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The Continental Reformation.

BY THE REV. ALFRED PLUMMER, D.D.

II.—THE CONTINENTAL CONTRASTED WITH THE ENGLISH REFORMATION.

WE have restricted ourselves to the religious factors in the Reformation, and we have decided to adopt the religious rather than the non-religious view in studying it. We must now make a further limitation. We must endeavour to confine ourselves to the Continental Reformation and leave our own country out of the account. This suggests that some of the features in which the reforming movement on the Continent differed from the reforming movement in England should be pointed out.¹

1. The two were alike in being the result of causes which had long been working, and which had greatly increased in force and volume during the preceding century; and to a considerable extent the causes were the same. But there were important differences, and only in certain particulars is the English Reformation parallel to the Continental one. It is specially interesting to notice the difference between the positions from which the two movements started. The English started with the desire to secure the ancient rights of the English Church, and to defend the English nation against the ceaseless encroachments of the Church of Rome. Centuries of experience had taught them that the only way in which this could effectually be accomplished was to cut themselves free from the jurisdiction of Rome. This, at the outset, was the main object, if not the only object.² No other changes, such as reforms in doctrine, or ritual, or discipline, were desired by any considerable number of persons; and nearly every official, whether in Church or State, was opposed to such changes. When at last a desire for these reforms became general, it was largely in consequence of what had already taken place on the Continent; and then the English

¹ A. L. Moore, "Lectures on the Reformation," pp. 319 *et seq.*

² A. Plummer, "English Church History," 1509-1575, pp. 50-64.

Church could do as its rulers thought best in the matter. It had freed itself from the hampering control of Rome, and had regained its constitutional liberty, therefore any ecclesiastical changes which were regarded as necessary could be executed at once. The organization of the English Church which had come down to it from Theodore of Tarsus (A.D. 668-690) remained intact; it was no longer impeded by Roman interference; and it could reform itself in any direction that seemed to be desirable.

This happy condition of things did not prevail on the Continent. There the process of reformation was reversed. The reforms in doctrine, ritual, and discipline came first, and these led on to a complete rejection of the authority of Rome. What was the consequence? Not only were reforms hampered by the interference of Rome, but Luther had no organization ready to his hand with which to effect them. The only ecclesiastical organization which existed was his deadly enemy. He had to build up an entirely new system, and had to do this long before the reforms in discipline and doctrine were complete. The result was dissension almost from the first. Luther had his view, and Zwingli his, and Calvin yet another, and there was no Convocation or Council to decide between them. The only substitute for a central authority, such as both Rome and England possessed, was the appeal to Scripture. And that was an appeal which settled very little. The text was not always certain; translations varied considerably, especially in the renderings of crucial passages, and interpretations varied most of all. Everyone claimed to have Scripture on his side.

2. Not only did the Continent begin with the reform of doctrine and practice, while England began with the rejection of Roman jurisdiction; both of them intended to end where they began. Neither had at first any intention of taking the step which was being taken by the other. When Luther agitated for reform in the matter of indulgences (A.D. 1517-1518), he had no thought of breaking with Rome: he wrote most submissively to his own diocesan and to the Pope.¹ When Henry VIII.

¹ Kidd, "Documents Illustrative of the Continental Reformation," pp. 27, 37.

broke with Rome (A.D. 1529-1532), he had no idea of introducing changes of doctrine; on the contrary, he ruthlessly persecuted those who advocated change (The Six Articles, 1539). Thus, the Continental Reformers would have kept just what England rejected, while England would have retained just what the Continent determined to reject.

3. Another point in which the English Reformation differed from the Continental was that in England the *paganism* of the Renaissance had little power. In general culture, and especially in literature, England felt the influence of the New Learning. But, while this aided the movement for reform by exposing the ignorant superstition and folly of monks and clergy, it did not corrupt society with a revival of pagan immorality. In England it was the increased knowledge of the Scriptures that was specially valued; in Italy and France it was chiefly the increased knowledge of the classics. In Italy, and especially in Rome, we find learning, a passion for the arts, and devotion to the refinements of culture, combined with ferocity, cruelty, and the coarsest forms of self-indulgence. On the one side, a seeming zeal for everything that is intellectual and beautiful; on the other, a dissoluteness worthy of the court of Elagabalus.¹ Erasmus said that the enthusiasm for classical literature was in some of the Humanists "a mere pretext for the revival of paganism, which is dearer to them than the glory of Christ."

Germany was closer to England in this respect. There, as in Italy, there was plenty of magnificence, luxury, and sensuality. But in Germany there was not much paganism among the Humanists. Some of them, like Melancthon, used their learning for the interpretation of Scripture. Others, like Ulrich von Hutten, were ready with verses and satires, and sometimes with swords, to free their country from Roman exactions and encroachments. Very few were enthusiastic for a revival of heathen thought and morals. The truth perhaps is, that the Renaissance, in its revolt from the obscurantist corporations of the Middle Ages, laid emphasis on the natural dignity of every individual. In the medieval system, the individual was lost in some

¹ Plummer, "English Church History," pp. 28, 29.

ecclesiastical order, or secular guild, to which he belonged. The New Learning taught him his own personal value. In some cases the sense of individuality led to libertinism; each might do what seemed good in his own eyes. In other cases it led to deeper moral earnestness; if the individual is so valuable, "self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control" are the virtues which he is bound to cultivate. The former was the effect which it too often had on the Continent; the latter was more often the effect in England. Or we may say that the New Learning taught each individual how much power he had over all his surroundings. This new sense of power made those who felt it eager to use it to the full. Italians exercised it in one way, Englishmen in another.

4. Yet a fourth point of difference between our Reformation and the Continental one may be mentioned, and it is one of considerable magnitude. In England, the results which were attained were much more the work of the nation than of any one Reformer. Scotland in this respect was like the Continent. It had its Knox, whose self-confident faith, strong will, and strong speech, carried the Scottish people along with him, as Luther carried the Germans, and made him for a time a Scottish political leader as well as a religious reformer. But in England there was no commanding genius who was the soul of the movement and put the impress of his character upon it. There is little comparison in this respect between Henry VIII. and Luther, and still less between Cranmer and Zwingli, or Parker and Calvin. Such comparisons bring out contrasts rather than similarities.

5. One more difference between the two movements is of considerable interest. Both in the processes which led up to the Reformation, and in the actual struggle, much less use was made in England than on the Continent of ridicule and satire as engines of assault upon Rome. Here we had no Pasquino or Marforio, and not very much that will bear comparison with Sebastian Brandt's "Ship of Fools" ("Narrenschiff") or Erasmus's "Praise of Folly" ("Encomium Moriae"); still less anything that can rival the immortal "Epistolæ Obscurorum

Virorum," by Crotus Rubianus and others, or the equally immortal "Pantagruel" and "Gargantua" of Rabelais, or even the "Vadiscus" and other pungent and witty products of that extraordinary compound of patriotism, passion, and recklessness, Ulrich von Hutten. It is quite true that some of these satires—notably the "Ship of Fools"—were soon translated into English, and had influence in England; while the "Praise of Folly" was made intelligible to those who knew no Latin by the speaking illustrations of Holbein. But they were not the work of Englishmen, and perhaps were never very widely read here; whereas they were devoured on the Continent. Moreover, there was on the Continent a vast amount of similar literature, written in the broadest humour, for the lower orders. Extravagant satires like "Karsthans" and "Neukarsthans," and the "Wittenbergische Nachtigall" of Hans Sachs, were immensely popular.¹ There were broadsheets, often illustrated with rough cuts, which were eagerly read by artisans in the towns and peasants in the villages; and those who were unable to read could appreciate the illustrations and get someone else to read to them. In England such things were far less common. In Scotland there were plenty of satirical verses, which have been collected in two large octavo volumes;² but perhaps one must be Scottish, or at any rate have more knowledge about details than most of us possess, in order to appreciate the witticisms. The rather tedious and monotonous lines of "Colyn Cloute," by that eccentric literary phenomenon, John Skelton, who had been tutor to Henry VIII., and was Poet Laureate early in his reign, give a fair idea of the kind of satire that was produced in England in attacking the ignorance of the clergy. Skelton was for twenty-five years rector of Diss in Norfolk, and we may assume that he knew a good many specimens of clergy such as he describes in his doggerel verses. One very soon becomes tired of reading them. Henry VIII. sometimes employed him to make fun of people, and among others he attacked Wolsey, who put him

¹ "Cambridge Modern History," ii., p. 159.

² Cranstoun, "Satirical Poems of the Time of the Reformation," 1891-1893. Dr. Kidd gives a better specimen in his "Documents," p. 695.

in prison. He fell foul of Alexander Barclay, who paid him in his own coin.

Barclay's English version of Brandt's "Ship of Fools" appeared in 1509, within fifteen years of the appearance of the original. It may be studied in a sumptuous edition in two volumes (1874), with the original illustrations, which add greatly to its interest.¹ It was the rage in the sixteenth century. Published in 1494, it was translated into Latin in 1497, and imitated in Latin in 1507. It was done into Dutch and Low German, twice into English, and three times into French. Selections from it were delivered from the pulpit by some of the best preachers of the day. Max Müller thus explains Brandt's immense popularity: "He writes in short chapters, and mixes his fools in such a manner that we always meet with a variety of new faces. There was room at that time for a work like the "Ship of Fools." It was the first printed book that treated of contemporaneous events and living persons. People are fond of the history of their own times. If the good qualities of their age are brought out, they think of themselves and their friends; if the dark features, they think of their neighbours and their enemies. The "Ship of Fools" is just such a satire as ordinary people would read, and read with pleasure. They would feel a slight twinge now and then, but they would put down the book at the end, and thank God that they were not as other men."²

Brandt divides society into 113 classes of fools, puts them into a ship, and sends them off to Narragonia, which we may regard as the Fools' Botany Bay. Many teachers, from the thirteenth century onwards, have been somewhat inaccurately called "forerunners of the Reformation." Brandt is really such. It is not as evidence of the scandals and corruptions which cried aloud for remedy that his poem is so valuable, but as the work

¹ Edited by T. H. Jamieson. See also Zarncke's edition (Leipzig, 1854) of the original "Narrenschiff." Barclay was a priest in the College of Ottery St. Mary.

² "Chips from a German Workshop," iii. In his work on "The German Classics," pp. 370-382, Max Müller gives extracts from the "Narrenschiff," and also from Johann Geiler's writings.

of one who actually began the work of reform. He does not expose the abominations committed by the greatest offenders among the clergy and laity, but the vices and follies of ordinary men and women. Like Luther, he used the vulgar tongue, and his verses became familiar to persons whom Luther's pamphlets did not reach. By his frank criticisms he helped the cause of reform, without any rebellion against the Church, or any special leaning towards the doctrines which were afterwards formulated by Luther. He was a Humanist, who frequently quotes Ovid, Catullus, Persius, and Seneca, and sometimes Cicero and Virgil, and thus was as much admired by Reuchlin and Erasmus as by the people. He is sarcastic rather than amusing, for his object is, not to raise a laugh, but to raise his fellows to higher aims. His shipload of fools is one of the best products of the surviving moral earnestness which prepared men's minds for radical reform. Barclay's rendering of it had more effect upon English literature than upon the English Reformation.

Some of the ephemeral sheets that were struck off for the enlightenment and amusement of the lower orders were very clever. Rather a favourite form was that of imaginary conversations—dialogues between peasants who freely criticize their superiors, between clergy and their parishioners, and so forth. In scores of these dialogues the peasant appears and “confounds with his common sense the learning of doctors of law and theology; he knows as much of the Scriptures as three parsons, and more; and he demolishes the arguments of Luther's antagonist, Murner.”¹ But few skits could be more telling than this story, which Johann Eberlin of Günzburg, himself a popular Swabian preacher (*circa* 1530-1550), relates. In 1521 he left the Franciscans and became an enthusiastic Lutheran teacher. He tells of a priest who confided to a friend that he really must begin to know something about the Bible. He has never read any of it, excepting what occurs in the services, and his parishioners are beginning to read it, or at any rate to know something about it. And they ask such puzzling questions

¹ “Cambridge Modern History,” ii., p. 175.

about persons and things in the Bible that he has never heard of. He intends now to study the Bible; where would be a good place to begin? His friend suggests that in the Pastoral Epistles of St. Paul there is a good deal that is very useful to a parish priest. So the perplexed pastor sets to work on the First Epistle to Timothy, where he finds to his confusion that the Apostle declares that a Bishop and a deacon must be the husband of one wife!¹

But quite the most famous of the satirical writings which appeared in Germany during the first half of the sixteenth century is the collection of mock letters known as the "*Epistolæ Obscurorum Virorum*." When Reuchlin had been attacked by ignorant bigots for showing that the Vulgate was sometimes incorrect, and for declaring that Jewish literature ought not to be burned, there was published in 1514 a number of letters in his favour under the title, "*Clarorum Virorum Epistolæ variis temporibus missæ ad Johannem Reuchlinum Phorcensensem*." This suggested the idea of making his obscurantist opponents ridiculous by publishing a collection of letters professing to be written on their side, but exposing the ignorance, stupidity, hypocrisy, and sensuality of the spiteful monks who were assailing Reuchlin and scholars generally. The style is all the more amusing, because the whole reads like a confidential and naïve confession out of the assailants' own mouths. These letters are addressed—without his leave and much to his confusion—to the comical person, Ortwin Gratius, whom Luther called *poetista asinus*, and who tried in vain to get this imperishable skit suppressed. In order to expose the ignorance of the supposed writers, the letters are written in dog-Latin, through which the German shows its idioms and vocabulary in an absurd manner here and there. A good idea of the effect may be got from Lord Dufferin's Latin speech, in his delightful "*Letters from High Latitudes*" (Murray, 1857). In Iceland, a dinner was given in his honour at the Government House, and a great many toasts had been drunk, when the Bishop rose and proposed Lord Dufferin's health in an eloquent

¹ Lindsay, "*The Reformation in Germany*," p. 308.

Latin speech. Lord Dufferin was just sufficiently primed to venture to reply in the same language, and this, he tells us, is the kind of Latinity which he produced: "*Viri illustres, insolitus ut sum ad publicum loquendum ego propero respondere ad complimentum quod recte reverendus prelativus mihi fecit in proponendo meam salutem; et supplico vos credere quod multum grattificatus et flattificatus sum honore tam distincto.*" That may suffice to give some idea of the canine Latin of the "Epistolæ," which are a caricature of monkish disquisitions, animosities, and tastes, as the "Provincial Letters" are of Jesuistical casuistry. A man eats a chicken in an egg, and his conscience is troubled when he remembers that it is Friday. A friend consoles him with the suggestion that an unhatched chicken is no more than the maggots in cheese, which anyone may eat on Fridays and vigils. He is not satisfied, because a doctor, who is a good naturalist, has told him that maggots belong to the order of fishes, which *may* be eaten on fast-days, whereas chickens may *not*. What does Ortwin think? Has he committed a mortal sin? or not even a venial one?¹

Then there is that rascal Reuchlin, advising people to learn Greek and Hebrew, as if the Scriptures were not much plainer in Latin. It would only make the schismatical Greeks and the infidel Jews proud, if decent Christians took to learning their languages. It is said that the Inquisitor has no more money with which to bribe the judges in Rome, and if that is true, the rascal may be acquitted after all. Can't the Dominicans, with their fine stock of abuse, stop the gab of a layman who dares to dispute the theologians? Then, can it be necessary to eternal salvation that students should learn grammar from profane poets, like Cicero and Pliny? It can't be, because Aristotle says poets tell many lies, and it is sinful to tell lies; therefore to base one's studies upon lies must be sinful. The writers don't profess to be immaculate; they have their little weaknesses. But even Samson and Solomon were not quite perfect, and the writers have too much humility to wish to be better than those Christian saints.

¹ Kidd, "Documents," p. 11.

They try their hand at etymology, and derive *magister* from *magis* and *ter*, because a *magister* ought to know three times as much as anybody else ; but it may come from *magis* and *terreo*, because a master should inspire his pupils with fear.

There were forty-one of these letters ; to the third edition seven more letters were added. Then the same delightful result followed as that which was produced by Daniel Defoe's "Shortest Way with the Dissenters" (1703). Some of the people who were ridiculed took the satire as a genuine production of their own party, and expressed sympathy. This was too good an opportunity to be missed. In 1517 a second volume, of sixty-two letters, was published, renewing and rubbing in the ridicule. Unlike most continuations, it is considered quite equal to the first. But perhaps one would have sufficed, and much less coarseness would have sufficed. Erasmus tells us that he was delighted with some of the first letters, which were shown to him before they were published ; and there is a story that he laughed so heartily over one of them that he cured a bad tumour, by causing it to break. But it is certain that he afterwards condemned the "Epistolæ," partly because in later editions his name was introduced in some of them, and partly because he thought the buffoonery overdone. He writes to Cæsarius, August 16, 1517 : "I highly disapproved of the 'Epistles of Obscure Men.' Their pleasantry might amuse at the first glance, if such a precedent had not been too aggressive. I have no objection to the ludicrous, provided it be without insult to anyone."

The most reasonable conjectures as to authorship are that Crotus Rubianus (Johann Jaeger) planned and wrote much of the first collection, and that Ulrich von Hutten wrote most of the second. But the authorship is less important than the fact that such an attempt to move public opinion against ecclesiastical authority should be successfully made. It was a very early and "decisive demonstration of the power of the press."¹

¹ Lord Acton, "Lectures," p. 86. There is an excellent edition of the "Epistolæ," by F. G. Stokes, with translation and notes. Chatto and Windus, 1909.