RENAISSANCE: THE CULTURAL REBIRTH OF EUROPE

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"Young and ardent, and resolved to live his life as he pleased, and to find his own answers to his questions in such experience as he could obtain, a man of the renaissance kicked down all the elaborate edifice of theory and formula, of ancient metaphysics and crystalized theology. He would breathe his own air of enfranchisement and liberty. He would go down the primrose path to the ever-lasting bonfire, or win his way through the strait gate and by the narrow path in his own fashion. Authority, theory, dogma — these he could not tolerate".

(W. L. Courtney: *The Idea of Tragedy)*

The Renaissance marked a new phase and a major departure in the history of European thought and literature, life and culture. Some of the most eminent Western writers on the Renaissance, including Hegel, Dilthey, Michelet, Burckhardt, James Frazer, Symonds, Sichel, Draper, Briffault and H. S. Lucas, have upheld the thesis that the Renaissance, in its most characteristic aspects, was a major and fundamental deviation and revolt from the medieval-Christian ideal and outlook. The new thought and the new culture of the Renaissance, made possible by the revival of classical learning through the medium of the Arabs, and the impact of the Muslim civilization on Europe laid the foundations of the new modern culture and civilization of the West. The new mental climate and attitude of the Renaissance fostered love of the temporal life, of beauty and pleasure and joy of living. After five centuries of sleep and gloom the dawn of light and learning, of life and joy, came to Europe in the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Renaissance love of the human, the natural and the sensual; its individualism, self-expression and self-assertion; its religious scepticism and free-thinking; its love of adventurous life; its love of power,

pomp, fame and earthly glory; its love of gold and wealth; its interest in discovery and exploration, were a clear antithesis of the medieval-Christian world-view which was characterised by transcendental other-wordliness and asceticism, by its three cardinal precepts: poverty, chastity, and obedience. Poverty was replaced by wealth and abundance, chastity by a frank pagan enjoyment of the flesh, and obedience by rebellion. But before examining the Renaissance and its ideals and values in detail, we must first examine the medieval-Christian order and its foundations.

Medieval Christian Order

Under the pagan Roman Empire Christianity was one of the religions of the Empire, and its followers had to pay homage to the Roman Emperor. During its first three centuries Christianity passed through three phases: persecution, toleration, and, finally, acceptance at the hands of the Roman emperors, the first of whom to embrace Christianity was Constantine. But even after Christianity became the religion of the Roman Empire, the fundamental Christian separation and dualism of God and Caesar, Church and State, Pope and Emperor, continued to exist. This Christian dualism of the two Powers of the Pope and the Emperor, based as it is upon the dualism of the spirit and the flesh, the secular and the spiritual, was further based upon the words of Jesus: "My Kingdom is not of this world", and "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's". As a result of this dualism people's loyalty and allegiance was divided between the Church and the State, Pope and Emperor, between the City of God and the Earthly City. But, since in the very nature of things, there can be no complete separation between the various aspects of life, there developed a conflict and clash not only within the individual himself, torn between the claims of the spirit and the flesh, but also between the Church and the State, finally resulting in the struggles for power and supremacy between the Church and the State who both claimed to govern the human herd. The struggle continued throughout the Middle Ages and

came to an end with the victory of the secular forces and the establishment of sovereign nation-states.

The early and medieval Christian society considered the two realms of Pope and Emperor as autonomous powers, both divine in origin; but, in actual practice, the Church regarded itself as superior to and higher than the State and hence the clash of jurisdiction and struggle for power and supremacy between the two powers. The Church hierarchy derives its authority not from the people but directly from Christ through the mediation of the Apostles. All real power and sovereignty over medieval Christendom was vested in the Roman Pontiff. The evils proceeding from this basic and permanent division and dualism of Christian consciousness were noted, among others, by Rousseau. Referring to the religious and political unity of the Greek and Roman polity, Rousseau writes: "It was in these circumstances that Jesus came to set upon earth a spiritual kingdom, which by separating the theological from the political system, made the state no longer one, and brought about the internal divisions which have never ceased to trouble Christian peoples . . . . this double power and conflict of jurisdiction have made all good polity impossible in Christian states; and men have never succeeded in finding out whether they were bound to obey the master (prince) or the priest . . Christianity as a religion is entirely spiritual, occupied solely with heavenly things; the country of the Christian is not of this world . ".[32]

The early and medieval Church upheld and preached, in theory, the ascetic and monastic ideal of life, regarding the earthly life as a painful but essential preliminary to the life to come; it held the life of this world in contempt and of no value and importance. The change from the medieval and the Christian to the pagan and the modern, from the theological to the secular, from the ascetic to the human, has been very well expressed by Sir

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[32] J. J. Rousseau, *Social Contract,* Ch: "Civil Religion", Everyman Library, London, 1952, P. 108.

James Frazer in these words . "The saint and the recluse, disdainful of earth and rapt in ecstatic contem plation of heaven, became in popular opinion the highest ideal of humanity, displacing the old ideal (Greek and Roman) of the patriot and hero who, forgetful of self, lives and is ready to die for the good of his country. The earthly city seemed poor and contemptible to men whose eyes beheld the City of God coming in the clouds of heaven. . In their anxiety to save their own souls and the souls of others, they were content to leave the material world, which they identified with the principle of evil, to perish around them. This obsession lasted for a thousand years. The revival of Roman law, of the Aristotelian philosophy, of ancient art and literature at the close of the Middle Ages, marked the return of Europe to native ideals of life and conduct, to saner, manlier views of the world".[33]

But the practice of the medieval Church did not correspond with its theoretical ideals; it had become a perfect spiritual and secular despotism. In the words of Henry S. Lucas, "The Church, which had been established during the Roman Empire, possessed extensive political privileges and an enormous amount of land. It was a powerful political and economic competitor of princes. It had elaborated a vast system of dogma and enjoyed greater sway over the souls of men than did any other organization".[34] The Church did not permit freedom of thought and belief. The laity had no right to think and express themselves freely; they had to accept Church doctrines and dogmas without questioning; they were expected to send their minds on a perpetual holiday in the blissful realms of ignorance. Condorcet has well expressed the intellectual condition during the dark ages of Europe: "During this disastrous stage we shall witness the rapid decline of the human mind from the height that it had attained and we shall see ignorance following in its wake, and sometimes bestial cruelty, and sometimes cruelty in all its refinement, and everywhere corruption and treachery. Nothing could

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[33] Sir James Frazer, *Golden Bough,* quoted by Arnold Toynbee in his *Civilization on Trial,* London, 1949, P. 229-30

[34] H. S. Lucas, *Renaissance and the Reformation,* New York, 1934, P. 49.

penetrate that profound darkness save a few shafts of talent, a few rays of kindness and magnanimity. Man's only achievements were theological day-dreaming and superstitious imposture, his only morality religious intolerance. In blood and tears, crushed between priestly tyranny and military despotism, Europe awaited the moment when a new enlightenment would allow her to be reborn free, heiress to humanity and virtue . . . . The intolerance of the priests, their struggle for political power, their scandalous greed and moral depravity made even more disgusting by a mask of hypocrisy, revolted any one whose soul was uncorrupted, whose mind unclouded, whose heart undaunted. There was such a striking contrast between the dogmas, principles and behaviour of the priests and those of the early disciples, the founders of their doctrine and moral creed, of whom the priests could scarcely keep the people in total ignorance".[35]

The official attitude of the medieval Church was authoritarian and anti-liberal; it did not favour freedom of religious and scientific speculation. Learning was mostly scriptural, and that too was the privilege of the clergy. Man's chief concerns, theoretically, were religious and other-wordly. "During the Middle Ages" writes **J.** A. Symonds, "man had lived enveloped in a cowl. He had not seen the beauty of the world, or had seen it only to cross himself and turn aside, to tell his beads and pray. Like St. Bernard travelling along the shores of Lake Leman, and noticing neither the azure of the waters, nor the luxuriance of the vines, nor the radiance of the mountains with their robe of sun and snow, but bending a thought-burdened forehead over the neck of his mule; even like this monk, humanity had passed, a careful pilgrim, intent on the terrors of sin, death, and judgment, along the highways of the world, and had scarcely known that they were sight-worthy, or that life is a blessing. Beauty is a snare, pleasure a sin, the world a fleeting shadow, man fallen and lost, death the only certainty; ignorance is acceptable to God as a proof of

[35] Condorcet, *Progress of the Human Mind,*

faith and submission; abstinence and mortification are the only safe rules of life: these were the fixed ideas of the ascetic medieval Church".[36]

The whole medieval attitude and outlook was hostile to the freedom of the mind and spirit and was irrational and unprogressive. "The idea of the universe which prevailed throughout the Middle Ages", wrote Professor Bury, "and the general orientation of men's thoughts were incompatible with some of the fundamental assumptions which are required by the idea of Progress. According to the Christian theory which was worked out by the Fathers, and especially by St. Augustine, the whole movement of history has the purpose of securing the happiness of a small portion of the human race in another world; it does not postulate a further development of human history on earth. For Augustine, as for any medieval believer, the course of history would be satisfactorily complete if the world came to an end in his own lifetime"[37] The human mind, during these days of the dominance of the Church, was completely enslaved. "In the period, then, in which the Church exercised its greatest influence, reason was enchained in the prison which Christianity had built around the human mind".[38] There are some famous names among the victims of the Church, including Abelard, Savonarola, Bruno and Galileo. The anti-liberal, dogmatic, intolerant and authoritarian attitude of the Church resulted in the Crusades, and in the religious persecutions, massacres and religious wars between the Christian sects and states themselves, including the Massacre of St. Bartholomew which had deeply moved Montaigne and inspired his plea for sanity and tolerance in matters of faith. Ultimately the authoritarian and orthodox medieval-Christian order broke down under the impact of the combined forces of the Renaissance and the Reformation, although the attitude of the latter movement was as hostile to the liberal-humanist tradition, to reason, nature and liberty as that of medieval Christianity. Luther and Calvin were anything

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[36] J. A. Symonds, *A Short History of the Renaissance in Italy,* Abridged by Lt. Col. A. Pearson, P. 5.

[37] J. B. Bury, *Idea of Progress,* (New York, 1955), P. 21.

[38] J. B. Bury, *History of Freedom of Thought,* (Home University Library), pp. 67-68.

but liberals and humamsts. The medieval chains, however, were broken, the European mind revolted against the despotism and dogmatic authority of the Church and its intellectual and political tyranny. Wycliff and Luther, Erasmus and Montaigne, Christopher Marlowe and Shakespeare, though differing between themselves, represent the new ways of thought and feeling, the new challenge and revolt against the medieval scheme of things. The medieval-Christian attitude of world-and-life negation gave place to an attitude of world-and-life affirmation. The intellect and conscience of Europe awakened to a consciousness of human dignity and freedom.

Forces Behind Renaissance

Now the question arises: how did this great change come about? Wherefrom came the new impulse for the new awakening? The old and common theory, found in most Western books on the subject, that in 1453 the Turk captured Constantinople and the Greek scholars came over to Italy and the new era of light and learning suddenly started, dispelling the clouds of medieval ignorance, no longer finds favour with honest and serious scholarship. This popular but unhistorical theory of the origins of the Renaissance seemed to imply that the Greek scholars said: 'Let there be light, and there was light'. Rejecting this old thoery, Douglas Bush writes: "Most of us must have encountered many times the idea that the fall of Constantinople in 1453 drove Greek scholars to Western Europe and so inaugurated the great revival of the classics. In the later nineteenth and the early twentieth century this was an almost universal pedagogical doctrine, and for English-speaking readers 1453 and all that was nearly as solid as 1066. This classic myth has so long been shattered that it might be allowed to rest in peace, or in the pages of popular writers, who so often cherish what scholars have abandoned . "[39]

The Influence of Islam

[39] Douglas Bush, *The Renaissance and English Humanism,* P. 14.

We shall have to find other answers to the question of the historical causes and origins of the Renaissance. An eminent and influential writer on the cultural and intellectual history of mankind says: "The light from which civilization was once more rekindled did not arise from any embers of Graeco-Roman culture smouldering amid the ruins of Europe, nor from the living death on the Bosporus. It did not come from the Northern, but from the Southern invaders of the empire, from the Saracens".[40] "It was under the influence of the Arabian and Moorish revival of culture," continues Briffault, "and not in the fifteenth century, that the real Renaissance took place. Spain, not Italy, was the cradle of the rebirth of Europe".[41] It was in the period between the end of the tenth and that of the twelfth century that the European mind began to question and doubt the established Christian doctrines and dogmas and the whole Christian world-view; and this was the very period of the dominance of Arab thought and culture in Southern Europe. "The greatest achievements of antiquity were due to the Greek, Western, genius"; writes George Sarton, "the greatest achievements of the Middle Ages were due to the Muslim, Easterngenius".[42] The most important and valuable works on philosophy and science during this period were written by Muslims. From the second half of the eighth to the end of the eleventh century, Arabic was the language of learning and science, and the intellectual supremacy of the Muslims during this period was unchallenged. This period was essentially a period of transition, and of intimate and intense intellectual exchanges between the Christian and Muslim civilizations of southern Europe. During this period (1100-1250) 'the West was assimilating the East'. "It is then", writes Sarton, "that the conflicting cultures were brought most closely together, especially the Christian and Muslim, and that their interpenetration constituted the solid core of the new Europe".[43] This view found acceptance and support as early as the eighteenth century.

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[40] Robert Briffault, *Making of Humanity*, London, 1928, p. 183.
[41] Ibid., p. 188.
[42] George Sarton, Introduction to the History of Science, Vol. 1, Baltimore, 1955, p. 16.
[43] George Sarton, Introduction to the History of Science, Vol. II, Part 1, p.2.

Condorcet, one of the most enlightened thinkers of the Age of Enlightenment, acknowledged the debt of Europe to the Arabs. "The manners of the Arabs were gentle and dignified", writes Condorcet, "They loved poetry and cultivated it; ruling over the most beautiful countries of Asia, they allowed the taste for letters and the sciences to temper their missionary zeal . ... They translated Aristotle and studied his works: they cultivated astronomy, optics, and the various branches of medicine; and they enriched these sciences with new truths. We owe to them the spread of the use of Algebra, which had been applied by the Greeks only to one class of problem. If it is true that their fanatical interest in the secrets of alchemy and the elexir of life sullied their work in chemistry, it must be remembered it was they who revived or rather invented this science which had till then been confused with pharmacy or with technical skill in the arts. It was with them that chemistry appeared for the first time as the analysis of bodies into discernible elements and as the theory of their compounds and the laws of such compounds . . . . With the Arabs the sciences were free, and to this freedom was due their success in reviving some sparks of the Greek genius; . . . . the work done by the Arabs would have been lost to the human race for ever if they had not done something to prepare the way for the more lasting revival which was brought about in the West".[44] "Then", continues Condorcet, "religious enthusiasm fired the Western nations to attempt the conquest of the Holy places, places consecrated, or so it was said, by the death and miracles of Christ. Not only this strange distemper assist the progress of liberty by bringing about the impoverishment and decline of the nobility, but it also furthered the relations between Europeans and Arabs, which began with the mingling of Christians and Arabs in Spain and were cemented by the commerce of Pisa, Genoa and Venice. People learnt the Arab language; they read Arab writings; they learnt something about their

[44] Condorcet, *Progress of the Human Mind,* pp. 86-87.

discoveries. and if in scientific matters they did not go beyond them, at least they had the ambition to rival them".[45]

We also have the testimony of another modern historian, J.B. Bury, to the same effect: "At the end of the twelfth century a stimulus from another world began to make itself felt. The philosophy of Aristotle became known to learned men in Western Christendom; their teachers were Jews and Mohammedans. Among the Mohammedans there was a certain amount of free thought, provoked by their knowledge of ancient Greek speculation. The works of the free-thinker Averroes (twelfth century) which were based on Aristotle's philosophy, propagated a small wave of rationalism in Christian countries"[46]

We have still another and older assertion of the same truth, coming from the famous thirteenth-century scholar-monk, Roger Bacon: "The large portion of the philosophy of Aristotle received little attention either on account of the concealment of the copies of his works an d their rarity, or on account of their difficulty or unpopularity, or on account of the wars in the East, till after the time of Mahomet, when Avicenna and Averroes and others, recalled to the light of full exposition the philosophy of Aristotle".[47]

One has the temptation to go on quoting from some of the most eminent Western scholars who had the honesty and courage to speak the truth in the story of the rebirth of modern Europe. "Whoever compares', wrote J. W. Draper, "the tenth and twelfth centuries together cannot fail to remark the great intellectual advance which Europe was making. The ideas occupying the minds of Christian men, their very turn of thought, had altogether changed...The presence of the Saracens in Spain offered an incessant provocation to the restless intellect of the west, now rapidly expandnig to indulge itself in such forbidden exercises. Arabian philosophy,

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[45] *Ibid.* P. 92

[46] J. B. Bury, *History of Freedom of Thought,* (H. U. L.), P. 68.

[47] Quoted by C. G. Shaw *in Trends of Civilization and Culture,* (New York), P. 250.

unseen and silently, was diffusing itself throughout France and Europe, and churchmen could sometimes contemplate a refuge from their enemies among the infidel. In his extremity, Abelard himself looked forward to a retreat among the Saracens — protection from ecclesiastical persecution".[48]

From the backwardness and barbarism of the people of Europe in the Middle Ages, their theological disputes, their sordid political struggles, their belief in shrine miracles and relics, their religious intolerance, it is pleasant to turn to Arab Spain and Sisily where a different and fascinating scene presents itself to us. "Across the Pyrennes", writes Draper, "literary, philosophical, and military adventurers were perpetually passing, and thus the luxury, the taste, and above all, the chivalrous gallantry and elegant courtesies of Moorish society found their way from Granada and Cordova to Provence and Languedoc. The French, and German and English nobles imbibed the Arab admiration of the Horse . . It was a scene of grandeur and gallantry; the pastimes were tilts and tournaments. The refined society of Cordova prided itself in its politeness. A gay contagion spread from the beautiful Moorish miscreants to their sisters beyond the mountains; the south of France was full of the witcheries of female fascinations, and of dancing to the lute and mandolin. Even in Italy and Sicily the lovesong became the favourite composition; and out of these genial but not orthodox beginnings the polite literature of modern Europe arose".[49]

Having sketched in outline some of the salient aspects of the Arab society, civilization and culture, Draper describes the medieval-Christian scene: "And now I have to turn from Arabian civilized life, its science, its philosophy, to another, a repulsive state of things. With reluctance I come back to the Italian system, defiling the holy name of religion with its intrigues, its bloodshed, its oppression of human thought, its hatred of intellectual advancement 'Ah! happy Saladin !', said the insulted Philip

[48] J. W. Draper, History of the Intellectual Development of Europe.
[49] Ibid.,

(Augustus of France), when his kingdom was put under interdict; 'he has no pope above him. I too will turn Mohammedan!' Draper continues: "We have now (during the Arab Age of Reason) to find human authority promoting intellectual advancement, and accepting as its maxim that the lot of man will be ameliorated, and his power and dignity increased in proportion as he is able to comprehend the mechanism of the world, the action of natural laws, and to apply physical forces to his use. The rise of the many-tongued European literature was therefore co-incident with the decline of papal Christianity. European literature was impossible under Catholic rule'. [50]Here we get the clues to the origins of the Renaissance and modern thought, culture and civilization, — secular, humanist, naturalistic, realistic and positivistic. Iqbal too refers to the above fact in his lecture on "The Spirit of Muslim Culture". He writes: "Duhring tells us that Roger Bacon's conceptions of science are more just and clear than those of his celebrated namesake. And where did Roger Bacon receive his scientific training? In the Muslim Universities of Spain. Indeed part V of his 'Opus Majus' which is devoted to 'perspective' is practically a copy of Ibn-i-Hatham's Optics'. Nor is the book, as a whole, lacking in evidence of Ibn-i-Hazm's influence on its author. Europe has been rather slow to recognize the Islamic origin of her scientific method."[19](a)..

Major Characteristics of Renaissance.

Having examined the medieval-Christian and Muslim worlds, existing side by side, and having traced some of the forces and factors that prepared the ground for the great revival and awakening of Euro - pean life and thought, we can now turn to the detailed and critical examination of some of the salient and fundamental characteristics of the Renaissance as an intellectual and cultural movement which laid the foundations of the modern world. A great intellectual and cultural, social, political and economic change

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[50] Draper, *History of the Intellectual Development of Europe.*

19(a) Iqbal, Muhammad, *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam,* Ashraf Publications, Lahore, 1954, P. 129

took place in Europe between 1300 and 1600, and this period marked the passage from the medieval to the modern world. The gloomy medieval view of the world and life was totally rejected by the emancipated man of the Renaissance — by Boccaccio, even by Petrarch, by Rabelais, by Montaigne, by Erasums, by Mirandola, by Thomas More, by Francis Bacon, by Bruno, and by Machiavelli. The typical figures of the age are Marlowe's Tamburlaine and Faustus, Rabelais's Gargantua: on the gate of Abbe de Theleme was inscribed the motto of the new age: Do what you like. The medieval-Christian ideal **of** self-denial and self-negation and self-mortification gave place to the modern ideal of self-expression and self-assertion; otherwordliness gave way to an intense interest in the visible world, man discovered man and nature, impulse and reason became man's guides instead of authority and tradition. The new change of outlook and attitude was manifested in the change of literary forms and motifs. Allegory and symbolism were the typical medieval literary and artistic forms. Since the main concern of man was with the invisible and intangible world of the spirit, literature also attempted to represent the transcendental world through allegory and symbol. Medieval literature was religious and mystical, or, in the words of Sorokin, it was 'Ideational'. The chief literature of the centuries from the fifth to the end of the twelfth was mainly Ideational. "From the point of view of its inner character", writes Sorokin, "the literature of the centuries from the fifth to the tenth was almost entirely religious. In that period there is almost nothing which can be styled secular".[51] The tone and attitude of this medieval literature, whether poetry, prose or drama, was consciously didactic, and contemptnous, even inimical, toward the secular life, its sensual joys and sufferings, which is nothing more than a mirage, carbest at painful preparation for the life in the beyond. Symbolism and allegory dominate all the thinking and literature of the Middle Ages.

When we pass to the period of the twelfth to the fourteenth century, the atmosphere and scene totally changes. The ascetic strain decreases and the

[51] P. A. Sorokin, Social and Cultural Dynamics, Vol I, New york, 1937, p. 612.

secular and the sensual increases. This new change is most typically present in Petrarch and Boccaccio; in Petrarch the ascetic and the humanist-sensuous strains are still in a state of conflict, but Boccaccio is blatantly sensual and lusty. Earthly human love or passion between man and woman begins to occupy a much larger place in poetry and romance. Even Dante, whose work represents in completest form the whole medieval Catholic world-view, cannot help feeling the pangs of human love, however much he may idealise and sublimate his love for Beatrice. Petrarch too had his Laura. This interest in and love of woman was also a very significant change indicating the transition from the medieval to the modern. The medieval attitude towards woman was not sympathetic and respectful. Times were violent and brutal and women were not treated kindly and humanely. It was commonly believed that woman was inferior to man and the cause of man's fall and all the ills and sorrows consequent upon that fall. Woman was regarded by the Church Fathers and the monks as the greatest temptation and snare of the Devil. "Woman was represented" writes Lecky, "as the door of hell, as the mother of all human ills. She should be ashamed at the very thought that she is a woman . . She should be especially ashamed of her beauty, for it is the most potent instrument of the demon . . Their essentially subordinate position was continually maintained".[52] But this medieval ascetic ideal was now replaced by the totally different ideal of the natural and sensual love of woman. "Asceticism", continues Lecky, "proclaiming war upon human nature, produced a revulsion towards its opposite, ."[53]. The new society of the Renaissance loved woman frankly, sometimes shamelessly, and made her socially the equal of man. Woman and her love become the main topics of the new literature. Beatrice becomes the ideal inspiration of *Divine Comedy* and Laura the inspiration of Petrarch's Sonnets. All the interest and charm of Boccaccio's *Decameron* centres round fair women. Sonnets are addressed to her; even when the lover complains and pines, he still praises her and adores her. This interest in the human and the sensate was not confined to love

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[52] W. E. H. Lecky, *History of European Morals,* Vol. (ii) (New York, 1955), P. 338. 22
[53] *Ibid,* P. 336.

alone; it extended to whatever delighted the senses: beautiful sights and sounds, good food and feasts, fine houses, fine clothing, gorgeous living, dazzling weapons and arms.

Beauty of the nude human body, particularly the female body, was glorified in the art and literature of the Renaissance. Boccaccio is among the masters in describing the physical female beauty. A passion for beauty, beauty of nature and of the human form, was a characteristic passion of the Renaissance, a passion voiced by poets and painters alike. "The moment people stopped looking fixedly towards heaven their eyes fell upon the earth," writes an authority on the art of the Renaissance, "and they began to see much on its surface that was pleasant. Their own faces and figures must have struck them as surprisingly interesting, and, considering how little St. Bernard and other medieval saints and doctors had led them to expect, singularly beautiful. A new feeling arose that mere living was a big part of life, and with it came a new passion, the passion for beauty, for grace, and for comeliness.".[54]

A sixteenth century Italian writer, Firenzuola, wrote a treatise on female beauty. This writer's ideal of female beauty has been beautifully described by Burckhardt in these words: "He defines the shades of colour which occur in the hair and skin, and gives to the 'biondo' the preference, as the most beautiful colour for the hair, understanding by it a soft yellow, inclining to brown. He requires that the hair should be thick, long, and locky; the forehead serene, and twice as broad as high; the skin bright and clear (candida), but not of a dead white (bianchezza); the eyebrows dark, silky, most strongly marked in the middle, and shading of towards the ears and the nose; the white of the eye faintly touched with blue, the iris not actually black…The eye itself should be large and full, and brought well forward; the lids white, and marked with almost invisible tiny veins; the lashes neither too long, nor too thick, nor too dark. The hollow round the eye should have the

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[54] Bernhard Berenson, *Italian Painters of the Renaissance,*

same colour as the cheek. The ear, neither too large nor too small, firmly and neatly fitted on, should show a stronger colour in the winding than in the even parts, with an edge of the transparent ruddiness of the pomegranate. The temples must be white and even, and for the most perfect beauty ought not to be too narrow. The red should grow deeper as the cheeks get rounder. The nose, which chiefly determines the value of the profile, must recede gently and uniformly in the direction of the eyes; where the cartilage ceases, there may be a slight elevation, but not so marked as to make the nose aquiline, which is not pleasing in women; the lower part must be less strongly coloured than the ears, but not of a chilly whiteness, and the middle partition above the lips lightly tinted with red. The mouth, our author would have rather small, and neither projecting to a point, nor quite flat, with the lips not too thin, and fitting neatly together; an accidental opening, that is, when the woman is neither speaking nor laughing, should not display more than six upper teeth. As delicacies of detail, he mentions a dimple in the upper lip, a certain fullness of the under lip, and a tempting smile in the left corner of the mouth — and so on.'[55]

Another significant change from the medieval to the Renaissance, also reflected in Petrarch, was in regard to man's attitude towards the beauties of nature. Man began to look with delight and joy upon the lakes and the woods, springs and the mountains, flowers, birds and animals. Nature was losing its taint of sin. This change towards nature is reflected even in a saint, St. Francis of Assisi, who, in his *Hymn to the Sun,* frankly praises God for creating the heavenly bodies and the four elements. Petrarch deeply felt the influence of natural beauty together with the charm of intellectual pursuits. When standing on the top of Mount Ventoux, near Avignon and enjoying the beautiful panorama, and at the moment recalling to mind his past life with its human follies, he opened St. Augustine's *Confessions and* his eyes fell on the passage, "and men go forth, and admire lofty mountains and broad

[55] Jacob Burckhardt, *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy,* New York, 1954, pp. 256-258.

seas, and roaring torrents, and the ocean, and the course of the stars, and forget their own selves while doing so". [56]

The discovery of new and exotic lands beyond the seas was one of the important factors in stirring the feelings, enlarging the bounds of imagination and quickening popular curiosity. After five centuries of sleep the dawn of light and learning, life and joy came to Europe. Renaissance turned men from the contemplation of the other world to this world; in some cases, this turning from the medieval to the modern caused spiritual conflict, as in the case of Petrarch. Man turned from the supernatural to the natural and the human; he became conscious of his faculties and potentialities, and of his freedom to use his powers as he pleased. This awakening to his own nature and freedom was man's discovery of man, as pointed out by Michelet and later by Burckhardt. Man now indulged in free speculations about religion, morals, philosophy, art and literature. Machievelli is one of the most representative men of the new age; in fact, Marlowe's Tamburlaine, Faustus and the Jew Barabas typify many of the Renaissance qualities associated with the name of Machiavelli. The decline of feudalism, expansion of commerce and trade, contact with the Moorish civilization, discovery of new sea routes, emergence of prosperous cities, the idea of separate nationhood, the decline of Papal power and the breakup of Christendom as a unity, rejection of ascetic and monastic ideals of life, brought about the great transformation of life, thought and literature in Europe. Renaissance, secularism and humanism meant a more human, generous and liberal estimate of human nature, and a belief in the right and power of man to reconstitute himself and his environment as a free being, not as the slave of ecclesiastical authority. Renaissance implied a movement of the European mind and will toward self-emancipation and assertion of the natural rights of man's reason, nature and the senses. Natural human impulses and desires for love and beauty, for power over nature through knowledge, for prosperity and pleasure, for fame and glory, for a full life, for adventurous and joyful living found expression in

[56] Quoted by Jacob Burckhardt, *ibid,* P. 221.

such figures as Faustus and Tamburlaine, Falstaff and Gargantua. Medieval warnings that the pleasures of the flesh are fleeting, that the visible world is but a shadow of the invisible, that the earthly life is a preparation and probation for the life beyond the grave, were not heeded by the natural man of the Renaissance.

The most important and characteristic idea associated with the Renaissance was that of the dignity and freedom of the individual. "The process of secularization in the Renaissance", writes Leo Lowenthal, "has intimate connections not only with an emerging individualism but with the problem of authority. This problem is, in turn, closely identified with a typical Renaissance concept of history — an interpretation of events in terms of the passions, drives and inner conflicts of leading historical figures".[57] Ever since the Renaissance the idea has existed that man carries an infinity of possibilities within himself, their realization is always within reach. The characters of Marlowe furnish a complete illustration of the above statements of Lowenthal. The plays of Marlowe, as also those of Shakespeare, are the products of a mind which "locates the drama of human existence within the soul of the individual man; it is the innermost victory or defeat that determinise the success or failure, triumph or tragedy, of man's life".[58] To the medieval man the meaning of life had been salvation in the hereafter; but a Faustus or a Tamburlaine sought self-realization and self-fulfilment here and now, within the bourne of time and space. Shakespeare epitomized in his famous lines the new sense of the wonder of life and man:

This goodly frame, the earth . . . . this most excellent canopy the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire!. . . What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action

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[57] Leo Lowenthal, *Literature and the Image cf Man,* (Boston, 1957), P. 57.
[58] Leo Lowenthal, *Literature and the Image of Man,* P. 60.

how like an angel ! in apprehension how like a god ! the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals!

Freedom of speculation concerning the nature of man and of the universe, the desire to explore and travel over uncharted and unknown seas of knowledge and experience was a characteristic of the Renaissance, reflected in Faustus's thirst for infinite knowledge and Tamburlaine's thirst for unlimited power and dominion. Self-assertion and force of will were the admired Renaissance qualities. "The Italian, at least", writes William Boulting, "had cast off the restraints of that rigid and traditional world, and was in reaction against it . . . . With the revival of letters, society became imbued once again with the Greek and Roman conception of man as a progressive creature, and was awakened to the richness of thought and feeling to be enjoyed in vigorous passionate life. Self-sufficiency, self-assertion, and force of will were admired above all other qualities . . Each man strove to fulfill his own nature in his own way . . .The rigorous men of the Renaissance sought to live fully, freely, and with diversity; they thirsted for new and refreshing draughts; they boldly winged their way to unfamiliar (and forbidden) spheres, or gratified sense and passion to the full . . . On the whole its passions were unrestrained, save by prudence; unchecked by any moral curb, which it had counted foolishness. The religious rapture of Savonarola was an ephemeral phenomenon, and almost unique".[59]

We thus find that the tag words of the Renaissance were Individualism and Humanism. "To the discovery of the outward world", wrote Burckhardt, "the Renaissance added a still greater achievement, by first discerning and bringing to light the full, the whole nature of man".[60] This period gave the highest development to human personality and individuality.

The Renaissance conception of the nature, dignity and freedom of man was best set forth by Pico della Mirandola. God, as Mirandola tells us, made

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[59] William Boulting, *Four Pilgrims,* London.
[60] Jacob Burckhardt, *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy,* P. 225.

man at the close of the creation, to know the laws of the universe, to love its beauty, to admire its greatness. God bound man to no fixed place, to no prescribed form of work, and by no iron necessity, but gave him freedom of will to choose his own station and destiny. In the words of Mirandola, God addressed Adam thus: "Neither a fixed abode nor a form that is thine alone nor any function peculiar to thyself have we given thee, Adam, to the end that according to thy longing and according to thy judgment thou mayest have and possess what abode, what form, and what functions thou thyself shalt desire. The nature of all other beings is limited and constrained within the bounds of laws prescribed by Us. Thou, constrained by no limits, in accordance with thine own free will, in whose hand We have placed thee, shalt ordain for thyself the limits of thy nature. We have set thee at the world's center that thou mayest from thence more easily observe whatever is in the world. We have made thee neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, so that with freedom of choice and with honor, as though the maker and moulder of thyself, thou mayest fashion thyself in whatever shape thou shalt prefer. Thou shalt have the power to degenerate into the lower forms of life, which are brutish. Thou shalt have the power, out of thy soul's judgment, to be reborn into the higher forms, which are divine".[61]

It is not without much interest and significance that in the very first sentence of Mirandola's Oration there is a reference to Arabs and a Muslim name. The Oration begins thus: "I have read in the records of the Arabians, reverend Fathers, that Abdala[62] the Saracen, when questioned as to what on this stage of the world, as it were, could be seen most worthy of wonder, replied. 'There is nothing to be seen more wonderful than man'."[63] Mirandola was undoubtedly fully conversant with the Arab philosophy and science, as with Greek, Jewish Persian, and Christian doctrines. "Adding the study of

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[61] Mirandola's 'Oration on the Dignity of Man', in *Renaissance Philosophy of Man,* Chicago, 1956, pp. 224-225.

[62] Abdala, that is, 'Abd Allah.

[63] P. 0. Kristeller, *Renaissance Philosophy of Man,* P. 223.

Hebrew and Arabic to the more common Latin and Greek, he not only gave an impulse to oriental studies but also came into direct contact with the heritage of medieval Arabic and Jewish philosophy" [64] It may be safely asserted that in his most characteristic ideas, namely, the Freedom and Dignity of Man, and the Unity of Truth, Mirandola was influenced by the thought of Muslim Arab philosophers. "Pico's notion of a universal truth in which the various thinkers and schools all have a part obviously belongs to this same tradition (Eclectic and Neo-Platonist). It has been suggested that Pico's conception may have had some connection with the Averroistic doctrine of the unity of the intellect".[65] Mirandola even refers to the Holy Prophet by name and attributes to him a saying. "Mohammed, . ..", writes Mirandola, "often had this saying on his tongue: 'They who have deviated from divine law become beasts', and surely he spoke justly".[66]

The new Renaissance concept of the dignity and freedom of man, his right to explore freely the realms of thought and speculation and to shape his own life as he chose, was the most characteristic thought of the new philosophy of life. As against the man of the Middle Ages, the man of the Renaissance no longer considered himself an exile from the Garden of Eden and a prisoner on earth; he said 'Yes' to life. Man discovered the value and importance of his earthly and human life and the wealth of his mind and heart. Boccaccio was among the first who frankly sought to justify the pleasures of the body and the mind, and whose warm sensuous temperament, unburdened by medieval asceticism, found a congenial element in amorous stories. The romances of Boccaccio are set amidst beautiful gardens, with fair women and fair lovers. The individual appears with all his virtues and vices: Petrarch is hailed by most writers as a typical individual personality, "who first broke through the bonds of corporation" and "made his ego the mirror of the world", and therefore, as "the prophet of the new

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[64] *IbidP.* 216.
[65] *IbidP.* 220.
[66] *IbidP.* 226.

age, the ancestor of the modern world". The individual distinguished himself by great deeds, great talents, great passions, even great crimes, This new Renaissance individualism expressed itself, on its darker side, in an attitude of irreligion, immorality, and violent passions. This unbridled individualism and freedom of the individual was also due to a reaction against the chains and shackles that were put on him by the medieval order based upon feudalism and ecclesiasticism. The new men of the Renaissance were like men who had long remained confined to some gloomy dungeon and were suddenly released, finding themselves in the warm sunshine of the Italian sky. They returned to freedom, life and light. And therefore Renaissance has been identified with the ideas of reaction against medieval transcendentalism, and of reassertion of man's self-consciousness, his moral and intellectual autonomy; and his reconciliation with the present world. This new spirit expressed itself through a humanised and sensualised art and literature, the study and revival of the classics, and the desire to explore the earth. "These three events", wrote Hegel, "may be compared with the blush of dawn, which after long storms betokens the bright and glorious day".[67]

In the medieval period man was conscious of himself only as a member of a collective whole: society, church, or the guild. But in the new or modern man of the Renaissance, such as a Petrarch or a Boccaccio or a Marlowe, the subjective self-asserted itself with full power. The Renaissance, for Burckhardt and Symonds, infact, for most writers, marked the birth of individualism and the modern spirit which has often been named 'Faustian', a spirit like that of Faustus which wants never to rest but seek all knowledge and experience, beauty and pleasure possible to man during his short sojourn on earth. The writers and artists of the Renaissance, not only in thought but in actual living, accepted life cheerfully, became wordly and irreligious, some openly pagan. Savonarola was an exception rather than typical of the age. Leonardo da Vinci, Boccaccio, Cellini, Arctino, Ariosto, Poggio, Valla,

[67] Quoted by W. K. Ferguson in The Renaissance in Historical Thought.

Machiavelli, Michel Angelo, Montaigne and Marlowe stand at opposite poles from St. Angustine, St. Francis of Assisi and from other Christian saints of the Middle Ages. "With the Renaissance", wrote Wilhelm Dilthey, "the Epicurean, the Stoic, the nature - intoxicated Pantheist, the skeptic, and the atheist made their appearance once more".[68] From these new men with completely changed attitude toward life there came a new and rich literature devoted to man's inner life and personality and passions. Man emerged as a self-conscious, willing, and creative individual, trying to bring under his dominion and control nature and the elements, like Faustus.

Petrarch is the typical transitional figure. He stands wavering between two worlds and two ideals, the medieval and the modern. He has the Renaissance love of life and nature, of human love, of fame and glory, and yet he is conscious of the opposite medieval ascetic-Christian ideal. In Petrarch we get glimpses of the changing attitude towards nature. "During the Renaissance", writes one scholar,"European culture turned from unattainable ideals to nature and reality".[69] Paracelsus also had turned to "the book of Nature written by the finger of God".[70] Among the Renaissance humanists, Petrarch expressed the new spirit of humanism, but he still was not completely above the inner conflict between the ascetic and the humanist ideals. His love for Laura was something new and human. But his *secret,* an imaginary dialogue between St. Augustine and himself, proves that he was not completely emancipated and that the medieval strain persisted in his thought and work. In the first dialogue the saint tells the poet that the poet's melancholy and restlessness rises from his many human desires. Those wordly and human interests and desires — love of woman and love of fame — have caused him to forget his Creator. Ascetic self-denial and contemplation of God are recommended as remedies for the poet's

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[68] Quoted by W. K. Ferguson in The Renaissance in Historical Thought.

[69] Ehrenburg, *Capital and Finance in the Age of the Renaissance,* quoted by H. S. Lucas *in Renaissance and the Reformation,* P. 367.

[70] Quoted by H. S. Lucas, 357.

melancholy and restlessness. The last dialogue concerns Petrarch's love for Laura and his love of fame. To the poet's assertion that love has proved an ennobling influence, St. Augustine replies: "Nothing so much leads a man to forget or despise God as the love of things temporal, and most of all this passion we call love".[71] But in spite of the saint's advice, life's secular and human interests continued to draw Petrarch's mind away from his thoughts of eternity and God.

In the matter of religious beliefs there are clear indications of questioning the established traditional medieval attitude; the new Renaissance religious attitudes range from scepticism; atheism, free- thinking to religious liberalism and humanised Christianity. In this sphere a lovable and important figure is that of Erasmus. He is the most famous of the Christian humanists of the Renaissance, who tried to reconcile the ethical spirit of the Sermon on the Mount with a broad humanistic culture . In him were united all the ethical and intellectual conceptions which that age of revolt brought forth. He was a truly eligious humanist, who revealed the enlightened humanist's dislike of monasticism, the worship of saints and relics, and the religious intolerance of the Church. He emphasized the spirit of Jesus's real ethical teaching shorn of all dogma and ritual and formalism. He believed in the basic goodness of human nature. The real teaching of Jesus, according to Erasmus, was that of love and charity, of righteousness in thought and action, his finest and realmessage being found in the Sermon on the Mount. To Erasmus the idea that the human will is shackled by predestination and human soul vitiated by depravity was shocking. Freedom of will was necessary if men were to be morally responsible for their thoughts and actions. Erasmus was one of the most representative and one of the most civilized men of his time. Scholars like Erasmus opened the windows of the mind, letting in fresh air. But most of the Renaissance humanists were not as pious and religious as Eramsus ; to most of them the medieval dogmas and taboos were repugnant to reason and nature.

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[71] *Ibid* P. 198

The great bulk of the classical humanists of the Renaissance were surely marginal Christians. Most of them had abandoned the most essential doctrine of the Christian faith, namely, that of the original and essential depravity of human nature. They were "casting off all authority, not merely that of the medieval church; they were humanists in the sense that they believed that man is the measure of allthings, and that each man is a measure for himself". Most humanists share the nature and character of Don Juan and Faust; Don Juan and Faustus typify and represent the new man of the Renaissance who had longings and desires which cannot be sanctioned by the orthodox faith. "Don Juan is indeed a brother of another figure of legend who by the Renaissance has become a literary figure — Doctor Faustus. Both Faustus and Don Juan want something excessive — their very wantings excessive. Yet they cannot satisfy their unending wants in a way the Christian tradition had long provided in its many variants of mystic other wordliness.

They have to get what they want in the flesh, here and now, like other men .. .. They have the restless striving after something infinite that men like Spengler find in the northerners, in the Faustian man. But as good children of humanism, they want all this without God, without theoria, nirvana, or any other mystic self-annihilation".[72]

A great influence for religious tolerance and liberalism was Boccaccio, whose *Decameron* reflects almost every important aspect of the Renaissance — its levity, even its license, its humour, its free-thinking, as well as its exuberant joy in life. The most significant part of its contents, in the religious context, isthe famous story of the Three Rings, embodied later by Lessing in his *Nathan the Wise, as* an apologue of tolerance. Rationalistic and anti-clerical thought is a contant feature in European thought of the age, particularly in Italy, France and England. In England the circle of Sir Walter Raleigh, to which belonged Marlowe, was accused of scepticism. even of atheism.

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[72] Crane Brinton, *Shaping of the Modern Mind, (New* York, 1953), P. 40.

The picture of the Renaissance will not be complete without Machiavelli, who exercised the deepest influence over the thought and literature not only of his own age but over the thought of succeeding ages. He represented in his thought the most outspoken departure from the Christian values: "our religion has glorified rather the humble and contemplative men than the active."[73] Machiavelli, anticipating Neitzsche, questioned and attacked the Christian values and ideals of humility and otherwordliness ; he, instead, favoured the Roman heroic ideal of self-assertion, power and strength, writing approvingly,. " .. the Pagan religion canonised only men crowned with public honor, as generals and statesmen."[74] Machiavelli was reputed in his own age as an atheist, as was Marlowe in his time; he certainly was not a Christian moralist. He was a typical product of the age of the Renaissance and fully represented Renaissance ideals of conduct and character. He was generally considered a symbol of Renaissance scepticism, atheism, immorality and corruption. He summed up the individualistic and naturalistic ideals of the Renaissance, ideals which marked the newly awakened Europe from the religious and corporate ideals of the Middle Ages. Machiavelli, in keeping with the spirit of the age, glorified those qualities in man which drive him to find free and full expression of his personality

Marlowe seized upon these 'Machiavellian' qualities and represented the liberated spirit of the new age. He represents his heroes — Tamburlaine, Faustus, and Barabas — overriding the Christian moral code in an effort to find the complete realization of their extraordinary expirations and goals. In the Prologue to The *Jew of Malta,* Machiavelli appears in person and declares the keynote of the play and of the age:.

I count religion but a childish toy,

And hold there is no sinne but ignorance.

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[73] Quoted by J. M. Robertson in *A Short History of Free Thought,* (New York, 1957), P. 231.
[74] *Ibid P.* 231

One important result of the Renaissance ideal of self-expression, self-assertion and self-realization was that differences of class were overlooked; and accordingly the dramas of Marlowe break away from the medieval pattern in some important respects. For the Middle Ages tragedy was a thing of princes, of men in high degree; for Marlowe it was a thing of individual heroes, individual will challenging all powers, human or divine, if those powers deny them the satisfaction of their ambitions and aspirations. The medieval conception of the royalty of tragedy is in Marlowe supplanted by the Renaissance ideal of individual worth.

The most characteristic and typical elements of modern culture and civilization, namely, the attitude of world-and -life affirmation, free and unfettered expression of the individual and the national ego, subjugation of Nature and pursuit of the goods of the world, are derived from the Renaissance. "The essential characteristic of the modern age", writes Albert Schweitzer, "is that it thinks and acts in the spirit of a world-and-life affirmation which has never before appeared in such active strength. This world-view breaks through in the Renaisance, beginning at the end of the fourteenth century, and it arises as a protest against medieval enslavement of the human spirit . .. Taking refuge from book-learning in nature, the men of that time discover the world . . As inquirers they press on into the infinite and the secrets of the universe and learn by experience that forces governed by uniform laws are, at work, and that man has power to make them serviceable to himself... With Paracelsus (1493-1541), Bernardino Telesio (1508-1588), Giordano. Bruno (1548-1600), and others, an enthusiastic nature-philosophy is announced... Under the steadily active influence of the new mentality, the world-view of Christianity changes, and becomes leavened with the yeast of world-and-life affirmation ... discovery and invention have given him (modern man) power over the world. This enhancement of his self-reliance and the consequent strengthening of his will and his hopes, determine his will-to-live in a correspondingly pronounced and positive sense". It can thus be maintained that modern civilization and culture, —

secular, humanist, scientific, technological, liberal and democratic, is not the product of official and historical Christianity; rather, it arose not because of Christianity but in spite of it.