

The Italian Renaissance and Popes of Avignon

velli. Much as was his respect for the master geniuses of antiquity, his love for the sacred writings of St. Jerome and St. Augustine was more profound, and it is said that on reading for the first time the works of the latter he thought of abandoning altogether the frivolous study of the classics, with a view of consecrating himself entirely to Christian meditation and reading. Petrarch's respect for the Christian ideal is to be found in the marginal annotations of his manuscripts. We have the poet's own word for it that he took the "Confessions of St. Augustine" for his model when he wrote his "De Contemptu Mundi." Practices of scrupulous piety marked his whole life. Each night he arose to pray to God, and on every Friday he practised a rigorous fast, while his devotion to the Blessed Virgin was most ardent and sincere.

It is true that, like all men of the Renaissance period, Petrarch was intense in his character. He hated with a Renaissance fervor, and he was not free from the jealousy and vainglory which belonged especially to the spirit of his times.

In estimating the character of Petrarch one must remember the spirit of the times in which he had birth—that it was an age of great virtues and great vices, and that excessive liberty to sin followed in the wake of the Renaissance