

"Imitation"; Saint Bernard in his devotional writings. But from each of the two last a phrase may be gathered which contains, as it were, the essential spirit of the Ages of Faith in respect of secular learning. "How many," says the author of the "Imitation," "perish by reason of vain learning in this world, who take little care of the serving of God? And because they rather choose to be great than humble, therefore they become vain in their imaginations (Rom. I, 21)." He adds: "He is truly learned that doeth the will of God, and forsaketh his own will." (Imit., Bk. I, c.iii.) From Saint Bernard, also, we may learn that which, if we have not forgotten, we have, probably, looked on as unattainable. "Si scribas," he says, "non sapit mihi, nisi legero ibi Jesum." (Serm. 15 super Cant.) An impossible standard? Perhaps; yet the only standard for those who profess and call themselves followers of Him who is the Wisdom of God.

It was from such trammels of mediaeval superstition that the Renaissance set free the mind of man. That it, incidentally, set free much besides, which had been held in not unwholesome bondage, is, of course, studiously ignored by its champions. "Their eyes are holden so that they cannot see"; blinded, it may be, by the glare of that false dawn.

Those, therefore, who hold that the Renaissance was, in truth, "the devil's travesty of the New Birth," are not wholly without grounds for their contention. Man's intellect, man's soul, were, if you will have it so, set free from the bondage of the Dark Ages, but what has he gained thereby? If he is no longer priest-ridden it may be that he is devil-ridden; if he is no longer a slave to the Church is it not possible that he has become a slave to himself?

But the Renaissance, it is asserted, marks the revival of learning. Granted; but, as Maitland says: "What is learning?" The scholars and Saints of the Dark Ages did not, indeed, "give the first place to classical or scientific learning." If so, may it not have been for the causes assigned by Saint Bernard and Thomas à Kempis, the causes which mark them off from Erasmus and his fellows; the Ages of Faith from the Ages of Enlightenment? "Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding." (Job XXXIII, 28). And if men, in the Ages of Faith, fell short of this ideal, the ideal of Saint Paul, Saint Bernard and of Thomas à Kempis that does not, surely, prove that the Old Learning was less real, less true, or of less value than the New.

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