant wickedness of Italy.

The French saw, wondered, shuddered, and played upon their camp stage the tragedy of the Borgias. But the French remained in Italy, became familiar with its ways, and soon merely shrugged their shoulders and smiled where they had once stared in horror. They served under the flags of Sforzas, Borgias, Baglionis, and Vitellis, by the side of the bravos of Naples and Umbria; they saw their princes wed the daughters of evil-famed Italian sovereigns, and their princes' children, their own Valois and Guises, develop into puny, ambiguous, and ominous Medicis and Gonzagas, surrounded by Italian minions and poison distillers, and buffoons and money-lenders. The French of the sixteenth century, during their long Neapolitan and Lombard wars and negotiations, and time to learn all that Italy could teach; to become refined, subtle,

indifferent, and cynical: bastard Italians, with the bastard Italian art of Goujon and Philibert Delorme, and the bastard Italian poetry of Du Bellay and Ronsard. The French of the sixteenth century therefore translated Machiavel and Ariosto and Bandello; but they never again attempted such another play as that which they had improvised while listening to the tales of Alexander VI. and Cæsar and Lucrezia, in their camp in the meadows behind Sant' Angelo. The Spaniards then came to Italy, and the Germans: strong mediæval nations, like the French, with the creative power of the Middle Ages still in them, refreshed by the long rest of the dull fifteenth century. But Spaniards and Germans came as mere greedy and besotten and savage mercenaries: the scum of their countries, careless of Italian sights and deeds, thinking only of torturing for hidden treasure, or swilling southern wines; and they returned to Spain and to Germany, to persecutions of Moriscos and plundering of abbeys, as savage and as dull as they had arrived. A smattering of Italian literature, art, and manners was carried back to Spain and Germany by Spanish and German princes and governors, to be transmitted to a few courtiers and humanists; but the imagination of the lower classes of Spain and of Germany, absorbed in the Quixotic Catholicism of Loyola and the biblical contemplation of Luther, never came into fertilizing contact with the decaying Italy of the Renaissance. The mystery-play of the soldiers of Charles VIII. seemed destined to remain an isolated and abortive attempt. But it was not so. The invasions had exhausted themselves; the political organization of Italy was definitely broken up; its material wealth was exhausted; the French, Germans, and Spaniards had come and gone, and returned and gone again; they had left nothing to annex or to pillage; when, about the middle of the sixteenth century, the country began to be overrun by a new horde of barbarians: the English. The English came neither as invaders nor as marauders; they were peaceable students and rich noblemen, who, so far from trying to extort money or annex territory, rather profited the ruined Italians by the work which they did and the money which they squandered. Yet these quiet and profitable travellers, before whom the Italians might safely display their remaining wealth, were in reality as covetous of the possessions of Italy and as resolute to return home enriched as any tattered Gascon men-at-arms or gluttonous Swiss or grinding Spaniards. They were, one and all, consciously and unconsciously, dragged to Italy by the irresistible instinct that Italy possessed that which they required; by the greed of intellectual gain. That which they thus instinctively knew that Italy possessed, that which they must obtain, was a mode of thought, a habit of form; philosophy, art, civilization: all the materials for intellectual manipulation. For, in the sixteenth century, on awakening from its long evil sleep, haunted by the nightmare of civil war, of the fifteenth century, the English mind had started up in the vigour of well-nigh mature youth, fed up and rested by the long inactivity in which it had slept through its period of assimilation and growth. It had awakened at the first touch of foreign influence, and had grown with every fresh contact with the outer world: with the first glance at Plato and Xenophon suddenly opened by Erasmus and Colet, at the Bible suddenly opened by Cranmer; it had grown with its sob of indignation at the sight of the burning faggots surrounding the martyrs, with its joyous heart-throbs at the sight of the seas and islands of the New World; it had grown with the sudden passionate strain of every nerve and every muscle when the galleys of Philip had been sighted in the Channel. And when it had paused, taken breath, and looked calmly around it, after the tumult of all these sights and sounds and actions, the English mind, in the time of Elizabeth, had found itself of a sudden full-grown and blossomed out into superb manhood, with burning activities and indefatigable powers. But it had found itself without materials for work. Of the scholastic philosophy and the chivalric poetry of the Middle Ages there remained but little that could be utilized: the few bungled formulas, the few half-obsolete rhymes still remaining, were as unintelligible, in their spirit of feudalism and monasticism and mysticism, as were the Angevin English and the monkish Latin in which they were written to these men of the sixteenth century. All the intellectual wealth of England remained to be created; but it could not be created out of nothing. Spenser, Shakespeare, and Bacon could not be produced out of the half-effete and scattered fragments of Chaucer, of Scotus, and of Wycliffe. The materials on which English genius was to work must be sought abroad, and abroad they could be found only in Italy. For in the demolished Italy of the sixteenth century lay the whole intellectual wealth of the world: the great legacy of Antiquity, the great work of the Middle Ages had been stored up, and had been increased threefold, and sorted and classified by the Renaissance; and now that the national edifice had been dismantled and dilapidated, and the national activity was languishing, it all lay in confusion, awaiting only the hand of those who would carry it away and use it once more. To Italy therefore Englishmen of thought and fancy were dragged by an impulse of adventure and greed as irresistible as that which dragged to Antwerp and the Hanse ports, to India and America, the seekers for gold and for soil. To Italy they flocked and through Italy they rambled, prying greedily into each cranny and mound of the half-broken civilization, upturning with avid curiosity all the rubbish and filth; seeking with aching eyes and itching fingers for the precious fragments of intellectual splendour; lingering with fascinated glance over the broken remnants and deep, mysterious gulfs of a crumbling and devastated civilization. And then, impatient of their intoxicating and tantalizing search, suddenly grown desperate, they clutched and stored away everything, and returned home tattered, soiled, bedecked with gold and with tinsel, laden with an immense uncouth burden of jewels, and broken wealth, and refuse and ordure, with pseudo-antique philosophy, with half-mediæval Dantesque and Petrarchesque poetry, with Renaissance science, with humanistic pedantry and obscenity, with euphuistic conceits and casuistic quibble, with art, politics, metaphysics—civilization embedded in all manner of rubbish and abomination, soiled with all manner of ominous stains. All this did they carry home and throw helter-skelter into the new-kindled fire of English intellectual life, mingling with it many a humble-seeming Northern alloy; cleaning and compounding, casting into shapes, mediæval and English, this strange Corinthian brass made of all these heterogeneous remnants, classical, Italian, Saxon, and Christian. A strange Corinthian brass indeed; and as various in tint, in weight,

and in tone, in manifold varieties of mixture, as were the moulds into which it was cast: the white and delicate silver settling down in the gracious poetic moulds of Sidney and Spenser; the glittering gold, which can buy and increase, in the splendid, heavy mould of Bacon's prose; and the copper, the iron, the silver and gold in wondrous mixture, with wondrous iridescences of colour and wondrous scale of tone, all poured into the manifold moulds, fantastic and beautiful and grand, of Shakespeare. And as long as all this dross and ore and filth brought from the ruins of Italy was thus mingling in the heat of English genius, while it was yet but imperfectly fused, while already its purest and best compounded portion was being poured in Shakespeare's mould, and when already there remained only a seething residue; as long as there remained aught of the glowing fire and the molten mass, some of it all, of the pure metal bubbling up, of the scum frothing round, nay, of the very used-up dregs, was ever and anon being ladled out—gold, dross, filth, all indiscriminately—and cast into shapes severe, graceful, or uncouth. And this somewhat, thus pilfered from what was to make, or was making, or had made, the works of Shakespeare; this base and noble, still unfused or already exhausted alloy, became the strange heterogeneous works of the Elizabethan dramatists: of Webster, of Ford, of Tourneur, of Ben Jonson, of Beaumont and Fletcher, and of their minor brethren; from the splendid ore of Marlowe, only half molten and half freed from dross, down to the shining metal, smooth and silvery as only tinsel can be, of Massinger. In all the works of our Elizabethans, we see not only the assimilated intellectual wealth of Italy, but we see the deep impression, the indelible picture in the memory, of Italy itself; the positive, unallegorical, essentially secular mode of thought; the unascetic, æsthetic, eminently human mode of feeling; the artistic desire of clear and harmonious form; the innumerable tendencies and habits which sever the Elizabethans so completely from the Middle Ages, and bring them so near at once to ourselves and to the ancients, making them at once antique and modern, in opposition to mediæval; these essential characters and the vast bulk of absolute scientific fact and formula, of philosophic opinion, of artistic shape, of humanistic learning, are only one-half of the debt of our sixteenth century to the Italy of the Renaissance. The delicate form of the Italian sonnet, as copied by Sidney from Bembo and Molza and Costanzo, contained within it the exotic and exquisite ideal passion of the "Vita Nuova" and Petrarch. With the bright, undulating stanza Spenser received from Ariosto and Tasso the richly coloured spirit of the Italian descriptive epic. With the splendid involutions of Machiavelli's and Guicciardini's prose Bacon learned their cool and disimpassioned philosophy. From the reading of Politian and Lorenzo dei Medici, from the sight of the Psyche of Raphael, the Europa of Veronese, the Ariadne of Tintoret, men like Greene and Dorset learned that revival of a more luscious and pictorial antique which was brought to perfection in Shakespeare's "Venus and Adonis" and Marlowe's "Sestiad." From the Platonists and Epicureans of Renaissance Italy our greatest dramatists learned that cheerful and serious love of life, that solemn and manly facing of death, that sense of the finiteness of man, the inexhaustibleness of nature, which shines out in such grand, paganism, with such Olympian serenity, as of the bent brows and smiling lips of an antique Zeus, in Shakespeare, in Marlowe, in Beaumont and Fletcher, even in the sad and savage Webster. But with the abstract, with the imbibed modes of thought and feeling, with the imitated forms, the Elizabethans brought back from Italy the concrete, the individual, the personal. They filled their works with Italian things: from the whole plot of a play borrowed from an Italian novel, to the mere passing allusion to an Italian habit, or the mere quotation of an Italian word; from the full-length picture of the actions of Italian men and women, down to the mere sketch, in two or three words, of a bit of Italian garden or a group of Italian figures; nay, to the innumerable scraps of tiny detail, grotesque, graceful, or richly coloured, which they stuffed into all their works: allusions to the buffoons of the mask comedy, to the high-voiced singers, to the dress of the Venetian merchants, to the step of a dance; to the pomegranate in the garden or the cypress on the hillside; mere names of Italian things: the lavolta and corrauto dances, the Traghetto ferry, the Rialto bridge; countless little touches, trifling to us, but which brought home to the audience at the Globe or at Blackfriars that wonderful Italy which every man of the day had travelled through at least in spirit, and had loved at least in imagination. And of this wonderful Italy the Englishmen of the days of Elizabeth and of James knew yet another side; were familiar, whether travelled or untravelled, with yet other things besides the buffoons and singers and dancers, the scholars and learned ladies, the pomegranates, and cypresses and roses and nightingales; were fascinated by something besides the green lagoons, the clear summer nights, the soft spring evenings of which we feel as it were the fascination in the words of Jessica and Portia and Juliet. The English knew and were haunted by the crimes of Italy: the terrible and brilliant, the mysterious and shadowy crimes of lust and of blood which, in their most gigantic union and monstrous enthronement on the throne of the vicar of Christ, had in the first terrified glimpse awakened the tragic impulse in the soldiers of Charles VIII.

We can imagine the innumerable English travellers who went to Italy greedy for life and knowledge or merely obeying a fashion of the day—travellers forced into far closer contact with the natives than the men of the time of Walpole and of Beckford, who were met by French-speaking hosts and lacqueys and officials—travellers also thirsting to imbibe the very spirit of the country as the travellers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries never thirsted; we can imagine these Englishmen possessed by the morbid passion for the stories of abominable and unpunished crime—crime of the learned, the refined, the splendid parts of society—with which the Italy of the deeply corrupted sixteenth century was permeated. We can imagine how the prosaic merchants' clerks from London; the perfumed dandies, trying on Italian clothes, rehearsing Italian steps and collecting Italian oaths, the Faulcon-bridges of Shakespeare and Mr. Gingleboys of Beaumont and Fletcher, sent to Italy to be able gracefully to

Kiss the hand and cry, "sweet lady!"

Say they had been at Rome and seen the relics,
Drunk your Verdea wine, and rid at Naples—

how all these privileged creatures ferreted about for monstrous crimes with which to horrify their stay-at-home countrymen; how the rich young lords, returning home with mincing steps and high-pitched lisp, surrounded by a train of parti-coloured, dialect-jabbering Venetian clowns, deft and sinister Neapolitan fencing masters, silver-voiced singing boys decoyed from some church, and cynical humanists escaped from the faggot or the gallows, were expected to bring home, together with the newest pastoral dramas, lewd novels, Platonic philosophy and madrigals set in complicated counterpoint; stories of hideous wickedness, of the murders and rapes and poisonings committed by the dukes and duchesses, the nobles and senators, in whose palaces they had so lately supped and danced. The crimes of Italy fascinated Englishmen of genius with a fascination even more potent than that which they exercised over the vulgar imagination of mere foppish and swashbuckler lovers of the scandalous and the sensational: they fascinated with the attraction of tragic grandeur, of psychological strangeness, of moral monstrosity, a generation in whom the passionate imagination of the playwright was curiously blent with the metaphysical analysis of the philosopher and the ethical judgment of the Puritan. To these men, ardent and serious even in their profligacy; imaginative and passionate even in their Puritanism, all sucking avidly at this newly found Italian civilization; the wickedness of Italy was more than morbidly attractive or morbidly appalling: it was imaginatively and psychologically fascinating. Whether they were as part of the action or as allusions, as in Webster's two great plays, in which there occurs poisoning by means of the leaves of a book, poisoning by the poisoned lips of a picture, poisoning by a helmet, poisoning by the pommel of a saddle; crimes were multiplied by means of subordinate plots and unnecessary incidents, like the double vengeance of Richardetto and of Hippolita in Ford's "Giovanni and Annabella," where both characters are absolutely unnecessary to the main story of the horrible love of the hero and heroine; like the murders of Levidulcia and Sebastian in Tournear's "Atheist's Tragedy," and the completely unnecessary though extremely pathetic death of young Marcello in Webster's "White Devil;" until the plays were brought to a close by the gradual extermination of all the principal performers, and only a few confidants and dummies remained to bury the corpses which strewed the stage. Imaginary monsters were fashioned out of half-a-dozen Neapolitan and Milanese princes, by Ford, by Beaumont and Fletcher, by Middleton, by Marston, even by the light and graceful Philip Massinger: mythical villains, Ferdinands, Lodowicks, and Fernezes, who yet fell short of the frightful realities of men like Sigismondo Malatesta, Alexander VI., and Pier Luigi Farnese; nay, more typical monsters, with no name save their vices, Lussuriosos, Gelosos, Ambitiosos, and Vindicis, like those drawn by the strong and savage hand of Cyril Tournear.

Nothing which the English stage could display seemed to the minds of English playwrights and the public to give an adequate picture of the abominations of Italy; much as they heaped up horrors and combined them with artistic skill, much as they forced into sight, there yet remained an abyss of evil which the English tongue refused to mention, but which weighed upon the English mind; and which, unspoken, nay (and it is the glory of the Elizabethan dramatists excepting Ford), unhinted, yet remained as an incubus in the consciousness of the playwrights and the public, was in their thoughts when they wrote and heard such savage misanthropic outbursts as those of Tournear and of Marston. The sense of the rottenness of the country whence they were obtaining their intellectual nourishment, haunted with a sort of sickening fascination the imaginative and psychological minds of the late sixteenth century, of the men who had had time to outgrow the first cynical plunge of the rebellious immature intellects of the contemporaries of Greene, Peele, and Marlowe into that dissolved civilization. And of the great men who were thus enthralled by Italy and Italian evil, only Shakespeare and Massinger maintain or regain their serenity and hopefulness of spirit, resist the incubus of horror: Shakespeare from the immense scope of his vision, which permitted him to pass over the base and frightful parts of human nature and see its purer and higher sides; Massinger from the very superficiality of his insight and the narrowness of his sympathies, which prevented his ever thoroughly realizing the very horrors he had himself invented. But on the minds less elastic than that of Shakespeare, and less superficial than that of Massinger, the Italian evil weighed like a nightmare. With an infinitely powerful and passionate imagination, and an exquisitely subtle faculty of mental analysis; only lately freed from the dogma of the Middle Ages; unsettled in their philosophy; inclined by wholesale classical reading to a sort of negative atheism, a fatalistic and half-melancholy mixture of epicurism and stoicism; yet keenly alive, from study of the Bible and of religious controversies, to all questions of right and wrong; thus highly wrought and deeply perplexed, the minds of the Elizabethan poets were impressed by the wickedness of Italy as by the horrible deeds of one whom we are accustomed to venerate as our guide, whom we cannot but love as our benefactor, whom we cannot but admire as our superior: it was a sense of frightful anomaly, of putrescence in beauty and splendour, of death in life and life in death, which made the English psychologist-poets savage and sombre, cynical and wrathful and hopeless. The influence is the same on all, and the difference of attitude is slight, and due to individual characters; but the gloom is the same in each of them. In Webster—no mere grisly inventor of Radcliffian horrors, as we are apt to think of the greatest of our dramatists after Shakespeare—in the noble and tender nature of Webster the sense is one of ineffable sadness, unmarred by cynicism, but unbrightened by hope. The villains, even if successful till death overtake them, are mere hideous phantoms—

these wretched eminent things
Leave no more fame behind 'em, than should one
Fall in a frost, and leave his print in snow—

the victims of tortured conscience, or, worse still, the owners of petrified hearts; there is nothing to envy in them. But none the better is it for the good: if Ferdinands, Bosolas, Brachianos, and Flaminius perish miserably, it is only after having done to death the tender and brave Duchess, the gentle Antonio, the chivalric Marcello; there is virtue on earth, but there is no justice in heaven. The half-pagan, half-puritanic feeling of Webster bursts out in the dying speech of the villain Bosola—

O, this gloomy world!
In what a shadow, or deep pit of darkness,
Doth womanish and fearful mankind live!
Let worthy minds ne'er stagger in distrust
To suffer death or shame for what is just.

Of real justice in this life or compensation in another, there is no thought: Webster, though a Puritan in spirit, is no Christian in faith. On Ford the influence is different; although equal, perhaps, in genius to Webster, surpassing him even in intense tragic passion, he was far below Webster, and, indeed, far below all his generation, in moral fibre. The sight of evil fascinates him; his conscience staggers, his sympathies are bedraggled in foulness; in the chaos of good and evil he loses his reckoning, and recognizes the superiority only of strength of passion, of passion for good or evil: the incestuous Giovanni, daring his enemies like a wild beast at bay and cheating them of their revenge by himself murdering the object of his horrible passion, is as heroic in the eyes of Ford as the magnanimous Princess of Sparta, bearing with unflinching spirit the succession of misfortunes poured down upon her, and leading off the dance while messenger succeeds messenger of evil; till, free from her duties as a queen, she sinks down dead. Cyril Tourneur and John Marston are far more incomplete in genius than either Webster or Ford, although Tourneur sometimes obtains a lurid and ghastly tragic intensity which more than equals Ford when at his best; and Marston, in the midst of crabbedness and dullness, sometimes has touches of pathos and Michelangelesque foreshortenings of metaphor worthy of Webster. But Tourneur and Marston have neither the constant sympathy with oppressed virtue of the author of the "Duchess of Malfy," nor the blind fury of passion of the poet of "Giovanni and Annabella;" they look on grim and hopeless spectators at the world of fatalistic and insane wickedness which they have created, in which their heroes and heroines and villains are slowly entangled in inextricable evil. The men and women of Tourneur and Marston are scarcely men and women at all: they are mere vague spectres, showing their grisly wounds and moaning out their miserable fate. There is around them a thick and clammy moral darkness, dispelled only by the ghastly flashes of lurid virtue of maniacs like Tourneur's Vindici and Hippolito; a crypt-like moral stillness, haunted by strange evil murmurs, broken only by the hysterical sobs and laughs of Marston's Antonios and Pandulphos. At the most there issues out of the blood-reeking depth a mighty yell of pain, a tremendous imprecation not only at sinful man but at unsympathizing nature, like that of Marston's old Doge, dethroned, hunted down, crying aloud into the grey dawn-mists of the desolate marsh by the lagoon—

O thou all-bearing earth
Which men do gape for till thou cram'st their mouths
And choak'st their throats for dust: O charme thy breast
And let me sinke into thee. Look who knocks;
Andrugio calls. But O, she's deafe and blinde.
A wretch but leane relief on earth can finde.

The tragic sense, the sense of utter blank evil, is stronger in all these Elizabethan painters of Italian crime than perhaps in any other tragic writers. There is, in the great and sinister pictures of Webster, of Ford, of Tourneur, and of Marston, no spot of light, no distant bright horizon. There is no loving suffering, resigned to suffer and to pardon, like that of Desdemona, whose dying lips forgive the beloved who kills from too great love; no consoling affection like Cordelia's, in whose gentle embrace the poor bruised soul may sink into rest; no passionate union in death with the beloved, like the union of Romeo and Juliet; nothing but implacable cruelty, violent death received with agonized protest, or at best as the only release from unmitigated misery with which the wretch has become familiar,

As the tann'd galley slave is with his oar.

Neither is there in these plays that solemn sense of heavenly justice, of the fatality hanging over a house which will be broken when guilt shall have been expiated, which lends a sort of serene background of eternal justice to the terrible tales of Thebes and Argos. There is for these men no fatality save the evil nature of man, no justice save the doubling of crime, no compensation save revenge: there is for Webster and Ford and Tourneur and Marston no heaven above, wrathful but placable; there are no Gods revengeful but just: there is nothing but this blood-stained and corpse-strewn earth, defiled by lust- burnt and death-hungering men, felling each other down and trampling on one another blindly in the eternal darkness which surrounds them. The world of these great poets is not the open world with its light and its air, its purifying storms and lightnings: it is the darkened Italian palace, with its wrought-iron bars preventing escape; its embroidered carpets muffling the foot steps; its hidden, suddenly yawning trap- doors; its arras-hangings concealing masked ruffians; its garlands of poisoned flowers; its long suites of untenanted darkened rooms, through which the wretch is pursued by the half-crazed murderer; while below, in the cloistered court, the clanking armour and stamping horses, and above, in the carved and gilded hall, the viols and lutes and cornets make a cheery triumphant concert, and drown the cries of the victim.

II.

Such is the Italy of the Renaissance as we see it in the works of our tragic playwrights: a country of mysterious horror, the sinister reputation of which lasted two hundred years; lasted triumphantly throughout the light and finikin eighteenth century, and found its latest expression in the grim and ghastly romances of the school of Ann Radcliff, romances which are but the last puny and grotesque descendants of the great stock of Italian tragedies, born of the first terror-stricken meeting of the England of Elizabeth with the Italy of the late Renaissance. Is the impression received by the Elizabethan playwrights a correct impression? Was Italy in the sixteenth century that land of horrors? Reviewing in our memory the literature and art of the Italian Renaissance, remembering the innumerable impressions of joyous and healthy life with which it has filled us; recalling the bright and thoughtless rhymes of Lorenzo dei Medici, of Politian, of Berni, and of Ariosto; the sweet and tender poetry of Bembo and Vittoria Colonna and Tasso; the bluff sensuality of novelists like Bandello and Masuccio, the Aristophanesque laughter of the comedy of Bibbiena and of Beolco; seeing in our mind's eye the stately sweet matrons and noble senators of Titian, the virginal saints and madonnas of Raphael, the joyous angels of Correggio;—recapitulating rapidly all our impressions of this splendid time of exuberant vitality, of this strong and serene Renaissance, we answer without hesitation, and with only a smile of contempt at our credulous ancestors—no. The Italy of the Renaissance was, of all things that have ever existed or ever could exist, the most utterly unlike the nightmare visions of men such as Webster and Ford, Marston and Tourneur. The only Elizabethan drama which really represents the Italy of the Renaissance is the comedy of Shakespeare, of Beaumont and Fletcher, and of Ben Jonson and Massinger: to the Renaissance belong those clear and sunny figures, the Portias, Antonios, Gratianos, Violas, Petruchios, Bellarios, and Almiras; their faces do we see on the canvases of Titian and the frescoes of Raphael; they are the real children of the Italian Renaissance. These frightful Brachianos and Annabellas and Ferdinands and Corombonas and Vindicis and Pieros of the "White Devil," of the "Duchess of Malfy," of the "Revenger's Tragedy," and of "Antonio and Mellida," are mere fantastic horrors, as false as the Counts Udolpho, the Spalatro, the Zastrozzis, and all their grotesquely ghastly pseudo-Italian brethren of eighty years ago.

And, indeed, the Italy of the Renaissance, as represented in its literature and its art, is the very negation of Elizabethan horrors. Of all the mystery, the colossal horror and terror of our dramatists, there is not the faintest trace in the intellectual productions of the Italian Renaissance. The art is absolutely stainless: no scenes of horror, no frightful martyrdoms, as with the Germans under Albrecht Dürer; no abominable butcheries, as with the Bolognese of the seventeenth century; no macerated saints and tattered assassins, as with the Spaniards; no mystery, no contortion, no horrors: vigorous and serene beauty, pure and cheerful life, real or ideal, on wall or canvas, in bronze or in marble. The literature is analogous to the art, only less perfect, more tainted with the weakness of humanity, less ideal, more real. It is essentially human, in the largest sense of the word; or if it cease, in creatures like Aretine, to be humanly clean, it becomes merely satyr-like, swinish, hircose. But it is never savage in lust or violence; it is quite free from the element of ferocity. It is essentially light and quiet and well regulated, sane and reasonable, never staggering or blinded by excess: it is full of intelligent discrimination, of intelligent leniency, of well-bred reserved sympathy; it is civilized as are the wide well-paved streets of Ferrara compared with the tortuous black alleys of mediæval Paris; as are the well-lit, clean, spacious palaces of Michelozzo or Bramante compared with the squalid, unhealthy, uncomfortable mediæval castles of Dürer's etchings. It is indeed a trifle too civilized; too civilized to produce every kind of artistic fruit; it is—and here comes the crushing difference between the Italian Renaissance and our Elizabethans' pictures of it—it is, this beautiful rich literature of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, completely deficient in every tragic element; it has intuition neither for tragic event nor for tragic character; it affords not a single tragic page in its poems and novels; it is incapable, after the most laborious and conscientious study of Euripides and Seneca, utterly and miserably incapable of producing a single real tragedy, anything which is not a sugary pastoral or a pompous rhetorical exercise. The epic poets of the Italian Renaissance, Pulci, Boiardo, Berni, and Ariosto, even the stately and sentimental Tasso, are no epic poets at all. They are mere light and amusing gossips, some of them absolute buffoons. Their adventures over hill and dale are mere riding parties; their fights mere festival tournaments, their enchantments mere pageant wonders. Events like the death of Hector, the slaughter of Penelope's suitors, the festive massacre of Chriemhilt, the horrible deceit of Alfonso the Chaste sending Bernardo del Carpio his father's corpse on horseback—things like these never enter their minds. When tragic events do by some accident come into their narration, they cease to be tragic; they are frittered away into mere pretty conceits like the death of Isabella and the sacrifice of Olympia in the "Orlando Furioso;" or melted down into vague pathos, like the burning of Olindo and Sofronia, and the death of Clorinda by the sentimental Tasso. Neither poet, the one with his cheerfulness, the other with his mild melancholy, brings home, conceives the horror of the situation; the one treats the tragic in the spirit almost of burlesque, the other entirely in the spirit of elegy. So, again, with the novel writers: these professional retailers of anecdotes will pick up any subject to fill their volumes. In default of pleasant stories of filthy intrigue or lewd jest, men like Cinthio and Bandello will gabble off occasionally some tragic story, picked out of a history book or recently heard from a gossip: the stories of Harmodius and Aristogeiton, of Disdemona and the Moorish Captain, of Romeo Montecchio and Giulietta Cappelletti, of the Cardinal d'Aragona and the Duchess of Amalfi, of unknown grotesque Persian Sophis and Turkish Bassas—stories of murder, massacre, rape, incest, anything and everything, prattled off, with a few words of vapid compassion and stale moralizing, in the serene, cheerful, chatty manner in

which they recount their Decameronian escapades or Rabelaisian repartees. As it is with tragic action, so is it with tragic character. The literature of the country which suggested to our Elizabethans their colossal villains, can display only a few conventional monsters, fire-eating, swashbuckler Rodomonts and Sultan Malechs, strutting and puffing like the grotesque villains of puppet-shows; Aladins and Ismenos, enchanters and ogres fit to be put into Don Quixote's library: mere conventional rag puppets, doubtless valued as such and no more by the shrewd contemporaries of Ariosto and Tasso. The inhabitants of Tasso's world of romance are pale chivalric unrealities, lifeless as Spenser's half-allegoric knights and ladies; those of Pulci's Ardenne forests and Cathay deserts are buffoons such as Florentine shopmen may have trapped out for their amusement in rusty armour and garlands of sausages. The only lifelike heroes and heroines are those of Ariosto. And they are most untragic, un-romantic. The men are occasionally small scoundrels, but unintentionally on the part of the author. They show no deep moral cancers or plague-spots; they display cheerfully all the petty dishonour and small lusts which the Renaissance regarded as mere flesh and blood characteristics. So also Ariosto's ladies: the charming, bright women, coquettish or Amazonian, are frail and fickle to the degree which was permissible to a court lady, who should be neither prudish nor coquettish; doing unchaste things and listening to unchaste words simply, gracefully, without prurience or horror; perfectly well-bred, gentili, as Ariosto calls them; prudent also, according to the notions of the day, in limiting their imprudence. The adventure of Fiordispina with Ricciardetto would have branded an English serving-wench as a harlot; the behaviour of Roger towards the lady he has just rescued from the sea-monster would have blushingly been attributed by Spenser to one of his satyrs; but these were escapades quite within Ariosto's notions of what was permitted to a gentil cavaliero and a nobile donzella; and if Fiordispina and Roger are not like Florimell and Sir Calidore, still less do they in the faintest degree resemble Tourneur and Marston's Levidulcias and Isabellas and Lussuriosos. And with the exception perhaps, of this heroine and this hero, we cannot find any very great harm in Ariosto's ladies and gentlemen: we may, indeed, feel indignant when we think that they replace the chaste and noble impossibilities of earlier romance, the Rolands and Percivals, the Beatrices and Lauras of the past; when we consider that they represent for Ariosto, not the bespattered but the spotless, not the real but the ideal. All this may awaken in us contempt and disgust; but if we consider these figures in themselves as realities, and compare them with the evil figures of our drama, we find that they are mere venial sinners—light, fickle, amorous, fibbing—very human in their faults; human, trifling, mild, not at all monstrous, like all the art products of the Renaissance.^[1]

- [1] The "Orlando Innamorato" of Boiardo contains, *parti*, canto 8, a story too horrible and grotesque for me to narrate, of a monster born of Marchino and his murdered sister-in-law, which forms a strange exception to my rule, even as does, for instance, Matteo di Giovanni's massacre of the Innocents. Can this story have been suggested, a ghastly nightmare, by the frightful tale of Sigismondo Malatesta and the beautiful Borbona, which was current in Boiardo's day?

A serene and spotless art, a literature often impure but always cheerful, rational, civilized—this is what the Italian Renaissance displays when we seek in it for spirits at all akin to Webster or Lope de Vega, to Holbein or Ribera. To find the tragic we must wait for the Bolognese painters of the seventeenth century, for Metastasio and Alfieri in the eighteenth; it is useless seeking it in this serene and joyous Renaissance. Where, then, in the midst of these spotless virgins, these noble saints, these brilliant pseudo-chivalric joustings and revels, these sweet and sonneteering pastorals, these scurrilous adventures and loose buffooneries; where in this Italian Renaissance are the horrors which fascinated so strangely our English playwrights: the fratricides and incests, the frightful crimes of lust and blood which haunted and half crazed the genius of Tourneur and Marston? Where in this brilliant and courteous and humane and civilized nation are the gigantic villains whose terrible features were drawn with such superb awfulness of touch by Webster and Ford? Where in this Renaissance of Italian literature, so cheerful and light of conscience, is the foul and savage Renaissance of English tragedy? Does the art of Italy tell an impossible, universal lie? or is the art of England the victim of an impossible, universal hallucination?

Neither; for art can neither tell lies nor be the victim of hallucination. The horror exists, and the light-heartedness exists; the unhealthiness and the healthiness. For as, in that weird story by Nathaniel Hawthorne, the daughter of the Paduan wizard is nurtured on the sap and fruit and the emanations of poisonous plants, till they become her natural sustenance, and she thrives and is strong and lovely; while the youth, bred in the ordinary pure air and nourished on ordinary wholesome food, faints and staggers as soon as he breathes the fatal odours of the poison garden, and sinks down convulsed and crazed at the first touch of his mistress' blooming but death-breathing lips; so also the Italians, steeped in the sin of their country, seeing it daily and hourly, remained intellectually healthy and serene; while the English, coming from a purer moral atmosphere, were seized with strange moral sickness of horror at what they had seen and could not forget. And the nation which was chaste and true wrote tales of incest and treachery, while the nation which was foul and false wrote poetry of shepherds and knights-errant. The monstrous immorality of the Italian Renaissance, as I have elsewhere shown in greater detail, was, like the immorality of any other historical period, not a formal rebellion against God, but a natural result of the evolution of the modern world. The Italy of the Renaissance was one of the many victims which inevitable moral sequence dooms to be evil in order that others may learn to be good: it was a sacrifice which consisted in a sin, a sacrifice requiring frightful expiation on the part of the victim. For Italy was subjected, during well-nigh two centuries, to a slow process of moral destruction; a process whose various factors—political disorganization, religious indifference, scientific scepticism, wholesale enthusiasm for the antique, breaking-up of mediæval standards

and excessive growth of industry, commerce, and speculative thought at the expense of warlike and religious habits—were at the same time factors in the great advent of modern civilization, of which Italy was the pioneer and the victim; a process whose result was, in Italy, insensibly and inevitably to reduce to chaos the moral and political organization of the nation; at once rendering men completely unable to discriminate between good and evil, and enabling a certain proportion of them to sin with complete impunity: creating on the one hand moral indifference, and on the other social irresponsibility. Civilization had kept pace with demoralization; the faculty of reasoning over cause and effect had developed at the expense of the faculty of judging of actions. The Italians of the Renaissance, little by little, could judge only of the adaptation of means to given ends; whether means or ends were legitimate or illegitimate they soon became unable to perceive and even unable to ask. Success was the criterion of all action, and power was its limit. Active and furious national wickedness there was not: there was mere moral inertia on the part of the people. The Italians of the Renaissance neither resisted evil nor rebelled against virtue; they were indifferent to both, and a little pressure sufficed to determine them to either. In the governed classes, where the law was equal between men, and industry and commerce kept up healthy activity, the pressure was towards good. The artisans and merchants lived decent lives, endowed hospitals, listened to edifying sermons, and were even moved (for a few moments) by men like San Bernardino or Savonarola. In the governing classes, where all right lay in force, where the necessity of self-defence induced treachery and violence, and irresponsibility produced excess, the pressure was towards evil. The princelets and prelates and mercenary generals indulged in every sensuality, turned treachery into a science and violence into an instrument; and sometimes let themselves be intoxicated into mad lust and ferocity, as their subjects were occasionally intoxicated with mad austerity and mysticism; but the excesses of mad vice, like the excesses of mad virtue, lasted only a short time, or lasted only in individual saints or blood-maniacs; and the men of the Renaissance speedily regained their level of indifferent righteousness and of indifferent sinfulness. Righteousness and sinfulness both passive, without power of aggression or resistance, and consequently in strange and dreadful peace with each other. The wicked men did not dislike virtue, nor the good men vice: the villain could admire a saint, and the saint could condone a villain. The prudery of righteousness was as unknown as the cynicism of evil; the good man, like Guarino da Verona, would not shrink from the foul man; the foul man, like Beccadelli, would not despise the pure man. The ideally righteous citizen of Agnolo Pandolfini does not interfere with the ideally unrighteous prince of Machiavelli: each has his own position and conduct; and who can say whether, if the positions were exchanged, the conduct might not be exchanged also? In such a condition of things as this, evil ceases to appear monstrous; it is explained, endured, condoned. The stately philosophical historians, so stoically grand, and the prattling local chroniclers, so highly coloured and so gentle and graceful; Guicciardini and Machiavelli and Valori and Segni, on the one hand—Corio, Alleghetti, Matarazzo, Infessura, on the other; all these, from whom we learn the real existence of immorality far more universal and abominable than our dramatists venture to show, relate quietly, calmly, with analytical frigidness or gossiping levity, the things which we often shrink from repeating, and sometimes recoil from believing. Great statesmanlike historians and humble chattering chroniclers are alike unaffected by what goes on around them: they collect anecdotes and generalize events without the fumes of evil, among which they seek for materials in the dark places of national or local history, ever going to their imagination, ever making their heart sicken and faint, and their fancy stagger and reel. The life of these righteous, or at least, not actively sinning men, may be hampered, worried, embittered, or even broken by the villainy of their fellow-men; but, except in some visionary monk, life can never be poisoned by the mere knowledge of evil. Their town maybe betrayed to the enemy, their daughters may be dishonoured or poisoned, their sons massacred; they may, in their old age, be cast starving on the world, or imprisoned or broken by torture; and they will complain and be fierce in diatribe: the fiercest diatribe written against any Pope of the Renaissance being, perhaps, that of Platina against Paul II., who was a saint compared with his successors Sixtus and Alexander, because the writer of the diatribe and his friends were maltreated by this pope. When personally touched, the Italians of the Renaissance will brook no villainy—the poniard quickly despatches sovereigns like Galeazzo Maria Sforza; but when the villainy remains abstract, injures neither themselves nor their immediate surroundings, it awakens no horror, and the man who commits it is by no means regarded as a fiend. The great criminals of the Renaissance— traitors and murderers like Lodovico Sforza, incestuous parricides like Gianpaolo Baglioni, committers of every iniquity under heaven like Cæsar Borgia— move through the scene of Renaissance history, as shown by its writers great and small, quietly, serenely, triumphantly; with gracious and magnanimous bearing; applauded, admired, or at least endured. On their passage no man, historian or chronicler, unless the agent of a hostile political faction, rises up, confronts them and says, "This man is a devil." And devils these men were not: the judgment of their contemporaries, morally completely perverted, was probably psychologically correct; they misjudged the deeds, but rarely, perhaps, misjudged the man. To us moderns, as to our English ancestors of the sixteenth century, this is scarcely conceivable. A man who does devilish deeds is necessarily a devil; and the evil Italian princes of the Renaissance, the Borgias, Sforzas, Baglionis, Malatestas, and Riarios appear, through the mist of horrified imagination, so many uncouth and gigantic monsters, nightmare shapes, less like human beings than like the grand and frightful angels of evil who gather round Milton's Satan in the infernal council. Such they appear to us. But if we once succeed in calmly looking at them, seeing them not in the lurid lights and shadows of our fancy, but in the daylight of contemporary reality, we shall little by little be forced to confess (and the confession is horrible) that most of these men are neither abnormal nor gigantic. Their times were monstrous, not they. They were not, that is clear, at variance with the moral atmosphere which surrounded them; and they were the direct result of the social and political condition.

This may seem no answer; for although we know the causes of monster births, they are monstrous none the less. What we mean is not that the existence of men capable of committing such actions was normal; we mean that the men who committed them, the conditions being what they were, were not necessarily men of exceptional character. The level of immorality was so high that a man need be no giant to reach up into the very seventh heaven of iniquity. When to massacre at a banquet a number of enemies enticed by overtures of peace was considered in Cæsar Borgia merely a rather audacious and not very holy action, indicative of very brilliant powers of diplomacy, then Cæsar Borgia required, to commit such an action, little more than a brilliant diplomatic endowment, unhampered by scruples and timidity; when a brave, and gracious prince like Gianpaolo Baglioni could murder his kinsmen and commit incest with his sister without being considered less gracious and magnanimous, then Gianpaolo Baglioni might indeed be but an Indifferent villain; when treachery, lust, and bloodshed, although objected to in theory, were condoned in practice, and were regarded as venial sins, those who indulged in them might be in fact scarcely more than venial sinners. In short, where a fiendish action might be committed without the perpetrator being considered a fiend, there was no need of his being one. And, indeed, the great villains of the Renaissance never take up the attitude of fiends; one or two, like certain Visconti or Aragonese, were madmen, but the others were more or less normal human beings. There was no barrier between them and evil; they slipped into it, remained in it, became accustomed to it; but a vicious determination to be wicked, a feeling of the fiend within one, like that of Shakespeare's Richard, or a gradual, conscious irresistible absorption into recognized iniquity like Macbeth's, there was not. The mere sense of absolute power and impunity, together with the complete silence of the conscience of the public at large, can make a man do strange things. If Cæsar Borgia be free to practise his archery upon hares and deer, why should he not practise it upon these prisoners? Who will blame him? Who can prevent him? If he had for his mistress every woman he might single out from among his captives, why not his sister? If he have the force to carry out a plan, why should a man stand in his way? The complete facility in the commission of all actions quickly brings such a man to the limits of the legitimate: there is no universal cry to tell him where those limits are, no universal arm to pull him back. He pooh-poohs, pushes them a little further, and does the iniquity. Nothing prevents his gratifying his ambition, his avarice, and his lust, so he gratifies them. Soon, seeking for further gratification, he has to cut new paths in villainy: he has not been restrained by man, who is silent; he is soon restrained no longer by nature, whose only voice is in man's conscience. Pleasure in wanton cruelty takes the same course: he prefers to throw javelins at men and women to throwing javelins at bulls or bears, even as he prefers throwing javelins at bulls or bears rather than at targets; the excitement is greater; the instinct is that of the soldiers of Spain and of France, who invariably preferred shooting at a valuable fresco like Sodoma's Christ, at Siena, or Lo Spagna's Madonna, at Spoleto, to practising against a mere worthless piece of wood. Such a man as Cæsar Borgia is the nec plus ultra of a Renaissance villain; he takes, as all do not, absolute pleasure in evil as such. Yet Cæsar Borgia is not a fiend nor a maniac. He can restrain himself whenever circumstances or policy require it; he can be a wise administrator, a just judge. His portraits show no degraded criminal; he is, indeed, a criminal in action, but not necessarily a criminal in constitution, this fiendish man who did not seem a fiend to Machiavel. We are astonished at the strange anomaly in the tastes and deeds of these Renaissance villains; we are amazed before their portraits. These men, who, in the frightful light of their own misdeeds, appear to us as complete demons or complete madmen, have yet much that is amiable and much that is sane; they stickle at no abominable lust, yet they are no bestial sybarites; they are brave, sober, frugal, enduring like any puritan; they are treacherous, rapacious, cruel, utterly indifferent to the sufferings of their enemies, yet they are gentle in manner, passionately fond of letters and art, superb in their works of public utility, and not incapable of genuinely admiring men of pure life like Bernardino or Savonarola: they are often, strange to say, like the frightful Baglioni of Perugia, passionately admired and loved by their countrymen. The bodily portraits of these men, painted by the sternly realistic art of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, are even more confusing to our ideas than their moral portraits drawn by historians and chroniclers. Cæsar Borgia, with his long fine features and noble head, is a gracious and refined prince; there is, perhaps, a certain duplicity in the well-cut lips; the beard, worn full and peaked in Spanish fashion, forms a sort of mask to the lower part of the face, but what we see is noble and intellectual. Sigismondo Malatesta has on his medals a head whose scowl has afforded opportunity for various fine descriptions of a blood maniac; but the head, thus found so expressive, of this monster, is infinitely more human than the head on the medals of Lionello d'Este, one of the most mild and cultivated of the decently behaved Ferrarese princes. The very flower of precocious iniquity, the young Baglioni, Vitellis, and Orsinis, grouped round Signorelli's preaching Antichrist at Orvieto, are, in their gallantly trimmed jenkins and jewelled caps, the veriest assemblage of harmless young dandies, pretty and insipid; we can scarcely believe that these mild beardless striplings, tight-waisted and well-curled like girls of sixteen, are the terrible Umbrian brigand condottieri—Gianpaolos, Simonettos, Vitellozzos, and Astorres—whose abominable deeds fill the pages of the chronicles of Matarazzo, of Froliere, of Monaldeschi. Nowhere among the portraits of Renaissance monsters do we meet with anything like those Roman emperors, whose frightful effigies, tumid, toad-like Vitelliuses or rage-convulsed Caracallas, fill all our museums in marble or bronze or loathsome purple porphyry; such types as these are as foreign to the reality of the Italian Renaissance as are the Brachianos and Lussoriosos, the Pieros and Corombonas, to the Italian fiction of the sixteenth century.

Nor must such anomalies between the type of the men and their deeds, between their abominable crimes and their high qualities, be merely made a subject for grandiloquent disquisition. The man of the Renaissance, as we have said, had no need to be a monster to do

monstrous things; a crime did not necessitate such a moral rebellion as requires complete unity of nature, unmixed wickedness; it did not precipitate a man for ever into a moral abyss where no good could ever enter. Seeing no barrier between the legitimate and the illegitimate, he could alternate almost unconsciously between them. He was never shut out from evil, and never shut out from good; the judgment of men did not dress him in a convict's jacket which made evil his only companion; it did not lock him up in a moral dungeon where no ray of righteousness could enter; he was not condemned, like the branded harlot, to hopeless infamy. He need be bad only as much and as long as he chose. Hence, on the part of the evil-doer of the Renaissance, no necessity either for violent rebellion or for sincere repentance; hence the absence of all characters such as the tragic writer seeks, developed by moral struggle, warped by the triumph of vice, or consciously soiled in virtue. What a "Revenger's Tragedy" might not Cyril Tourneur have made, had he known all the details, of the story of Alessandro de' Medici's death! What a Vindici he would have made of the murderer Lorenzino; with what a strange lurid grandeur he would have surrounded the plottings of the pander Brutus. But Lorenzino de' Medici had none of the feeling of Tourneur's Vindici; there was in him none of the ghastly spirit of self-immolation of the hero of Tourneur in his attendance upon the foul creature whom he leads to his death. Lorenzino had the usual Brutus mania of his day, but unmixed with horror. To be the pander and jester of the Duke was no pain to his nature; there was probably no sense of debasement in the knowledge either of his employer or of his employment. To fasten on Alexander, to pretend to be his devoted slave and server of his lust, this piece of loathsome acting, merely enhanced, by the ingenuity it required, the attraction of what to Lorenzino was an act of heroism. His ambition was to be a Brutus; that he had bespattered the part probably never occurred to him. The indifference to good and evil permitted the men of the Renaissance to mix the two without any moral sickness, as it permitted them to alternate them without a moral struggle. Such is the wickedness of the Renaissance: not a superhuman fury of lust and cruelty, like Victor Hugo's Lucrezia Borgia; but an indifferent, a characterless creature like the Lucrezia Borgia of history: passive to surrounding influences, blind to good and evil, infamous in the infamous Rome, among her father and brother's courtesans and cut-throats; grave and gracious! in the grave and gracious Ferrara, among the Platonic poets and pacific courtiers of the court of the Estensi. Thus, in the complete prose and colourlessness of reality, has the evil of the Renaissance been understood and represented only by one man, and transmitted to us in one pale and delicate psychological masterpiece far more loathsome than any elaborately hideous monster painting by Marston or Tourneur. The man who thus conceived the horrors of the Italian Renaissance in the spirit in which they were committed is Ford. In his great play he has caught the very tone of the Italian Renaissance: the abominableness of the play consisting not in the coarse slaughter scenes added merely to please the cockpit of an English theatre, but in the superficial innocence of tone; in its making evil lose its appearance of evil, even as it did to the men of the Renaissance. Giovanni and Annabella make love as if they were Romeo and Juliet: there is scarcely any struggle, and no remorse; they weep and pay compliments and sigh and melt in true Aminta style. There is in the love of the brother and sister neither the ferocious heat of tragic lust, nor the awful shudder of unnatural evil; they are lukewarm, neither good nor bad. Their abominable love is in their own eyes a mere weakness of the flesh; there is no sense of revolt against man and nature and God; they are neither dragged on by irresistible demoniac force nor held back by the grip of conscience; they slip and slide, even like Francesca and Paolo. They pay each other sweet and mawkish compliments. The ferocious lust of Francesco Cenci is moral compared with the way in which the "trim youth" Giovanni praises Annabella's beauty; the blushing, bride-like way in which Annabella, "white in her soul," acknowledges her long love. The atrociousness of all this is, that if you strike out a word or two the scene may be read with perfect moral satisfaction, with the impression that this is really "sacred love." For in these scenes Ford wrote with a sweetness and innocence truly diabolical, not a shiver of horror passing through him—serene, unconscious; handling the filthy without sense of its being unclean, to the extent, the incredible extent, of making Giovanni and Annabella swear on their mother's ashes eternal fidelity in incest: horror of horrors, to which no Walpurgis Night abomination could ever approach, this taking as witness of the un-utterable, not an obscene Beelzebub with abominable words and rites, but the very holiest of holies. If ever Englishman approached the temper of the Italian Renaissance, it was not Tourneur, nor Shelley with his cleansing hell fires of tragic horror, but this sweet and gentle Ford. If ever an artistic picture approached the reality of such a man as Gianpaolo Baglioni, the incestuous murderer whom the Froliere chronicler, enthusiastic like Matarazzo, admires, for "his most beautiful person, his benign and amiable manner and lordly bearing," it is certainly not the elaborately villainous Francesco Cenci of Shelley, boasting like another Satan of his enormous wickedness, exhausting in his picture of himself the rhetoric of horror, committing his final enormity merely to complete the crown of atrocities in which he glories; it is no such tragic impossibility of moral hideousness as this; it is the Giovanni of Ford, the pearl of virtuous and studious youths, the spotless, the brave, who, after a moment's reasoning, tramples on a vulgar prejudice— "Shall a peevish sound, a customary form from man to man, of brother and of sister, be a bar 'twixt my eternal happiness and me?" who sins with a clear conscience, defies the world, and dies, bravely, proudly, the "sacred name" of Annabella on his lips, like a chivalrous hero. The pious, pure Germany of Luther will give the world the tragic type of the science- damned Faustus; the devout and savage Spain of Cervantes will give the tragic type of Don Juan, damned for mockery of man and of death and of heaven; the Puritan England of Milton will give the most sublimely tragic type of all, the awful figure of him who says, "Evil, be thou my good." What tragic type can this evil Italy of Renaissance give to the world? None: or at most this miserable, morbid, compassionated Giovanni: whom Ford would have us admire, and whom we can only despise.

The blindness to evil which constitutes the criminality of the Renaissance is so great as to give a certain air of innocence. For the men of that time were wicked solely from a complete sophistication of ideas, a complete melting away (owing to slowly operating political and intellectual tendencies) of all moral barriers. They walked through the paths of wickedness with the serenity with which they would have trod the ways of righteousness; seeing no boundary, exercising their psychic limbs equally in the open and permitted spaces and in the forbidden. They plucked the fruit of evil without a glance behind them, without a desperate setting of their teeth; plucked it openly, calmly, as they would have plucked the blackberries in the hedge; bit into it, ate it, with perfect ease and serenity, saying their prayers before and after, as if it were their natural daily bread mentioned in the Lord's Prayer; no grimace or unseemly leer the while; no moral indigestion or nightmare (except very rarely) in consequence. Hence the serenity of their literature and art. These men and women of the Italian Renaissance have, in their portraits, a very pleasing nobility of aspect: serene, thoughtful, healthy, benign. Titian's courtesans are our archetypes of dignified womanhood; we might fancy Portia or Isabella with such calm, florid beauty, so wholly unmeretricious and uncantered. The humanists and priests who lie outstretched on the acanthus-leaved and flower-garlanded sarcophagi by Desiderio and Rossellino are the very flowers of refined and gentle men of study; the youths in Botticelli's "Adoration of The Magi," for instance, are the ideal of Boiardo's chivalry, Rinaldos and Orlando every one; the corseleted generals of the Renaissance, so calm and stern and frank, the Bartolomeo Colleoni of Verrocchio, the Gattamelata by Giorgione (or Giorgione's pupil), look fit to take up the banner of the crusade: that Gattamelata in the Uffizi gallery especially looks like a sort of military Milton: give him a pair of wings and he becomes at once Signorelli's archangel, clothed in heavenly steel and un-sheathing the flaming sword of God. Compare with these types Holbein's courtiers of Henry VIII.; what scrofulous hogs! Compare Sanchez Coello's Philip II. and Don Carlos; what monomaniacs. Compare even Dürer's magnificent head of Willibald Pirckheimer: how the swine nature is blended with the thinker. And the swine will be subdued, the thinker will triumph. Why? Just because there is a contest—because the thinker-Willibald is conscious of the swine-Willibald. In this coarse, brutal, deeply stained Germany of the time of Luther, affording Dürer and Holbein, alas! how many besotten and bestial types, there will arise a great conflict: the obscene leering Death—Death-in-Life as he really is—will skulk everywhere, even as in the prints of the day, hideous and powerful, trying, with hog's snout, to drive Christ Himself out of limbo; but he is known, seen, dreaded. The armed knight of Dürer turns away from his grimacings, and urges on his steel-covered horse. He visits even the best, even Luther in the Wartburg; but the good men open their Bibles, cry "Vade retro!" and throw their inkstands at him, showing themselves terrified and ruffled after the combat. And these Germans of Luther's are disgustingly fond of blood and horrors: they like to see the blood spirt from the decapitated trunk, to watch its last contortions; they hammer with a will (in Dürer's "Passion") the nails of the cross, they peel off strips of skin in the flagellation. But then they can master all that; they can be pure, charitable; they have gentleness for the hare and the rabbit, like Luther; they kneel piously before the cross-bearing stag, like Saint Hubert. Not so the Italians. They rarely or never paint horrors, or death, or abominations. Their flagellated Christ, their arrow-riddled Sebastian, never writhe or howl with pain; indeed, they suffer none. Judith, in Mantegna's print, puts the head of Holophernes into her bag with the serenity of a muse; and the head is quite clean, without loathsome drippings or torn depending strings of muscle; unconvulsed, a sort of plaster cast. The tragedy of Christ, the tragedy of Judith; the physical agency shadowing the moral agony; the awfulness of victim and criminal—the whole tragic meaning was unknown to the light and cheerful contemporaries of Ariosto, the cold and cynical contemporaries of Machiavelli.

The tragic passion and imagination which, in the noble and grotesque immaturity of the Middle Ages, had murmured confusedly in the popular legends which gave to Ezzelin the Fiend as a father, and Death and Sin as adversaries at dice; which had stammered awkwardly but grandly in the school Latin of Mussato's tragedy of "Eccerinis;" which had wept and stormed and imprecated and laughed for horror in the infinite tragedy—pathetic, grand, and grotesque, like all great tragedy—of Dante; this tragic passion and imagination, this sense of the horrible and the terrible, had been forfeited by the Italy of the Renaissance, lost with its sense of right and wrong. The Italian Renaissance, supreme in the arts which require a subtle and strong perception of the excellence of mere lines and colours and lights and shadows, which demand unflinching judgment of material qualities; was condemned to inferiority in the art which requires subtle and strong perception of the excellence of human emotion and action; in the art which demands unflinching judgment of moral motives. The tragic spirit is the offspring of the conscience of a people. The sense of the imaginative grandeur of evil may perhaps be a forerunner of demoralization; but such a sense of wonder and awe, such an imaginative fascination of the grandly, superhumanly wicked such a necessity to magnify a villain into a demon with archangelic splendour of power of evil, can exist only in minds pure and strong, braced up to virtue, virgin of evil, with a certain childlike power of wonder; minds to whom it appears that to be wicked requires a powerful rebellion; minds accustomed to nature and nature's plainness, to whom the unnatural can be no subject of sophistication and cynicism, but only of wonder. While, in Italy, Giraldi Cinthio prattles off to a gay party of ladies and gentlemen stories of murder and lust as frightful as those of "Titus' Andronicus," of "Giovanni and Annabella," and of the "Revenger's Tragedy," in the intelligent, bantering tone in which he tells his Decameronian tales; in England, Marston, in his superb prologue to the second part of "Antonio and Mellida," doubts whether all his audience can rise to the conception of the terrible passions he wishes to display:

If any spirit breathes within this round
 Uncapable of weighty passion,

Who winks and shuts his apprehension up
From common sense of what men were and are,
Who would not know what men must be: let such
Hurry amain from our black visaged shows;
We shall affright their eyes.

The great criminals of Italy were unconscious of being criminals; the nation was unconscious of being sinful. Bembo's sonnets were the fit reading for Lucrezia Borgia; pastorals by Guarini the dramatic amusements of Rannuccio Farnesi; if Vittoria Accoramboni and Francesco Cenci read anything besides their prayer- book or ribald novels, it was some sugary "Aminta" or "Pastor Fido:" their own tragedies by Webster and Shelley they could never have understood.

And thus the Italians of the Renaissance walked placidly through the evil which surrounded them; for them, artists and poets, the sky was always blue and the sun always bright, and their art and their poetry were serene. But the Englishmen of the sixteenth century were astonished and fascinated by the evil of Italy: the dark pools of horror, the dabs of infamy which had met them ever and anon in the brilliant southern cities, haunted them like nightmare, bespattered for them the clear blue sky, and danced, black and horrible spots, before the face of the sun. The remembrance of Italian wickedness weighed on them like an incubus, clung to them with a frightful fascination. While the foulest criminals of Italy discussed the platonic vapidnesses of Bembo's sonnets, and wept at the sweet and languid lamentations of Guarini's shepherds and nymphs; the strong Englishmen of the time of Shakespeare, the men whose children were to unsheathe under Cromwell the sword of righteousness, listened awe-stricken and fascinated with horror to the gloomy and convulsed, the grand and frightful plays of Webster and of Tourneur. And the sin of the Renaissance, which the art of Italy could neither pourtray nor perceive; appeared on the stage decked in superb and awful garb by the tragic imagination of Elizabethan England.

THE OUTDOOR POETRY.

The thought of winter is bleak and barren to our mind; the late year is chary of æsthetic as of all other food. In the country it does not bring ugliness; but it terribly reduces and simplifies things, depriving them of two-thirds of their beauty. In sweeping away the last yellow leaves, the last crimson clouds, and in bleaching the last green grass, it effaces a whole wealth of colour. It deprives us still more by actually diminishing the number of forms: for what summer had left rich, various, complex, winter reduces to blank uniformity. There is a whole world of lovely things, shapes and tints, effects of light, colour, and perspective in a wood, as long as it is capriciously divided into a thousand nooks and crannies by projecting boughs, bushes, hedges, and hanging leaves; and this winter clears away and reduces to a Haussmanized simplicity of plan. There is a smaller world, yet one quite big enough for a summer's day, in any hay field, among the barren oats, the moon-daisies, the seeded grasses, the sorrel, the buttercups, all making at a distance a wonderful blent effect of luminous brown and lilac and russet foamed with white; and forming, when you look close into it, an unlimited forest of delicately separate stems and bloom and seed; every plant detaching itself daintily from an undefinable background of things like itself. This winter turns into a rusty brown and green expanse, or into a bog, or a field of frozen upturned clods. The very trees, stripped of their leaves, look as if prepared for diagrams of the abstraction tree. Everything, in short, is reduced most philosophically to its absolutely ultimate elements; and beauty is got rid of almost as completely as by a metaphysical definition. This æsthetic barrenness of winter is most of all felt in southern climates, to which it brings none of the harsh glitter and glamour of snow and ice; but leaves the frozen earth and leafless trees merely bare, without the crisp sheen of snow, the glint and glimmer of frost and icicles, forming for the denuded rigging of branches a fantastic system of ropes and folded sails. In the South, therefore, unless you go where winter never comes, and autumn merely merges into a lengthened spring, winter is more than ever negative, dreary, barren to our fancy. Yet even this southern winter gives one things, very lovely things: things which one scarcely notices perhaps, yet which would baffle the most skilled painter to imitate, the most skilled poet to describe. Thus, for instance, there is a peculiar kind of morning by no means uncommon in Tuscany in what is completely winter, not a remnant of autumn or a beginning of spring. It is cold, but windless; the sky full of sun, the earth full of mist. Sun and mist uniting into a pale luminousness in which all things lose body, become mere outline; bodiless hills taking shape where they touch the sky with their curve; clear line of irregular houses, of projecting ilex roundings and pointed cypresses marking the separation between hill and sky, the one scarcely more solid, corporeal than the other; the hill almost as blue as the sky, the sky almost as vaporous as the hill; the tangible often more ghostlike than the intangible. But the sun has smitten the higher hills, and the vapours have partially rolled down, in a scarcely visible fold, to their feet; and the high hill, not yet rock or earth, swells up into the sky as something real, but fluid and of infinite elasticity. All in front the plain is white with mist; or pinkish grey with the unseen agglomeration of bare tree boughs and trunks, of sere field; till, nearer us, the trees become more visible, the short vinebearing elms in the fields, interlacing their branches compressed by distance, the clumps of poplars, so scant and far between from nearly, so serried and compact from afar; and between them an occasional flush, a tawny vapour of the orange twigged osiers; and then, still nearer, the expanse of sere field, of mottled, crushed-together, yellowed grass and grey brown leaves; things of the summer

which winter is burying to make room for spring. Along the reaches of the river the clumps of leafless poplars are grey against the pale, palest blue sky; grey but with a warmth of delicate brown, almost of rosinness. Grey also the shingle in the river bed; the river itself either (if after rain) pale brown, streaked with pale blue sky reflections; or (after a drought), low, grey, luminous throughout its surface, you might think, were it not that the metallic sheen, the vacillating sparkles of where the sun, smiting down, frets it into a shifting mass of scintillating facets, gives you the impression that this other luminousness of silvery water must be dull and dead. And, looking up the river, it gradually disappears, its place marked only, against the all-pervading pale blue haze, by the brownish grey spectre of the furthest poplar clumps. This, I have said, is an effect which winter produces, nay, even a southern winter, with those comparatively few and slight elements at its disposal. We see it, notice it, and enjoy its delicate loveliness; but while so doing we do not think, or we forget, that the habit of noticing, nay, the power of perceiving such effects as this, is one of those habits and powers which we possess, so to speak, only since yesterday. The possibility of reproducing in painting effects like this one; or, more truthfully, the wish to reproduce them, is scarcely as old as our own century; it is, perhaps, the latest born of all our artistic wishes and possibilities. But the possibility of any visible effect being perceived and reproduced by the painter, usually precedes—at least where any kind of pictorial art already exists—the perception of such effects by those who are not painters, and the attempt to reproduce them by means of words. We do not care to admit that our grandfathers were too unlike ourselves, lest ourselves should be found too unlike our grand-children. We hold to the metaphysic fiction of man having always been the same, and only his circumstances having changed; not admitting that the very change of circumstances implies something new in the man who altered them; and similarly we shrink from the thought of the many things which we used never to notice, and which it has required a class of men endowed with special powers of vision to find out, copy, and teach us to see and appreciate. Yet there is scarcely one of us who has not a debt towards some painter or writer for first directing his attention to objects or effects which may have abounded around him, but unnoticed or confused with others. The painters, as I have said, the men who see more keenly and who study what they have seen, naturally come first; nor does the poet usually describe what his contemporary painter attempts not to paint. An exception might, perhaps, require to be made for Dante, who would seem to have seen and described many things left quite untouched by Giotto, and even by Raphael; but in estimating Dante we must be careful to distinguish the few touches which really belong to him, from the great mass of colour and detail which we have unconsciously added thereto, borrowing from our own experience and from innumerable pictures and poems which, at the moment, we may not in the least remember; and having done so, we shall be led to believe that those words which suggest to us so clear and coloured a vision of scenes often complex and uncommon, presented to his own mind only a comparatively simple and incomplete idea: the atmospheric effects, requiring a more modern painter than Turner, which we read between the lines of the "Inferno" and the "Purgatorio," most probably existed as little for Dante as they did for Giotto; the poet seeing and describing in reality only salient forms of earth and rock, monotonous in tint and deficient in air, like those in the backgrounds of mediæval Tuscan frescoes and panels. Be this as it may, the fact grows daily on me that men have not at all times seen in the same degree the nature which has always equally surrounded them; and that during some periods they have, for explicable reasons, seen less not only than their successors, but also than their predecessors; and seen that little in a manner conventional in proportion to its monotony. There are things about which certain historic epochs are strangely silent; so much so, indeed, that the breaking of the silence impresses us almost as the more than human breaking of a spell; and that silence is the result of a grievous wrong, of a moral disease which half closes the eyes of the fancy, or of a moral poison which presents to those sorely aching eyes only a glimmer amid darkness. And it is as the most singular instance of such conditions that I should wish to study, in themselves, their causes and effects, the great differences existing between the ancients and ourselves on the one hand, and the men of the genuine Middle Ages on the other, in the degree of interest taken respectively by each in external nature, the seasons and that rural life which seems to bring us into closest contact with them both.

There is, of course, a considerable difference between the manner in which the country, its aspects and occupations, are treated by the poets of Antiquity and by those of our own day; in the mode of enjoying them of an ancient who had read Theocritus and Virgil and Tibullus, and a modern whose mind is unconsciously full of the influence of Wordsworth or Shelley or Ruskin. But it is a mere difference of mode; and is not greater, I think, than the difference between the descriptions in the "Allegro," and the descriptions in "Men and Women;" than the difference between the love of our Elizabethans for the minuter details of the country, the flowers by the stream, the birds in the bushes, the ferrets, frogs, lizards, and similar small creatures; and the pleasure of our own contemporaries in the larger, more shifting, and perplexing forms and colours of cloud, sunlight, earth, and rock. The description of effects such as these latter ones, nay, the attention and appreciation given to them, are things of our own century, even as is the power and desire of painting them. Landscape, in the sense of our artists of to-day, is a very recent thing; so recent that even in the works of Turner, who was perhaps the earliest landscape painter in the modern sense, we are forced to separate from the real rendering of real effects, a great deal in which the tints of sky and sea are arranged and distributed as a mere vast conventional piece of decoration. Nor could it be otherwise. For, in poetry as in painting, landscape could become a separate and substantive art only when the interest in the mere ins and outs of human adventure, in the mere structure and movement of human limbs, had considerably diminished. There is room, in epic or drama, only for such little scraps of description as will make clearer, without checking, the human action; as there is place, in a

fresco of a miracle, or a little picture of carousing and singing bacchantes and Venetian dandies, only for such little bits of laurel grove, or dim plain, or blue alpine crags, as can be introduced in the gaps between head and head, or figure and figure. Thus, therefore, a great difference must exist between what would be felt and written about the country and the seasons by an ancient, by a man of the sixteenth century, or by a contemporary of our own: a difference, however, solely of mode; for we feel sure that of the three men each would find something to delight himself and wherewith to delight others among the elm-bounded English meadows, the fiat cornfields of central France, the vine and olive yards of Italy—wherever, in short, he might find himself face to face and, so to speak, hand in hand with Nature. But about the man of the Middle Ages (unless, perhaps, in Italy, where the whole Middle Ages were merely an earlier Renaissance) we could have no such assurance; nay, we might be persuaded that, however great his genius, be he even a Gottfried von Strassburg, or a Walther von der Vogelweide, or the unknown Frenchman who has left us "Aucassin et Nicolette," he would bring back impressions only of two things, authorized and consecrated by the poetic routine of his contemporaries—of spring and of the woods.

There is nothing more characteristic of mediæval poetry than this limitation. Of autumn, of winter; of the standing corn, the ripening fruit of summer; of all these things so dear to the ancients and to all men of modern times, the Middle Ages seem to know nothing. The autumn harvests, the mists and wondrous autumnal transfiguration of the humblest tree, or bracken, or bush; the white and glittering splendour of winter, and its cosy life by hearth or stove; the drowsiness of summer, its suddenly inspired wish for shade and dew and water, all this left them stolid. To move them was required the feeling of spring, the strongest, most complete and stirring impression which, in our temperate climates, can be given by Nature. The whole pleasurable-ness of warm air, clear moist sky, the surprise of the shimmer of pale green, of the yellowing blossom on tree tops, the first flicker of faint shadow where all has been uniform, colourless, shadeless; the replacing of the long silence by the endless twitter and trill of birds, endless in its way as is the sea, twitter and trill on every side, depths and depths of it, of every degree of distance and faintness, a sea of bird song; and along with this the sense of infinite renovation to all the earth and to man's own heart. Of all Nature's effects this one alone goes sparkling to the head; and it alone finds a response in mediæval poetry. Spring, spring, endless spring—for three long centuries throughout the world a dreary green monotony of spring all over France, Provence, Italy, Spain, Germany, England; spring, spring, nothing but spring even in the mysterious countries governed by the Grail King, by the Fairy Morgana, by Queen Proserpine, by Prester John; nay, in the new Jerusalem, in the kingdom of Heaven itself, nothing but spring; till one longs for a bare twig, for a yellow leaf, for a frozen gutter, as for a draught of water in the desert. The green fields and meadows enamelled with painted flowers, how one detests them! how one would rejoice to see them well sprinkled with frost or burnt up to brown in the dry days! the birds, the birds which warble through every sonnet, canzone, sirventes, glosa, dance lay, roundelay, virelay, rondel, ballade, and whatsoever else it may be called,—how one wishes them silent for ever, or their twitter, the tarantarantandei of the eternal German nightingale especially, drowned by a good howling wind. After any persistent study of mediæval poetry, one's feeling towards spring is just similar to that of the morbid creature in Schubert's "Müllerin," who would not stir from home for the dreadful, dreadful greenness, which he would fain bleach with tears, all around:

Ich möchte ziehn in die Welt hinaus, hinaus in die weite Welt,

Wenn's nur so grün, so grün nicht wär da draussen in Wald und Feld.

Moreover this mediæval spring is the spring neither of the shepherd, nor of the farmer, nor of any man to whom spring brings work and anxiety and hope of gain; it is a mere vague spring of gentle-folk, or at all events of well-to-do burgesses, taking their pleasure on the lawns of castle parks, or the green holiday places close to the city, much as we see them in the first part of "Faust;" a sweet but monotonous charm of grass, beneath green lime tree, or in the South the elm or plane; under which are seated the poet and the fiddler, playing and singing for the young women, their hair woven with chaplets of fresh flowers, dancing upon the sward. And poet after poet, Provençal, Italian, and German, Nithart and Ulrich, and even the austere singer of the Holy Grail, Wolfram, pouring out verse after verse of the songs in praise of spring, which they make even as girls wind their garlands: songs of quaint and graceful ever-changing rhythm, now slowly circling, now bounding along, now stamping out the measure like the feet of the dancers, now winding and turning as wind and twine their arms in the long-linked mazes; while the few and ever-repeated ideas, the old, stale platitudes of praise of woman, love pains, joys of dancing, pleasure of spring (spring, always spring, eternal, everlasting spring) seem languidly to follow the life and movement of the mere metre. Poets, these German, Provençal, French, and early Italian lyrists, essentially (if we venture to speak heresy) not of ideas or emotions, but of metre, of rhythm and rhyme; with just the minimum of necessary thought, perpetually presented afresh just as the words, often and often repeated and broken up and new combined, of a piece of music — poetry which is in truth a sort of music, dance or dirge or hymn music as the case may be, more than anything else.

As it is in mediæval poetry with the seasons, so it is likewise with the country and its occupations: as there is only spring, so there is only the forest. Of the forest, mediæval poetry has indeed much to say; more perhaps, and more familiar with its pleasures, than Antiquity. There is the memorable forest where the heroes of the Nibelungen go to hunt, followed by their

waggons of provisions and wine; where Siegfried overpowers the bear, and returns to his laughing comrades with the huge thing chained to his saddle; where, in that clear space which we see so distinctly, a lawn on to which the blue black firs are encroaching, Siegfried stoops to drink of the spring beneath the lime tree, and Hagen drives his boar-spear straight through the Nibelung's back. There is the thick wood, all a golden haze through the young green, and with an atmosphere of birds' song, where King Mark discovers Tristram and Iseult in the cave, the deceitful sword between them, as Gottfried von Strassburg relates with wonderful luscious charm. The forest, also, more bleak and austere, where the four outlawed sons of Aymon live upon roots and wild animals, where they build their castle by the Meuse. Further, and most lovely of all, the forest in which Nicolette makes herself a hut of branches, bracken, and flowers, through which the stars peep down on her whiteness as she dreams of her Lord Aucassin. The forest where Huon meets Oberon; and Guy de Lusignan, the good snake-lady; and Parzival finds on the snow the feathers and the drops of blood which throw him into his long day-dream; and Owen discovers the tomb of Merlin; the forest, in short, which extends its interminable glades and serried masses of trunks and arches of green from one end to the other of mediæval poetry. It is very beautiful, this forest of the Middle Ages; but it is monotonous, melancholy; and has a terrible eeriness in its endlessness. For there is nothing else. There are no meadows where the cows lie lazily, no fields where the red and purple kerchiefs of the reapers overtop the high corn; no orchards, no hayfields; nothing like those hill slopes where the wild herbs encroach upon the vines, and the goats of Corydon and Damoetas require to be kept from mischief; where, a little lower down, the Athenian shopkeeper of Aristophanes goes daily to look whether yesterday's hard figs may not have ripened, or the vine wreaths pruned last week grown too lushly. Nor anything of the sort of those Umbrian meadows, where Virgil himself will stop and watch the white bullocks splashing slowly into the shallow, sedgy Clitumnus; still less like those hamlets in the cornfields through which Propertius would stroll, following the jolting osier waggon, or the procession with garlands and lights to Pales or to the ochre-stained garden god. Nothing of all this: there are no cultivated spots in mediæval poetry; the city only, and the castle, and the endless, all-encompassing forest. And to this narrowness of mediæval notions of outdoor life, inherited together with mediæval subjects by the poets even of the sixteenth century, must be referred the curious difference existing between the romance poets of antiquity, like Homer in the *Odyssey*, and the romance poets—Boiardo, Ariosto, Tasso, Spenser, Camoens—of modern times, in the matter of —how shall I express it?—the ideal life, the fortunate realms, the "Kennaqwhere." In Homer, in all the ancients, the ideal country is merely a more delightful reality; and its inhabitants happier everyday men and women; in the poetry sprung from the Middle Ages it is always a fairy-land constructed by mechanics and architects. For, as we have seen, the Middle Ages could bequeath to the sixteenth century no ideal of peaceful outdoor enjoyment. Hence, in the poetry of the sixteenth century, still permeated by mediæval traditions, an appalling artificiality of delightfulness. Fallerina, Alcina, Armida, Acrasia, all imitated from the original Calypso, are not strong and splendid god-women, living among the fields and orchards, but dainty ladies hidden in elaborate gardens, all bedizened with fashionable architecture: regular palaces, pleasaunces, with uncomfortable edifices, artificial waterfalls, labyrinths, rare and monstrous plants, parrots, apes, giraffes; childish splendours of gardening and engineering and menageries, which we meet already in "Ogier the Dane" and "Huon of Bordeaux," and which later poets epitomized out of the endless descriptions of Colonna's "Hypnerotomachia Poliphili," the still more frightful inventories of the Amadis romances. They are, each of them, a kind of anticipated Marly, Versailles, Prince Elector's Friedrichsruhe or Nymphenburg, with clipped cypresses and yews, doubtless, and (O Pales and Pan!) flowerbeds filled with coloured plaster and spas, and cascades spirting out (thanks to fifty invisible pumps) under your feet and over your head. All the vineyards and cornfields have been swept away to make these solemn terraces and water-works; all the cottages which, with their little wooden shrine, their humble enclosure of sunflowers and rosemary and fruit trees, their buzzing hives and barking dogs, were loved and sung even by town rakes like Catullus and smart coffeehouse wits like Horace; all these have been swept away to be replaced by the carefully constructed (? wire) bowers, the aviaries, the porticoes, the frightful circular edifice (tondo è il ricco edificio), a masterpiece of Palladian stucco work, in which Armida and Rinaldo, Acrasia and her Knight, drearily disport themselves. What has become of Calypso's island? of the orchards of Alcinous? What would the noble knights and ladies of Ariosto and Spenser think of them? What would they say, these romantic, dainty creatures, were they to meet Nausicaa with the washed linen piled on her waggon? Alas! they would take her for a laundress. For it is the terrible aristocratic idleness of the Middle Ages, their dreary delicacy, which hampers Boiardo, Ariosto, Tasso, Spenser, even in the midst of their most unblushing plagiarisms from Antiquity: their heroes and heroines have been brought up, surrounded by equerries and duennas, elegant, useless things, or at best (the knights at least) good only for aristocratic warfare. Plough or prune! defile the knightly hands! wash or cook, ply the loom like Nausicaa, Calypso, or Penelope! The mere thought sends them very nearly into a faint. No: the ladies of mediæval romance must sit quiet, idle; at most they may sing to the lute; and if they work with their hands, it must be some dreary, strictly useless, piece of fancy work; they are hot-house plants, all these dainty folk. Had they no eyes, then, these poets of the Middle Ages, that they could see, among all the things of Nature, only those few which had been seen by their predecessors? At first one feels tempted to think so, till the recollection of many vivid touches in spring and forest descriptions persuades one that, enormous as was the sway of tradition among these men, they were not all of them, nor always, repeating mere conventional platitudes. This singular limitation in the mediæval perceptions of Nature—a limitation so important as almost to make it appear as if the Middle Ages had not perceived Nature at all—is most frequently attributed to the prevalence of asceticism, which, according to some critics, made all mediæval men into so many repetitions of Bernard of Clairvaux, of whom it is written

that, being asked his opinion of Lake Lemán, he answered with surprise that, during his journey from Geneva to the Rhone Valley, he had remarked no lake whatever, so absorbed had he been in spiritual meditations. But the predominance of asceticism has been grossly exaggerated. It was a state of moral tension which could not exist uninterruptedly, and could exist only in the classes for whom poetry was not written. The mischief done by asceticism was the warping of the moral nature of men, not of their æsthetic feelings; it had no influence upon the vast numbers, the men and women who relished the profane and obscene fleshliness and buffoonery of stage plays and fabliaux, and those who favoured the delicate and exquisite immoralities of Courtly poetry. Indeed, the presence of whole classes of writings, of which such things as Boccaccio's Tales, "The Wife of Bath," and Villon's "Ballades," on the one hand, and the songs of the troubadours, the poem of Gottfried, and the romance or rather novel of "Flamenca," are respectively but the most conspicuous examples, ought to prove only too clearly that the Middle Ages, for all their asceticism, were both as gross and as æsthetic in sensualism as antiquity had been before them. We must, therefore, seek elsewhere than in asceticism, necessarily limited, and excluding the poetry-reading public, for an explanation of this peculiarity of mediæval poetry. And we shall find it, I think, in that which during the Middle Ages could, because it was an all-regulating social condition, really create universal habits of thought and feeling, namely, feudalism. A moral condition like asceticism must leave unbiassed all such minds as are incapable of feeling it; but a social institution like feudalism walls in the life of every individual, and forces his intellectual movements into given paths; nor is there any escape, excepting in places where, as in Italy and in the free towns of the North, the feudal conditions are wholly or partially unknown. To feudalism, therefore, would I ascribe this, which appears at first so purely æsthetic, as opposed to social, a characteristic of the Middle Ages. Ever since Schiller, in his "Gods of Greece," spoke for the first time of undivined Nature [die entgötterte Natur], it has been the fashion among certain critics to fall foul of Christianity for having robbed the fields and woods of their gods, and reduced to mere manured clods the things which had been held sacred by antiquity. Desecrated in those long mediæval centuries Nature may truly have been, but not by the holy water of Christian priests. Desecrated because out of the fields and meadows was driven a divinity greater than Pales or Vertumnus or mighty Pan, the divinity called Man. For in the terrible times when civilization was at its lowest, the things of the world had been newly allotted; and by this new allotment, man—the man who thinks and loves and hopes and strives, man who fights and sings—was shut out from the fields and meadows, forbidden the labour, nay, almost the sight, of the earth; and to the tending of kine, and sowing of crops, to all those occupations which antiquity had associated with piety and righteousness, had deemed worthy of the gods themselves, was assigned, or rather condemned, a creature whom every advancing year untaught to think or love, or hope, or fight, or strive; but taught most utterly to suffer and to despair. For a man it is difficult to call him, this mediæval serf, this lump of earth detached from the field and wrought into a semblance of manhood, merely that the soil of which it is part should be delved and sown, and then manured with its carcass or its blood; nor as a man did the Middle Ages conceive it. The serf was not even allowed human progenitors: his foul breed had originated in an obscene miracle; his stupidity and ferocity were as those of the beasts; his cunning was demoniac; he was born under God's curse; no words could paint his wickedness, no persecutions could exceed his deserts; the whole world turned pale at his crime, for he it was, he and not any human creature, who had nailed Christ upon the cross. Like the hunger and sores of a fox or a wolf, his hunger and his sores are forgotten, never noticed. Were it not that legal and ecclesiastical narratives of trials (not of feudal lords for crushing and contaminating their peasants, but of peasants for spitting out and trampling on the consecrated wafer) give us a large amount of pedantically stated detail; tell us how misery begat vice, and filth and starvation united families in complicated meshes of incest, taught them depopulation as a virtue and a necessity; and how the despair of any joy in nature, of any mercy from God, hounded men and women into the unspeakable orgies, the obscene parodies, of devil worship; were it not for these horrible shreds of judicial evidence (as of tatters of clothes or blood-clotted hairs on the shoes of a murderer) we should know little or nothing of the life of the men and women who, in mediæval France and Germany, did the work which had been taught by Hesiod and Virgil. About all these tragedies the literature of the Middle Ages, ready to show us town vice and town horror, dens of prostitution and creaking, overweighted gibbets, as in Villon's poems, utters not a word. All that we can hear is the many-throated yell of mediæval poets, noble and plebeian, French, Provençal, and German, against the brutishness, the cunning, the cruelty, the hideousness, the heresy of the serf, whose name becomes synonymous with every baseness; which, in mock grammatical style, is declined into every epithet of wickedness; whose punishment is prayed for from the God whom he outrages by his very existence; a hideous clamour of indecent jibe, of brutal vituperation, of senseless accusation, of every form of words which furious hatred can assume, whose echoes reached even countries like Tuscany, where serfdom was well nigh unknown, and have reached even to us in the scraps of epigram still bandied about by the townsfolk against the peasants, nay, by the peasants against themselves.^[1] A monstrous

[1] The reader may oppose to my views the existence of the —class of poems, French, Latin, and German, of which the Provençal Pastourela is the original type, and which represent the courting, by the poet, who is, of course, a knight, of a beautiful country-girl, who is shown us as feeding her sheep or spinning with her distaff. But these poems are, to the best of my knowledge, all of a single pattern, and extremely insincere and artificial in tone, that I feel inclined to class them with the pastorals —Dresden china idylls by men who had never looked a live peasant in the face—of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, —as distant descendants from the pastoral poetry of antiquity, of which the chivalric poets may have got some indirect notions as they did of the antique epics. It is moreover extremely rag doll, dressed up in shreds of many-coloured villainy without a

recognizable human feature, dragged in the likely that these love poems, in which, successfully or unsuccessfully, the poet usually offers a bribe to the woman of low degree, conceal beneath the conventional pastoral trappings the intrigues of minnesingers and troubadours with women of the small artizan or village proprietor class. The real peasant woman—the female of the villain—could scarcely have been above the notice of the noblemen's servants; and, in countries where the seigneurial rights were in vigour, would scarcely have been offered presents and fine words. As regards the innumerable poems against the peasantry, I may refer the reader to an extremely curious publication of "Carmina Medii Ævi," recently made by Sig. Francesco Novati, and which contains, besides a selection of specimens, a list of references on the subject of poems "De Natura Rusticorum." One of the satirical declensions runs as follows:

Singulariter.	Pluraliter.
Nom. Hic villanus.	Nom. Hi maledicti.
Gen. Huius rustici.	Gen. Horum tristium.
Dat. Huic tferfero (sic).	Dat. His mendacibus.
Acc. Hunc furem.	Acc. Hos nequissimos.
Voc. O latro.	Voc. O pessimi.
Abl. Ab hoc depredatore.	Abl. Ab his infidelibus.

The accusation of heresy and of crucifying Christ is evidently due to the devil-worship prevalent among the serfs, and is thus, alluded to in a north Italian poem, probably borrowed from the French:

Christo fo da villan crucifiò,
E stagom sempre in pioza, in vento, e in neve,
Perchè havom fato cosi gran peccà.

This feeling is exactly analogous to that existing nowadays in semi-barbarous countries against the Jews. The idle hated the industrious, and hated them all the more when their industry brought them any profit.

mud, pilloried with unspeakable ordure, paraded in mock triumph like a King of Fools, and burnt in the market-place like Antichrist, such is the image which mediæval poetry has left us of the creature who was once the pious rustic, the innocent god-beloved husbandman, on whose threshold justice stopped a while when she fled from the towns of Antiquity. Yet not so; I can recall one, though only one, occasion in which mediæval literature shows us the serf. The place is surely the most unexpected, the charming thirteenth century tale of "Aucassin et Nicolette." In his beautiful essay upon that story, Mr. Pater has deliberately omitted this episode, which is indeed like a spot of blood-stained mud upon some perfect tissue of silver flowers on silver ground. It is a piece of cruellest realism, because quite quiet and unforced, in the midst of a kind of fairy-land idyl of almost childish love, the love of the beautiful son of the lord of Beaucaire for a beautiful Saracen slave girl. For, although Aucassin and Nicolette are often separated, and always disconsolate—she in her wonderfully frescoed vaulted room, he in his town prison—there is always surrounding them a sort of fairy land of trees and flowers, a constant song of birds; although they wander through the woods and tear their delicate skin, and catch their hair in brambles and briars, we have always the sense of the daisies bending beneath their tread, of the green leaves rustling aside from their heads covered with hair— "blond et menu crespelé." Their very hardships are lovely, like the hut of flowering branches and grapes, which Nicolette builds for herself, and through whose fissures the moonlight shines and the little stars twinkle: so much so, that when they weep, these two beautiful and dainty creatures, we listen as if to singing, and with no more sense of grief than at some pathetic little snatch of melody. And in the midst of this idyl of lovely things; in the midst of all these delicate patternings, whose minuteness and faint tint merge into one vague pleasurable impression; stands out, unintentionally placed there by the author, little aware of its terrible tragic realism, the episode which I am going to translate.

"Thus Aucassin wandered all day through the forest, without hearing any news of his sweet love; and when he saw that dusk was spreading, he began bitterly to weep. As he was riding along an old road, where weeds and grass grew thick and high, he suddenly saw before him, in the middle of this road, a man such as I am going to describe to you. He was tall, ugly; nay, hideous quite marvellously. His face was blacker than smoked meat, and so wide, that there was a good palm's distance between his eyes; his cheeks were huge, his nostrils also, with a very big flat nose; thick lips as red as embers, and long teeth yellow and smoke colour. He wore leathern shoes and gaiters, kept up with string at the knees; on his back was a parti-coloured coat. He was leaning upon a stout bludgeon. Aucassin was startled and fearful, and said:

"Fair brother ("beau frère"—a greeting corresponding to the modern "bon homme") 'God be with thee!'

"God bless you!' answered the man.

"What dost thou here?' asked Aucassin.

"What is that to you?' answered the man.

"I ask thee from no evil motive.'

"Then tell me why,' said the man, 'you yourself are weeping with such grief? Truly, were I a rich man like you, nothing in the world should make me weep.'

"And how dost thou know me?"

"I know you to be Aucassin, the son of the Count; and if you will tell me why you weep, I will tell you why I am here."

"I will tell thee willingly," answered Aucassin. "This morning I came to hunt in the forest; I had a white leveret, the fairest in the world; I have lost him—that is why I am weeping."

"What!" cried the man; "it is for a stinking hound that you waste the tears of your body? Woe to those who shall pity you; you, the richest man of this country. If your father wanted fifteen or twenty white leverets, he could get them. I am weeping and mourning for more serious matters."

"And what are these?"

"I will tell you. I was hired to a rich farmer to drive his plough, dragged by four bullocks. Three days ago, I lost a red bullock, the best of the four. I left the plough, and sought the red bullock on all sides, but could not find him. For three days I have neither eaten nor drunk, and have been wandering thus. I have been afraid of going to the town, where they would put me in jail, because I have not wherewith to pay for the bullock. All I possess are the clothes on my back. I have a mother; and the poor woman had nothing more valuable than me; since she had only an old smock wherewith to cover her poor old limbs. They have torn the smock off her back, and now she has to lie on the straw. It is about her that I am afflicted more than about myself, because, as to me, I may get some money some day or other, and as to the red bullock, he may be paid for when he may. And I should never weep for such a trifle as that. Ah! woe betide those who shall make sorrow with you!"

Inserted merely to give occasion to show Aucassin's good heart in paying the twenty sols for the man's red bullock; perhaps for no reason at all, but certainly with no idea of making the lover's misery seem by comparison trifling—there are, nevertheless, few things in literature more striking than the meeting in the wood of the daintily nurtured boy, weeping over the girl whom he loves with almost childish love of the fancy; and of that ragged, tattered, hideous serf, at whose very aspect the Bel Aucassin stops in awe and terror. And the attitude is grand of this unfortunate creature, who neither begs nor threatens, scarcely complains, and not at all for himself; but merely tells his sordid misfortune with calm resignation, as if used to such everyday miseries, roused to indignation only at the sight of the tears which the fine-bred youth is shedding. We feel the dreadful solemnity of the man's words; of the reproach thus thrown by the long-suffering serf, accustomed to misfortunes as the lean ox is to blows, to that delicate thing weeping for his lady love, for the lady of his fancy. It is the one occasion upon which that delicate and fantastic mediæval love poetry, that fanciful, wistful stripling King Love of the Middle Ages, in which he keeps high court, and through which he rides in triumphal procession; that King Love laughing and fainting by turns with all his dapper artificiality of woes; is confronted with the sordid reality, the tragic impersonation of all the dumb miseries, the lives and loves, crushed and defiled unnoticed, of the peasantry of those days. Yes, while they sing—Provençals, minnesingers, Sicilians, sing of their earthly lady and of their paramour in heaven—the hideous peasant, whose naked granny is starving on the straw, looks on with dull and tearless eyes; crying out to posterity, as the serf cries to Aucassin: "Woe to those who shall sorrow at the tears of such as these."

II.

But meanwhile, during those centuries which lie between the dark ages and modern times, the Middle Ages (inasmuch as they mean not a mere chronological period, but a definite social and mental condition) fortunately did not exist everywhere. Had they existed, it is almost impossible to understand how they would ever throughout Europe have come to an end; for as the favourite proverb of Catharine of Siena has it, one dead man cannot bury another dead man; and the Middle Ages, after this tedious dying of the fifteenth century, required to be shovelled into the tomb, nay, rather, given the final stroke, by the Renaissance. This that we foolishly call—giving a quite incorrect notion of sudden and miraculous birth—the Renaissance, and limit to the time of the revival of Greek humanities, really existed, as I have repeatedly suggested wherever, during the mediæval centuries, the civilization of which the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were big was not, by the pressure of feudalism and monasticism, made to be abortive or stillborn. Low as was Italy at the very close of the dark ages, and much as she borrowed for a long while from the more precocious northern nations, especially France and Provence; Italy had, nevertheless, an enormous advantage in the fact that her populations were not divided into victor and vanquished, and that the old Latin institutions of town and country were never replaced, except in certain northern and southern districts, by feudal arrangements. The very first thing which strikes us in the obscure Italian commonwealths of early times, is that in these resuscitated relics of Roman or Etruscan towns there is no feeling of feudal superiority and inferiority; that there is no lord, and consequently no serf. Nor is this the case merely within the city walls. The never sufficiently appreciated difference between the Italian free burghs and those of Germany, Flanders, and Provence, is that the citizens depend only in the remotest and most purely fictitious way upon any kind of suzerain; and moreover that the country, instead of belonging to feudal nobles, belong every day more and more completely to the burghers. The peasant is not a serf, but one of three things—a hired labourer, a possessor of property, or a farmer, liable to no taxes, paying no rent, and only sharing with the proprietor the produce of the land. By this latter system, existing, then as now, throughout Tuscany, the peasantry was an independent and well-to-do class. The land owned by one man (who, in the commonwealths, was usually a shopkeeper or manufacturer

in the town) was divided into farms small enough to be cultivated—vines, olives, corn, and fruit—by one family of peasants, helped perhaps by a paid labourer. The thrifter and less scrupulous peasants could, in good seasons, put by sufficient profit from their share of the produce to suffice after some years, and with the addition of what the women might make by washing, spinning, weaving, plaiting straw hats (an accomplishment greatly insisted upon by Lorenzo dei Medici), and so forth, to purchase some small strip of land of their own. Hence, a class of farmers at once living on another man's land and sharing its produce with him, and cultivating and paying taxes upon land belonging to themselves.

Of these Tuscan peasants we get occasional glimpses in the mediæval Italian novelists—a well-to-do set of people, in constant communication with the town where they sell their corn, oil, vegetables, and wine, and easily getting confused with the lower class of artizans with whom they doubtless largely intermarried. These peasants whom we see in tidy kilted tunics and leathern gaiters, driving their barrel-laden bullock carts, or riding their mules up to the red city gates in many a Florentine and Sienese painting of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, were in many respects better off than the small artizans of the city, heaped up in squalid houses, and oppressed by the greater and smaller guilds. Agnolo Pandolfini, teaching thrift to his sons in Alberti's charming treatise on "The Government of the Family," frequently groans over the insolence, the astuteness of the peasantry; and indeed seems to consider that it is impossible to cope with them—a conclusion which would have greatly astounded the bailiffs of the feudal proprietors in the Two Sicilies and beyond the Alps. Indeed it is impossible to conceive a stranger contrast than that between the northern peasant, the starved and stunted serf, whom Holbein drew, driving his lean horses across the hard furrow, with compassionate Death helping along the plough, and the Tuscan farmer, as shown us by Lorenzo dei Medici—the young fellow who, while not above minding his cows or hoeing up his field, goes into Florence once a week, offers his sweetheart presents of coral necklaces, silk staylaces, and paint for her cheeks and eyelashes; who promises, to please her, to have his hair frizzled (as only the youths of the Renaissance knew how to be frizzled and fuzzed) by the barber, and even dimly hints that some day he may appear in silken jerkin and tight hose, like a well-to-do burgess. No greater contrast perhaps, unless indeed we should compare his sweetheart, Lorenzo's beautiful Nenciozza, with her box full of jewels, her Sunday garb of damask kirtle and gold-worked bodice, her almost queenly ways towards her adorers, with the wretched creature, not a woman, but a mere female animal, cowering among her starving children in her mud cottage, and looking forward, in dull lethargy, after the morning full of outrages at the castle, to the night, the night on the heath, lit with mysterious flickers, to the horrible joys of the sacrifice which the oppressed brings to the dethroned, the serf to Satan; when, in short, we compare the peasant woman described by Lorenzo with the female serf resuscitated by the genius of Michelet; nay, more poignant still, with that mother in the "Dance of Death," seated on the mud flood of the broken-roofed, dismantled hovel, stewing something on a fire of twigs, and stretching out vain arms to her poor tattered baby- boy, whom, with the good-humoured tripping step of an old nurse, the kindly skeleton is leading away out of this cruel world.

Such were the conditions of the peasantry of the great Italian commonwealths. They were, as much as the northern serfs were the reverse, creatures pleasant to deal with, pleasant to watch. The upper classes, on the other hand, differed quite as much from the upper classes of feudal countries. They were, be it remembered, men of business, constantly in contact with the working classes; Albizis, Strozzi, Pandolfinis, Guinigi, Tolomeis, no matter what their name, these men who built palaces and churches which outdid the magnificence of northern princes, and who might, at any moment, be sent ambassadors from Florence, Lucca, or Siena, to the French or English kings, to the Emperor or the Pope, spent a large portion of their days at their office desk, among the bales of their warehouses, behind the counter of their shops; they wore the same dress, had the same habits, spoke the same dialect, as the weavers and dyers, the carriers and porters whom they employed, and whose sons might, by talent and industry, amass a fortune, build palaces, and go ambassadors to kings in their turn. When, therefore, these merchant nobles turned to the country for rest and relief from their cares, it was not to the country as it existed for the feudal noble of the North. Boar and stag hunts had no attraction for quiet men of business; forests stocked with wild beasts where vineyard and cornfield might have extended, would have seemed to them the very height of wastefulness, discomfort, and ugliness. Pacific and businesslike, they merely transferred to the country the habits of thought and of life which had arisen in the city. Not for them any imitation of the feudal castle, turreted and moated, cut up into dark irregular rooms and yards, filled with noisy retainers and stinking hounds. On some gentle hillside a well-planned palace, its rooms spacious and lofty, and sparsely windowed for coolness in summer; with a neat cloistered court in the centre, ventilating the whole house, and affording a cool place, full of scent of flowers and sound of fountains for the burning afternoons; a belvedere tower also, on which to seek a breeze on stifling nights, when the very stars seem faint for heat, and the dim plummy heads of cypress and poplar are motionless against the misty blue sky. In front a broad terrace, whence to look down towards the beloved city, a vague fog of roofs in the distance; on the side and behind, elaborate garden walks walled with high walls of box and oak and laurel, in which stand statues in green niches; gardens with little channels to bring water, even during droughts, to the myrtles, the roses, the stocks and clove pinks, over which bend with blossoms brilliant against the pale blue sky the rose-flowered oleander, the scarlet-flowered pomegranate; also aviaries and cages full of odd and harmless creatures, ferrets, guinea pigs, porcupines, squirrels, and monkeys; arbours where wife, daughters, and daughters-in-law may sew and make music; and neat lawns where the young men may play at quoits, football, or swordsticks and bucklers; and then, sweeping all round the house and gardens

and terraces an undulating expanse of field and orchard, smoke-tinted with olive, bright green in spring with budding crops, russet in autumn with sere vines; and from which, in the burning noon, rises the incessant sawing noise of the cicalas, and ever and anon the high, nasal, melancholy chant of the peasant, lying in the shade of barn door or fig tree till the sun shall sink and he can return to his labour. If the house in town, with its spacious store-rooms, its carved chapel, and painted banqueting hall, large enough to hold sons' children and brothers' wives and grandchildren, and a whole host of poor relatives, whom the wise father (as Pandolfini teaches) employs rather than strangers for his clerks and overseers—if this town house was the pride of the Italian burgess; the villa, with its farms and orchards, was the real joy, the holiday paradise of the over-worked man. To read in the cool house, with cicala's buzz and fountain plash all round, the Greek and Latin authors; to discuss them with learned men; to watch the games of the youths and the children, this was the reward for years of labour and intelligence; but sweeter than all this (how we feel it in Agnolo Pandolfini's speeches!) were those occupations which the city could not give: the buying and selling of plants, grain, and kine, the meddling with new grafted trees, the mending of spaliers, the straightening of fences, the going round (with the self-importance and impatience of a cockney) to see what flowers had opened, what fruit had ripened over-night; to walk through the oliveyards, among the vines; to pry into stable, pig-stye, and roosting-place, taking up handfuls of drying grain, breaking twigs of olives, to see how things were doing; and to have long conversations with the peasants, shrewd enough to affect earnest attention when the master was pleased to vent his town-acquired knowledge of agriculture and gardening. Sweet also, doubtless, for younger folk, or such perhaps as were fonder of teaching new lute tunes to the girls than of examining into cabbages, and who read Dante and Boccaccio more frequently than Cicero or Sallust; though sweet perhaps only as a vague concomitant of their lazy pleasures, to listen to those songs of the peasantry rising from the fields below, while lying perhaps on one's back in the shaded grass, watching the pigeons whirring about the belvedere tower. Vaguely pleasant this also, doubtless; but for a long while only vaguely. For, during more than two centuries, the burgesses of Italy were held enthralled by the Courtly poets of other countries; listening to, and reading, at first, only Provençals and Sicilians, or Italians, like Sordello, pretending to be of Provence or Sicily; and even later, enduring in their own poets, their own Guittones, Cavalcantis, Cinos, Guinicellis, nay even in Dante and Petrarch's lyrics, only the repetition (however vivified by genius) of the old common-places of Courtly love, and artificial spring, of the poetry of feudal nations. But the time came when not only Provençal and Sicilian, but even Tuscan, poetry was neglected, when the revival of Greek and Latin letters made it impossible to rewrite the threadbare mediæval prettinesses, or even to write in earnest in the modern tongue, so stiff and thin (as it seemed) and like some grotesque painted saint, when compared with the splendidly fleshed antique languages, turning and twining in graceful or solemn involutions, as of a Pyrrhic or a maidens' dance. And it was during this period, from Petrarch to Politian, that, as philologists have now proved beyond dispute, the once fashionable chivalric romance, and the poetry of Provençal and Sicilian school, cast off by the upper classes, was gradually picked up by the lower and especially by the rural classes. Vagabond ballad-singers and story-tellers—creatures who wander from house to house, mending broken pottery, collecting rags or selling small pedlar's wares—were the old clothesmen who carried about these bits of tarnished poetic finery. The people of the town, constantly in presence of the upper classes, and therefore sooner or later aware of what was or was not in fashion, did not care long for the sentimental daintiness of mediæval poetry; besides, satire and scurrility are as inevitable in a town as are dogs in gutters and cats on roofs; and the townsfolk soon set their own buffoonish or satirical ideas to whatever remained of the music of mediæval poetry: already early in the fifteenth century the sonnet had become for the Florentine artizans a mere scurrilous epigram. It was different in the country. The peasant, at least the Tuscan peasant, is eminently idealistic and romantic in his literary tastes; it may be that he has not the intellectual life required for any utterances or forms of his own, and that he consequently accepts poetry as a ready-made ornament, something pretty and exotic, which is valued in proportion to its prettiness and rarity. Be the reason whatever it may, certain it is that nothing can be too artificial or high-flown to please the Italian peasantry: its tales are all of kings; princesses, fairies, knights, winged horses, marvellous jewels, and so forth; its songs are almost without exception about love, constancy, moon, stars, flowers. Such things have not been degraded by familiarity and parody as in the town; they retain for the country folk the vague charm (like that of music, automatic and independent of thorough comprehension) of belonging to a sphere of the marvellous; hence they are repeated and repeated with almost religious servility, as any one may observe who will listen to the stories and verses told and sung even nowadays in the Tuscan country, or who will glance over the splendid collections of folklore made in the last twenty years. Such things, must suffer alteration from people who can neither read nor write, and who cannot be expected to remember very clearly details which, in many cases, must have for them only the vaguest meaning. The stories split in process of telling and re-telling, and are completed with bits of other stories; details are forgotten and have to be replaced; the same happens with poetry: songs easily get jumbled together, their meaning is partially obliterated, and has to be restored or, again, an attempt is made by bold men to adapt some seemingly adaptable old song to a new occasion an old love ditty seems fit to sing to a new sweetheart—names, circumstances, and details require arranging for this purpose; and hence more alterations. Now, however much a peasant may enjoy the confused splendours of Court life and of Courtly love, he cannot, with the best will in the world, restore their details or colouring if they happen to become obliterated. If he chance to forget that when the princess first met the wizard she was riding forth on a snow-white jennet with a falcon on her glove, there is nothing to prevent his describing her as walking through the meadow in charge of a flock of geese; and similarly, should he happen to forget that the Courtly lover compares the skin of his mistress to ivory and her eyes to Cupid's torches, he is quite

capable of filling up the gap by saying that the girl is as white as a turnip and as bright-eyed as a ferret. As with details of description and metaphors, so also with the emotional and social parts of the business. The peasant has not been brought up in the idea that the way to gain a woman's affection is to stick her glove on a helmet and perform deeds of prowess closely resembling those of Don Quixote in the Sierra Morena; so he attempts to ingratiate himself by offering her presents of strawberries, figs, buttons, hooks-and-eyes, and similar desirable things. Again, were the peasant to pay attentions to a married woman, he would merely get (what noble husbands were too well bred to dream of) a sound horsewhipping, or perhaps even a sharp knife thrust in his stomach; so that he takes good care to address his love songs only to marriageable young women. In this way, without any deliberate attempt at originality, the old Courtly poetry becomes, when once removed to the country, thoroughly patched and seamed with rustic ideas, feelings, and images; while never ceasing to be, in its general stuff and shape, of a kind such as only professional poets of the upper classes can produce. The Sicilian lyrics collected by Signor Pitre, still more the Tuscan poems of Tigri's charming volume, are, therefore, a curious mixture of highflown sentiment, dainty imagery, and most artistic arrangements of metre and diction (especially in the *rispetto*, where metrical involution is accompanied by logical involution of the most refined mediæval sort), with hopes and complaints such as only a farmer could frame, with similes and descriptions such as only the business of the field, vineyard, and dairy could suggest. A mixture, but not a jumble. For as in this slow process of assimilation and alteration only that was remembered by the peasant which the peasant could understand and sympathize with; and only that was welded into the once Courtly poetry which was sufficiently refined to please the people who delighted in the exotic refinement—as, in short, everything came about perfectly simply and unconsciously, there resulted what in good sooth may be considered as a perfectly substantive and independent form of art, with beauties and refinements of its own. And, indeed, it appears to me that one might say, without too much paradox, that in these peasant songs only does the poetry of minnesingers and troubadours, become thoroughly enjoyable; that only when the conventionality of feeling and imagery is corrected by the freshness, the straightforwardness, nay, even the grotesqueness of rural likings, dislikings, and comparisons, can the dainty beauty of mediæval Courtly poetry ever really satisfy our wishes. Comparing together Tigri's collection of Tuscan folk poetry with any similar anthology that might be made of middle- high German and Provençal, and early Italian lyrics, I feel that the adoption of Courtly mediæval poetry by the Italian peasantry of the Renaissance can be compared more significantly than at first seemed with the adoption of a once fashionable garb by country folk. The peasant pulled about this Courtly lyrism, oppressively tight in its conventional fit and starched with elaborate rhetorical embroideries; turned it inside out, twisted a bit here, a bit there, ripped open seam after seam, patched and repatched with stuffs and stitches of its own; and then wore the whole thing as it had never been intended to be worn; until this cast-off poetic apparel, stretched on the freer moral limbs of natural folk, faded and stained by weather and earth into new and richer tints, had lost all its original fashionable stiffness, and crudeness of colour, and niminy-piminy fit, and had acquired instead I know not what grace of unexpectedness, picturesqueness, and ease.^[1]

[1] Any one who is sceptical of the Courtly derivation of the Italian popular song may, besides consulting the admirable book of Prof. d'Ancona, compare with the contents of Tigri's famous "Canti popolari Toscani," the following scraps of Sicilian and early Italian lyrics:—

The Emperor Frederick II. writes: "Rosa di maggio— Colorita e fresca—Occhi hai fini—E non rifini—Di gioie dare— Lo tuo parlare—La gente innamora—Castella ed altura." Jacopo Pugliesi says of his lady: "Chiarita in viso più che argento—Donami allegrezze— Ben eo son morto—E mal colto— Se non mi dai conforto—*Fior dell' orto*."

Inghilfredi Siciliano: "Gesù Cristo ideolla in paradiso— E poi la fece angelo incarnando— Gioia aggio preso di giglio novello—E vago, che sormonta ogni ricchezza—Sua dottrina m' affrezza—Cosi mi coglie e olezza—Come pantera le bestie selvagge."

Jacopo da Lentino: "E di virtute tutte l' altre avanza—E somigliante a stella è di splendore—Colla sua conta (*cf.* Provençal *coindeta*, gentile) e gaia innamoranza—E più bella è che rosa e che fiore—Cristo le doni vita ed allegranza—E sì la cresca in gran pregio ed onore."

I must finish off what might be a much longer collection with a charming little scrap, quite in *rispetto* tone, by Guinicelli: "Vedut 'ho la lucente stella diana—Ch' appare anzi che 'l giorno renda albore—Ch' a preso forma di figura umana— Sovr' ogni altra mi par che dia splendore—Viso di neve colorato in grana—Occhi lucenti, gai e pien d'amore— Non credo che nel mondo sia cristiana—Si piena di beltate e di valore."

Well; for many a year did the song of the peasants rise up from the fields and oliveyards unnoticed by the good townfolk taking their holiday at the Tuscan villa; but one day, somewhere in the third quarter of the fifteenth century, the long-drawn chant of the *rispetto*, telling perhaps how the singer's sweetheart was beautiful as the star Diana, so beautiful as a baby that the Pope christened her with his own hands; the quavering nasal cadence of the *stornello* saying by chance

Flower of the Palm, &c.,

did at last waken the attention of one lettered man, a man of curious and somewhat misshapen body and mind, of features satyr-like in ugliness, yet moody and mystical in their very earthiness; a man essentially of the senses, yet imperfect in them, without taste or smell, and, over and above, with a marvellously supple intellect; weak and coarse and idealistic; and at once feebly the slave of his times, and so boldly, spontaneously innovating as to be quite unconscious of

innovation: the mixed nature, or rather the nature in many heterogeneous bits, of the man of letters who is artistic almost to the point of being an actor, natural in every style because morally connected with no style at all. The man was Lorenzo di Piero dei Medici, for whom posterity has exclusively reserved the civic title of all his family and similar town despots, calling him the Magnificent. It is the fashion at present to give Lorenzo only the leavings, as it were, of our admiration for the weaker, less original, nay, considerably enervate, humanistic exquisite Politian; and this absurd injustice appears to me to show that the very essence and excellence of Lorenzo is not nowadays perceived. The Renaissance produced several versatile and charming poets; and, in the midst of classic imitation, one or two, of whom one is certainly Boiardo, of real freshness and raciness. But of this new element in the Renaissance, this element which is neither imitation of antiquity nor revival of mediæval, which is original, vital, fruitful, in short, modern, Lorenzo is the most versatile example. He is new, Renaissance, modern; not merely in this or that quality, he is so all round. And this in the first place because he is so completely the man of impressions; the man not uttering wonderful things, nor elaborating exquisite ones, but artistically embodying with marvellous versatility whatever strikes his fancy and feeling—fancy and feeling which are as new as the untouched sculptor's clay. And this extraordinary temper of art for art's sake, or rather effect for effect and form's sake, was possible in that day only in a man equally without strong passions, and without strong convictions. He is naturally attracted most by what is most opposed to the academic, Virgilian, Horatian, or Petrarchesque æstheticism of his contemporaries; he is essentially a realist, and all the effects, which he produces, all the beauty, charm, or beastliness of his work, corresponds to beauty, charm, or beastliness in the reality of things. If Lorenzo writes at one moment carnival songs of ribald dirtiness, at the next hymns full of holy solemnity; it is, I think, merely because this versatile artist takes pleasure in trying whether his face may not be painted into grinning drunkenness, and then elongated and whitened into ascetic gentleness. Instead of seeking, like most of his contemporaries, to be Greek, Roman, or mediæval by turns, he preferred trying on all the various tricks of thought and feeling which he remarked among his unlettered townfolk. His realism naturally drew him towards the classes where realism can deal with the real; and not the affected, the self-conscious, the deliberately attempted. Hence those wonderful little poems, the carnival songs of the gold-thread spinners, of the pastry-cooks, of the shoemakers, which give us so completely, so gracefully, the whole appearance, work, manner, gesture of the people; give them to us with ease and rapidity so perfect, that we scarcely know how they are given; that we almost forget verses and song, and actually see the pulling, twisting, and cutting of the gold-threads; that we see and hear the shoemaker's hands smoothing down the leather of the shoe in his hand, to convince his customers of its pliability; that we see and smell the dear little pale yellow pasties nestling in the neat white baskets, after having stood by and watched the dough being kneaded, chopped, and floured over, the iron plates heated in the oven, the soft, half-baked paste twisted and bent; nay, we feel almost as if we had eaten of them, those excellent things which seem such big mouthfuls but are squeezed and crunched at one go like nothing at all. Hence, I mean from this love of watching effects and reproducing them, originated also the masterpiece of Lorenzo dei Medici, the *Nencia da Barberino*.

This poem, of some fifty octaves, is the result of those Tuscan peasant songs, of which I have told you the curious Courtly descent, at last having struck the fancy of a real poet. It is, what Lorenzo's masterpiece necessarily must be, in the highest degree a modern performance; as modern as a picture by Bastien Lepage; as an opera, founded upon local music, by Bizet. For it is not by any manner of means a pastoral, a piece of conventional poetic decoration, with just a little realistic detail, more of the mere conventional or more of the realistic dominating according as it is a pastoral by Theocritus, or a pastoral by Quinault or Metastasio. It is the very reverse of this: it is the attempt to obtain a large and complete, detailed and balanced impression by the cunning arrangement of a number of small effects which the artist has watched in reality; it is the making into a kind of little idyl, something half narrative, half drama, with distinct figures and accessories and background, of a whole lot of little fragments imitated from the peasant poetry, and set in thin, delicate rims of imitation no longer of the peasant's songs, but of the peasant's thoughts and speech; a perfect piece of impressionist art, marred only in rare places by an attempt (inevitable in those days) to force the drawing and colour into caricature. The construction, which appears to be nowhere, is in reality a masterpiece; for, without knowing it, you are shown the actors, the background, the ups and downs of temper, the variation of the seasons; above all you are shown the heroine through the medium of the praises, the complaints, the narratives of the past, the imaginings of the future, of the hero, whose incoherent rhapsodizing constitutes the whole poem. He, Vallera, is a well-to-do young farmer; she, *Nencia*, is the daughter of peasant folk of the castellated village of Barberino in the Mugello; he is madly in love, but shy, and (to all appearance) awkward, so that we feel convinced that of all these speeches in praise of his *Nenciozza*, in blame of his indifference, highly poetic flights and most practical adjurations to see all the advantages of a good match, the young woman hears few or none; Vallera is talking not to her, but at her, or rather, he is rehearsing to himself all the things which he cannot squeeze out in her presence. It is the long day-dream, poetic, prosaic, practical, and imaginative, of a love-sick Italian peasant lad, to whom his sweetheart is at once an ideal thing of beauty, a goddess at whose shrine songs must be sung and wreaths twined; and a very substantial lass, who cannot be indifferent to sixpenny presents, and whom he cannot conceive as not ultimately becoming the sharer of his cottage, the cooker of his soup, the mender of his linen, the mother of his brats—a dream in which image is effaced by image, and one thought is expelled, unfinished, by another. She is to him like the Fairy Morgana, the fairy who kept so much of chivalry in her enchanted island; she is like the evening star when above his cottage it slowly pierces the soft blue sky with its white brilliancy; she is purer than the water in the well,

and sweeter than the malmsey wine, and whiter than the miller's flour; but her heart is as hard as a pebble, and she loves driving to distraction a whole lot of youths who dangle behind her, captives of those heart-thievish eyes of hers. But she is also a most excellent housewife, can stand any amount of hard field labour, and makes lots of money by weaving beautiful woollen stuff. To see her going, to church of a morning, she is a little pearl! her bodice is of damask, and her petticoat of bright, colour, and she kneels down carefully where she may be seen, being so smart. And then, when she dances! —a born dancer, bouncing like a little goat, and twirling more than a mill-wheel; and when she has finished she makes you such a curtsy; no citizen's wife in Florence can curtsy as she does. It was in April that he first fell in love. She was picking salad in the garden; he begged her for a little, and she sent him about his business. *las, alas!* ever since then his peace has been gone; he cannot sleep, he can only think of her, and follow her about; he has become quite good-for-nothing as to his field work,—yet he hears all the people around laughing and saying, "Of course Valléra will get her." Only she will pay no heed to him. She is finer to look at than the Pope, whiter than the whitest wood core: she is more delectable than are the young figs to the earwigs, more beautiful than the turnip flower, sweeter than honey. He is more in love with her than the moth is in love with the lamp; she loves to see him perishing for her. If he could cut himself in two without too much pain, he would, just to let her see that he carries her in his heart. No; he would cut out his heart, and when she has touched it with that slender hand of hers, it would cry out, "Nencia, Nencia bella." But, after all, he is not to be despised: he is an excellent labourer, most learned in buying —and selling pigs, he can play the bagpipe beautifully; he is rich, is willing to go to any expense to please her, nay, even to pay the barber double that his hair may be nice and fuzzy from the crimping irons; and if only he were to get himself tight hose and a silk jerkin, he would be as good as any Florentine burgess. But she will not listen; or, rather, she listens and laughs. Yes, she sits up in bed at night and laughs herself to death at the mere thought of him, that is all he gets. But he knows what it is! There is a fellow who will keep sneaking about her; if Valléra only catch him near his cottage, won't he give him a taste of his long new knife! nay, rip him up and throw his bowels, like those of a pig, to dry on a roof! He is sorry—perhaps he bores her—God bless you, Nencia!—he had better go and look after his sheep.

All this is not the poetry of the Renaissance peasant; it is the poem made out of his reality; the songs which Valléra sang in the fields about his Nencia we must seek in the volume of Tigrì; those *rispetti* and *stornelli* of to-day are the *rispetti* and *stornelli* of four centuries ago; they are much more beautiful and poetic than any of Lorenzo's work; but Lorenzo has given us not merely a peasant's love-song; he has given us a peasant's thoughts, actions, hopes, fears; he has given us the peasant himself, his house, his fields, and his sweetheart, as they exist even now. For Lorenzo is gone, and, greater than he, the paladins and ladies of Boiardo and Ariosto, have followed the saints and virgins of Dante into the limbo of fair unrealities; and the very Greek and Roman heroes of a hundred years ago, the very knights and covenanters of forty years since, have joined them; but Valléra exists still, and still in the flesh exists his Nenciozza. Everything changes, except the country and the peasant. For, in the long farms of Southern Tuscany, with double row of blackened balcony all tapestried with heavy ingots of Indian corn, and spread out among the olives of the hillside, up which twists the rough bullock road protected by its vine trellis; and in the little farms, with queer hood-shaped double roofs (as if to pull over the face of the house when it blows hard), and pigeon towers which show that some day they must have been fortified, all about Florence; farms which I pass every day, with their sere trees all round, their rough gardens of bright dahlias and chrysanthemums dragged by the autumn rains—in these there are, do not doubt it, still Nencias: magnificent creatures, fit models for Amazons, only just a trifle too full-blown and matronly; but with real Amazonian limbs, firm and delicate, under their red and purple striped print frocks; creatures with heads set on necks like towers or columns, necks firm in broad, well-fleshed chest as branches in a tree's trunk; great penthouses of reddish yellow or lustreless black crimped hair over the forehead; the forehead, like the cheeks, furrowed a good deal—perhaps we dainty people might say, faded and wrinkled by work in the burning sun and the wind; women whom you see shovelling bread into the heated ovens, or plashing in winter with bare arms in half-frozen streams, or digging up a turnip field in the drizzle; or on a Sunday, standing listless by their door, surrounded by rolling and squalling brats, and who, when they slowly look up at the passer-by, show us, on those monumental faces of theirs, a strange smile, a light of bright eyes and white teeth; a smile which to us sophisticated townspeople is as puzzling as certain sudden looks in some comely animal, but which yet makes us understand instinctively that we have before us a Nencia; and that the husband yonder, though he now swears at his wife, and perhaps occasionally beats her, has nevertheless, in his day, dreamed, argued, raged, and sung to himself just like Lorenzo's Vallera. The "Nencia da Barberino" is certainly Lorenzo dei Medici's masterpiece: it is completely and satisfactorily worked out. Yet we may strain possibilities to the point of supposing (which, however, I cannot for a moment suppose) that this "Nencia" is a kind of fluke; that by an accident a beautiful and seemingly appreciative poem has resulted where the author, a mediæval realist of a superior Villon sort, had intended only a piece of utter grotesqueness. But important as is the "Nencia," Lorenzo has left behind him another poem, greatly inferior in completeness, but which settles beyond power of doubt that in him the Renaissance was not merely no longer mediæval, but most intensely modern. This poem is the "Ambra." It is simply an allegorical narrative of the inundation, by the river Ombrone, of a portion, called Ambra, of the great Medicean villa of Poggio a Caiano. Lorenzo's object was evidently to write a semi-Ovidian poem, of a kind common in his day, and common almost up to our own: a river-god, bearded, crown of reeds, urn, general dampness and uproariousness of temper, all quite correct; and a nymph, whom he pursues, who prays to the Virgin huntress to save her from his love, and who, just in the nick of time, is metamorphosed into a mossy stone,

dimly showing her former woman's shape; the style of thing, charming, graceful, insipid, of which every one can remember a dozen instances, and which immediately brings up to the mind a vision of grand-ducal gardens, where, among the clipped ilexes and the cypress trunks, great lumbering water-gods and long-limbed nymphs splash, petrified and covered with melancholy ooze and yellow lichen, among the stagnant grotto waters. In some respects, therefore, there is in the "Ambra" somewhat more artificial, more barocco than that early Renaissance of Politian and Pontano would warrant. There also several bits, half graceful, half awkward, pedantic, constrained, childish, delightful, like the sedge-crowned rivers telling each other anecdotes of the ways and customs of their respective countries, and especially the charming dance of zephyr with the flowers on the lawns of Cyprus, which must immediately suggest pictures by Piero di Cosimo and by Botticelli. So far, therefore, there is plenty to enjoy, but nothing to astonish, in the "Ambra." But the Magnificent Lorenzo has had the extraordinary whim of beginning his allegory with a description, twenty-one stanzas long, of the season of floods. A description, full of infinitely delicate minute detail: of the plants which have kept their foliage while the others are bare—the prickly juniper, the myrtle and bay; of the flocks of cranes printing the sky with their queer shapes, of the fish under the ice, and the eagle circling slowly round the ponds—little things which affect us mixed up as they are with all manner of stiff classic allusions, very much as do the carefully painted daisies and clover among the embossed and gilded unrealities of certain old pictures. From these rather finikin details, Lorenzo passes, however, to details which are a good deal more than details, things little noticed until almost recently: the varying effect of the olives on the hillside—a grey, green mass, a silver ripple, according as the wind stirs them; the golden appearance of the serene summer air, and so forth; details no longer, in short, but essentially, however minute, effects. And then, suddenly leaving such things behind, he rushes into the midst of a real picture, a picture which you might call almost impressionistic, of the growth of rivers and the floods. The floods are a grand sight; more than a sight—a grand performance, a drama; sometimes, God knows, a tragedy. Last night, under a warm, hazy sky, through whose buff-tinted clouds the big moon crept in and out, the mountain stream was vaguely visible—a dark riband in its wide shingly bed, when the moon was hidden; a narrow, shallow, broken stream, sheets of brilliant metallic sheen, and showers of sparkling facets, when the moon was out; a mere drowsy murmur mixing with the creaking and rustling of dry reeds in the warm, wet wind. Thus in the evening. Look down from your window next morning. A tremendous rushing mass of waters, thick, turbid, reddish, with ominous steel-like lustre where its coppery surface reflects the moist blue sky, now fills the whole bed, shaking its short fringe of foam, tossing the spray as it swirls round each still projecting stone, angrily tugging at the reeds and alders which flop their draggled green upon its surface; eddying faster and faster, encircling each higher rock or sandbank, covering it at last with its foaming red mass. Meanwhile, the sky is covered in with vaporous grey clouds, which enshroud the hills; the clear runnels, dash over the green banks, spirt through the walls, break their way across the roads; the little mountain torrents, dry all summer, descend, raging rivers, red with the hill soil; and with every gust of warm wind the river rises higher and rushes along tremendously impetuous. Down in the plain it eats angrily at the soft banks, and breaks its muddy waters, fringed on the surface with a sort of ominous grime of broken wood and earth, higher and higher against the pierheads of the bridges; shaking them to split their masonry, while crowds of men and women look on, staring at the rising water, at the planks, tables, beams, cottage thatches, nay, whole trees, which it hurls at the bridge piers. And then, perhaps, the terrible, soft, balmy flood-wind persisting, there comes suddenly the catastrophe; the embankment, shaken by the resistless current, cracks, fissures gives way; and the river rushes into the city, as it has already rushed into the fields, to spread in constantly rising, melancholy livid pools, throughout the streets and squares. This Lorenzo saw, and, wonderful to say, in this soiled and seething river, in these torn and crumbling banks, in all the dreadfulness of these things, he saw a beauty and a grandeur. But he saw not merely the struggle of the waters and of the land; he—the heartless man who laid his hand even upon the saved-up money of orphan girls in order to keep up the splendour of his house and of his bank—saw the misfortunes of the peasantry; the mill, the cottage by the riverside, invaded by the flood; the doors burst open by the tremendous rushing stream, the stables and garners filled with the thick and oozy waters; the poor creatures, yesterday prosperous, clinging to the roof, watching their sheep and cows, their hay, and straw, and flour, the hemp bleached in the summer, the linen spun and woven in the long winter, their furniture and chattels, their labour and their hope whirled along by the foaming river.

Thus by this versatile Lorenzo dei Medici, this flippant, egotistic artist and despot, has at last been broken the long spell of the Middle Ages. The Renaissance has sung no longer of knights and of spring, but of peasants and of autumn. An immoral and humanistic time, an immoral and humanistic man, have had at length a heart for the simpler, ruder less favoured classes of mankind; an eye for the bolder, grander, more solemn sights of Nature: modern times have begun, modern sympathies, modern art are in full swing.

SYMMETRIA PRISCA.

Mirator veterum, discipulusque memor,
Defuit mini symmetria prisca. Peregi
Quod potui; Veniam da mihi, posteritas.

—*Lionardo da Vinci's epitaph by Platino Piatto.*

Into the holy enclosure which had received the precious shiploads of earth from Calvary, the Pisans of the thirteenth century carried the fragments of ancient sculpture brought from Rome and from Greece; and in the Gothic cloister enclosing the green sward and dark cypresses of the graveyard of Pisa, the art of the Middle Ages came for the first time face to face with the art of Antiquity. There, among pagan sarcophagi turned into Christian tombs, with heraldic devices chiselled on their arabesques and vizored helmets surmounting their garlands, the great unsigned artist of the fourteenth century, Orcagna of Florence, or Lorenzetti of Siena, painted the typical masterpiece of mediæval art, the great fresco of the Triumph of Death. With wonderful realization of character and situation he painted the prosperous of the world, the dapper youths and damsels seated with dogs and falcons beneath the orchard trees, amusing themselves with Decameronian tales and sound of lute and psaltery, unconscious of the colossal scythe wielded by the gigantic dishevelled Death, and which, in a second, will descend and mow them to the ground; while the crowd of beggars, ragged, maimed, paralyzed, leprous, grovelling on their withered limbs, see and implore Death, and cry stretching forth their arms, their stumps, and their crutches. Further on, three kings in long embroidered robes and gold-trimmed shovel caps, Lewis the Emperor, Ugucione of Pisa, and Castruccio of Lucca, with their retinue of ladies and squires, and hounds and hawks, are riding quietly through a wood. Suddenly their horses stop, draw back; the Emperor's bay stretches out his long neck sniffing the air; the kings strain forward to see, one holding his nose for the stench of death which meets him; and before them are three open coffins, in which lie, in three loathsome stages of corruption, from blue and bloated putrescence to well-nigh fleshless decay, three crowned corpses. This is the triumph of Death; the grim and horrible jest of the Middle Ages: equality in decay; kings, emperors, ladies, knights, beggars, and cripples, this is what we all come to be, stinking corpses; Death, our lord, our only just and lasting sovereign, reigns impartially over all.

But opposite, all along the sides of the painted cloister, the Amazons are wrestling with the youths on the stone of the sarcophagi; the chariots are dashing forward, the Tritons are splashing in the marble waves; the Bacchantæ are striking their timbrels in their dance with the satyrs; the birds are pecking at the grapes, the goats are nibbling at the vines; all is life, strong and splendid in its marble eternity. And the mutilated Venus smiles towards the broken Hermes; the stalwart Hercules, resting against his club, looks on quietly, a smile beneath his beard; and the gods murmur to each other, as they stand in the cloister filled with earth from Calvary, where hundreds of men lie rotting beneath the cypresses, "Death will not triumph for ever; our day will come."

We have all seen them opposite to each other, these two arts, the art born of Antiquity and the art born of the Middle Ages; but whether this meeting was friendly or hostile or merely indifferent, is a question of constant dispute. To some, mediæval art has appeared being led, Dante-like, by a magician Virgil through the mysteries of nature up to a Christian Beatrice, who alone can guide it to the kingdom of heaven; others have seen mediæval art, like some strong, chaste Sir Guyon turning away resolutely from the treacherous sorceress of Antiquity, and pursuing solitarily the road to the true and the good; for some the antique has been an impure goddess Venus, seducing and corrupting the Christian artist; the antique has been for others a glorious Helen, an unattainable perfection, ever pursued by the mediæval craftsman, but seized by him only as a phantom. Magician or witch, voluptuous, destroying Venus or cold and ungrasped Helen, what was the antique to the art born of the Middle Ages and developed during the Renaissance? Was the relation between them that of tuition, cool and abstract; or of fruitful love; or of deluding and damning example?

The art which came to maturity in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries was generated in the early mediæval revival. The seeds may, indeed, have come down from Antiquity, but they remained for nearly a thousand years hidden in the withered, rotting remains of former vegetation; and it was not till that vegetation had completely decomposed and become part of the soil, it was not till putrefaction had turned into germination, that artistic organism timidly reappeared. The new art-germ developed with the new civilization which surrounded it. Manufacture and commerce reappeared: the artizans and merchants formed into communities; the communities grew into towns, the towns into cities; in the city arose the cathedral; the Lombard or Byzantine mouldings and traceries of the cathedral gave birth to figure-sculpture; its mosaics gave birth to painting; every forward movement of the civilization unfolded as it were a new form or detail of the art, until, when mediæval civilization was reaching its moment of consolidation, when the cathedrals of Lucca and Pisa stood completed, when Niccolo and Giovanni Pisano had sculptured their pulpits and sepulchres; painting, in the hands of Cimabue and Duccio, of Giotto and of Guido da Siena, freed itself from the tradition of the mosaicists as sculpture had freed itself from the practice of the stone-masons, and stood forth an independent and organic art.

Thus painting was born of a new civilization, and grew by its own vital force; a thing of the Middle Ages, original and spontaneous. But contemporaneous with the mediæval revival was the resuscitation of Antiquity; in proportion as the new civilization developed, the old civilization was exhumed; real Latin began to be studied only when real Italian began to be written; Dante, Petrarca, and Boccaccio were at once the founders of modern literature and the exponents of the literature of antiquity; the strong young present was to profit by the experience of the past.

As it was with literature, so likewise was it with art. The most purely mediæval sculpture, the sculpture which has, as it were, just detached itself from the capitals and porches of the cathedral, is the direct pupil of the antique; and the three great Gothic sculptors, Niccoló,

Giovanni, and Andrea of Pisa, learn from fragments of Greek and Roman sculpture how to model the figure of the Redeemer and how to chisel the robe of the Virgin. This spontaneous mediæval sculpture, aided by the antique, preceded by a full half-century the appearance of mediæval painting; and it was from the study of the works of the Pisan sculptors that Cimabue and Giotto learned to depart from the mummified monstrosities of the hieratic, Byzantine and Roman style of Giunta and Berlinghieri. Thus, through the sculpture of the Pisans the painting of the school of Giotto received at second-hand the teachings of Antiquity. Sculpture had created painting; painting now belonged to the painters. In the hands of Giotto it developed within a few years into an art which seemed almost mature, an art dealing victoriously with its materials, triumphantly solving its problems, executing as if by miracle all that was demanded of it. But Giottesque art appeared perfect merely because it was limited; it did all that was required of it, because that which was required was little; it was not asked to reproduce the real nor to represent the beautiful; it was asked merely to suggest a character, a situation, a story.

The artistic development of a nation has its exact parallel in the artistic development of an individual. The child uses his pencil to tell a story, satisfied with balls and sticks as body, head, and legs; provided he and his friends can associate with them the ideas in their minds. The youth sets himself to copy what he sees, to reproduce forms and effects, without any aim beyond the mere pleasure of copying. The mature artist strives to obtain forms and effects of which he approves, he seeks for beauty. In the life of Italian painting the generation of men who flourished at the beginning of the sixteenth century are the mature artists; the men of the fifteenth century are the inexperienced youths; the Giottesques are the children— children Titanic and seraph-like, but children nevertheless; and, like all children, learning more perhaps in their few years than can the youth and the man learn in a lifetime.

Like the child, the Giottesque painter wished to show a situation or express a story, and for this purpose the absolute realization of objects was unnecessary. Giottesque art is not incorrect art, it is generalized art; it is an art of mere outline. The Giottesques could draw with great accuracy the hand: the form of the fingers, the bend of the limb, they could give to perfection its whole gesture and movement, they could produce a correct and spirited outline, but within this correct outline marked off in dark paint there is but a vague, uniform mass of pale colour; the body of the hand is missing, and there remains only its ghost, visible indeed, but unsubstantial, without weight or warmth, eluding the grasp. The difference between this spectre hand of the Giottesques, and the sinewy, muscular hand which can shake and crush of Masaccio and Signorelli; or the soft hand with throbbing pulse and warm pressure of Perugino and Bellini,—this difference is typical of the difference between the art of the fourteenth century and the art of the fifteenth century: the first suggests, the second realizes; the one gives impalpable outlines, the other gives tangible bodies. The Giottesque cares for the figure only inasmuch as it displays an action; he reduces it to a semblance, a phantom, to the mere exponent of an idea; the man of the Renaissance cares for the figure inasmuch as it is a living organism, he gives it substance and weight, he makes it stand out as an animate reality. Thence, despite its early triumphs, the Giottesque style, by its inherent nature, forbade any progress; it reached its limits at once, and the followers of Giotto look almost as if they were his predecessors, for the simple reason that, being unable to advance, they were forced to retrograde. The limited amount of artistic realization required to present to the mind of the spectator a situation or an allegory, had been obtained by Giotto himself, and bequeathed by him to his followers; who, finding it more than sufficient for their purposes, and having no incentive to further acquisition in the love of form and reality for their own sake, worked on with their master's materials, composing and recomposing, but adding nothing of their own. Giotto had observed Nature with passionate interest, because, although its representation was only a means to an end, it was a means which required to be mastered; and as such became in itself a sort of secondary aim; but the followers of Giotto merely utilized his observations of Nature, and in so doing gradually conventionalized and debased these second-hand observations. Giotto's forms are wilfully incomplete, because they aim at mere suggestion, but they are not conventional: they are diagrams, not symbols, and thence it is that Giotto seems nearer to the Renaissance than do his latest followers, not excepting even Orcagna. Painting, which had made the most prodigious strides from Giunta to Cimabue, and from Cimabue to Giotto, had got enclosed within a vicious circle, in which it moved for nearly a century neither backwards nor forwards: painters were satisfied with suggestion; and as long as they were satisfied, no progress was possible. From this Giottesque treadmill, painting was released by the intervention of another art. The painters were hopelessly mediocre; their art was snatched from them by the sculptors. Orcagna himself, perhaps the only Giottesque who gave painting an onward push, had modelled and cast one of the bronze gates of the Florence baptistery; the generation of artists who arose at the beginning of the fifteenth century, and who opened the period of the Renaissance, were sculptors or pupils of sculptors. When we see these vigorous lovers of nature, these heroic searchers after truth, suddenly pushing aside the decrepit Giottesque allegory-mongers, we ask ourselves in astonishment whence they have arisen, and how those broken-down artists of effete art could have begotten such a generation of giants. Whence do they come? Certainly not from the studios of the Giottesques. No, they issue out of the workshops of the stone-mason, of the goldsmith, of the worker in bronze, of the sculptor. Vasari has preserved the tradition that Masolino and Paolo Uccello were apprentices of Ghiberti; he has remarked that their greatest contemporary, Masaccio, "trod in the steps of Brunelleschi and of Donatello." Pollaiuolo and Verrocchio we know to have been equally excellent as painters and as workers in bronze. Sculpture, at once more naturalistic and more constantly under the influence of the antique, had for the second time laboured for painting. Itself a subordinate art, without much vitality, without deep roots in the civilization, sculpture was

destined to remain the unsuccessful pupil of the antique, and the unsuccessful rival of painting; but sculpture had for its mission to prepare the road for painting and to prepare painting for antique influence; and the noblest work of Ghiberti and Donatello was Masaccio, as the most lasting glory- to the Pisani had been Giotto.

With Masaccio began the study of nature for its own sake, the desire of reproducing external objects, without any regard to their significance as symbols, or as parts of a story; the passionate wish to arrive at absolute realization. The merely suggestive outline art of the Giottesques had come to an end; the suggestion became a matter of indifference, the realization became a paramount interest; the story was forgotten in the telling, the religious thought was lost in the search for the artistic form. The Giottesques had used debased conventionalism to represent action with wonderful narrative and logical power; the artists of the early Renaissance became unskilful narrators and foolish allegorists almost in proportion as they became skilful draughtsmen and colourists; the saints had become to Masaccio merely so many lay figures on to which to cast drapery; for Fra Filippo the Madonna was a mere peasant model; for Filippino Lippi and for Ghirlandajo, a miracle meant merely an opportunity of congregating a number of admirable portrait figures in the dress of the day; the Baptism for Verrocchio had significance only as a study of muscular legs and arms; and the sacrifice of Noah had no importance for Uccello save as a grand opportunity for foreshortenings. In the hands of the Giottesques, interested in the subject and indifferent to the representation, painting had remained stationary for eighty years; for eighty years did it develop in the hands of the men of the fifteenth century, indifferent to the subject and passionately interested in the representation. The unity, the appearance of comparative perfection of the art had disappeared with the limits within which the Giottesques had been satisfied to move; instead of the intelligible and solemn conventionalism of the Giottesques, we see only disorder, half-understood ideas and abortive attempts, confusion which reminds us of those enigmatic sheets on which Leonardo or Michael Angelo scrawled out their ideas—drawings within drawings, plans of buildings scratched over Madonna heads, single flowers upside down next to flayed arms, calculations, monsters, sonnets; a very chaos of thoughts and of shapes, in which the plan of the artist is inextricably lost, which mean everything and nothing, but out of whose unintelligible network of lines and curves have issued masterpieces, and which only the foolish or the would-be philosophical would exchange for some intelligible, hopelessly finished and finite illustration out of a Bible or a book of travels. Anatomy, perspective, colour, drapery, effects of light, of water, of shadow, forms of trees and flowers, converging lines of architecture, all this at once absorbed and distracted the attention of the artists of the early Renaissance; and while they studied, copied, and calculated, another thought began to haunt them, another eager desire began to pursue them: by the side of Nature, the manifold, the baffling, the bewildering, there rose up before them another divinity, another sphinx, mysterious in its very simplicity and serenity—the Antique.

The exhumation of the antique had, as we have seen, been contemporaneous with the birth of painting; nay, the study of the remains of antique sculpture had, in contributing to form Niccolò Pisano, indirectly helped to form Giotto; the very painter of the Triumph of Death had inserted into his terrible fresco two-winged genii, upholding a scroll, copied without any alteration from some coarse Roman sarcophagus, in which they may have sustained the usual *Dis Manibus Sacrum*. There had been, on the part of both sculptors and painters, a constant study of the antique; but during the Giottesque period this study had been limited to technicalities, and had in no way affected the conception of art. The mediæval artists, surrounded by physical deformities, and seeing sanctity in sickness and dirt, little accustomed to observe the human figure, were incapable, both as men and as artists, of at all entering into the spirit of antique art. They could not perceive the superior beauty of the antique; they could recognize only its superior science and its superior handicraft, and these alone they studied to obtain.

Giovanni Pisano sculpturing the unfleshed, caried carcasses of the devils who leer, writhe, crunch, and tear on the outside of Orvieto Cathedral; and the Giottesques painting those terrible green, macerated Christs, hanging livid and broken from the cross, which abound in Tuscany and Umbria; the artists who produced these loathsome and lugubrious works were indubitably students of the antique; but they had learned from it not a love for beautiful form and noble drapery, but merely the general shape of the limbs and the general fall of the garments: the anatomical science and technical processes of Antiquity were being used to produce the most intensely un-antique, the most intensely mediæval works. Thus matters stood in the time of Giotto. His followers, who studied only arrangement, probably consulted the antique as little as they consulted nature; but the contemporary sculptors were brought by the very constitution of their art into close contact both with Nature and with the antique; they studied both with determination, and handed over the results of their labours to the sculptor-taught painters of the fifteenth century.

Here, then, were the two great factors in the art of the Renaissance—the study of nature, and the study of the Antique: both understand slowly, imperfectly; the one counteracting the effect of the other; the study of nature now scaring away all antique influence, the study of the antique now distorting all imitation of nature; rival forces confusing the artist and marring the work, until, when each could receive its due, the one corrected the other, and they combined, producing by this marriage of the living reality with the dead but immortal beauty, the great art of Michael Angelo, of Raphael, and of Titian: double, like its origin, antique and modern, real and ideal.

The study of the antique is thus placed opposite to the study of nature, the comprehension of the works of Antiquity is the momentary antagonist of the comprehension of the works of nature. And

this may seem strange, when we consider that antique art was itself due to perfect comprehension of nature. But the contradiction is easily explained. The study of nature, as it was carried on in the Renaissance, comprised the study of effects which had remained unnoticed by Antiquity; and the study of the statue, --colourless, without light, shade, or perspective, hampered, and was hampered by, the study of colour, of light and shade, of perspective, and of all that a generation of painters would seek to learn from nature. Nor was this all; the influence of the civilization of the Renaissance, of a civilization directly issued from the Middle Ages, was entirely at variance with the influence of antique civilization through the medium of ancient art; the Middle Ages and Antiquity, Christianity and Paganism, were even more opposed to each other than could be the statue and the easel picture, the fresco and the bas-relief.

First, then, we have the hostility between painting --and sculpture, between the *modus operandi* of the modern and the *modus operandi* of the ancient art. Antique art is, in the first place, purely linear art, colourless, tintless, without light and shade; next, it is essentially the art of the isolated figure, without background, grouping, or perspective. As linear art it could directly affect only that branch of painting which was itself linear; and as art of the isolated figure it was ever being contradicted by the constantly developing arts of perspective and landscape. The antique never directly influenced the Venetians, not from reasons of geography and culture, but from the fact that Venetian painting, founded from the earliest times upon a system of colour, could not be affected by antique sculpture, based upon a system of modelled, colourless form; the men who saw form only through the medium of colour could not learn much from purely linear form; hence it is that even after a certain amount of antique imitation had passed into Venetian painting, through the medium of Mantegna, the Venetian painters display comparatively little antique influence. In Bellini, Carpaccio, Cima, and other early masters, the features, forms, and dress are mainly modern and Venetian; and Giorgione, Titian, and even the eclectic Tintoret, were more interested in the bright lights of a steel breastplate than in the shape of a limb; and preferred in their hearts a shot brocade of the sixteenth century to the finest drapery ever modelled by an ancient.

The antique influence was naturally strongest among the Tuscan schools; because the Tuscan schools were essentially schools of drawing, and the draughtsman recognized in antique sculpture the highest perfection of that linear form which was his own domain. Yet while the antique appealed most to the linear schools, even in these it could strongly influence only the purely linear part; it is strong in the drawings and weak in the paintings. As long as the artists had only the pencil or pen, they could reproduce much of the linear perfection of the antique; they were, so to speak, alone with it; but as soon as they brought in colour, perspective, and scenery, the linear perfection was lost in attempts at something new; the antique was put to flight by the modern. Botticelli's crayon study for his Venus is almost antique; his tempera picture of Venus, with the pale blue scaly sea, the laurel grove, the flower-embroidered garments, the wisps of tawny hair, is comparatively mediæval; Pinturicchio's sketch of Pans and satyrs contrasts strangely with his frescoes in the library of Siena; Mantegna himself, supernaturally antique in his engravings, becomes comparatively trivial and modern in his oil-paintings. Do what they might, draw from the antique and calculate its proportions, the artists of the Renaissance found themselves baffled as soon as they attempted to apply the result of their linear studies to coloured pictures; as soon as they tried to make the antique unite with the modern, one of the two elements was sure to succumb. In Botticelli, draughtsman and student though he was, the modern, the mediæval, that part of the art which had arisen in the Middle Ages, invariably had the upper hand; his Venus, despite her forms studied from the antique and her gesture imitated from some earlier discovered copy of the Medicean Venus, has the woe-begone prudery of a Madonna or of an abbess; she shivers physically and morally in her unaccustomed nakedness, and the goddess of Spring, who comes skipping up from beneath the laurel copse, does well to prepare her a mantle, for in the pallid tempera colour, against the dismal background of rippled sea, this mediæval Venus, at once indecent and prudish, is no very pleasing sight. In the Allegory of Spring in the Academy of Florence, we again have the antique; goddesses and nymphs whose clinging garments the gentle Sandro Botticelli has assuredly studied from some old statue of Agrippina or Faustina; but what strange livid tints are there beneath those draperies, what eccentric gestures are those of the nymphs, what a green, ghostlike light illumines this garden of Venus. Are these goddesses and nymphs immortal women such as the ancients conceived, or are they not rather fantastic fairies or nixen, Titanias and Undines, incorporeal daughters of dew and gossamer and mist? In Sandro Botticelli the teachings of the statue are forgotten or distorted when the artist takes up his palette and brushes; in his greater contemporary, Andrea Mantegna, the ever-present antique chills and arrests the vitality of the modern. Mantegna, the pupil of the ancient marbles of Squarcione's workshop even more than the pupil of Donatello, studies for his paintings not from nature, but from sculpture; his figures are seen in strange projection and foreshortening, like figures in a high relief seen from below; despite his mastery of perspective, they seem hewn out of the background; despite the rich colours which he displays in his Veronese altar-piece, they look like painted marbles, with their hard clots of stonelike hair and beard, with their vacant glance and their wonderful draperies, clinging and weighty like the wet draperies of ancient sculpture. They are beautiful petrifications, or vivified statues; Mantegna's masterpiece, the sepia "Judith" in Florence, is like an exquisite, pathetically lovely Eurydice, who has stepped unconscious and lifeless out of a Praxitelian bas-relief. And there are stranger works than even the Judith; strange statuesque fancies, like the fight of Marine Monsters and the Bacchanal among Mantegna's engravings. The group of three wondrous creatures, at once men, fish, and gods, is as grand and even more fantastic than Leonardo's Battle of the Standard: a Triton, sturdy and muscular, with sea-weed beard and hair, wheels round his finned horse,

preparing to strike his adversary with a bunch of fish which he brandishes above him; on him is rushing, careering on an osseous sea-horse, a strange, lank, sinewy being, fury stretching every tendon, his long-clawed feet striking into the flanks of his steed, his sharp, reed-crowned head turned fiercely, with clenched teeth, on his opponent, and stretching forth a truncheon, ready to run down his enemy as a ship runs down another; and further off a young Triton, with clotted hair and heavy eyes, seems ready to sink wounded below the rippling wavelets, with the massive head and marble agony of the dying Alexander; enigmatic figures, grand and grotesque, lean, haggard, vehement, and yet, in the midst of violence and monstrosity, unaccountably antique.. The other print, called the Bacchanal, has no background: half a dozen male figures stand separate and naked as in a bas-relief. Some are leaning against a vine-wreathed tub; a satyr, with acanthus-leaves growing wondrously out of him, half man, half plant, is emptying a cup; a heavy Silenus is prone upon the ground; a faun, seated upon the vat, is supporting in his arms a beautiful sinking youth; another youth, grand, muscular, and grave as a statue, stands on the further side. Is this really a bacchanal? Yes, for there is the paunchy Silenus, there are the fauns, there the vat and vine-wreaths and drinking-horns. And yet it cannot be a bacchanal. Compare with it one of Rubens's orgies, where the overgrown, rubicund men and women and fauns tumble about in tumultuous, riotous intoxication: that is a bacchanal; they have been drinking, those magnificent brutes, there is wine firing their blood and weighing down their heads. But here all is different, in this so-called Bacchanal of Mantegna. This heavy Silenus is supine like a mass of marble; these fauns are shy and mute; these youths are grave and sombre; there is no wine in the cups, there are no lees in the vat, there is no life in these magnificent colossal forms; there is no blood in their grandly bent lips, no light in their wide-opened eyes; it is not the drowsiness of intoxication which is weighing down the youth sustained by the faun; it is no grapejuice which gives that strange, vague glance. No; they have drunk, but not of any mortal drink; the grapes are grown in Persephone's garden, the vat contains no fruits that have ripened beneath our sun. These strange, mute, solemn revellers have drunk of Lethe, and they are growing cold with the cold of death and of marble; they are the ghosts of the dead ones of antiquity, revisiting the artist of the Renaissance, who paints them, thinking he is painting life, while that which he paints is in reality death. This anomaly, this unsatisfactory character of the works of both Botticelli and Mantegna, is mainly technical; the antique is frustrated in Botticelli, not so much by the Christian, the mediæval, the modern mode of feeling, as by the new methods and aims of the new art which disconcert the methods and aims of the old art; and that which arrests Mantegna in his development as a painter is not the spirit of Paganism deadening the spirit of Christianity, but the laws of sculpture hampering painting. But this technical contest between two arts, the one not yet fully developed, the other not yet fully understood, is as nothing compared with the contest between the two civilizations, the antique and the modern; between the habits and tendencies of the contemporaries of the artists of the Renaissance and of the artists themselves, and the habits and tendencies of the antique artists and their contemporaries. We are apt to think of the Renaissance as of a period closely resembling antiquity, misled by the inevitable similarity between southern and democratic countries of whatever age; misled still less pardonably by the Ciceronian pedantries and pseudo-antique obscenities of a few humanists, and by the pseudo-Corinthian arabesques and capitals of a few learned architects. But all this was mere archæological finery borrowed by a civilization in itself entirely unlike that of ancient Greece. The Renaissance, let us remember, was merely the flowering time of that great mediæval movement which had germinated early in the twelfth century; it was merely a more advanced stage of the civilization which had produced Dante and Giotto, of the civilization which was destined to produce Luther and Rabelais. The fifteenth century was merely the continuation of the fourteenth century, as the fourteenth had been of the thirteenth; there had been growth and improvement; development of the more modern, diminishing of the more mediæval elements; but, despite growth and the changes due to growth, the Renaissance was part and parcel of the Middle Ages. The life, thought, aspirations, and habits were mediæval; opposed to the open-air life, the physical training and the materialistic religion of Antiquity. The surroundings of Masaccio and of Signorelli, nay, even of Raphael, were very different from those of Phidias or Praxiteles. Let us think what were the daily and hourly impressions given by the Renaissance to its artists. Large towns, in which thousands of human beings were crowded together, in narrow, gloomy streets, with but a strip of blue visible between the projecting roofs; and in these cities an incessant commercial activity, with no relief save festivals at the churches, brawls at the taverns, and carnival buffooneries. Men and women pale and meagre for want of air, and light, and movement; undeveloped, untrained bodies, warped by constant work at the loom or at the desk, at best with the lumpish freedom of the soldier and the vulgar nimbleness of the prentice. And these men and women dressed in the dress of the Middle Ages, gorgeous perhaps in colour, but heavy, miserable, grotesque, nay, sometimes ludicrous in form; citizens in lumpish robes and long-tailed caps; ladies in stiff and foldless brocade hoops and stomachers; artisans in striped and close-adhering hose and egg-shaped padded jerkin; soldiers in lumbering armour-plates, ill-fitted over ill-fitting leather, a shapeless shell of iron, bulging out and angular, in which the body was buried as successfully as in the robes of the magistrates. Thus we see the men and women of the Renaissance in the works of all its painters: heavy in Ghirlandajo, vulgarly jaunty in Filippino, preposterously starched and prim in Mantegna, ludicrously undignified in Signorelli; while mediæval stiffness, awkwardness, and absurdity reach their acme perhaps in the little boys, companions of the Medici children, introduced into Benozzo Gozzoli's Building of Babel. These are the prosperous townfolk, among whom the Renaissance artist is but too glad to seek for models; but besides these there are lamentable sights, mediæval beyond words, at every street corner: dwarfs and cripples, maimed and diseased beggars of all degrees of loathsomeness, lepers and epileptics, and infinite numbers of monks, brown, grey, and black, in sack-shaped frocks and pointed hoods, with shaven crown and cropped beard, emaciated with penance or

bloated with gluttony. And all this the painter sees, daily, hourly; it is his standard of humanity, and as such finds its way into every picture. It is the living; but opposite it arises the dead. Let us turn aside from the crowd of the mediæval city, and look at what the workmen have just laid bare, or what the merchant has just brought from Rome or from Greece. Look at this: it is corroded by oxides, battered by ill-usage, stained with earth: it is not a group, not even a whole statue, it has neither head nor arms remaining; it is a mere broken fragment of antique sculpture, —a naked body with a fold or two of drapery; it is not by Phidias nor by Praxiteles, it may not even be Greek; it may be some cheap copy, made for a garden or a bath, in the days of Hadrian. But to the artist of the fifteenth century it is the revelation of a whole world, a world in itself. We can scarcely realize all this; but let us look and reflect, and even we may feel as must have felt the man of the Renaissance in the presence of that mutilated, stained, battered torso. He sees in that broken stump a grandeur of outline, a magnificence of osseous structure, a breadth of muscle and sinew, a smooth, firm covering of flesh, such as he would vainly seek in any of his living models; he sees a delicate and infinite variety of indentures, of projections, of creases following the bend of every limb; he sees, where the surface still exists intact, an elasticity of skin, a buoyancy of hidden life such as all the colours of his palette are unable to imitate; and in this piece of drapery, negligently gathered over the hips or rolled upon the arm, he sees a magnificent alternation of large folds and small plaits, of straight lines, and broken lines, and curves. He sees all this; but he sees more: the broken torso is, as we have said, not merely a world in itself, but the revelation of a world. It is the revelation of antique civilization, of the palæstra and the stadium, of the sanctification of the body, of the apotheosis of man, of the religion of life and nature and joy; revealed to the man of the Middle Ages, who has hitherto seen in the untrained, diseased, despised body but a deformed piece of baseness, which his priests tell him belongs to the worms and to Satan; who has been taught that the monk living in solitude and celibacy, filthy, sick, worn out with fastings and bleeding with flagellation, is the nearest approach to divinity; who has seen Divinity itself, pale, emaciated, joyless, hanging bleeding from the cross; and who is for ever reminded that the kingdom of this Godhead is not of this world. What passes in the mind of that artist? What surprise, what dawning doubts, what sickening fears, what longings and what remorse are not the fruit of this sight of Antiquity? Is he to yield or to resist? Is he to forget the saints and Christ, and give himself over to Satan and to Antiquity? Only one man boldly answered, Yes. Mantegna abjured his faith, abjured the Middle Ages, abjured all that belonged to his time; and in so doing cast away from him the living art and became the lover, the worshipper of shadows. And only one man turned completely aside from the antique as from the demon, and that man was a saint, Fra Angelico da Fiesole. And with the antique, Fra Angelico rejected all the other artistic influences and aims of his time, the time not of Giotto or of Orcagna, but of Masaccio and Uccello, of Pollaiuolo and Donatello. For the mild, meek, angelic monk dreaded the life of his days; dreaded to leave the cloister where the sunshine was tempered and the noise reduced to a mere faint hum, and where the flower-beds were tidy and prim; dreaded to soil or rumple his spotless white robe and his shining black cowl; a spiritual sybarite, shrinking from the sight of the crowd seething in the streets, shrinking from the idea of stripping the rags off the beggar in order to see his tanned and gnarled limbs; shuddering at the thought of seeking for muscles in the dead, cut-open body; fearful of every whiff of life that might mingle with the incense atmosphere of his chapel, of every cry of human passion which might break through the well-ordered sweetness of his chants. No; the Renaissance did not exist for him who lived in a world of diaphanous form, colour and character, unsubstantial and unruffled; dreaming feebly and sweetly of transparent-cheeked Madonnas with no limbs beneath their robes; of smooth-faced saints with well-combed beard and placid, vacant gaze, seated in well-ordered masses, holy with the purity of inanity; of divine dolls with pallid flaxen locks, floating between heaven and earth, playing upon lute and viol and psaltery; raised to faint visions of angels and blessed, moving noiseless, feelingless, meaningless, across the flowerets of Paradise; of assemblies of saints seated, arrayed in pure pink, and blue and lilac, in an atmosphere of liquid gold, in glory. And thus Fra Angelico worked on, content with the dearly purchased science of his masters, placid, beatic, effeminate, in an æsthetical paradise of his own, a paradise of sloth and sweetness, a paradise for weak souls, weak hearts, and weak eyes; patiently repeating the same fleshless angels, the same boneless saints, the same bloodless virgins; happy in smoothing the unmixed, unshaded tints of the sky, and earth, and dresses; laying on the gold of the fretted skies, and of the iridescent wings, embroidering robes, instruments of music, halos, flowers, with threads of gold.... Sweet, simple artist saint, reducing art to —something akin to the delicate pearl and silk embroidery of pious nuns, to the exquisite sweetmeat cookery of pious monks; a something too delicately gorgeous, too deliciously insipid for human wear or human food; no, the Renaissance does not exist for thee, either in its study of the existing reality, or in its study of antique beauty.

Mantegna, the learned, the archæological, the pagan, who renounces his times and his faith; and Angelico, the monk, the saint, who shuts and bolts his monastery doors and sprinkles holy water in the face of the antique; the two extremes, are both exceptions. The innumerable artists of the Renaissance remained in hesitation; tried to court both the antique and the modern, to unite the Pagan and the Christian—some, like Ghirlandajo, in cold indifference to all but mere artistic science, encrusting marble bacchanals into the walls of the Virgin's paternal house, bringing together, unthinkingly, antique-draped women carrying baskets, and noble Strozzi and Ruccellai ladies with gloved hands folded over their gold brocaded skirts; others, with cheerful and childlike pleasure in both antique and modern, like Benozzo, crowding together half-naked youths and nymphs treading the grapes and scaling the trellise with Florentine magnificos in plaited skirts and starched collars, among the pines, and porticos, the sprawling children, barking dogs, peacocks sunning themselves, and partridges picking up grain, of his Pisan

frescoes; yet others using the antique as mere pageant shows, allegorical mummeries, destined to amuse some Duke of Ferrara or Marquis of Mantua, together with the hurdle races of Jews, hags, and riderless donkeys.

Thus little by little the antique amalgamates with the modern; the art born of the Middle Ages absorbs the art born of Paganism; but how slowly, and with what fantastic and ludicrous results at first; as when the anatomical sculptor Pollaiuolo gives scenes of naked Roman prize-fighters as martyrdoms of St. Sebastian; or when the pious Perugino (pious at least with his brush) dresses up his sleek, hectic, beardless archangels as Roman warriors, and makes them stand, straddling beatifically on thin little dapper legs, wistfully gazing from beneath their wondrously ornamented helmets on the walls of the Cambio at Perugia; when he masquerades meditative fathers of the Church as Socrates and haggard anchorites as Numa Pompilius; most ludicrous of all, when he attires in scantiest of --clinging antique drapery his mild and pensive Madonnas, and, with daintily pointed toes, places them to throne bashfully on allegorical chariots as Venus or Diana.

Long is the period of amalgamation, and small are the results throughout that long early Renaissance. Mantegna, Piero della Francesca, Melozzo, Ghirlandajo, Filippino, Botticelli, Verrocchio, have none of them shown us the perfect fusion of the two elements whose union is to give us Michael Angelo, Raphael, and all the great perfect artists of the early sixteenth century; the two elements are for ever ill-combined and hostile to each other; the modern vulgarizes the antique, the antique paralyzes the modern. And meanwhile the fifteenth century, the century of study, of conflict, and of confusion, is rapidly drawing to a close; eight or ten more years, and it will be gone. Is the new century to find the antique still dead and the modern still mediæval?

The antique and the modern had met for the first time and as irreconcilable enemies in the cloisters of Pisa; and the modern had triumphed in the great mediæval fresco of the Triumph of Death. By a strange coincidence, by a sublime jest of accident, the antique and the modern were destined to meet again, and this time indissolubly united, in a painting representing the Resurrection. Yes, Signorelli's fresco in Orvieto Cathedral is indeed a resurrection, the resurrection of human beauty after the long death-slumber of the Middle Ages. And the artist would seem to have been dimly conscious of the great allegory he was painting. Here and there are strewn skulls; skeletons stand leering by, as if in remembrance of the ghastly past, and as a token of former death; but magnificent youths are breaking through the crust of the earth, emerging, taking shape and flesh; arising, strong and proud, ready to go forth at the bidding of the Titanic angels who announce from on high with trumpet blast and waving banners, that the death of the world has come to an end, and that humanity has arisen once more in the youth and beauty of Antiquity.

Signorelli's frescoes at Orvieto, at once the "latest works of the fifteenth century, and the latest works of an old man nurtured in the traditions of Benozzo Gozzoli and of Piero della Francesca, mark the beginning of the maturity and perfection of Italian art. From them Michael Angelo learns what he could not be taught even by his master Ghirlandajo, the grand and cold realist. He learns; and what he has learned at Orvieto he teaches with doubled force in Rome; and the ceiling of the Sixtine Chapel, the superb and heroic nudités, the majestic draperies, the reappearance in the modern art of painting of the spirit and hand of Phidias, give a new impulse and hasten on perfection. When the doors of the chapel are at length opened, Raphael forgets Perugino; Fra Bartolomeo forgets Botticelli; Sodoma forgets Leonardo; the narrower hesitating styles of the fifteenth century are abandoned, as the great example is disseminated throughout Italy; and even the tumult of angels in glory which the Lombard Correggio is to paint in far-off Parma, and the daringly simple Bacchus and Ariadne with which Tintoret will decorate the Ducal Palace more than fifty years later—all that is great and bold, all that is a re-incarnation of the spirit of Antiquity, all that marks the culmination of Renaissance art, seems due to the impulse of Michael Angelo, and, through him, to the example of Signorelli. From the celestial horseman and bounding avenging angels of Raphael's Heliodorus, to the St. Sebastian of Sodoma, with exquisite limbs and head, rich with tendril-like locks, delicate against the brown Umbrian sunset; from the Madonna of Andrea del Sarto seated, with the head and drapery of a Niobe, by the sack of flour in the Annunziata cloister, to the voluptuous goddess, with purple mantle half concealing her body of golden white, who leans against the sculptured fountain in Titian's Sacred and Profane Love, with the greenish blue sky and hazy light of evening behind her; from the most extreme examples of the most extreme schools of Lombardy and Venetia, to the most intense examples of the remotest schools of Tuscany and Umbria; throughout the art of the early sixteenth century, of those thirty years which were the years of perfection, we see, more or less marked, but always distinct, the union of the living art born of the Middle Ages with the dead art left by Antiquity, a union producing life and perfection, producing the great art of the Renaissance.

This much is clear and easy of definition; but what is neither clearly understood nor easily defined is the nature of this union, the manner in which the antique and the modern did thus amalgamate. It is easy to speak of a vague union of spirit, of the antique idea having permeated the modern; but all this explains but little: art is not a metaphysical figment, and all its phases and revolutions are concrete, and, so to speak, physically explicable and definable. The union of the antique with the modern meant simply the absorption by the art of the Renaissance of elements of civilization necessary for its perfection, but not existing in the medieval civilization of the fifteenth century; of elements of civilization which gave what the civilization of the fifteenth century—which could give colour, perspective, grouping, and landscape—could never have afforded: the nude, drapery, and gesture. The naked human body, which the Greeks had trained, studied, and idolized, did not exist in the fifteenth century; in its stead there was only the

undressed body, ill-developed, untrained, pinched, and distorted by the garments only just cast off; cramped and bent by sedentary occupations, livid with the plague-spots of the Middle Ages, scarred by the whipmarks of asceticism. This stripped body, unseen and unfit to be seen, unaccustomed to the air and to the eyes of others, shivered and cowered for cold and for shame. The Giottoesques ignored its very existence, conceiving humanity as a bodiless creature, with face and hands to express emotion, and just enough malformed legs and feet to be either standing or moving; further, beneath the garments, there was nothing. The realists of the fifteenth century tore off the clothes and drew the ugly thing beneath; and bought the corpses from the lazarettos, and stole them from the gallows; in order to see how bone fitted into bone, and muscle was stretched over muscle. They learned to perfection the anatomy of the human frame, but they could not learn its beauty; they became even reconciled to the ugliness they were accustomed to see; and, with their minds full of antique examples, Verrocchio, Donatello, Pollaiuolo, and Ghirlandajo, the greatest anatomists of the fifteenth century, imitated their coarse and ill-made living models when they imagined that they were imitating antique marbles. So much for the nude. Drapery, as the ancients understood it in the delicate plaits of Greek chiton and tunic, in the grand folds of the Roman toga, the fifteenth century could not show; it knew only the stiff, scanty raiment of the active classes; the shapeless masses of lined cloth of the merchants and magistrates; the prudish and ostentatious starched dress of the women; and the coarse, lumpish garb of the monks. The artist of the fifteenth century knew drapery only as an exotic, an exotic with whose representation the habit of seeing mediæval costume was for ever interfering; on the stripped, unseemly, indecent body he places, with the stiffness of artificiality, drapery such as he has never seen upon any living creature; the result is awkwardness and rigidity. And what attitude, what gesture, can he expect from this stripped and artificially draped model? None, for the model scarce knows how to stand in so unaccustomed a condition of body. The artist must seek for attitude and gesture among his townfolk, and among them he can find only trivial, awkward, often vulgar movement.

They have never been taught how to stand or to move with grace and dignity; the artist must study attitude and gesture in the market-place or the bull-baiting ground, where Ghirlandajo found his jauntily strutting idlers, and Verrocchio his brutally staggering prize-fighters. Between the constrained attitudinizing of Byzantine and Giottoesque tradition, and the imitation of the movements of clodhoppers and ragamuffins, the realist of the fifteenth century would wander hopelessly were it not for the antique. Genius and science are of no avail; the position of Christ in baptism in the paintings of Verrocchio and Ghirlandajo is mean and servile; the movements of the "Thunder-stricken" in Signorelli's lunettes is an inconceivable mixture of the brutish, the melodramatic, and the comic; the magnificently drawn youth at the door of the prison in Filippino's Liberation of St. Peter is gradually going to sleep and collapsing in a fashion which is truly ignoble. And the same applies to sculptured figures or to figures standing isolated like statues; no Greek would have ventured upon the swaggering position, with legs apart and elbows out, of Donatello's St. George, or Perugino's St. Michael; and a young Athenian who should have assumed the attitude of Verrocchio's David, with tripping legs and hand clapped on his hip, would have been sent to sit in a corner as a saucy little ragamuffin.

Coarse nude, stiff drapery, vulgar attitude, was all that the fifteenth century could offer to its artists; but Antiquity could offer more and very different things: the naked body developed by the most artistic training, drapery the most natural and refined, and attitude and gesture regulated by an education the most careful and artistic; and all these things Antiquity did give to the artists of the Renaissance. They did not copy antique statues as living naked men and women, but they corrected the faults of their living models by the example of the statues; they did not copy antique stone draperies in coloured pictures, but they arranged the robes on their models with the antique folds well in their memory; they did not give the gestures of statues to living figures, but they made the living figures move in accordance with those principles of harmony which they had found exemplified in the statues.

They did not imitate the antique, they studied it; they obtained through the fragments of antique sculpture a glimpse into the life of antiquity, and that glimpse served to correct the vulgarism and distortion of the mediæval life of the fifteenth century. In the perfection of Italian painting, the union of antique and modern being consummated, it is perhaps difficult to disentangle what really is antique from what is modern; but in the earlier times, when the two elements were still separate, we can see them opposite each other and compare them in the works of the greatest artists. Wherever, in the paintings of the early Renaissance, there is realism, marked by the costume of the times, there is ugliness of form and vulgarity of movement; where there is idealism, marked by imitation of the antique, the nude, and drapery, there is beauty and dignity. We need only compare Filippino's Scene before the Proconsul with his Raising of the King's Son in the Brancacci Chapel; the grand attitude and draperies of Ghirlandajo's Zachariah with the vulgar dress and movements of the Florentine citizens surrounding him; Benozzo Gozzoli's noble naked figure of Noah with his ungainly, hideously dressed figure of Cosimo de' Medici; Mantegna's exquisite Judith with his preposterous Marquis of Mantua; in short, all the purely realistic with all the purely idealistic painting of the fifteenth century. We may give one last instance. In Signorelli's Orvieto frescoes there is a figure of a young man, with aquiline features, long crisp hair and strongly developed throat, which reappears unmistakably in all the compositions, and in some of them twice and thrice in various positions. His naked figure is magnificent, his attitudes splendid, his thrown-back head superb, whether he be slowly and painfully emerging from the earth, staggered and gasping with his newly infused life, or sinking oppressed on the ground, broken and crushed by the sound of the trumpet of judgment; or whether he be moving forward with ineffable longing towards the angel about to award him the

crown of the blessed; in all these positions he is heroically beautiful. We meet him again, unmistakable, but how different, in the realistic group of the "Thunder-stricken"—the long, lank youth, with spindle-shanks and egg-shaped body, bounding forward, with most grotesque strides, over the uncouth heap of dead bodies, ungainly masses with soles and nostrils uppermost, lying in beast-like confusion. This youth, with something of a harlequin in his jumps and his ridiculous thin legs and preposterous round body, is evidently the model for the naked demi-gods of the Resurrection and the Paradise: he is the handsome boy as the fifteenth century gave him to Signorelli; opposite, he is the living youth of the fifteenth century idealized by the study of ancient sculpture; just as the "Thunder-stricken" may be some scene of street massacre such as Signorelli might have witnessed at Cortona or Perugia; while the agonies of the "Hell" are the grouped and superb agonies taught by the antique; just as the two arch-angels of the "Hell," in their armour of Baglioni's heavy cavalry, may represent the modern element, and the same archangels, naked, with magnificent flying draperies, blowing the trumpets of the Resurrection, may show the antique element in Renaissance art. The antique influence was not, indeed, equally strong throughout Italy; it was strongest in the Tuscan school, which, seeking for perfection of linear form, found that perfection in the antique; it was weakest in the Lombard and Venetian schools, which sought for what the antique could not give, light and shade and colour; the antique was most efficacious where it was most indispensable, and it was more necessary to a Tuscan, strong only with his charcoal or pencil, than to Leonardo da Vinci, who could make an imperfect figure, beckoning mysteriously from out of the gloom, more fascinating than the finest drawn Florentine Madonna, and could surround an insignificant childish head with the wondrous sheen and ripple of hair, as with an aureole of poetry; it was also less necessary to Giorgione and Titian, who could hide coarse limbs beneath their draperies of precious ruby, and transfigure, by the liquid gold of their palettes, a peasant woman into a goddess. But even the Lombards, even the Venetians, required the antique influence. They could not perhaps have obtained it direct like the Tuscans: the colourists and masters of light and shade might never have understood the blank lines and faint shadows of the marble; but they received the antique influence, strong but modified by the medium through which it had passed, from Mantegna; and the relentless self-sacrifice to Antiquity, the self-paralyzation of the great artist, was not without its use: from Venetian Padua, Mantegna influenced the Bellini and Giorgione; from Lombard Mantua, he influenced Leonardo; and Mantegna's influence was that of the antique.

What would have been the art of the Renaissance without the antique? The speculation is vain, for the antique had influenced it, had been goading it on ever since the earliest times; it had been present at its birth, it had affected Giotto through Niccolo Pisano, and Masaccio through Ghiberti; the antique influence cannot be conceived as absent in the history of Italian painting. So far, as a study of the impossible, the speculation respecting the fate of Renaissance art had it not been influenced by the antique would be childishly useless. But lest we forget that this antique influence did exist, lest, grown ungrateful and blind, we refuse it its immense share in producing Michael Angelo, Raphael, and Titian, we may do well to turn to an art born and bred like Italian art, in the Middle Ages; like it, full of strength and power of self-development, but which, unlike Italian art, was not influenced by the antique. This art is the great German art of the early sixteenth century; the art of Martin Schongauer, of Aldegrever, of Altdorfer, of Wohlgemuth, of Kranach, of Albrecht Durer and Hans Holbein, whom they resemble as Pinturicchio and Lo Spagna resemble Perugino, as Palma and Paris Bordone resemble Titian. This is an art born in a civilization less perfect indeed than that of Italy, narrower, as Nürnberg or Basle is narrower than Florence; but resembling it in habits, dress, religion, above all, the main characteristic of being mediæval; and its masters, as great as their Italian contemporaries in all the technicalities of the art, and in absolute honesty of endeavour, may show what the Italian art of the sixteenth century might have been without the antique. Let us therefore open a portfolio of those wonderful minute yet grand engravings of the old Germans. They are for the most part Scriptural scenes or allegories, quite analogous to those of the Italians, but purely realistic, conscious of no world beyond that of an Imperial City of the year 1520. Here we have the whole turn-out, male and female, of a German free-town, in the shape of scenes from the lives of the Virgin and saints; here are short fat burghers, with enormous blotchy, bloated faces and little eyes set in fat, their huge stomachs protruding from under their jackets; here are blear-eyed ladies, tall, thin, wrinkled though not old, with figures like hungry harpies, stalking about in high headgears and stiff gowns, or sitting by the side of lean and stunted pages, singing (with dolorous voice) to lutes; or promenading under trees with long-shanked, high-shouldered gentlemen, with vacant sickly face and long scraggy hair and beard, their bony elbows sticking out of their slashed doublets. These courtly figures culminate in Dürer's magnificent plate of the wild man of the woods kissing the hideous, leering Jezebel in her brocade and jewels. These aristocratic women are terrible; prudish, malicious, licentious, never modest because they are always ugly. Even the poor Madonnas, seated in front of village hovels or windmills, smile the smile of starved, sickly sempstresses. It is a stunted, poverty-stricken, plague-sick society, this mediæval society of burghers and burghers' wives; the air seems bad and heavy, and the light wanting physically and morally, in these old free-towns; there is intellectual sickness as well as bodily in those musty gabled houses; the mediæval spirit blights what revival of healthiness may exist in these commonwealths. And feudalism is outside the gates. There are the brutal, leering men-at-arms, in slashed, puffed doublets and heavy armour, face and dress as unhuman as possible, standing grimacing at the blood spirting from John the Baptist's decapitated trunk, as in Kranach's horrible print, while gaping spectators fill the castle-yard; there are the castles high on rocks amidst woods, with miserable villages below, where the Prodigal Son wallows among the swine, and the tattered boors tumble about in drunkenness, or rest wearied on their spades. There are the Middle Ages in full force. But had these Germans of the days of Luther really no thought

beyond their own times and their own country? Had they really no knowledge of the antique? Not so; they had heard from their learned men, from Willibald Pirkheimer and Ulrich von Hutten, that the world had once been peopled with naked gods and goddesses. Nay, the very year perhaps that Raphael handed to his engraver, Marc Antonio, his magnificent drawing of the Judgment of Paris, Lukas Kranach bethought him to represent the story of the good Knight Paris giving the apple to the Lady Venus. So Kranach took up his steady pencil and sharp chisel, and in strong, clear, minute lines of black and white showed us the scene. There, on Mount Ida, with a castellated rock in the distance, the charger of Paris browses beneath some stunted larches; the Trojan knight's helmet, with its monstrous beak and plume, lies on the ground; and near it reclines Paris himself, lazy, in complete armour, with frizzled fashionable beard. To him, all wrinkled and grinning with brutal lust, comes another bearded knight, with wings to his vizored helmet, Sir Mercury, leading the three goddesses, short, fat-cheeked German wenches, housemaids stripped of their clothes, stupid, brazen, indifferent. And Paris is evidently prepared with his choice: he awards the apple to the fattest, for among a half-starved, plague-stricken people like this, the chosen of gods and men must needs be the fattest.

No, such pagan scenes are mere burlesques, coarse mummeries, such as may have amused Nürnberg and Augsburg during Shrovetide, when drunken louts figured as Bacchus and sang drinking songs by Hans Sachs. There is no reality in all this; there is no belief in pagan gods. If we would see the haunting divinity of the German Renaissance, we shall find him prying and prowling in nearly every scene of real life; him, the ever present, the king of the Middle Ages, whose triumph we have seen on the cloister wall at Pisa, the Lord Death. His fleshless face peers from behind a bush at Zatzinger's stunted, fever-stricken lady and imbecile gentleman; he sits grinning on a tree in Orso Grafts allegory, while the cynical knights, with haggard, sensual faces, crack dirty jokes with the fat, brutish woman squatted below; he puts his hand into the basket of Dürer's tattered pedlar; he leers hideously at the stirrup of Dürer's armed and stalwart knight. No gods of youth and nature, no Hercules, no Hermes, no Venus, have invaded his German territories, as they invaded even his own palace, the burial-ground at Pisa; the antique has not perverted Dürer and his fellows, as it perverted Masaccio and Signorelli and Mantegna, from the mediæval worship of Death.

The Italians had seen the antique and had let themselves be seduced by it, despite their civilization and their religion. Let us only rejoice thereat. There are indeed some, and among them the great English critic who is irrefutable when he is a poet, and irrational when he becomes a philosopher;—there are some who tell us that in its union with antique art, the art of the followers of Giotto embraced death, and rotted away ever after. There are others, more moderate but less logical, who would teach us that in uniting with the antique, the mediæval art of the fifteenth century purified and sanctified the beautiful but evil child of Paganism; that the goddess of Scopas and the athlete of Polyclète were raised to a higher sphere when Raphael changed the one into a Madonna, and Michael Angelo metamorphosed the other into a prophet. But both schools of criticism are wrong. Every civilization has its inherent evil; Antiquity had its inherent evils, as the Middle Ages had theirs; Antiquity may have bequeathed to the Renaissance the bad with the good, as the Middle Ages had bequeathed to the Renaissance the good with the bad. But the art of Antiquity was not the evil, it was the good of Antiquity; it was born of its strength and its purity only, and it was the incarnation of its noblest qualities. It could not be purified, because it was spotless; it could not be sanctified, because it was holy. It could gain nothing from the art of the Middle Ages, alternately strong in brutal reality, and languid in mystic inanity; the men of the Renaissance could, if they influenced it at all, influence the antique only for evil; they belonged to an inferior artistic civilization, and if we conscientiously seek for the spiritual improvements brought by them into antique types, we shall see that they consist in spoiling their perfect proportions; in making necks longer and muscles more prominent; in rendering more or less flaccid, or meagre or coarse, the grand and delicate forms of antique art. And when we have examined into this purified art of the Renaissance, when we have compared coolly and equitably, we may perhaps confess that, while the Renaissance added immense wealth of beauty in colour, perspective, and grouping, it took away something of the perfection of simple lines and modest light and shade of the antique; we may admit to ourselves that the grandest saint by Raphael is meagre and stunted; and the noblest Virgin by Titian is overblown and sensual by the side of the demi-gods and amazons of antique sculpture.

The antique perfected the art of the Renaissance, it did not corrupt it. The art of the Renaissance fell indeed into shameful degradation soon after the period of its triumphant union with the antique; and Raphael's grand gods and goddesses, his exquisite Eros and radiant Psyche of the Farnesina, are indeed succeeded but too soon by the Olympus of Giulio Romano, an Olympus of harlots and acrobats, who smirk and mouth and wriggle and sprawl ignobly on the walls and ceilings of the dismantled palace which crumbles away among the stunted willows, the stagnant pools, and rank grass of the marshes of Mantua. But this is no more the fault of Antiquity than it is the fault of the Middle Ages; it is the fault of that great principle of life and of change which makes all things organic, be they physical or intellectual, germinate, grow, attain maturity, and then fade, wither, and rot. The dead art of Antiquity could never have brought the art of the Renaissance to an untimely end; the art of the Renaissance decayed because it was mature, and died because it had lived.

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