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THE

CHURCHMAN

MARCH, 1901.

ART. I.—SAVONAROLA.[1]

I HAVE to speak to you this morning about the Renaissance, the most complicated movement of thought the world has ever seen, but, I think, most imperfectly understood if it is considered as a movement of thought which took place at one time and has now ceased to be of importance. It really corresponds to tendencies of human thought continually going on, not only in society, but in individual minds. There is a renaissance going on in the mind of every one of you; you have to face precisely the same question the men of that time had to face. The Renaissance is not a movement that is passed away, it is the exhibition, on a large scale, with reference to some particular questions, of active tendencies continuous in all human society. Now, the Renaissance means "the recovery of knowledge"—*renatiamento*, that is the meaning of the word, the "new birth," the new birth of man into a new field of knowledge. But what was the importance of this knowledge? Knowledge, in the first place, is always being acquired, but not that with which the Renaissance particularly is concerned. It was not so much to be considered for its value as regards information, as for the attitude of mind which it involved towards the world. We often forget this when we speak of knowledge. Though it can be divided under separate heads, we omit from our consideration the important thing in all knowledge, and that is the point of view which it engenders towards the world and towards life. This is the importance of the period called the Renaissance. You cannot lay hold of its tendencies in any particular form; you cannot say they pursued knowledge in some things and not in others. It was

[1] A lecture delivered in St. Paul's Cathedral on June 13, 1900, by the late Mandell Creighton, D.D., Bishop of London; taken down in shorthand.

a tendency; it was a point of view; it was an attitude towards life; it was the self-consciousness of man then striving to see how it could best express itself—and that is always going on, and that gives the great value to every intellectual movement. You ought to stop and consider the question, How do we differ? (and each generation does differ). How do successive epochs differ in the point of view they adopt towards life? The Renaissance was the recovery of this point of view—the point of view possessed by ancient civilization and accepted in ancient literature. It had disappeared, it had gone, it had to be recovered. Why had it to be recovered? Because it was valuable, because men needed it. Why was it lost? It was lost because of the faults, the weaknesses to which it had led. Put shortly, the ancient world fell because its progress had been one-sided, because it had progressed in knowledge first of all, and then in culture, and then in refinement, and then in external things, and as it progressed in all these, it lost hold upon the great central formative ideas. Rome and Greece lost their hold upon religion—they lost their hold upon those great ideas which make the character, and the result was that the civilization of Greece and Rome passed away, because it no longer created character strong enough to do the work necessary to keep the world together. Then in that general decay of character Christianity suddenly arose, and Christianity, therefore, had to deal with the remaking of a world that fell in pieces. The decline and fall of the Roman Empire was a period of the greatest falling in pieces that the world has ever seen. It was the long-protracted agony, the decay of a great city, because it could not create the character necessary to move it. It fell, and it fell externally, of course, before the barbarian invasion; internally (because nothing falls unless from the inside and the outside at the same time), because it could no longer create character. New peoples had to be created, a mixture of the barbarians and the civilized Romans; the savageness, and yet force, of the barbarians, the elevation, and yet weakness, of the Roman Empire, were joined together, and these had to be brought into one by the instrumentality of the Christian Church. Therefore, during the period we call the Middle Ages, there was the great process going on which we do not sufficiently recognise and look at. It was the process of the creation of character, and before that great process other processes of the human mind fell into the background. But it is always so; no one generation can be doing two things at the same time. Particular problems, not of men's setting, have to be faced, and wisdom consists in recognising the problem we have to solve, the work that we have to do. What is the special task

fallen upon our generation now? The special task that fell upon the Middle Ages was the remaking of character by means of the Christian faith, and that process was carried out. It was carried out thoroughly and well. In the Middle Ages men were made; you may call them raw, or savage, or what you like, but they were men.

Now, in this process of creation, art, and knowledge, and science in all its branches had fallen into the background. It is impossible to both make your men and at the same time equip them for all their duties. The end of the period of the Middle Ages was when human character again had been formed into strength; and men, becoming conscious, therefore, of what they had to do in the world, looked round to see how they could equip themselves for their task. Then you get the beginning of the Renaissance—*i.e.*, the mind of man going back to the desire for knowledge and seeking some cultivation of its powers. Religion made the powers—religion informed them to a certain point. Not that knowledge was wholly forgotten. Do not suppose that knowledge of classical antiquity ever disappeared; it lived in the monasteries. It was not operative; the operative thing was the creation of character, to wean men from the materialism into which creation had sunk by emancipating them from the exclusive pressure of this world by turning their attention to the thoughts of the world to come.

Now all these things are frequently said to be the causes that killed knowledge. Knowledge was not killed by the influence of the Church at all; it was killed by the decay of character and the downfall of some of the external appliances of civilization. The conscious pursuit of knowledge is always one of the most tender plants, it is the thing immediately affected by any political difficulty. The first thing that anybody economizes in is the education of his children, and it is so always—knowledge, you must remember, is, and always will be, a luxury; it is only something that can be gained when conditions are quiet and life is established, and men are agreed; knowledge always goes into the background when the times become troublous. They were troublous in the days of the downfall of the Roman Empire. Not under the influence of the Church did knowledge go; the Church ordained laws to answer for its own purpose and work, which was the re-creation of character. When character had been formed, then came the question of how to adorn it, for you cannot adorn and equip that which does not exist. The Church created character and then looked for its adornment. Now, the process of the discovery of the right way to equip human character is that to which the name of the Renaissance has

been given, and it took the shape of the recovery of something lost. True ideas can never disappear. They may cease to be operative for a time, but they must be recovered, not in the form in which they existed before, but in a form adapted to the new needs of the time. Now, the question therefore was, How was the knowledge of antiquity gained by men of the past to be brought back again? In what shape was it to be applied to the new conditions of life which had been developed? That was what the Renaissance had to do, and in this process of this recovery of classical knowledge there were two tendencies to be kept distinct and apart; one was the natural tendency, the tendency to reaction, to bring back the past just as it existed, that was towards Paganism. "Forget," said the supporters of that view. "Let us put away this Christianity which is a check upon us, which restrains the natural tendencies of man and hides him from himself; let us put that away and go back to the frank, full, free enjoyment of life which men had before this doctrine was placed upon their shoulders." There was a reaction towards Paganism. And then similarly there was the second line of the Renaissance towards the observation of all that was good in the past and its application to the needs of the present. These were the two tendencies: to apply knowledge to the new state of things, and to bring back the old state of things. I need not speak at length of the Pagan reaction. It was very large, larger than is supposed. There are people who talk of an age of Faith, a period in which all Europe was united in a frank acceptance of Christian doctrine. There never was any such time; anyone who has read the literature of what was called the age of faith, and gone a little below the surface, I think will come to the same conclusion. There was a vast body of opinion which was frankly and absolutely materialistic; not only irreligious, but irreverent, and if you wish to follow it out, you will find it in the songs of a band of Pagan scholars who wandered about in the Middle Ages. Their literature has been quoted by several; it is blasphemous, and that is apparent at the slightest glance.

On the other side there was the desire to bring back the knowledge of the past and adapt it to the needs of the present. Now, that may be approached from a great many sides indeed. Of course, to follow out the growth of European science would be a difficult task, but the Renaissance was not so much concerned with that as with the emotions and mental attitudes of man. Consider the first great exhibitor of the recovery by Christianity of culture, and the enlarging of its attitude towards the world—he was St. Francis of Assisi. He is not usually spoken of in connection with the Renaissance at all,

but the Italian Renaissance entirely sprang from St. Francis. He was a man who held an entirely new attitude towards the world; he expressed a great love of animals, he appreciated glory and beauty in all its forms. This had hitherto been much overlooked. He attempted to realize actually what had occurred in the past; and consequently the preaching of St. Francis was picturesque. Above all, it was popular; it realized the Gospel scenes in simple and straightforward language; and the consequence was, it brought into the world a desire for the realization of things that had gone before, of art and literature. It was this simple process of realization, and not accident, that was the real outcome of the Franciscan movement. On the one side Dante and Giotto were the great exponents of the movement of the Christian Renaissance. To Dante, all the past was equally serviceable; to Dante, things sacred and profane stood upon the same footing. You remember in the "Purgatorio," when Dante wishes to show how those who had been guilty of evil were being purged in another world, he represents them as wandering in a sphere where voices breathed in their ears maxims to call them back to industry; and the patterns for examples with which the air was full were, first of all, the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who, when she went to visit her cousin Elizabeth, "rose in haste and went to the hill country"; and Cæsar, who in his haste to put down the rebellion of Pompey, stopped at Marseilles and captured the town on the way—things sacred and profane on a parallel. He gives the analysis of man's inner life; his writings are all full of learning and observation. What is literature since Dante but a carrying on of these ideas? In Dante you have all that literature and art require. And in the same way Petrarch carried a little further a more modern element. The new element was more manifest in this point, that the ideal of the head and the passion of the heart were different. Surely that is the cry of all modern literature. All that we think of as being most pathetic is to point out the war which goes on between the ideal of the head and the feelings of the heart. It is overdone nowadays; but this continual outcry is expressed nowhere more completely than in Petrarch, when he says:

> "No peace I find, yet have no power to fight.
> I fear, I hope, I burn; yet it is all too cold.
> I lie on earth, and yet in heaven I fly—
> I nothing clasp, yet all things do I hold."

Well, then, here you have the expression of the Renaissance, this recovery of man to human knowledge, and this desire of man to enter into the mysteries of his own being, and

to grasp the duties of the world that surrounds him. That is the first attitude of mind described by the Renaissance.

But with that came the sharp voices of purpose amongst the scholars. It was the scholars who were understood to be influencing this movement, to be remaking the world, to be bringing back man's knowledge of himself, to be analyzing his character, and discovering the truth about man's own nature. And amongst the scholars was now carried that division which hitherto had prevailed amongst the people generally. There were the pure followers of the antique, who wished to return to the natural Paganism, and whose aims were, first of all, to free the senses from the restraint of Christian spiritualism, and then to rebuild Nature, and assert the power of beauty to direct man. But this is one side, and only one side, of the movement. The other side was a desire to strengthen the national traditions of faith, while at the same time enlarging them and leading them to a broader sphere. Now, those two tendencies ran through everything, not only into literature but politics; and the first of these tendencies, the tendency towards the pagan revival, ended in the acceptance of tyranny as the best form of government, because it supplied the best patronage for men of letters. The Christian Renaissance, as I may call it, strove to maintain republican institutions in Italy founded on national endowments. The division was complete between the two, and yet they went on side by side. In every Italian state you had these two tendencies of thought and feeling.

It was in Savonarola's person and round his person that these two tendencies came into distinct conflict. Savonarola first of all represents the character set forth by the movement of the Renaissance, and, as such, he stands forth as the rebuker and reprover of the purely Pagan Renaissance. In the first place, he stood forth in Florence to maintain Christian morality as against immorality. He stood forth, in the next place, as a maintainer of the public institutions against the members of the Medicæan tyranny. On all those points you have him standing forth as the maintainer and the supporter of the Christian Renaissance as against the Pagan Renaissance; and the danger to Savonarola was that he precipitated this crisis, and that in him the conflict had to be fought. He had to pay the penalty for raising these questions, and he failed. The most important thing is to see why he failed, and what wrecked him.

He failed because he carried his Christianity into the sphere of politics. Savonarola was right when he maintained Christianity against Paganism. Savonarola was right even in the apparent excess of his patriotism, for he knew that it was

necessary. Savonarola was right when he maintained republican traditions against the Medicæan tyranny. But he failed because he was not content with simply maintaining political principles, but proceeded to apply them in his own person. The great lesson to be learned from Savonarola's downfall is the impossibility of one who speaks in God's name and for God's sake to identify himself with any particular measures of current politics. It is always a great temptation so to do. The world is always clamouring that men shall do so. It is continually the cry of the world to the Church, "Why do not you of the Church take decided parties? Why not content yourselves with the statement that one is fighting for the truth, and the other is to be condemned as fighting against it?" It is quite natural; political parties are always struggling to overcome one another; the party wants the assistance of all the forces it can possibly lay hold of. There is a continual pressure upon the teachers of Christian principle and the righteousness of Christian morality to declare the right is all on one side and the wrong all on the other side. But woe betide the Christian teacher who listens to such requests! Then he abandons all that gives strength to his position; then he is himself laid hold of by another power; he enters into practical politics; he becomes their tool. So it was with Savonarola. He was perfectly justified in his political conceptions in themselves, but it is so difficult to be equally justified in their appliance to actual facts. Your principles may be indisputable, but when they are applied to particular cases they must always be a matter open to doubt. So it was with Savonarola.

To reassert the republican institutions, to inspire them with the Christian spirit, to put before them the pursuit of righteousness as their object, was all right; only he identified his own teaching with them, and, still more, he identified his own teaching with great political issues lying beyond the Florentine Republic. That is the mistake for which he paid the penalty. The maintenance of the republican government of Florence could not be brought about solely by the forces Florence itself contained. The French expedition into Italy at that time gave the republican party the help they needed. How natural it was for Savonarola to see in Charles VIII. and his invading army the scourge of God on the sins of Florence! How natural for him to welcome Charles as a divine agent appointed to deliver them! How easy for him to identify the Florentine Government and constitution with alien armies to welcome the support of a stranger! Oh, what a downfall was that from the primary principles of Italy's patriotism! How it exposed Savonarola to the charge of opening his country

to a stranger that he might cause his own party to win in the place where he himself was living! How hard it is to mix in great political questions and keep abstract principles entirely pure; how easy to identify yourself and your own interests with great eternal principles, and work for the one when you think you are working for the other!

That was the misfortune of Savonarola in the first place. And in the next place he posed as a prophet. Not consciously perhaps, but he was converted into a prophet, he was regarded as a prophet, he was considered as being above the ordinary man, and he could not help taking to himself that prophetic position which he had proclaimed in his ears. It is a temptation to one who speaks for God to clothe himself with the prophetic mantle, to suppose that, because of the integrity of his purpose, he has a greater insight into the Divine law, into the Divine will, as it governs the universe God has made. He may have an insight, but only into the operation of those small causes which regulate actual affairs. It is only experience and tried wisdom and statesmanship that enable one to speak with authority. Savonarola was dragged into politics not of his own seeking. Savonarola fell, not, I think, a victim, as is ordinarily said, to a corrupt Papacy (not but that the Pope was corrupt enough: doubtless Savonarola fell with the connivance and by the consent of the Pope); but the fact was that he fell before the forces of the Medicæan principality and the new learning he had attacked.

It was not the Church that slew him; even Alexander regretted condemning him. There have been attempts made from time to time to obtain his canonization. It was not to be said that the Church rejoiced over his downfall; but there was that great difficulty in separating the prophet from the politician. As a practical politician, it was necessary that he should be deposed from his power, and there was the great pathos. To express to you fully what the downfall of Savonarola is, I think I may give you only one instance to enable you to understand practically what were these tendencies of the Renaissance, and the great difference that came over them. Savonarola lived and ruled in the great Dominican monastery of San Marco. Before his eyes he had the pictures of Fra Angelico. It was that which very largely inspired his efforts. What do those pictures show? They show us a childlike soul resting upon God and finding quietness and peace; that was what Savonarola primarily was, that was what he wished others to be. He did not succeed. His downfall marked a period of political disturbance for Italy—a period which disturbed the minds of men, and from

which they have not yet recovered. But who was the man who carried out Savonarola's ideas and expressed them in the next generation? It was Michael Angelo. Compare Michael Angelo with Fra Angelico, and see how they stood as at the parting of two ways, as a man who connected the end of one period and the beginning of another. Compare the difference of the childlike soul resting upon God and finding peace, and Michael Angelo, who is dragging all the power of man's nature through manifold struggles to draw nigh to God. And thus the great issue of his life was only good. He dragged himself through the temptations and troubles of the world; and, being himself no longer in harmony with it, he dragged himself into God's presence at last, bearing the scars and marks of many a conflict, won through so many struggles and by so many elements.

M. LONDIN.

ART. II.—PECOCK, FISHER, COLET, MORE.

OF these four distinguished men, whose names are so often mentioned in connection with each other and with the preludes of the English Reformation, Reginald Pecock stands in fact quite alone, apart from the other three. He died in 1460, a year after the birth of Fisher, the earliest of the others—if, indeed, Fisher was in fact born so early as 1459. Men born in England at the time of Pecock's death, and in the ten or twenty years following, lived their lives as grown men in the beginning of a new world, while he died very near the end of the old. Colet died in 1519; Fisher and More were executed in 1535.

The attitude of the four men to the great questions moving the thoughts of Englishmen, during the years in which England was ripening for a Reformation, may be described fairly in the following fashion.

Pecock was too early, by at least a whole generation, for the New Learning, which eventually shattered the fabric of ecclesiastical mediævalism, built up laboriously in the dark and ignorant ages. He knew nothing of it. Fisher fostered the New Learning, but was not greatly touched by it. To Colet and More it was the mainspring of their thoughts.

The disciplinary reform of the Church was the great demand of Pecock's time. To such demands he opposed arguments for things as they were, while allowing that there were matters for which the clergy were worthy to be blamed "in brotherly and neighbourly correption." Fisher favoured the demand