

JACOB BURCKHARDT

THE
CIVILIZATION
OF THE
RENAISSANCE
IN ITALY

Translated by S. G. C. Middlemore
With a new Introduction by Peter Burke
and Notes by Peter Murray

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PART II

The Development of the Individual

PERSONALITY

IN THE character of these states, whether republics or despotisms, lies not the only but the chief reason for the early development of the Italian. To this it is due that he was the first-born among the sons of modern Europe.

In the Middle Ages both sides of human consciousness – that which was turned within as that which was turned without – lay dreaming or half awake beneath a common veil. The veil was woven of faith, illusion and childish prepossession, through which the world and history were seen clad in strange hues. Man was conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, family or corporation – only through some general category. In Italy this veil first melted into air; an *objective* treatment and consideration of the state and of all the things of this world became possible. The *subjective* side at the same time asserted itself with corresponding emphasis; man became a spiritual *individual*,³² and recognized himself as such. In the same way the Greek had once distinguished himself from the barbarian, and the Arab had felt himself an individual at a time when other Asiatics knew themselves only as members of a race. It will not be difficult to show that this result was due above all to the political circumstances of Italy.

In far earlier times we can here and there detect a development of free personality which in northern Europe either did not occur at all, or could not display itself in the same manner. The band of audacious wrongdoers in the tenth century described to us by Liudprand, some of the contemporaries of Gregory VII (for example, Benzo of Alba) and a few of the opponents of the first Hohenstaufen show us characters of this kind. But at the close of the thirteenth century Italy began to swarm with individuality; the ban laid upon human personality was dissolved; and a thousand figures meet us each in its own special shape and dress. Dante's great poem would have been impossible in any other country of Europe, if only for the reason that they all still lay

under the spell of race. For Italy the august poet, through the wealth of individuality which he set forth, was the most national herald of his time. But this unfolding of the treasures of human nature in literature and art – this many-sided representation and criticism – will be discussed in separate chapters; here we have to deal only with the psychological fact itself. This fact appears in the most decisive and unmistakable form. The Italians of the fourteenth century knew little of false modesty or of hypocrisy in any shape; not one of them was afraid of singularity, of being and seeming unlike his neighbours.

Despotism, as we have already seen, fostered in the highest degree the individuality not only of the tyrant or *condottiere* himself,³³ but also of the men whom he protected or used as his tools – the secretary, minister, poet and companion. These people were forced to know all the inward resources of their own nature, passing or permanent; and their enjoyment of life was enhanced and concentrated by the desire to obtain the greatest satisfaction from a possibly very brief period of power and influence.

But even the subjects whom they ruled over were not free from the same impulse. Leaving out of account those who wasted their lives in secret opposition and conspiracies, we speak of the majority who were content with a strictly private station, like most of the urban population of the Byzantine empire and the Muhammadan states. No doubt it was often hard for the subjects of a Visconti to maintain the dignity of their persons and families, and multitudes must have lost in moral character through the servitude they lived under. But this was not the case with regard to individuality; for political impotence does not hinder the different tendencies and manifestations of private life from thriving in the fullest vigour and variety. Wealth and culture, so far as display and rivalry were not forbidden to them, a municipal freedom which did not cease to be considerable, and a Church which, unlike that of the Byzantine or of the Muhammadan world, was not identical with the state – all these conditions undoubtedly favoured the growth of individual thought, for which the necessary leisure was furnished by the cessation of party conflicts. The private man, indifferent to politics, and busied partly with serious pursuits, partly with the interests of a dilettante, seems to have been first fully formed in these despotisms of the fourteenth century. Documentary evidence cannot, of course, be required on such a point. The novelists, from whom we might expect information, describe to us oddities in plenty, but only from one point

of view and in so far as the needs of the story demand. Their scene, too, lies chiefly in the republican cities.

In the latter, circumstances were also, but in another way, favourable to the growth of individual character. The more frequently the governing party was changed, the more the individual was led to make the utmost of the exercise and enjoyment of power. The statesmen and popular leaders, especially in Florentine history, acquired so marked a personal character that we can scarcely find, even exceptionally, a parallel to them in contemporary history, hardly even in Jacob von Artevelde.

The members of the defeated parties, on the other hand, often came into a position like that of the subjects of the despotic states, with the difference that the freedom or power already enjoyed, and in some cases the hope of recovering them, gave a higher energy to their individuality. Among these men of involuntary leisure we find, for instance, an Agnolo Pandolfini (d. 1446), whose work on domestic economy³⁴ is the first complete programme of a developed private life. His estimate of the duties of the individual as against the dangers and thanklessness of public life is in its way a true monument of the age.

Banishment, too, has this effect above all, that it either wears the exile out or develops whatever is greatest in him. 'In all our more populous cities,' says Gioviano Pontano, 'we see a crowd of people who have left their homes of their own free will; but a man takes his virtues with him wherever he goes.' And, in fact, they were by no means only men who had been actually exiled, but thousands left their native place voluntarily, because they found its political or economical condition intolerable. The Florentine emigrants at Ferrara and the Luccese in Venice formed whole colonies by themselves.

The cosmopolitanism which grew up in the most gifted circles is in itself a high stage of individualism. Dante, as we have already said, finds a new home in the language and culture of Italy, but goes beyond even this in the words, 'My country is the whole world.' And when his recall to Florence was offered him on unworthy conditions, he wrote back: 'Can I not everywhere behold the light of the sun and the stars; everywhere meditate on the noblest truths, without appearing ingloriously and shamefully before the city and the people? Even my bread will not fail me.' The artists exult no less defiantly in their freedom from the constraints of fixed residence. 'Only he who has

learned everything,' says Ghiberti,³⁵ 'is nowhere a stranger; robbed of his fortune and without friends, he is yet the citizen of every country, and can fearlessly despise the changes of fortune.' In the same strain an exiled humanist writes: 'Wherever a learned man fixes his seat, there is home.'³⁶

An acute and practised eye might be able to trace, step by step, the increase in the number of complete men during the fifteenth century. Whether they had before them as a conscious object the harmonious development of their spiritual and material existence is hard to say; but several of them attained it, so far as is consistent with the imperfection of all that is earthly. It may be better to renounce the attempt at an estimate of the share which fortune, character and talent had in the life of Lorenzo il Magnifico. But look at a personality like that of Ariosto, especially as shown in his satires. In what harmony are there expressed the pride of the man and the poet, the irony with which he treats his own enjoyment, the most delicate satire, and the deepest goodwill!

When this impulse to the highest individual development was combined with a powerful and varied nature, which had mastered all the elements of the culture of the age, then arose the 'all-sided man' – *l'uomo universale* – who belonged to Italy alone. Men there were of encyclopedic knowledge in many countries during the Middle Ages, for this knowledge was confined within narrow limits; and even in the twelfth century there were universal artists, but the problems of architecture were comparatively simple and uniform, and in sculpture and painting the matter was of more importance than the form. But in Italy at the time of the Renaissance we find artists who in every branch created new and perfect works, and who also made the greatest impression as men. Others, outside the arts they practised, were masters of a vast circle of spiritual interests.

Dante, who, even in his lifetime, was called by some a poet, by others a philosopher, by others a theologian, pours forth in all his writings a stream of personal force by which the reader, apart from the interest of the subject, feels himself carried away. What power of will must the steady, unbroken elaboration of the *Divine Comedy* have required! And if we look at the matter of the poem, we find that in the whole spiritual or physical world there is hardly an important subject which the poet has not fathomed, and on which his utterances – often only a few words – are not the most weighty of his time. For the plastic arts he is of the first importance, and this for better reasons than

the few references to contemporary artists – he soon became himself the source of inspiration.

The fifteenth century is, above all, that of the many-sided men. There is no biography which does not, besides the chief work of its hero, speak of other pursuits all passing beyond the limits of dilettantism. The Florentine merchant and statesman was often learned in both the classical languages; the most famous humanists read the *Ethics* and *Politics* of Aristotle to him and his sons; even the daughters of the house were highly educated. It is in these circles that private education was first treated seriously. The humanist, on his side, was compelled to the most varied attainments, since his philological learning was not limited, as it is now, to the theoretical knowledge of classical antiquity, but had to serve the practical needs of daily life. While studying Pliny, he made collections of natural history; the geography of the ancients was his guide in treating of modern geography; their history was his pattern in writing contemporary chronicles, even when composed in Italian; he not only translated the comedies of Plautus, but acted as manager when they were put on the stage; every effective form of ancient literature down to the dialogues of Lucian he did his best to imitate; and besides all this, he acted as magistrate, secretary and diplomatist – not always to his own advantage.

But among these many-sided men, some who may truly be called all-sided tower above the rest. Before analysing the general phases of life and culture of this period, we may here, on the threshold of the fifteenth century, consider for a moment the figure of one of these giants – Leon Battista Alberti (b. 1404?, d. 1472). His biography,³⁷ which is only a fragment, speaks of him but little as an artist, and makes no mention at all of his great significance in the history of architecture. We shall now see what he was, apart from these special claims to distinction.

In all by which praise is won, Leon Battista was from his childhood the first. Of his various gymnastic feats and exercises we read with astonishment how, with his feet together, he could spring over a man's head; how, in the cathedral, he threw a coin in the air till it was heard to ring against the distant roof; how the wildest horses trembled under him. In three things he desired to appear faultless to others, in walking, in riding, and in speaking. He learned music without a master, and yet his compositions were admired by professional judges. Under the pressure of poverty, he studied both civil and canonical law for many

years, till exhaustion brought on a severe illness. In his twenty-fourth year, finding his memory for words weakened, but his sense of facts unimpaired, he set to work at physics and mathematics. And all the while he acquired every sort of accomplishment and dexterity, cross-examining artists, scholars and artisans of all descriptions, down to the cobblers, about the secrets and peculiarities of their craft. Painting and modelling he practised by the way, and especially excelled in admirable likenesses from memory. Great admiration was excited by his mysterious camera obscura, in which he showed at one time the stars and the moon rising over rocky hills, at another wide landscapes with mountains and gulfs receding into dim perspective, and with fleets advancing on the waters in shade or sunshine. And that which others created he welcomed joyfully, and held every human achievement which followed the laws of beauty for something almost divine. To all this must be added his literary works, first of all those on art, which are landmarks and authorities of the first order for the Renaissance of form, especially in architecture; then his Latin prose writings – novels and other works – of which some have been taken for productions of antiquity; his elegies, eclogues and humorous dinner-speeches. He also wrote an Italian treatise on domestic life³⁸ in four books; and even a funeral oration on his dog. His serious and witty sayings were thought worth collecting, and specimens of them, many columns long, are quoted in his biography. And all that he had and knew he imparted, as rich natures always do, without the least reserve, giving away his chief discoveries for nothing. But the deepest spring of his nature has yet to be spoken of – the sympathetic intensity with which he entered into the whole life around him. At the sight of noble trees and waving cornfields he shed tears; handsome and dignified old men he honoured as ‘a delight of nature’, and could never look at them enough. Perfectly formed animals won his goodwill as being specially favoured by nature; and more than once, when he was ill, the sight of a beautiful landscape cured him. No wonder that those who saw him in this close and mysterious communion with the world ascribed to him the gift of prophecy. He was said to have foretold a bloody catastrophe in the family of Este, the fate of Florence, and the death of the popes years before they happened, and to be able to read into the countenances and the hearts of men. It need not be added that an iron will pervaded and sustained his whole personality; like all the great men of the Renaissance, he said, ‘Men can do all things if they will.’

And Leonardo da Vinci was to Alberti as the finisher to the beginner, as the master to the dilettante. Would only that Vasari's work were here supplemented by a description like that of Alberti! The colossal outlines of Leonardo's nature can never be more than dimly and distantly conceived.

GLORY

To this inward development of the individual corresponds a new sort of outward distinction – the modern form of glory.³⁹

In the other countries of Europe the different classes of society lived apart, each with its own medieval caste sense of honour. The poetical fame of the troubadours and Minnesingers was peculiar to the knightly order. But in Italy social equality had appeared before the time of the tyrannies or the democracies. We there find early traces of a general society, having, as will be shown more fully later on, a common ground in Latin and Italian literature; and such a ground was needed for this new element in life to grow in. To this must be added that the Roman authors, who were now zealously studied, are filled and saturated with the conception of fame, and that their subject itself – the universal empire of Rome – stood as a permanent ideal before the minds of Italians. From henceforth all the aspirations and achievements of the people were governed by a moral postulate, which was still unknown elsewhere in Europe.

Here, again, as in all essential points, the first witness to be called is Dante. He strove for the poet's garland with all the power of his soul. As publicist and man of letters, he laid stress on the fact that what he did was new, and that he wished not only to be, but to be esteemed, the first in his own walks. But even in his prose writings he touches on the inconveniences of fame; he knows how often personal acquaintance with famous men is disappointing, and explains how this is due partly to the childish fancy of men, partly to envy, and partly to the imperfections of the hero himself. And in his great poem he firmly maintains the emptiness of fame, although in a manner which betrays that his heart was not set free from the longing for it. In paradise the sphere of Mercury is the seat of such blessed ones as on earth strove after glory and thereby dimmed 'the beams of true love'. It is characteristic that the lost souls in hell beg of Dante to keep alive for them their memory and fame on earth, while those in purgatory only entreat his

prayers and those of others for their deliverance. And in a famous passage, the passion for fame – '*lo gran disio dell'eccellenza*' – is reproved for the reason that intellectual glory is not absolute, but relative to the times, and may be surpassed and eclipsed by greater successors.

The new race of poet-scholars which arose soon after Dante quickly made themselves masters of this fresh tendency. They did so in a double sense, being themselves the most acknowledged celebrities of Italy, and at the same time, as poets and historians, consciously disposing of the reputation of others. An outward symbol of this sort of fame was the coronation of the poets, of which we shall speak later on.

A contemporary of Dante, Albertinus Musattus or Mussatus, crowned poet at Padua by the bishop and rector, enjoyed a fame which fell little short of deification. Every Christmas Day the doctors and students of both colleges at the university came in solemn procession before his house with trumpets and, as it seems, with burning tapers, to salute him and bring him presents. His reputation lasted till, in 1318, he fell into disgrace with the ruling tyrant of the House of Carrara.

This new incense, which once was offered only to saints and heroes, was given in clouds to Petrarch, who persuaded himself in his later years that it was but a foolish and troublesome thing. His letter 'To Posterity' is the confession of an old and famous man, who is forced to gratify the public curiosity. He admits that he wishes for fame in the times to come, but would rather be without it in his own day. In his dialogue on fortune and misfortune, the interlocutor, who maintains the futility of glory, has the best of the contest. But, at the same time, Petrarch is pleased that the autocrat of Byzantium knows him as well by his writings as Charles IV knows him. And in fact, even in his lifetime, his fame extended far beyond Italy. And the emotion which he felt was natural when his friends, on the occasion of a visit to his native Arezzo (1350), took him to the house where he was born, and told him how the city had provided that no change should be made in it. In former times the dwellings of certain great saints were preserved and revered in this way, like the cell of St Thomas Aquinas in the Dominican convent at Naples, and the Portiuncula of St Francis near Assisi; and one or two great jurists also enjoyed the half-mythical reputation which led to this honour. Towards the close of the fourteenth century the people at Bagnolo, near Florence, called an old building the 'Studio' of Accursius (b. c. 1150), but, nevertheless,

suffered it to be destroyed. It is probable that the great incomes and the political influence which some jurists obtained as consulting lawyers made a lasting impression on the popular imagination.

To the cultus of the birthplaces of famous men must be added that of their graves, and, in the case of Petrarch, of the spot where he died. In memory of him Arquà became a favourite resort of the Paduans, and was dotted with graceful little villas. At this time there were no 'classic spots' in northern Europe, and pilgrimages were only made to pictures and relics. It was a point of honour for the different cities to possess the bones of their own and foreign celebrities; and it is most remarkable how seriously the Florentines, even in the fourteenth century – long before the building of Santa Croce – laboured to make their cathedral a pantheon. Accorso, Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio and the jurist Zanobi della Strada were to have had magnificent tombs there erected to them. Late in the fifteenth century, Lorenzo il Magnifico applied in person to the Spoletans, asking them to give up the corpse of the painter Fra Filippo Lippi for the cathedral, and received the answer that they had none too many ornaments to the city, especially in the shape of distinguished people, for which reason they begged him to spare them; and, in fact, he had to be contented with erecting a cenotaph. And even Dante, in spite of all the applications to which Boccaccio urged the Florentines with bitter emphasis, remained sleeping tranquilly by the side of San Francesco at Ravenna, 'among ancient tombs of emperors and vaults of saints, in more honourable company than thou, O Home, couldst offer him'. It even happened that a man once took away unpunished the lights from the altar on which the crucifix stood, and set them by the grave, with the words, 'Take them; thou art more worthy of them than He, the Crucified One!'

And now the Italian cities began again to remember their ancient citizens and inhabitants. Naples, perhaps, had never forgotten its tomb of Virgil, since a kind of mythical halo had become attached to the name.

The Paduans, even in the sixteenth century, firmly believed that they possessed not only the genuine bones of their founder, Antenor, but also those of the historian Livy.⁴⁰ 'Sulmona,' says Boccaccio, 'bewails that Ovid lies buried far away in exile; and Parma rejoices that Cassius sleeps within its walls.' The Mantuans coined a medal in 1257 with the bust of Virgil, and raised a statue to represent him. In a

fit of aristocratic insolence, the guardian of the young Gonzaga, Carlo Malatesta, caused it to be pulled down in 1392, and was afterwards forced, when he found the fame of the old poet too strong for him, to set it up again. Even then, perhaps, the grotto, a couple of miles from the town, where Virgil was said to have meditated, was shown to strangers, like the 'Scuola di Virgilio' at Naples. Como claimed both the Plinys for its own, and at the end of the fifteenth century erected statues in their honour, sitting under graceful baldachins on the façade of the cathedral.

History and the new topography were now careful to leave no local celebrity unnoticed. At the same period the northern chronicles only here and there, among the list of popes, emperors, earthquakes and comets, put in the remark that at such a time this or that famous man 'flourished'. We shall elsewhere have to show how, mainly under the influence of this idea of fame, an admirable biographical literature was developed. We must here limit ourselves to the local patriotism of the topographers who recorded the claims of their native cities to distinction.

In the Middle Ages, the cities were proud of their saints and of the bones and relics in their churches. With these the panegyrist of Padua in 1450, Michele Savonarola, begins his list; from them he passes to 'the famous men who were no saints, but who, by their great intellect and force [*virtus*] deserve to be added [*adnecti*] to the saints' – just as in classical antiquity the distinguished man came close upon the hero. The further enumeration is most characteristic of the time. First comes Antenor, the brother of Priam, who founded Padua with a band of Trojan fugitives; King Dardanus, who defeated Attila in the Euganean hills, followed him in pursuit and struck him dead at Rimini with a chess-board; the Emperor Henry IV, who built the cathedral; a King Marcus, whose head was preserved in Monselice; then a couple of cardinals and prelates as founders of colleges, churches and so forth; the famous Augustinian theologian, Fra Alberto; a string of philosophers beginning with Paolo Veneto and the celebrated Pietro of Albano; the jurist Paolo Padovano; then Livy and the poets Petrarch, Mussato, Lovato. If there is any want of military celebrities in the list, the poet consoles himself for it by the abundance of learned men whom he has to show, and by the more durable character of intellectual glory, while the fame of the soldier is buried with his body, or, if it lasts, owes its permanence only to the scholar. It is nevertheless

honourable to the city that foreign warriors lie buried here by their own wish, like Pietro de' Rossi of Parma, Filippo Arcelli of Piacenza, and especially Gattamelata of Narni (d. 1443), whose brazen equestrian statue, 'like a Caesar in triumph', already stood by the church of the Santo. The author then names a crowd of jurists and physicians, nobles 'who had not only, like so many others, received, but deserved, the honour of knighthood'. Then follows a list of famous mechanicians, painters and musicians, which is closed by the name of a fencing-master Michele Rosso, who, as the most distinguished man in his profession, was to be seen painted in many places.

By the side of these local temples of fame, which myth, legend, popular admiration and literary tradition combined to create, the poet-scholars built up a great pantheon of world-wide celebrity. They made collections of famous men and famous women, often in direct imitation of Cornelius Nepos, the pseudo-Suetonius, Valerius Maximus, Plutarch (*Mulierum virtutes*), Hieronymus (*De viris illustribus*) and others; or they wrote of imaginary triumphal processions and Olympian assemblies, as was done by Petrarch in his *Trionfo della fama*, and Boccaccio in the *Amorosa visione*, with hundreds of names, of which three-fourths at least belong to antiquity and the rest to the Middle Ages.⁴¹ By and by this new and comparatively modern element was treated with greater emphasis; the historians began to insert descriptions of character, and collections arose of the biographies of distinguished contemporaries, like those of Filippo Villani, Vespasiano Fiorentino, Bartolommeo Facio and lastly of Paolo Giovio.

The north of Europe, until Italian influence began to tell upon its writers – for instance, on Trithemius, the first German who wrote the lives of famous men – possessed only either legends of the saints, or descriptions of princes and churchmen partaking largely of the character of legends and showing no traces of the idea of fame, that is, of distinction won by a man's personal efforts. Poetical glory was still confined to certain classes of society, and the names of northern artists are only known to us at this period in so far as they were members of certain guilds or corporations.

The poet-scholar in Italy had, as we have already said, the fullest consciousness that he was the giver of fame and immortality, or, if he chose, of oblivion. Boccaccio complains of a fair one to whom he had done homage, and who remained hard-hearted in order that he might go on praising her and making her famous, and he gives her a hint that

he will try the effect of a little blame. Sannazaro, in two magnificent sonnets, threatens Alfonso of Naples with eternal obscurity on account of his cowardly flight before Charles VIII. Angelo Poliziano seriously exhorts (1491) King John of Portugal to think betimes of his immortality in reference to the new discoveries in Africa, and to send him materials to Florence, there to be put into shape (*operosius excolenda*), otherwise it would befall him as it had befallen all the others whose deeds, unsupported by the help of the learned, 'lie hidden in the vast heap of human frailty'. The king, or his humanistic chancellor, agreed to this, and promised that at least the Portuguese chronicles of African affairs should be translated into Italian and sent to Florence to be done into Latin. Whether the promise was kept is not known. These pretensions are by no means so groundless as they may appear at first sight; for the form in which events, even the greatest, are told to the living and to posterity is anything but a matter of indifference. The Italian humanists, with their mode of exposition and their Latin style, had long the complete control of the reading world of Europe, and till last century the Italian poets were more widely known and studied than those of any other nation. The baptismal name of the Florentine Amerigo Vespucci was given, on account of his book of travels, to a new quarter of the globe, and if Paolo Giovio, with all his superficiality and graceful caprice, promised himself immortality, his expectation has not altogether been disappointed.

Amid all these preparations outwardly to win and secure fame, the curtain is now and then drawn aside, and we see with frightful evidence a boundless ambition and thirst after greatness, independent of all means and consequences. Thus, in the Preface to Machiavelli's Florentine history, in which he blames his predecessors Leonardo, Aretino and Poggio for their too considerate reticence with regard to the political parties in the city: 'They erred greatly and showed that they understood little the ambition of men and the desire to perpetuate a name. How many who could distinguish themselves by nothing praiseworthy strove to do so by infamous deeds! Those writers did not consider that actions which are great in themselves, as is the case with the actions of rulers and of states, always seem to bring more glory than blame, of whatever kind they are and whatever the result of them may be.' In more than one remarkable and dreadful undertaking the motive assigned by serious writers is the burning desire to achieve something great and memorable. This motive is not a mere

extreme case of ordinary vanity, but something demonic, involving a surrender of the will, the use of any means, however atrocious, and even an indifference to success itself. In this sense, for example, Machiavelli conceives the character of Stefano Porcari; of the murderers of Galeazzo Maria Sforza (p. 54), the documents tell us about the same; and the assassination of Duke Alessandro of Florence (1537) is ascribed by Varchi himself to the thirst for fame which tormented the murderer Lorenzino Medici. Still more stress is laid on this motive by Paolo Giovio. Lorenzino, according to him, pilloried by a pamphlet of Molza, broods over a deed whose novelty shall make his disgrace forgotten, and ends by murdering his kinsmen and prince. These are characteristic features of this age of overstrained and despairing passions and forces, and reminds us of the burning of the temple of Diana at Ephesus in the time of Philip of Macedon.

RIDICULE AND WIT

The corrective, not only of this modern desire for fame, but of all highly developed individuality, is found in ridicule, especially when expressed in the victorious form of wit. We read in the Middle Ages how hostile armies, princes and nobles provoked one another with symbolical insult, and how the defeated party was loaded with symbolical outrage. Here and there, too, under the influence of classical literature, wit began to be used as a weapon in theological disputes, and the poetry of Provence produced a whole class of satirical compositions. Even the Minnesingers, as their political poems show, could adopt this tone when necessary. But wit could not be an independent element in life till its appropriate victim, the developed individual with personal pretensions, had appeared. Its weapons were then by no means limited to the tongue and the pen, but included tricks and practical jokes – the so-called *burle* and *beffe* – which form a chief subject of many collections of novels.

The Hundred Old Tales, which must have been composed about the end of the thirteenth century, have as yet neither wit, the fruit of contrast, nor the *burla*, for their subject; their aim is merely to give simple and elegant expression to wise sayings and pretty stories or fables. But if anything proves the great antiquity of the collection, it is precisely this absence of satire. For with the fourteenth century comes Dante, who, in the utterance of scorn, leaves all other poets in the

world far behind, and who, if only on account of his great picture of the deceivers, must be called the chief master of colossal comedy. With Petrarch begin the collections of witty sayings after the pattern of Plutarch (*Apophthegmata*, etc.).

What stores of wit were concentrated in Florence during this century is most characteristically shown in the novels of Franco Sacchetti. These are, for the most part, not stories but answers, given under certain circumstances – shocking pieces of *naïveté*, with which silly folks, court jesters, rogues and profligate women make their retort. The comedy of the tale lies in the startling contrast of this real or assumed *naïveté* with conventional morality and the ordinary relations of the world – things are made to stand on their heads. All means of picturesque representation are made use of, including the introduction of certain North Italian dialects. Often the place of wit is taken by mere insolence, clumsy trickery, blasphemy and obscenity; one or two jokes told of *condottieri* are among the most brutal and malicious which are recorded. Many of the *burle* are thoroughly comic, but many are only real or supposed evidence of personal superiority, of triumph over another. How much people were willing to put up with, how often the victim was satisfied with getting the laugh on his side by a retaliatory trick, cannot be said; there was much heartless and pointless malice mixed up with it all, and life in Florence was no doubt often made unpleasant enough from this cause.⁴² The inventors and retailers of jokes soon became inevitable figures, and among them there must have been some who were classical – far superior to all the mere court-jesters, to whom competition, a changing public and the quick apprehension of the audience, all advantages of life in Florence, were wanting. Some Florentine wits went starring among the despotic courts of Lombardy and Romagna, and found themselves much better rewarded than at home, where their talent was cheap and plentiful. The better type of these people is the amusing man (*l'uomo piacevole*), the worse is the buffoon and the vulgar parasite who presents himself at weddings and banquets with the argument, 'If I am not invited, the fault is not mine.' Now and then the latter combine to pluck a young spendthrift, but in general they are treated and despised as parasites, while wits of higher position bear themselves like princes, and consider their talent as something sovereign. Dolcibene, whom Charles IV had pronounced to be the 'king of Italian jesters', said to him at Ferrara: 'You will conquer the world, since you are my friend

and the pope's; you fight with the sword, the pope with his bulls, and I with my tongue.' This is no mere jest, but the foreshadowing of Pietro Aretino.

The two most famous jesters about the middle of the fifteenth century were a priest near Florence, Arlotto (1483), for more refined wit (*facezie*), and the court-fool of Ferrara, Gonnella, for buffoonery. We can hardly compare their stories with those of the Parson of Kalenberg and Till Eulenspiegel, since the latter arose in a different and half-mythical manner, as fruits of the imagination of a whole people, and touch rather on what is general and intelligible to all, while Arlotto and Gonnella were historical beings, coloured and shaped by local influences. But if the comparison be allowed, and extended to the jests of the non-Italian nations, we shall find in general that the joke in the French *fabliaux*, as among the Germans, is chiefly directed to the attainment of some advantage or enjoyment, while the wit of Arlotto and the practical jokes of Gonnella are an end in themselves, and exist simply for the sake of the triumph of production. (Till Eulenspiegel again forms a class by himself, as the personified quiz, mostly pointless enough, of particular classes and professions.) The court-fool of the Este saved himself more than once by his keen satire and refined modes of vengeance.

The type of the *uomo piacevole* and the *buffone* long survived the freedom of Florence. Under Duke Cosimo flourished Barlacchia, and at the beginning of the seventeenth century Francesco Ruspoli and Curzio Marignolli. In Pope Leo X the genuine Florentine love of jesters showed itself strikingly. This prince, whose taste for the most refined intellectual pleasures was insatiable, endured and desired at his table a number of witty buffoons and jack-puddings, among them two monks and a cripple; at public feasts he treated them with deliberate scorn as parasites, setting before them monkeys and crows in the place of savoury meats. Leo, indeed, showed a peculiar fondness for the *burla*; it belonged to his nature sometimes to treat his own favourite pursuits – music and poetry – ironically, parodying them with his factotum, Cardinal Bibbiena. Neither of them found it beneath him to fool an honest old secretary till he thought himself a master of the art of music. The *improvvisatore*, Baraballo of Gaeta, was brought so far by Leo's flattery that he applied in all seriousness for the poet's coronation on the Capitol. On the anniversary of St Cosmas and St Damian, the patrons of the House of Medici, he was first

compelled, adorned with laurel and purple, to amuse the papal guests with his recitations, and at last, when all were ready to split with laughter, to mount a gold-harnessed elephant in the court of the Vatican, sent as a present to Rome by Emmanuel the Great of Portugal, while the pope looked down from above through his eye-glass. The brute, however, was so terrified by the noise of the trumpets and kettledrums, and the cheers of the crowd, that there was no getting him over the bridge of Sant' Angelo.

The parody of what is solemn or sublime, which here meets us in the case of a procession, had already taken an important place in poetry.⁴³ It was naturally compelled to choose victims of another kind than those of Aristophanes, who introduced the great tragedians into his plays. But the same maturity of culture which at a certain period produced parody among the Greeks did the same in Italy. By the close of the fourteenth century the love-lorn wailings of Petrarch's sonnets and others of the same kind were taken off by caricaturists; and the solemn air of this form of verse was parodied in lines of mystic twaddle. A constant invitation to parody was offered by the *Divine Comedy*, and Lorenzo il Magnifico wrote the most admirable travesty in the style of the *Inferno* (*Simposio* or *I Beoni*). Luigi Pulci obviously imitates the *improvvisatori* in his *Morgante*, and both his poetry and Boiardo's are in part, at least, a half-conscious parody of the chivalrous poetry of the Middle Ages. Such a caricature was deliberately undertaken by the great parodist Teofilo Folengo (about 1520). Under the name of Limerno Pitocco, he composed the *Orlandino*, in which chivalry appears only as a ludicrous setting for a crowd of modern figures and ideas. Under the name of Merlinus Coccaius he described the journeys and exploits of his fantastic vagabonds (also in the same spirit of parody) in half-Latin hexameters, with all the affected pomp of the learned Epos of the day (*opus macaronicorum*). Since then caricature has been constantly, and often brilliantly, represented on the Italian Parnassus.

About the middle period of the Renaissance a theoretical analysis of wit was undertaken, and its practical application in good society was regulated more precisely. The theorist was Gioviano Pontano. In his work on speaking, especially in the third and fourth books, he tries by means of the comparison of numerous jokes, or *facetiae*, to arrive at a general principle. How wit should be used among people of position is taught by Baldassare Castiglione in his *Cortigiano*.⁴⁴ Its chief function

is naturally to enliven those present by the repetition of comic or graceful stories and sayings; personal jokes, on the contrary, are discouraged on the ground that they wound unhappy people, show too much honour to wrong-doers, and make enemies of the powerful and the spoiled children of fortune; and even in repetition, a wide reserve in the use of dramatic gestures is recommended to the gentleman. Then follows, not only for purposes of quotation, but as patterns for future jesters, a large collection of puns and witty sayings, methodically arranged according to their species, among them some that are admirable. The doctrine of Giovanni della Casa, some twenty years later, in his guide to good manners,⁴⁵ is much stricter and more cautious; with a view to the consequences, he wishes to see the desire of triumph banished altogether from jokes and *burle*. He is the herald of a reaction, which was certain sooner or later to appear.

Italy had, in fact, become a school for scandal, the like of which the world cannot show, not even in France at the time of Voltaire. In him and his comrades there was assuredly no lack of the spirit of negation; but where, in the eighteenth century, was to be found the crowd of suitable victims, that countless assembly of highly and characteristically developed human beings, celebrities of every kind, statesmen, churchmen, inventors and discoverers, men of letters, poets and artists, all of whom then gave the fullest and freest play to their individuality? This host existed in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and by its side the general culture of the time had educated a poisonous brood of impotent wits, of born critics and railers, whose envy called for hecatombs of victims; and to all this was added the envy of the famous men among themselves. In this the philologists notoriously led the way – Filelfo, Poggio, Lorenzo Valla and others – while the artists of the fifteenth century lived in peaceful and friendly competition with one another. The history of art may take note of the fact.

Florence, the great market of fame, was in this point, as we have said, in advance of other cities. 'Sharp eyes and bad tongues' is the description given of the inhabitants. An easygoing contempt of everything and everybody was probably the prevailing tone of society. Machiavelli, in the remarkable Prologue to his *Mandragola*, refers rightly or wrongly the visible decline of moral force to the general habit of evil-speaking, and threatens his detractors with the news that he can say sharp things as well as they. Next to Florence comes the papal court, which had long been a rendezvous of the bitterest and

wittiest tongues. Poggio's *Facetiae* are dated from the Chamber of Lies (*bugiale*) of the apostolic notaries; and when we remember the number of disappointed place-hunters, of hopeless competitors and enemies of the favourites, of idle, profligate prelates there assembled, it is intelligible how Rome became the home of the savage pasquinade as well as of more philosophical satire. If we add to this the widespread hatred borne to the priests, and the well-known instinct of the mob to lay any horror to the charge of the great, there results an untold mass of infamy. Those who were able protected themselves best by contempt both of the false and true accusations, and by brilliant and joyous display. More sensitive natures sank into utter despair when they found themselves deeply involved in guilt, and still more deeply in slander. In course of time calumny became universal, and the strictest virtue was most certain of all to challenge the attacks of malice. Of the great pulpit orator, Fra Egidio of Viterbo, whom Leo made a cardinal on account of his merits, and who showed himself a man of the people and a brave monk in the calamity of 1527, Giovio gives us to understand that he preserved his ascetic pallor by the smoke of wet straw and other means of the same kind. Giovio is a genuine Curial in these matters. He generally begins by telling his story, then adds that he does not believe it, and then hints at the end that perhaps after all there may be something in it. But the true scapegoat of Roman scorn was the pious and moral Adrian VI. A general agreement seemed to be made to take him only on the comic side. He fell out from the first with the formidable Francesco Berni, threatening to have thrown into the Tiber not, as people said, the statue of Pasquino, but the writers of the satires themselves. The vengeance for this was the famous *Capitolo* against Pope Adriano, inspired not exactly by hatred, but by contempt for the comical Dutch barbarian; the more savage menaces were reserved for the cardinals who had elected him. The plague, which then was prevalent in Rome, was ascribed to him; Berni and others sketch the environment of the pope with the same sparkling untruthfulness with which the modern *feuilletoniste* turns black into white, and everything into anything. The biography which Paolo Giovio was commissioned to write by the Cardinal of Tortosa, and which was to have been a eulogy, is for anyone who can read between the lines an unexampled piece of satire. It sounds ridiculous – at least for the Italians of that time – to hear how Adrian applied to the Chapter of Saragossa for the jaw-bone of St Lambert; how the devout Spaniards

decked him out till he looked 'like a right well-dressed pope'; how he came in a confused and tasteless procession from Ostia to Rome, took counsel about burning or drowning Pasquino, would suddenly break off the most important business when dinner was announced; and lastly, at the end of an unhappy reign, how he died of drinking too much beer – whereupon the house of his physician was hung with garlands by midnight revellers, and adorned with the inscription, '*Liberatori Patriae S.P.Q.R.*' It is true that Giovio had lost his money in the general confiscation of public funds, and had only received a benefice by way of compensation because he was 'no poet', that is to say, no pagan. But it was decreed that Adrian should be the last great victim. After the disaster which befell Rome in 1527, slander visibly declined along with the unrestrained wickedness of private life.

But while it was still flourishing was developed, chiefly in Rome, the greatest railer of modern times, Pietro Aretino. A glance at his life and character will save us the trouble of noticing many less distinguished members of his class.

We know him chiefly in the last thirty years of his life (1527–56), which he passed in Venice, the only asylum possible for him. From hence he kept all that was famous in Italy in a kind of state of siege, and here were delivered the presents of the foreign princes who needed or dreaded his pen. Charles V and Francis I both pensioned him at the same time, each hoping that Aretino would do some mischief to the other. Aretino flattered both, but naturally attached himself more closely to Charles, because he remained master in Italy. After the emperor's victory at Tunis in 1535, this tone of adulation passed into the most ludicrous worship, in observing which it must not be forgotten that Aretino constantly cherished the hope that Charles would help him to a cardinal's hat. It is probable that he enjoyed special protection as Spanish agent, as his speech or silence could have no small effect on the smaller Italian courts and on public opinion in Italy. He affected utterly to despise the papal court because he knew it so well; the true reason was that Rome neither could nor would pay him any longer. Venice, which sheltered him, he was wise enough to leave unassailed. The rest of his relations with the great is mere beggary and vulgar extortion.

Aretino affords the first great instance of the abuse of publicity to such ends. The polemical writings which a hundred years earlier

Poggio and his opponents interchanged are just as infamous in their tone and purpose, but they were not composed for the press, but for a sort of private circulation. Aretino made all his profit out of a complete publicity, and in a certain sense may be considered the father of modern journalism. His letters and miscellaneous articles were printed periodically, after they had already been circulated among a tolerably extensive public.

Compared with the sharp pens of the eighteenth century, Aretino had the advantage that he was not burdened with principles, neither with liberalism nor philanthropy nor any other virtue, nor even with science; his whole baggage consisted of the well-known motto, '*Veritas odium parit*'. He never, consequently, found himself in the false position of Voltaire, who was forced to disown his *Pucelle* and conceal all his life the authorship of other works. Aretino put his name to all he wrote, and openly gloried in his notorious *Ragionamenti*. His literary talent, his clear and sparkling style, his varied observation of men and things, would have made him a considerable writer under any circumstances, destitute as he was of the power of conceiving a genuine work of art, such as a true dramatic comedy; and to the coarsest as well as the most refined malice he added a grotesque wit so brilliant that in some cases it does not fall short of that of Rabelais.

In such circumstances, and with such objects and means, he set to work to attack or circumvent his prey. The tone in which he appealed to Clement VII not to complain or to think of vengeance, but to forgive, at the moment when the wailings of the devastated city were ascending to the Castel Sant' Angelo, where the pope himself was a prisoner, is the mockery of a devil or a monkey. Sometimes, when he is forced to give up all hope of presents, his fury breaks out into a savage howl, as in the *Capitolo* to the Prince of Salerno, who after paying him for some time refused to do so any longer. On the other hand, it seems that the terrible Pierluigi Farnese, Duke of Parma, never took any notice of him at all. As this gentleman had probably renounced altogether the pleasures of a good reputation, it was not easy to cause him any annoyance; Aretino tried to do so by comparing his personal appearance to that of a constable, a miller and a baker. Aretino is most comical of all in the expression of whining mendicancy, as in the *Capitolo* to Francis I; but the letters and poems made up of menaces and flattery cannot, notwithstanding all that is ludicrous in them, be read without the deepest disgust. A letter like that one of his

written to Michelangelo⁴⁶ in November 1545 is alone of its kind; along with all the admiration he expresses for the *Last Judgement* he charges him with irreligion, indecency and theft from the heirs of Julius II, and adds in a conciliating postscript, 'I only want to show you that if you are *divino*, I am not *d'acqua*.' Aretino laid great stress upon it – whether from the insanity of conceit or by way of caricaturing famous men – that he himself should be called divine, as one of his flatterers had already begun to do; and he certainly attained so much personal celebrity that his house at Arezzo passed for one of the sights of the place. There were indeed whole months during which he never ventured to cross his threshold at Venice, lest he should fall in with some incensed Florentine like the younger Strozzi. Nor did he escape the cudgels and the daggers of his enemies, although they failed to have the effect which Berni prophesied him in a famous sonnet. Aretino died in his house, of apoplexy.

The differences he made in his modes of flattery are remarkable: in dealing with non-Italians he was grossly fulsome; people like Duke Cosimo of Florence he treated very differently. He praised the beauty of the then youthful prince, who in fact did share this quality with Augustus in no ordinary degree; he praised his moral conduct, with an oblique reference to the financial pursuits of Cosimo's mother Maria Salviati, and concluded with a mendicant whine about the bad times and so forth. When Cosimo pensioned him, which he did liberally, considering his habitual parsimony – to the extent, at last, of 160 ducats a year – he had doubtless an eye to Aretino's dangerous character as Spanish agent. Aretino could ridicule and revile Cosimo, and in the same breath threaten the Florentine agent that he would obtain from the duke his immediate recall; and if the Medicean prince felt himself at last to be seen through by Charles V he would not care for Aretino's jokes and rhymes against him to circulate at the imperial court. A curiously qualified piece of flattery was that addressed to the notorious Marquis of Marignano, who as castellan of Musso had attempted to found an independent state. Thanking him for the gift of a hundred crowns, Aretino writes: 'All the qualities which a prince should have are present in you, and all men would think so, were it not that the acts of violence inevitable at the beginning of all undertakings cause you to appear a trifle rough [*aspro*].'

It has often been noticed as something singular that Aretino only reviled the world, and not God also. The religious belief of a man who

lived as he did is a matter of perfect indifference, as are also the edifying writings which he composed for reasons of his own.⁴⁷ It is in fact hard to say why he should have been a blasphemer. He was no professor, or theoretical thinker or writer; and he could extort no money from God by threats or flattery, and was consequently never goaded into blasphemy by a refusal. A man like him does not take trouble for nothing.

It is a good sign of the present spirit of Italy that such a character and such a career have become a thousand times impossible. But historical criticism will always find in Aretino an important study.

philosophical dialogues are, in fact, better evidence of the growing love of nature than the poets. The novelist Bandello, for example, observes rigorously the rules of his department of literature; he gives us in his novels themselves not a word more than is necessary on the natural scenery amid which the action of his tales takes place, but in the dedications which always precede them we meet with charming descriptions of nature as the setting for his dialogues and social pictures. Among letter-writers, Aretino unfortunately must be named as the first who has fully painted in words the splendid effect of light and shadow in an Italian sunset.

We sometimes find the feeling of the poets, also, attaching itself with tenderness to graceful scenes of country life. Tito Strozzi, about the year 1480, describes in a Latin elegy the dwelling of his mistress. We are shown an old ivy-clad house, half hidden in trees, and adorned with weather-stained frescoes of the saints, and near it a chapel, much damaged by the violence of the river Po, which flowed hard by; not far off, the priest ploughs his few barren roods with borrowed cattle. This is no reminiscence of the Roman elegists, but true modern sentiment; and the parallel to it – a sincere, unartificial description of country life in general – will be found at the end of this part of our work.

It may be objected that the German painters at the beginning of the sixteenth century succeed in representing with perfect mastery these scenes of country life, as, for instance, Albrecht Dürer, in his engraving of the Prodigal Son. But it is one thing if a painter, brought up in a school of realism, introduces such scenes, and quite another thing if a poet, accustomed to an ideal or mythological framework, is driven by inward impulse into realism. Besides which, priority in point of time is here, as in the descriptions of country life, on the side of the Italian poets.

DISCOVERY OF MAN

To the discovery of the outward world the Renaissance added a still greater achievement, by first discerning and bringing to light the full, whole nature of man.

This period, as we have seen, first gave the highest development to individuality, and then led the individual to the most zealous and thorough study of himself in all forms and under all conditions.

Indeed, the development of personality is essentially involved in the recognition of it in oneself and in others. Between these two great processes our narrative has placed the influence of ancient literature because the mode of conceiving and representing both the individual and human nature in general was defined and coloured by that influence. But the power of conception and representation lay in the age and in the people.

The facts which we shall quote in evidence of our thesis will be few in number. Here, if anywhere in the course of this discussion, the author is conscious that he is treading on the perilous ground of conjecture, and that what seems to him a clear, if delicate and gradual, transition in the intellectual movement of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, may not be equally plain to others. The gradual awakening of the soul of a people is a phenomenon which may produce a different impression on each spectator. Time will judge which impression is the most faithful.

Happily the study of the intellectual side of human nature began, not with the search after a theoretical psychology – for that, Aristotle still sufficed – but with the endeavour to observe and to describe. The indispensable ballast of theory was limited to the popular doctrine of the four temperaments, in its then habitual union with the belief in the influence of the planets. Such conceptions may remain ineradicable in the minds of individuals without hindering the general progress of the age. It certainly makes on us a singular impression, when we meet them at a time when human nature in its deepest essence and in all its characteristic expressions was not only known by exact observation, but represented by an immortal poetry and art. It sounds almost ludicrous when an otherwise competent observer considers Clement VII to be of a melancholy temperament, but defers his judgement to that of the physicians, who declare the pope of a sanguine-choleric nature; or when we read that the same Gaston de Foix, the victor of Ravenna, whom Giorgione painted and Bambaia carved, and whom all the historians describe, had the saturnine temperament. No doubt those who use these expressions mean something by them; but the terms in which they tell us their meaning are strangely out of date in the Italy of the sixteenth century.

As examples of the free delineation of the human spirit, we shall first speak of the great poets of the fourteenth century.

If we were to collect the pearls from the courtly and knightly

poetry of all the countries of the West during the two preceding centuries, we should have a mass of wonderful divinations and single pictures of the inward life, which at first sight would seem to rival the poetry of the Italians. Leaving lyrical poetry out of account, Godfrey of Strassburg gives us, in *Tristan und Isolde*, a representation of human passion, some features of which are immortal. But those pearls lie scattered in the ocean of artificial convention, and they are altogether something very different from a complete objective picture of the inward man and his spiritual wealth.

Italy, too, in the thirteenth century had, through the *trovatori*, its share in the poetry of the courts and of chivalry. To them is mainly due the *canzone*, whose construction is as difficult and artificial as that of the songs of any northern minstrel. Their subject and mode of thought represents simply the conventional tone of the courts, be the poet a burgher or a scholar.

But two new paths at length showed themselves, along which Italian poetry could advance to another and a characteristic future. They are not the less important for being concerned only with the formal and external side of the art.

To the same Brunetto Latini – the teacher of Dante – who, in his *Canzoni*, adopts the customary manner of the *trovatori*, we owe the first-known *versi sciolti*, or blank hendecasyllabic verses, and in his apparent absence of form, a true and genuine passion suddenly showed itself. The same voluntary renunciation of outward effect, through confidence in the power of the inward conception, can be observed some years later in fresco-painting, and later still in painting of all kinds, which began to cease to rely on colour for its effect, using simply a lighter or darker shade. For an age which laid so much stress on artificial form in poetry, these verses of Brunetto mark the beginning of a new epoch.

About the same time, or even in the first half of the thirteenth century, one of the many strictly balanced forms of metre, in which Europe was then so fruitful, became a normal and recognized form in Italy – the sonnet. The order of rhymes and even the number of lines varied for a whole century, till Petrarch fixed them permanently. In this form all higher lyrical or meditative subjects, and at a later time subjects of every possible description, were treated, and the madrigals, the *sestine* and even the *canzoni* were reduced to a subordinate place. Later Italian writers complain, half jestingly, half resentfully, of this

inevitable mould, this Procrustean bed, to which they were compelled to make their thoughts and feelings fit. Others were, and still are, quite satisfied with this particular form of verse, which they freely use to express any personal reminiscence or idle sing-song without necessity or serious purpose. For which reason there are many more bad or insignificant sonnets than good ones.

Nevertheless, the sonnet must be held to have been an unspeakable blessing for Italian poetry. The clearness and beauty of its structure, the invitation it gave to elevate the thought in the second and more rapidly moving half, and the ease with which it could be learned by heart, made it valued even by the greatest masters. In fact, they would not have kept it in use down to our own century, had they not been penetrated with a sense of its singular worth. These masters could have given us the same thoughts in other and wholly different forms. But when once they had made the sonnet the normal type of lyrical poetry, many other writers of great, if not the highest, gifts, who otherwise would have lost themselves in a sea of diffusiveness, were forced to concentrate their feelings. The sonnet became for Italian literature a condenser of thoughts and emotions such as was possessed by the poetry of no other modern people.

Thus the world of Italian sentiment comes before us in a series of pictures, clear, concise, and most effective in their brevity. Had other nations possessed a form of expression of the same kind, we should perhaps have known more of their inward life; we might have had a number of pictures of inward and outward situations – reflections of the national character and temper – and should not be dependent for such knowledge on the so-called lyrical poets of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, who can hardly ever be read with any serious enjoyment. In Italy we can trace an undoubted progress from the time when the sonnet came into existence. In the second half of the thirteenth century the *trovatori della transizione*, as they have been recently named, mark the passage from the troubadours to the poets – that is, to those who wrote under the influence of antiquity. The simplicity and strength of their feeling, the vigorous delineation of fact, the precise expression and rounding off of their sonnets and other poems, herald the coming of a Dante. Some political sonnets of the Guelphs and Ghibellines (1260–70) have about them the ring of his passion, and others remind us of his sweetest lyrical notes.

Of his own theoretical view of the sonnet, we are unfortunately

ignorant, since the last books of his work, *De vulgari eloquentia*, in which he proposed to treat of ballads and sonnets, either remained unwritten or have been lost. But, as a matter of fact, he has left us in his sonnets and *canzoni* a treasure of inward experience. And in what a framework he has set them! The prose of the *Vita nuova*, in which he gives an account of the origin of each poem, is as wonderful as the verses themselves, and forms with them a uniform whole, inspired with the deepest glow of passion. With unflinching frankness and sincerity he lays bare every shade of his joy and his sorrow, and moulds it resolutely into the strictest forms of art. Reading attentively these sonnets and *canzoni*, and the marvellous fragments of the diary of his youth which lie between them, we fancy that throughout the Middle Ages the poets have been purposely fleeing from themselves, and that he was the first to seek his own soul. Before his time we meet with many an artistic verse; but he is the first artist in the full sense of the word – the first who consciously cast immortal matter into an immortal form. Subjective feeling has here a full objective truth and greatness, and most of it is so set forth that all ages and peoples can make it their own. Where he writes in a thoroughly objective spirit, and lets the force of his sentiment be guessed at only by some outward fact, as in the magnificent sonnets '*Tanto gentile*', etc., and '*Vede perfettamente*', etc., he seems to feel the need to excuse himself. The most beautiful of these poems really belongs to this class – the '*Deh peregrini che pensosi andate*'.

Even apart from the *Divine Comedy*, Dante would have marked by these youthful poems the boundary between medievalism and modern times. The human spirit had taken a mighty step towards the consciousness of its own secret life.

The revelations in this matter which are contained in the *Divine Comedy* itself are simply immeasurable; and it would be necessary to go through the whole poem, one canto after another, in order to do justice to its value from this point of view. Happily we have no need to do this, as it has long been a daily food of all the countries of the West. Its plan, and the ideas on which it is based, belong to the Middle Ages, and appeal to our interest only historically; but it is nevertheless the beginning of all modern poetry, through the power and richness shown in the description of human nature in every shape and attitude.

From this time forward poetry may have experienced unequal fortunes, and may show, for half a century together, a so-called

relapse. But its nobler and more vital principle was saved for ever; and whenever in the fourteenth, fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries an original mind devotes himself to it, he represents a more advanced stage than any poet out of Italy, given – what is certainly not always easy to settle satisfactorily – an equality of natural gifts to start with.

Here, as in other things in Italy, culture – to which poetry belongs – precedes the plastic arts and, in fact, gives them their chief impulse. More than a century elapsed before the spiritual element in painting and sculpture attained a power of expression in any way analogous to that of the *Divine Comedy*. How far the same rule holds good for the artistic development of other nations, and of what importance the whole question may be, does not concern us here. For Italian civilization it is of decisive weight.

The position to be assigned to Petrarch in this respect must be settled by the many readers of the poet. Those who come to him in the spirit of a cross-examiner, and busy themselves in detecting the contradictions between the poet and the man, his infidelities in love, and the other weak sides of his character, may perhaps, after sufficient effort, end by losing all taste for his poetry. In place, then, of artistic enjoyment, we may acquire a knowledge of the man in his 'totality'. What a pity that Petrarch's letters from Avignon contain so little gossip to take hold of, and that the letters of his acquaintances and of the friends of these acquaintances have either been lost or never existed! Instead of Heaven being thanked when we are not forced to inquire how and through what struggles a poet has rescued something immortal from his own poor life and lot, a biography has been stitched together for Petrarch out of these so-called 'remains', which reads like an indictment. But the poet may take comfort. If the printing and editing of the correspondence of celebrated people goes on for another half-century as it has begun in England and Germany, he will have illustrious company enough sitting with him on the stool of repentance.

Without shutting our eyes to much that is forced and artificial in his poetry, where the writer is merely imitating himself and singing on in the old strain, we cannot fail to admire the marvellous abundance of pictures of the inmost soul – descriptions of moments of joy and sorrow which must have been thoroughly his own, since no one before him gives us anything of the kind, and on which his significance

rests for his country and for the world. His verse is not in all places equally transparent; by the side of his most beautiful thoughts stands at times some allegorical conceit, or some sophistical trick of logic, altogether foreign to our present taste. But the balance is on the side of excellence.

Boccaccio, too, in his imperfectly known sonnets, succeeds sometimes in giving a most powerful and effective picture of his feeling. The return to a spot consecrated by love (Son. 22), the melancholy of spring (Son. 33), the sadness of the poet who feels himself growing old (Son. 65), are admirably treated by him. And in the *Ameto* he has described the ennobling and transfiguring power of love in a manner which would hardly be expected from the author of the *Decameron*. In the *Fiammetta* we have another great and minutely painted picture of the human soul, full of the keenest observation, though executed with anything but uniform power, and in parts marred by the passion for high-sounding language and by an unlucky mixture of mythological allusions and learned quotations. The *Fiammetta*, if we are not mistaken, is a sort of feminine counterpart to the *Vita nuova* of Dante, or at any rate owes its origin to it.

That the ancient poets, particularly the elegists, and Virgil, in the fourth book of the *Aeneid*, were not without influence on the Italians of this and the following generation is beyond a doubt; but the spring of sentiment within the latter was nevertheless powerful and original. If we compare them in this respect with their contemporaries in other countries, we shall find in them the earliest complete expression of modern European feeling. The question, be it remembered, is not to know whether eminent men of other nations did not feel as deeply and as nobly, but who first gave documentary proof of the widest knowledge of the movements of the human heart.

Why did the Italians of the Renaissance do nothing above the second rank in tragedy? That was the field on which to display human character, intellect and passion in the thousand forms of their growth, their struggles and their decline. In other words: why did Italy produce no Shakespeare? For with the stage of other northern countries besides England the Italians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had no reason to fear a comparison; and with the Spaniards they could not enter into competition, since Italy had long lost all traces of religious fanaticism, treated the chivalrous code of honour only as a form, and was both too proud and too intelligent to bow down before its

tyrannical and illegitimate masters. We have therefore only to consider the English stage in the period of its brief splendour.

It is an obvious reply that all Europe produced but one Shakespeare, and that such a mind is the rarest of Heaven's gifts. It is further possible that the Italian stage was on the way to something great when the Counter-Reformation broke in upon it, and, aided by the Spanish rule over Naples and Milan, and indirectly over almost the whole peninsula, withered the best flowers of the Italian spirit. It would be hard to conceive of Shakespeare himself under a Spanish viceroy, or in the neighbourhood of the Holy Inquisition at Rome, or even in his own country a few decades later, at the time of the English Revolution. The stage, which in its perfection is a late product of every civilization, must wait for its own time and fortune.

We must not, however, quit this subject without mentioning certain circumstances which were of a character to hinder or retard a high development of the drama in Italy till the time for it had gone by.

As the most weighty of these causes we must mention without doubt that the scenic tastes of the people were occupied elsewhere, and chiefly in the mysteries and religious processions. Throughout all Europe dramatic representations of sacred history and legend form the origin of the secular drama; but Italy, as it will be shown more fully in the sequel, had spent on the mysteries such a wealth of decorative splendour as could not but be unfavourable to the dramatic element. Out of all the countless and costly representations, there sprang not even a branch of poetry like the *autos sacramentales* of Calderón and other Spanish poets, much less any advantage or foundation for the legitimate drama.

And when the latter did at length appear, it at once gave itself up to magnificence of scenic effects, to which the mysteries had already accustomed the public taste to far too great an extent. We learnt with astonishment how rich and splendid the scenes in Italy were, at a time when in the North the simplest indication of the place was thought sufficient. This alone might have had no such unfavourable effect on the drama if the attention of the audience had not been drawn away from the poetical conception of the play partly by the splendour of the costumes, partly and chiefly by fantastic interludes (*intermezzi*).

That in many places, particularly in Rome and Ferrara, Plautus and Terence, as well as pieces by the old tragedians, were given in Latin or in Italian, that the academies of which we have already spoken made

this one of their chief objects, and that the poets of the Renaissance followed these models too servilely, were all untoward conditions for the Italian stage at the period in question. Yet I hold them to be of secondary importance. Had not the Counter-Reformation and the rule of foreigners intervened, these very disadvantages might have been turned into useful means of transition. At all events, by the year 1520 the victory of the mother-tongue in tragedy and comedy was, to the great disgust of the humanists, as good as won. On this side, then, no obstacle stood in the way of the most developed people in Europe to hinder them from raising the drama, in its noblest forms, to be a true reflection of human life and destiny. It was the Inquisitors and Spaniards who cowed the Italian spirit, and rendered impossible the representation of the greatest and most sublime themes, most of all when they were associated with patriotic memories. At the same time, there is no doubt that the distracting *intermezzi* did serious harm to the drama. We must now consider them a little more closely.

When the marriage of Alfonso of Ferrara with Lucrezia Borgia was celebrated, Duke Hercules in person showed his illustrious guests the 110 costumes which were to serve at the representation of five comedies of Plautus, in order that all might see that not one of them was used twice. But all this display of silk and camlet was nothing to the ballets and pantomimes which served as interludes between the acts of the Plautine dramas. That, in comparison, Plautus himself seemed mortally dull to a lively young lady like Isabella Gonzaga, and that while the play was going on everybody was longing for the interludes, is quite intelligible when we think of the picturesque brilliancy with which they were put on the stage. There were to be seen combats of Roman warriors, who brandished their weapons to the sound of music, torch-dances executed by Moors, a dance of savages with horns of plenty, out of which streamed waves of fire – all as the ballet of a pantomime in which a maiden was delivered from a dragon. Then came a dance of fools, got up as Punches, beating one another with pigs' bladders, with more of the same kind. At the court of Ferrara they never gave a comedy without 'its' ballet (*moresca*). In what style the *Amphitruo* of Plautus was there represented (1491, at the first marriage of Alfonso with Anna Sforza) is doubtful. Possibly it was given rather as a pantomime with music than as a drama. In any case, the accessories were more considerable than the play itself. There was a choral dance of ivy-clad youths, moving in intricate figures, done to the music of a

ringing orchestra; then came Apollo, striking the lyre with the plectrum, and singing an ode to the praise of the House of Este; then followed, as an interlude within an interlude, a kind of rustic farce, after which the stage was again occupied by classical mythology – Venus, Bacchus and their followers – and by a pantomime representing the judgement of Paris. Not till then was the second half of the fable of *Amphitruo* performed, with unmistakable references to the future birth of a Hercules of the House of Este. At a former representation of the same piece in the courtyard of the palace (1487), ‘a paradise with stars and other wheels’ was constantly burning, by which is probably meant an illumination with fireworks, that, no doubt, absorbed most of the attention of the spectators. It was certainly better when such performances were given separately, as was the case at other courts. We shall have to speak of the entertainments given by the Cardinal Pietro Riario, by the Bentivogli at Bologna, and by others, when we come to treat of the festivals in general.

This scenic magnificence, now become universal, had a disastrous effect on Italian tragedy. ‘In Venice formerly,’ writes Francesco Sansovino, about 1570,

besides comedies, tragedies by ancient and modern writers were put on the stage with great pomp. The fame of the scenic arrangements (*apparati*) brought spectators from far and near. Nowadays, performances are given by private individuals in their own houses, and the custom has long been fixed of passing the carnival in comedies and other cheerful entertainments.

In other words, scenic display had helped to kill tragedy.

The various starts or attempts of these modern tragedians, among which the *Sofonisba* of Trissino (1515) was the most celebrated, belong to the history of literature. The same may be said of genteel comedy, modelled on Plautus and Terence. Even Ariosto could do nothing of the first order in this style. On the other hand, popular prose-comedy, as treated by Machiavelli, Bibbiena and Aretino, might have had a future, if its matter had not condemned it to destruction. This was, on the one hand, licentious to the last degree, and on the other, aimed at certain classes in society, which, after the middle of the sixteenth century, ceased to afford a ground for public attacks. If in the *Sofonisba* the portrayal of character gave place to brilliant declamation, the latter, with its half-sister caricature, was used far too freely in comedy also.

The writing of tragedies and comedies, and the practice of putting both ancient and modern plays on the stage, continued without intermission; but they served only as occasions for display. The national genius turned elsewhere for living interest. When the opera and the pastoral fable came up, these attempts were at length wholly abandoned.

One form of comedy only was and remained national – the unwritten, improvised *commedia dell'arte*. It was of no great service in the delineation of character, since the masks used were few in number and familiar to everybody. But the talent of the nation had such an affinity for this style that often in the middle of written comedies the actors would throw themselves on their own inspiration, so that a new mixed form of comedy came into existence in some places. The plays given in Venice by Burchiello, and afterwards by the company of Armonio, Val. Zuccato, Lod. Dolce and others, were perhaps of this character. Of Burchiello we know expressly that he used to heighten the comic effect by mixing Greek and Slavonic words with the Venetian dialect. A complete *commedia dell'arte*, or very nearly so, was represented by Angelo Beolco, known as *il Ruzzante* (1502–42), whose customary masks were Paduan peasants, with the names Menato, Vezzo, Billora, etc. He studied their dialect when spending the summer at the villa of his patron Luigi Cornaro (Aloysius Cornelius) at Codevico. Gradually all the famous local masks made their appearance, whose remains still delight the Italian populace in our day: Pantalone, the Doctor, Brighella, Pulcinella, Arlecchino and the rest. Most of them are of great antiquity, and possibly are historically connected with the masks in the old Roman farces; but it was not till the sixteenth century that several of them were combined in one piece. At the present time this is less often the case; but every great city still keeps to its local mask – Naples to the Pulcinella, Florence to the Stentorello, Milan to its often so admirable Meneghino.

This is indeed scanty compensation for a people which possessed the power, perhaps to a greater degree than any other, to reflect and contemplate its own highest qualities in the mirror of the drama. But this power was destined to be marred for centuries by hostile forces, for whose predominance the Italians were only in part responsible. The universal talent for dramatic representation could not indeed be uprooted, and in music Italy long made good its claim to supremacy in Europe. Those who can find in this world of sound a compensation

for the drama, to which all future was denied, have, at all events, no meagre source of consolation.

But perhaps we can find in epic poetry what the stage fails to offer us. Yet the chief reproach made against the heroic poetry of Italy is precisely on the score of the insignificance and imperfect representation of its characters.

Other merits are allowed to belong to it, among the rest, that for three centuries it has been actually read and constantly reprinted, while nearly the whole of the epic poetry of other nations has become a mere matter of literary or historical curiosity. Does this perhaps lie in the taste of the readers, who demand something different from what would satisfy a northern public? Certainly, without the power of entering to some degree into Italian sentiment, it is impossible to appreciate the characteristic excellence of these poems, and many distinguished men declare that they can make nothing of them. And in truth, if we criticize Pulci, Boiardo, Ariosto and Berni solely with an eye to their thought and matter, we shall fail to do them justice. They are artists of a peculiar kind, who write for a people which is distinctly and eminently artistic.

The mediæval legends had lived on after the gradual extinction of the poetry of chivalry, in the form partly of rhyming adaptations and collections, and partly of novels in prose. The latter was the case in Italy during the fourteenth century; but the newly awakened memories of antiquity were rapidly growing up to a gigantic size, and soon cast into the shade all the fantastic creations of the Middle Ages. Boccaccio, for example, in his *Amorosa visione*, names among the heroes in his enchanted palace Tristram, Arthur, Galeotto and others, but briefly, as if he were ashamed to speak of them; and following writers either do not name them at all, or name them only for purposes of ridicule. But the people kept them in its memory, and from the people they passed into the hands of the poets of the fifteenth century. These were now able to conceive and represent their subjects in a wholly new manner. But they did more. They introduced into it a multitude of fresh elements, and in fact recast it from beginning to end. It must not be expected of them that they should treat such subjects with the respect once felt for them. All other countries must envy them the advantage of having a popular interest of this kind to appeal to; but they could not without hypocrisy treat these myths with any respect.

Instead of this, they moved with victorious freedom in the new

field which poetry had won. What they chiefly aimed at seems to have been that their poems, when recited, should produce the most harmonious and exhilarating effect. These works indeed gain immensely when they are repeated, not as a whole, but piecemeal, and with a slight touch of comedy in voice and gesture. A deeper and more detailed portrayal of character would do little to enhance this effect; though the reader may desire it, the hearer, who sees the rhapsodist standing before him, and who hears only one piece at a time, does not think about it at all. With respect to the figures, which the poet found ready made for him, his feeling was of a double kind; his humanistic culture protested against their medieval character, and their combats as counterparts of the battles and tournaments of the poet's own age exercised all his knowledge and artistic power, while at the same time they called forth all the highest qualities in the reciter. Even in Pulci, accordingly, we find no parody, strictly speaking, of chivalry, nearly as the rough humour of his paladins at times approaches it. By their side stands the ideal of pugnacity – the droll and jovial Morgante – who masters whole armies with his bell-clapper, and who is himself thrown into relief by contrast with the grotesque and most interesting monster Margutte. Yet Pulci lays no special stress on these two rough and vigorous characters, and his story, long after they had disappeared from it, maintains its singular course. Boiardo treats his characters with the same mastery, using them for serious or comic purposes as he pleases; he has his fun even out of supernatural beings, whom he sometimes intentionally depicts as louts. But there is one artistic aim which he pursues as earnestly as Pulci, namely, the lively and exact description of all that goes forward. Pulci recited his poem, as one book after another was finished, before the society of Lorenzo il Magnifico, and in the same way Boiardo recited his at the court of Hercules of Ferrara. It may be easily imagined what sort of excellence such an audience demanded, and how little thanks a profound exposition of character would have earned for the poet. Under these circumstances the poems naturally formed no complete whole, and might just as well be half or twice as long as they now are. Their composition is not that of a great historical picture, but rather that of a frieze, or of some rich festoon entwined among groups of picturesque figures. And precisely as in the figures or tendrils of a frieze we do not look for minuteness of execution in the individual forms, or for distant perspectives and different planes, so we must as little expect anything of the kind from these poems.

The varied richness of invention which continually astonishes us, most of all in the case of Boiardo, turns to ridicule all our school definitions as to the essence of epic poetry. For that age, this form of literature was the most agreeable diversion from archeological studies, and, indeed, the only possible means of re-establishing an independent class of narrative poetry. For the versification of ancient history could only lead to the false tracks which were trodden by Petrarch in his *Africa*, written in Latin hexameters, and a hundred and fifty years later by Trissino in his *Italy Delivered from the Goths*, composed in *versi sciolti* – a never-ending poem of faultless language and versification, which only makes us doubt whether this unlucky alliance has been more disastrous to history or to poetry.

And whither did the example of Dante beguile those who imitated him? The visionary *Trionfi* of Petrarch were the last of the works written under this influence which satisfy our taste. The *Amorosa visione* of Boccaccio is at bottom no more than an enumeration of historical or fabulous characters, arranged under allegorical categories. Others preface what they have to tell with a baroque imitation of Dante's first canto, and provide themselves with some allegorical comparison, to take the place of Virgil. Uberti, for example, chose Solinus for his geographical poem, the *Dittamondo*, and Giovanni Santi, Plutarch for his encomium on Frederick of Urbino. The only salvation of the time from these false tendencies lay in the new epic poetry which was represented by Pulci and Boiardo. The admiration and curiosity with which it was received, and the like of which will perhaps never fall again to the lot of epic poetry to the end of time, is a brilliant proof of how great was the need of it. It is idle to ask whether that epic ideal which our own day has formed from Homer and the *Nibelungenlied* is or is not realized in these works; an ideal of their own age certainly was. By their endless descriptions of combats, which to us are the most fatiguing part of these poems, they satisfied, as we have already said, a practical interest of which it is hard for us to form a just conception – as hard, indeed, as of the esteem in which a lively and faithful reflection of the passing moment was then held.

Nor can a more inappropriate test be applied to Ariosto than the degree in which his *Orlando Furioso* serves for the representation of character. Characters, indeed, there are, and drawn with an affectionate care; but the poem does not depend on these for its effect, and would lose, rather than gain, if more stress were laid upon them. But the

demand for them is part of a wider and more general desire which Ariosto fails to satisfy as our day would wish it satisfied. From a poet of such fame and such mighty gifts we would gladly receive something better than the adventures of Orlando. From him we might have hoped for a work expressing the deepest conflicts of the human soul, the highest thoughts of his time on human and divine things – in a word, one of those supreme syntheses like the *Divine Comedy* or *Faust*. Instead of which he goes to work like the plastic artists of his own day, not caring for originality in our sense of the word, simply reproducing a familiar circle of figures, and even, when it suits his purpose, making use of the details left him by his predecessors. The excellence which, in spite of all this, can nevertheless be attained, will be the more incomprehensible to people born without the artistic sense, the more learned and intelligent in other respects they are. The artistic aim of Ariosto is brilliant, living action, which he distributes equally through the whole of his great poem. For this end he needs to be excused, not only from all deeper expression of character, but also from maintaining any strict connection in his narrative. He must be allowed to take up lost and forgotten threads when and where he pleases; his heroes must come and go, not because their character, but because the story requires it. Yet in this apparently irrational and arbitrary style of composition he displays a harmonious beauty, never losing himself in description, but giving only such a sketch of scenes and persons as does not hinder the flowing movement of the narrative. Still less does he lose himself in conversation and monologue, but maintains the lofty privilege of the true epos, by transforming all into living narrative. His pathos does not lie in the words, not even in the famous twenty-third and following cantos, where Roland's madness is described. That the love-stories in the heroic poem are without all lyrical tenderness must be reckoned a merit, though from a moral point of view they cannot be always approved. Yet at times they are of such truth and reality, notwithstanding all the magic and romance which surrounds them, that we might think them personal affairs of the poet himself. In the full consciousness of his own genius, he does not scruple to interweave the events of his own day into the poem, and to celebrate the fame of the house of Este in visions and prophecies. The wonderful stream of his octaves bears it all forward in even and dignified movement.

With Teofilo Folengo, or, as he here calls himself, Limerno Pitocco, the parody of the whole system of chivalry attained the end it had so

long desired. But here comedy, with its realism, demanded of necessity a stricter delineation of character. Exposed to all the rough usage of the half-savage street-lads in a Roman country town, Sutri, the little Orlando grows up before our eyes into the hero, the priest-hater and the disputant. The conventional world which had been recognized since the time of Pulci and had served as a framework for the epos, here falls to pieces. The origin and position of the paladins is openly ridiculed, as in the tournament of donkeys in the second book, where the knights appear with the most ludicrous armament. The poet utters his ironical regrets over the inexplicable faithlessness which seems implanted in the house of Gano of Mainz, over the toilsome acquisition of the sword Durindana, and so forth. Tradition, in fact, serves him only as a substratum for episodes, ludicrous fancies, allusions to events of the time (among which some, like the close of cap. vi., are exceedingly fine) and indecent jokes. Mixed with all this, a certain derision of Ariosto is unmistakable, and it was fortunate for the *Orlando Furioso* that the *Orlandino*, with its Lutheran heresies, was soon put out of the way by the Inquisition. The parody is evident when (cap. v. str. 28) the house of Gonzaga is deduced from the paladin Guidone, since the Colonna claimed Orlando, the Orsini Rinaldo, and the house of Este – according to Ariosto – Ruggiero as their ancestors. Perhaps Ferrante Gonzaga, the patron of the poet, was a party to this sarcasm on the house of Este.

That in the *Jerusalem Delivered* of Torquato Tasso the delineation of character is one of the chief tasks of the poet proves only how far his mode of thought differed from that prevalent half a century before. His admirable work is a true monument of the Counter-Reformation which had meanwhile been accomplished, and of the spirit and tendency of that movement.

BIOGRAPHY IN THE MIDDLE AGES AND IN THE RENAISSANCE

Outside the sphere of poetry also, the Italians were the first of all European nations who displayed any remarkable power and inclination accurately to describe man as shown in history, according to his inward and outward characteristics.

It is true that in the Middle Ages considerable attempts were made in the same direction; and the legends of the Church, as a kind of

PART V

Society and Festivals

EQUALITY OF CLASSES

EVERY PERIOD of civilization which forms a complete and consistent whole manifests itself not only in political life, in religion, art and science, but also sets its characteristic stamp on social life. Thus the Middle Ages had their courtly and aristocratic manners and etiquette, differing but little in the various countries of Europe, as well as their peculiar forms of middle-class life.

Italian customs at the time of the Renaissance offer in these respects the sharpest contrast to medievalism. The foundation on which they rest is wholly different. Social intercourse in its highest and most perfect form now ignored all distinctions of caste, and was based simply on the existence of an educated class as we now understand the word. Birth and origin were without influence, unless combined with leisure and inherited wealth. Yet this assertion must not be taken in an absolute and unqualified sense, since medieval distinctions still sometimes made themselves felt to a greater or less degree, if only as a means of maintaining equality with the aristocratic pretensions of the less advanced countries of Europe. But the main current of the time went steadily towards the fusion of classes in the modern sense of the phrase.

The fact was of vital importance that, from certainly the twelfth century onwards, the nobles and the burghers dwelt together within the walls of the cities. The interests and pleasures of both classes were thus identified, and the feudal lord learned to look at society from another point of view than that of his mountain castle. The Church, too, in Italy never suffered itself, as in northern countries, to be used as a means of providing for the younger sons of noble families. Bishoprics, abbacies and canonries were often given from the most unworthy motives, but still not according to the pedigrees of the applicants; and if the bishops in Italy were more numerous, poorer and, as a rule, destitute of all sovereign rights, they still lived in the cities where their cathedrals stood, and formed, together with their chapters, an import-

ant element in the cultivated society of the place. In the age of despots and absolute princes which followed, the nobility in most of the cities had the motives and the leisure to give themselves up to a private life free from the political danger and adorned with all that was elegant and enjoyable, but at the same time hardly distinguishable from that of the wealthy burgher. And after the time of Dante, when the new poetry and literature were in the hands of all Italy, when to this was added the revival of ancient culture and the new interest in man as such, when the successful *condottiere* became a prince, and not only good birth, but legitimate birth, ceased to be indispensable for a throne, it might well seem that the age of equality had dawned, and the belief in nobility vanished for ever.

From a theoretical point of view, when the appeal was made to antiquity, the conception of nobility could be both justified and condemned from Aristotle alone. Dante, for example, adapts from Aristotelian definition, 'Nobility rests on excellence and inherited wealth', his own saying, 'Nobility rests on personal excellence or on that of predecessors'. But elsewhere he is not satisfied with this conclusion. He blames himself, because even in Paradise, while talking with his ancestor Cacciaguida, he made mention of his noble origin, which is but a mantle from which time is ever cutting something away, unless we ourselves add daily fresh worth to it. And in the *Convito* he disconnects '*nobile*' and '*nobiltà*' from every condition of birth, and identifies the idea with the capacity for moral and intellectual eminence, laying a special stress on high culture by calling *nobiltà* the sister of *filosofia*.

And as time went on, the greater the influence of humanism on the Italian mind, the firmer and more widespread became the conviction that birth decides nothing as to the goodness or badness of a man. In the fifteenth century this was the prevailing opinion. Poggio, in his dialogue *On Nobility*, agrees with his interlocutors – Niccolò Niccoli and Lorenzo Medici, brother of the great Cosimo – that there is no other nobility than that of personal merit. The keenest shafts of his ridicule are directed against much of what vulgar prejudice thinks indispensable to an aristocratic life.

A man is all the farther removed from true nobility, the longer his forefathers have plied the trade of brigands. The taste for hawking and hunting savours no more of nobility than the nests and lairs of the

hunted creatures of spikenard. The cultivation of the soil, as practised by the ancients, would be much nobler than this senseless wandering through the hills and woods, by which men make themselves liker to the brutes than to the reasonable creatures. It may serve well enough as a recreation, but not as the business of a lifetime.

The life of the English and French chivalry in the country or in the woody fastnesses seems to him thoroughly ignoble, and worst of all the doings of the robber-knights of Germany. Lorenzo here begins to take the part of the nobility, but not – which is characteristic – appealing to any natural sentiment in its favour, but because Aristotle in the fifth book of the *Politics* recognizes the nobility as existent, and defines it as resting on excellence and inherited wealth. To this Niccoli retorts that Aristotle gives this not as his own conviction, but as the popular impression; in his *Ethics*, where he speaks as he thinks, he calls him noble who strives after that which is truly good. Lorenzo urges upon him vainly that the Greek word for nobility (*eugeneia*) means good birth; Niccoli thinks the Roman word *nobilis* (i.e. remarkable) a better one, since it makes nobility depend on a man's deeds. Together with these discussions, we find a sketch of the conditions of the nobles in various parts of Italy. In Naples they will not work, and busy themselves neither with their own estates nor with trade and commerce, which they hold to be discreditable; they either loiter at home or ride about on horseback. The Roman nobility also despise trade, but farm their own property; the cultivation of the land even opens the way to a title; 'it is a respectable but boorish nobility'. In Lombardy the nobles live upon the rent of their inherited estates; descent and the abstinence from any regular calling constitute nobility. In Venice, the *nobili*, the ruling caste, were all merchants. Similarly in Genoa the nobles and non-nobles were alike merchants and sailors, and only separated by their birth; some few of the former, it is true, still lurked as brigands in their mountain castles. In Florence a part of the old nobility had devoted themselves to trade; another, and certainly by far the smaller part, enjoyed the satisfaction of their titles, and spent their time, either in nothing at all, or else in hunting and hawking.

The decisive fact was that, nearly everywhere in Italy, even those who might be disposed to pride themselves on their birth could not make good the claims against the power of culture and of wealth, and that their privileges in politics and at court were not sufficient to

encourage any strong feeling of caste. Venice offers only an apparent exception to this rule, for there the *nobili* led the same life as their fellow-citizens, and were distinguished by few honorary privileges. The case was certainly different at Naples, where the strict isolation and the ostentatious vanity of its nobility excluded it, above all other causes, from the spiritual movement of the Renaissance. The traditions of medieval Lombardy and Normandy, and the French aristocratic influences which followed, all tended in this direction; and the Aragonese government, which was established by the middle of the fifteenth century, completed the work, and accomplished in Naples what followed a hundred years later in the rest of Italy – a social transformation in obedience to Spanish ideas, of which the chief features were the contempt for work and the passion for titles. The effect of this new influence was evident, even in the smaller towns, before the year 1500. We hear complaints from La Cava that the place had been proverbially rich, as long as it was filled with masons and weavers; whilst now, since instead of looms and trowels nothing but spurs, stirrups and gilded belts was to be seen, since everybody was trying to become a doctor of laws or of medicine, notary, officer or knight, the most intolerable poverty prevailed. In Florence an analogous change appears to have taken place by the time of Cosimo, the first grand duke; he is thanked for adopting the young people, who now despise trade and commerce, as knights of his order of St Stephen. This goes straight in the teeth of the good old Florentine custom, by which fathers left property to their children on the condition that they should have some occupation. But a mania for titles of a curious and ludicrous sort sometimes crossed and thwarted, especially among the Florentines, the levelling influence of art and culture. This was the passion for knighthood, which became one of the most striking follies of the day, at a time when the dignity itself had lost every shadow of significance.

‘A few years ago,’ writes Franco Sacchetti, towards the end of the fourteenth century,

everybody saw how all the workpeople down to the bakers, how all the wool-carders, usurers, money-changers and blackguards of all descriptions, became knights. Why should an official need knighthood when he goes to preside over some little provincial town? What has this title to do with any ordinary bread-winning pursuit? How art thou sunken, unhappy dignity! Of all the long list of knightly duties, what

single one do these knights of ours discharge? I wished to speak of these things that the reader might see that knighthood is dead. And as we have gone so far as to confer the honour upon dead men, why not upon figures of wood and stone, and why not upon an ox?

The stories which Sacchetti tells by way of illustration speak plainly enough. There we read how Bernabò Visconti knighted the victor in a drunken brawl, and then did the same derisively to the vanquished; how German knights with their decorated helmets and devices were ridiculed – and more of the same kind. At a later period Poggio makes merry over the many knights of his day without a horse and without military training. Those who wished to assert the privilege of the order, and ride out with lance and colours, found in Florence that they might have to face the government as well as the jokers.

On considering the matter more closely, we shall find that this belated chivalry, independent of all nobility of birth, though partly the fruit of an insane passion for titles, had nevertheless another and a better side. Tournaments had not yet ceased to be practised, and no one could take part in them who was not a knight. But the combat in the lists, and especially the difficult and perilous tilting with the lance, offered a favourable opportunity for the display of strength, skill and courage, which no one, whatever might be his origin, would willingly neglect in an age which laid such stress on personal merit.

It was in vain that from the time of Petrarch downwards the tournament was denounced as a dangerous folly. No one was converted by the pathetic appeal of the poet: 'In what book do we read that Scipio and Caesar were skilled at the joust?' The practice became more and more popular in Florence. Every honest citizen came to consider his tournament – now, no doubt, less dangerous than formerly – as a fashionable sport. Franco Sacchetti has left us a ludicrous picture of one of these holiday cavaliers – a notary seventy years old. He rides out on horseback to Peretola, where the tournament was cheap, on a jade hired from a dyer. A thistle is stuck by some wag under the tail of the steed, who takes fright, runs away and carries the helmeted rider, bruised and shaken, back into the city. The inevitable conclusion of the story is a severe curtain-lecture from the wife, who is not a little enraged at these break-neck follies of her husband.

It may be mentioned in conclusion that a passionate interest in this sport was displayed by the Medici, as if they wished to show – private citizens as they were, without noble blood in their veins – that the society

which surrounded them was in no respect inferior to a court. Even under Cosimo (1459), and afterwards under the elder Pietro, brilliant tournaments were held at Florence. The younger Pietro neglected the duties of government for these amusements and would never suffer himself to be painted except clad in armour. The same practice prevailed at the court of Alexander VI, and when the Cardinal Ascanio Sforza asked the Turkish Prince Djem how he liked the spectacle, the barbarian replied with much discretion that such combats in his country only took place among slaves, since then, in the case of accident, nobody was the worse for it. The Oriental was unconsciously in accord with the old Romans in condemning the manners of the Middle Ages.

Apart, however, from this particular prop of knighthood, we find here and there in Italy, for example at Ferrara, orders of court servants, whose members had a right to the title.

But, great as were individual ambitions, and the vanities of nobles and knights, it remains a fact that the Italian nobility took its place in the centre of social life, and not at the extremity. We find it habitually mixing with other classes on a footing of perfect equality, and seeking its natural allies in culture and intelligence. It is true that for the courtier a certain rank of nobility was required, but this exigence is expressly declared to be caused by a prejudice rooted in the public mind – *per l'opinion'universale* – and never was held to imply the belief that the personal worth of one who was not of noble blood was in any degree lessened thereby, nor did it follow from this rule that the prince was limited to the nobility for his society. It meant simply that the perfect man – the true courtier – should not be wanting in any conceivable advantage, and therefore not in this. If in all the relations of life he was specially bound to maintain a dignified and reserved demeanour, the reason was not found in the blood which flowed in his veins, but in the perfection of manner which was demanded from him. We are here in the presence of a modern distinction, based on culture and on wealth, but on the latter solely because it enables men to devote their life to the former, and effectually to promote its interests and advancement.

COSTUMES AND FASHIONS

But in proportion as distinctions of birth ceased to confer any special privilege, the individual himself was compelled to make the most of

his personal qualities, and society to find its worth and charm in itself. The demeanour of individuals, and all the higher forms of social intercourse, became ends pursued with a deliberate and artistic purpose.

Even the outward appearance of men and women and the habits of daily life were more perfect, more beautiful and more polished than among the other nations of Europe. The dwellings of the upper classes fall rather within the province of the history of art; but we may note how far the castle and the city mansion in Italy surpassed in comfort, order and harmony the dwellings of the northern noble. The style of dress varied so continually that it is impossible to make any complete comparison with the fashions of other countries, all the more because since the close of the fifteenth century imitations of the latter were frequent. The costumes of the time, as given us by the Italian painters, are the most convenient, and the most pleasing to the eye which were then to be found in Europe; but we cannot be sure if they represent the prevalent fashion, or if they are faithfully reproduced by the artist. It is nevertheless beyond a doubt that nowhere was so much importance attached to dress as in Italy. The nation was, and is, vain; and even serious men among it looked on a handsome and becoming costume as an element in the perfection of the individual. At Florence, indeed, there was a brief period when dress was a purely personal matter, and every man set the fashion for himself, and till far into the sixteenth century there were exceptional people who still had the courage to do so; and the majority at all events showed themselves capable of varying the fashion according to their individual tastes. It is a symptom of decline when Giovanni della Casa warns his readers not to be singular or to depart from existing fashions. Our own age, which, in men's dress at any rate, treats uniformity as the supreme law, gives up by so doing far more than it is itself aware of. But it saves itself much time, and this, according to our notions of business, outweighs all other disadvantages.

In Venice and Florence at the time of the Renaissance there were rules and regulations prescribing the dress of the men and restraining the luxury of the women. Where the fashions were more free, as in Naples, the moralists confess with regret that no difference can be observed between noble and burgher. They further deplore the rapid changes of fashion, and – if we rightly understand their words – the senseless idolatry of whatever comes from France, though in many

cases the fashions which were received back from the French were originally Italian. It does not further concern us how far these frequent changes, and the adoption of French and Spanish ways, contributed to the national passion for external display; but we find in them additional evidence of the rapid movement of life in Italy in the decades before and after the year 1500.

We may note in particular the efforts of the women to alter their appearance by all the means which the toilette could afford. In no country of Europe since the fall of the Roman Empire was so much trouble taken to modify the face, the colour of the skin and the growth of the hair, as in Italy at this time. All tended to the formation of a conventional type, at the cost of the most striking and transparent deceptions. Leaving out of account costume in general, which in the fourteenth century was in the highest degree varied in colour and loaded with ornament, and at a later period assumed a character of more harmonious richness, we here limit ourselves more particularly to the toilette in the narrower sense.

No sort of ornament was more in use than false hair, often made of white or yellow silk. The law denounced and forbade it in vain, till some preacher of repentance touched the worldly minds of the wearers. Then was seen, in the middle of the public square, a lofty pyre (*talamo*), on which, besides lutes, dice-boxes, masks, magical charms, song-books and other vanities, lay masses of false hair, which the purging fires soon turned into a heap of ashes. The ideal colour sought for both natural and artificial hair was blond. And as the sun was supposed to have the power of making the hair this colour,⁷⁵ many ladies would pass their whole time in the open air on sunshiny days. Dyes and other mixtures were also used freely for the same purpose. Besides all these, we meet with an endless list of beautifying waters, plasters and paints for every single part of the face – even for the teeth and eyelids – of which in our day we can form no conception. The ridicule of the poets, the invectives of the preachers and the experience of the baneful effects of these cosmetics on the skin were powerless to hinder women from giving their faces an unnatural form and colour. It is possible that the frequent and splendid representations of mysteries, at which hundreds of people appeared painted and masked, helped to further this practice in daily life. It is certain that it was widely spread, and that the countrywomen vied in this respect with their sisters in the towns. It was vain to preach that such decorations were the mark of

the courtesan; the most honourable matrons, who all the year round never touched paint, used it nevertheless on holidays when they showed themselves in public. But whether we look on this bad habit as a remnant of barbarism, to which the painting of savages is a parallel, or as a consequence of the desire for perfect youthful beauty in feature and in colour, as the art and complexity of the toilette would lead us to think – in either case there was no lack of good advice on the part of the men.

The use of perfumes, too, went beyond all reasonable limits. They were applied to everything with which human beings came into contact. At festivals even the mules were treated with scents and ointments. Pietro Aretino thanks Cosimo I for a perfumed roll of money.

The Italians of that day lived in the belief that they were more cleanly than other nations. There are in fact general reasons which speak rather for than against this claim. Cleanliness is indispensable to our modern notion of social perfection, which was developed in Italy earlier than elsewhere. That the Italians were one of the richest of existing peoples is another presumption in their favour. Proof, either for or against these pretensions, can of course never be forthcoming, and if the question were one of priority in establishing rules of cleanliness, the chivalrous poetry of the Middle Ages is perhaps in advance of anything that Italy can produce. It is nevertheless certain that the singular neatness and cleanliness of some distinguished representatives of the Renaissance, especially in their behaviour at meals, was noticed expressly, and that 'German' was the synonym in Italy for all that is filthy. The dirty habits which Massimiliano Sforza picked up in the course of his German education, and the notice they attracted on his return to Italy, are recorded by Giovio. It is at the same time very curious that, at least in the fifteenth century, the inns and hotels were left chiefly in the hands of Germans, who probably, however, made their profit mostly out of the pilgrims journeying to Rome. Yet the statements on this point may refer rather to the country districts, since it is notorious that in the great cities Italian hotels held the first place. The want of decent inns in the country may also be explained by the general insecurity of life and property.

To the first half of the sixteenth century belongs the manual of politeness which Giovanni della Casa, a Florentine by birth, published under the title *Il Galateo*.⁷⁶ Not only cleanliness in the strict sense of

the word, but the dropping of all the tricks and habits which we consider unbecoming, is here prescribed with the same unfailing tact with which the moralist discerns the highest ethical truths. In the literature of other countries the same lessons are taught, though less systematically, by the indirect influence of repulsive descriptions.

In other respects also, the *Galateo* is a graceful and intelligent guide to good manners – a school of tact and delicacy. Even now it may be read with no small profit by people of all classes, and the politeness of European nations is not likely to outgrow its precepts. So far as tact is an affair of the heart, it has been inborn in some men from the dawn of civilization, and acquired through force of will by others; but the Italian first recognized it as a universal social duty and a mark of culture and education. And Italy itself had altered much in the course of two centuries. We feel at their close that the time for practical jokes between friends and acquaintances – for *burle* and *beffe* – was over in good society, that the people had emerged from the walls of the cities and had learned a cosmopolitan politeness and consideration. We shall speak later on of the intercourse of society in the narrower sense.

Outward life, indeed, in the fifteenth and the early part of the sixteenth centuries, was polished and ennobled as among no other people in the world. A countless number of those small things and great things which combine to make up what we mean by comfort we know to have first appeared in Italy. In the well-paved streets of the Italian cities, driving was universal, while elsewhere in Europe walking or riding was the custom, and at all events no one drove for amusement. We read in the novelists of soft, elastic beds, of costly carpets and bedroom furniture, of which we hear nothing in other countries. We often hear especially of the abundance and beauty of the linen. Much of all this is drawn within the sphere of art. We note with admiration the thousand ways in which art ennobles luxury, not only adorning the massive sideboard or the light brackets with noble vases, clothing the walls with the moving splendour of tapestry, and covering the toilet-table with numberless graceful trifles, but absorbing whole branches of mechanical work – especially carpentering – into its province. All Western Europe, as soon as its wealth enabled it to do so, set to work in the same way at the close of the Middle Ages. But its efforts produced either childish and fantastic toy-work, or were bound by the chains of a narrow and purely Gothic art, while the Renaissance moved freely, entering into the spirit of every task it undertook and

working for a far larger circle of patrons and admirers than the northern artists. The rapid victory of Italian decorative art over northern in the course of the sixteenth century is due partly to this fact, though partly the result of wider and more general causes.

LANGUAGE AND SOCIETY

The higher forms of social intercourse, which here meet us as a work of art – as a conscious product and one of the highest products of national life – have no more important foundation and condition than language. In the most flourishing period of the Middle Ages, the nobility of Western Europe had sought to establish a ‘courtly’ speech for social intercourse as well as for poetry. In Italy, too, where the dialects differed so greatly from one another, we find in the thirteenth century a so-called *curiale*, which was common to the courts and to the poets. It is of decisive importance for Italy that the attempt was there seriously and deliberately made to turn this into the language of literature and society. The introduction to the *Cento novelle antiche*, which were put into their present shape before 1300, avows this object openly. Language is here considered apart from its uses in poetry; its highest function is clear, simple, intelligent utterance in short speeches, epigrams and answers. This faculty was admired in Italy as nowhere else but among the Greeks and Arabs: ‘how many in the course of a long life have scarcely produced a single *bel parlare*?’

But the matter was rendered more difficult by the diversity of the aspects under which it was considered. The writings of Dante transport us into the midst of the struggle. His work on the Italian language is not only of the utmost importance for the subject itself, but is also the first complete treatise on any modern language. His method and results belong to the history of linguistic science, in which they will always hold a high place. We must here content ourselves with the remark that long before the appearance of this book the subject must have been one of daily and pressing importance, that the various dialects of Italy had long been the objects of eager study and dispute, and that the birth of the one classical language was not accomplished without many throes.

Nothing certainly contributed so much to this end as the great poem of Dante. The Tuscan dialect became the basis of the new national speech. If this assertion may seem to some to go too far, as

foreigners we may be excused, in a matter on which much difference of opinion prevails, for following the general belief.

Literature and poetry probably lost more than they gained by the contentious purism which was long prevalent in Italy, and which marred the freshness and vigour of many an able writer. Others, again, who felt themselves masters of this magnificent language, were tempted to rely upon its harmony and flow, apart from the thought which it expressed. A very insignificant melody, played upon such an instrument, can produce a very great effect. But however this may be, it is certain that socially the language had great value. It was, as it were, the crown of a noble and dignified behaviour, and compelled the gentleman, both in his ordinary bearing and in exceptional moments, to observe external propriety. No doubt this classical garment, like the language of Attic society, served to drape much that was foul and malicious; but it was also the adequate expression of all that is noblest and most refined. But politically and nationally it was of supreme importance, serving as an ideal home for the educated classes in all the states of the divided peninsula. Nor was it the special property of the nobles or of any one class, but the poorest and humblest might learn it if they would. Even now – and perhaps more than ever – in those parts of Italy where, as a rule, the most unintelligible dialect prevails, the stranger is often astonished at hearing pure and well-spoken Italian from the mouths of peasants or artisans, and looks in vain for anything analogous in France or in Germany, where even the educated classes retain traces of a provincial speech. There is certainly a larger number of people able to read in Italy than we should be led to expect from the condition of many parts of the country – as for instance, the States of the Church – in other respects; but what is more important is the general and undisputed respect for pure language and pronunciation as something precious and sacred. One part of the country after another came to adopt the classical dialect officially. Venice, Milan and Naples did so at the noontime of Italian literature, and partly through its influences. It was not till the present century that Piedmont became of its own free will a genuine Italian province by sharing in this chief treasure of the people – pure speech. The dialects were from the beginning of the sixteenth century purposely left to deal with a certain class of subjects, serious as well as comic, and the style which was thus developed proved equal to all its tasks. Among other nations a conscious separation of this kind did not occur till a much later period.

The opinion of educated people as to the social value of language is fully set forth in the *Cortigiano*. There were then persons, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, who purposely kept to the antiquated expressions of Dante and the other Tuscan writers of his time, simply because they were old. Our author forbids the use of them altogether in speech, and is unwilling to permit them even in writing, which he considers a form of speech. Upon this follows the admission that the best style of speech is that which most resembles good writing. We can clearly recognize the author's feeling that people who have anything of importance to say must shape their own speech, and that language is something flexible and changing because it is something living. It is allowable to make use of any expression, however ornate, as long as it is used by the people; nor are non-Tuscan words, or even French and Spanish words, forbidden, if custom has once applied them to definite purposes.⁷⁷ Thus care and intelligence will produce a language, which, if not the pure old Tuscan, is still Italian, rich in flowers and fruit like a well-kept garden. It belongs to the completeness of the *cortigiano* that his wit, his polished manners and his poetry must be clothed in this perfect dress.

When style and language had once become the property of a living society, all the efforts of purists and archaists failed to secure their end. Tuscany itself was rich in writers and talkers of the first order, who ignored and ridiculed these endeavours. Ridicule in abundance awaited the foreign scholar who explained to the Tuscans how little they understood their own language. The life and influence of a writer like Machiavelli was enough to sweep away all these cobwebs. His vigorous thoughts, his clear and simple mode of expression, wore a form which had any merit but that of the *trecentisti*. And on the other hand there were too many North Italians, Romans and Neapolitans who were thankful if the demand for purity of style in literature and conversation was not pressed too far. They repudiated, indeed, the forms and idioms of their dialect; and Bandello, with what a foreigner might suspect to be false modesty, is never tired of declaring: 'I have no style; I do not write like a Florentine, but like a barbarian; I am not ambitious of giving new graces to my language; I am a Lombard, and from the Ligurian border into the bargain.' But the claims of the purists were most successfully met by the express renunciation of the higher qualities of style, and the adoption of a vigorous, popular language in their stead. Few could hope to rival Pietro Bembo who,

though born in Venice, nevertheless wrote the purest Tuscan, which to him was a foreign language, or the Neapolitan Sannazaro, who did the same. But the essential point was that language, whether spoken or written, was held to be an object of respect. As long as this feeling was prevalent, the fanaticism of the purists – their linguistic congresses and the rest of it – did little harm. Their bad influence was not felt till much later, when the original power of Italian literature relaxed and yielded to other and far worse influences. At last it became possible for the Accademia della Crusca to treat Italian like a dead language. But this association proved so helpless that it could not even hinder the invasion of Gallicism in the eighteenth century.

This language – loved, tended and trained to every use – now served as the basis of social intercourse. In northern countries, the nobles and the princes passed their leisure either in solitude, or in hunting, fighting, drinking and the like; the burghers in games and bodily exercises, with a mixture of literary or festive amusements. In Italy there existed a neutral ground, where people of every origin, if they had the needful talent and culture, spent their time in conversation and the polished interchange of jest and earnest. As eating and drinking formed a small part of such entertainments, it was not difficult to keep at a distance those who sought society for these objects. If we are to take the writers of dialogues literally, the loftiest problems of human existence were not excluded from the conversation of thinking men, and the production of noble thoughts was not, as was commonly the case in the North, the work of solitude, but of society. But we must here limit ourselves to the less serious side of social intercourse – to the side which existed only for the sake of amusement.

SOCIAL ETIQUETTE

This society, at all events at the beginning of the sixteenth century, was a matter of art; and had, and rested on, tacit or avowed rules of good sense and propriety, which are the exact reverse of all mere etiquette. In less polished circles, where society took the form of a permanent corporation, we meet with a system of formal rules and a prescribed mode of entrance, as was the case with those wild sets of Florentine artists of whom Vasari tells us that they were capable of giving representations of the best comedies of the day. In the easier intercourse of society it was not unusual to select some distinguished

lady as president, whose word was law for the evening. Everybody knows the introduction to Boccaccio's *Decameron*, and looks on the presidency of Pampinea as a graceful fiction. That it was so in this particular case is a matter of course; but the fiction was nevertheless based on a practice which often occurred in reality. Firenzuola, who nearly two centuries later (1523) prefaces his collection of tales in a similar manner, with express reference to Boccaccio, comes assuredly nearer to the truth when he puts into the mouth of the queen of the society a formal speech on the mode of spending the hours during the stay which the company proposed to make in the country. The day was to begin with a stroll among the hills passed in philosophical talk; then followed breakfast, with music and singing, after which came the recitation, in some cool, shady spot, of a new poem, the subject of which had been given the night before; in the evening the whole party walked to a spring of water where they all sat down and each one told a tale; last of all came supper and lively conversation 'of such a kind that the women might listen to it without shame and the men might not seem to be speaking under the influence of wine'. Bandello, in the introductions and dedications to single novels, does not give us, it is true, such inaugural discourses as this, since the circles before which the stories are told are represented as already formed; but he gives us to understand in other ways how rich, how manifold and how charming the conditions of society must have been. Some readers may be of opinion that no good was to be got from a world which was willing to be amused by such immoral literature. It would be juster to wonder at the secure foundations of a society which, notwithstanding these tales, still observed the rules of order and decency, and which knew how to vary such pastimes with serious and solid discussion. The need of noble forms of social intercourse was felt to be stronger than all others. To convince ourselves of it, we are not obliged to take as our standard the idealized society which Castiglione depicts as discussing the loftiest sentiments and aims of human life at the court of Guidobaldo of Urbino, and Pietro Bembo at the castle of Asolo. The society described by Bandello, with all the frivolities which may be laid to its charge, enables us to form the best notion of the easy and polished dignity, of the urbane kindness, of the intellectual freedom, of the wit and the graceful dilettantism, which distinguished these circles. A significant proof of the value of such circles lies in the fact that the women who were the centres of them could become famous and

illustrious without in any way compromising their reputation. Among the patronesses of Bandello, for example, Isabella Gonzaga (born an Este) was talked of unfavourably not through any fault of her own, but on account of the too free-lived young ladies who filled her court. Giulia Gonzaga Colonna, Ippolita Sforza married to a Bentivoglio, Bianca Rangona, Cecilia Gallerana, Camilla Scarampa and others were either altogether irreproachable, or their social fame threw into the shade whatever they may have done amiss. The most famous woman of Italy, Vittoria Colonna (b. 1490, d. 1547), the friend of Castiglione and Michelangelo, enjoyed the reputation of a saint. It is hard to give such a picture of the unconstrained intercourse of these circles in the city, at the baths or in the country, as will furnish literal proof of the superiority of Italy in this respect over the rest of Europe. But let us read Bandello, and then ask ourselves if anything of the same kind would have been possible, say, in France, before this kind of society was there introduced by people like himself. No doubt the supreme achievements of the human mind were then produced independently of the help of the drawing-room. Yet it would be unjust to rate the influence of the latter on art and poetry too low, if only for the reason that society helped to shape that which existed in no other country – a widespread interest in artistic production and an intelligent and critical public opinion. And apart from this, society of the kind we have described was in itself a natural flower of that life and culture which was then purely Italian, and which since then has extended to the rest of Europe.

In Florence society was powerfully affected by literature and politics. Lorenzo the Magnificent was supreme over his circle, not, as we might be led to believe, through the princely position which he occupied, but rather through the wonderful tact he displayed in giving perfect freedom of action to the many and varied natures which surrounded him. We see how gently he dealt with his great tutor Politian, and how the sovereignty of the poet and scholar was reconciled, though not without difficulty, with the inevitable reserve prescribed by the approaching change in the position of the house of Medici and by consideration for the sensitiveness of the wife. In return for the treatment he received, Politian became the herald and the living symbol of Medicean glory. Lorenzo, after the fashion of a true Medici, delighted in giving an outward and artistic expression to his social amusements. In his brilliant improvisation – ‘The Hawking Party’ –

he gives us a humorous description of his comrades, and in the 'Symposium' a burlesque of them, but in both cases in such a manner that we clearly feel his capacity for more serious companionship. Of this intercourse his correspondence and the records of his literary and philosophical conversation give ample proof. Some of the social unions which were afterwards formed in Florence were in part political clubs, though not without a certain poetical and philosophical character. Of this kind was the so-called Platonic Academy which met after Lorenzo's death in the gardens of the Rucellai.

At the courts of the princes, society naturally depended on the character of the ruler. After the beginning of the sixteenth century they became few in number, and these few soon lost their importance. Rome, however, possessed in the unique court of Leo X a society to which the history of the world offers no parallel.

EDUCATION OF THE CORTIGIANO

It was for this society – or rather for his own sake – that the *cortigiano*, as described to us by Castiglione, educated himself. He was the ideal man of society, and was regarded by the civilization of that age as its choicest flower; and the court existed for him rather than he for the court. Indeed, such a man would have been out of place at any court, since he himself possessed all the gifts and the bearing of an accomplished ruler, and because his calm supremacy in all things, both outward and spiritual, implied a too independent nature. The inner impulse which inspired him was directed, though our author does not acknowledge the fact, not to the service of the prince, but to his own perfection. One instance will make this clear. In time of war the courtier refuses even useful and perilous tasks, if they are not beautiful and dignified in themselves, such as for instance the capture of a herd of cattle; what urges him to take part in war is not duty but *l'onore*. The moral relation to the prince, as described in the fourth book, is singularly free and independent. The theory of well-bred love-making, set forth in the third book, is full of delicate psychological observation, which perhaps would be more in place in a treatise on human nature generally; and the magnificent praise of ideal love, which occurs at the end of the fourth book, and which rises to a lyrical elevation of feeling, has no connection whatever with the special object of the work. Yet here, as in the *Asolani* of Bembo, the culture of the time

shows itself in the delicacy with which this sentiment is represented and analysed. It is true that these writers are not in all cases to be taken literally; but that the discourses they give us were actually frequent in good society cannot be doubted, and that it was no affectation, but genuine passion, which appeared in this dress we shall see further on.

Among outward accomplishments, the so-called knightly exercises were expected in thorough perfection from the courtier, and besides these much that could only exist at courts highly organized and based on personal emulation, such as were not to be found out of Italy. Other points obviously rest on an abstract notion of individual perfection. The courtier must be at home in all noble sports, among them running, leaping, swimming and wrestling; he must, above all things, be a good dancer and, as a matter of course, an accomplished rider. He must be master of several languages, at all events of Latin and Italian; he must be familiar with literature and have some knowledge of the fine arts. In music a certain practical skill was expected of him, which he was bound, nevertheless, to keep as secret as possible. All this is not to be taken too seriously, except what relates to the use of arms. The mutual interaction of these gifts and accomplishments results in the perfect man, in whom no one quality usurps the place of the rest.

So much is certain, that in the sixteenth century the Italians had all Europe for their pupils both theoretically and practically in every noble bodily exercise and in the habits and manners of good society. Their instructions and their illustrated books on riding, fencing and dancing served as the model to other countries. Gymnastics as an art, apart both from military training and from mere amusement, was probably first taught by Vittorino da Feltre and after his time became essential to a complete education. The important fact is that they were taught systematically, though what exercises were most in favour, and whether they resembled those now in use, we are unable to say. But we may infer, not only from the general character of the people, but from positive evidence which has been left for us, that not only strength and skill, but grace of movement was one of the main objects of physical training. It is enough to remind the reader of the great Federigo of Urbino directing the evening games of the young people committed to his care.

The games and contests of the popular classes did not differ essentially from those which prevailed elsewhere in Europe. In the maritime cities boat-racing was among the number, and the Venetian regattas

were famous at an early period. The classical game of Italy was and is the ball;⁷⁸ and this was probably played at the time of the Renaissance with more zeal and brilliancy than elsewhere. But on this point no distinct evidence is forthcoming.

MUSIC

A few words on music will not be out of place in this part of our work. Musical composition down to the year 1500 was chiefly in the hands of the Flemish school, whose originality and artistic dexterity were greatly admired. Side by side with this, there nevertheless existed an Italian school, which probably stood nearer to our present taste. Half a century later came Palestrina, whose genius still works powerfully among us. We learn among other facts that he was a great innovator; but whether he or others took the decisive part in shaping the musical language of the modern world lies beyond the judgement of the unprofessional critic. Leaving on one side the history of musical composition, we shall confine ourselves to the position which music held in the social life of the day.

A fact most characteristic of the Renaissance and of Italy is the specialization of the orchestra, the search for new instruments and modes of sound, and, in close connection with this tendency, the formation of a class of *virtuosi*, who devoted their whole attention to particular instruments or particular branches of music.

Of the more complex instruments which were perfected and widely diffused at a very early period, we find not only the organ, but a corresponding string instrument, the *gravicembalo* or *clavicembalo*. Fragments of these, dating from the beginning of the fourteenth century, have come down to our own days, adorned with paintings from the hands of the greatest masters. Among other instruments the first place was held by the violin, which even then conferred great celebrity on the successful player. At the court of Leo X, who, when cardinal, had filled his house with singers and musicians, and who enjoyed the reputation of a critic and performer, the Jew Giovan Maria and Jacopo Sanseculo were among the most famous. The former received from Leo the title of count and a small town; the latter has been taken to be the Apollo in the *Parnassus* of Raphael. In the course of the sixteenth century, celebrities in every branch of music appeared in abundance, and Lomazzo (about the year 1580) names the then most distinguished

masters of the art of singing, of the organ, the lute, the lyre, the *viola da gamba*, the harp, the cithern, the horn and the trumpet, and wishes that their portraits might be painted on the instruments themselves. Such many-sided comparative criticism would have been impossible anywhere but in Italy, although the same instruments were to be found in other countries.

The number and variety of these instruments is shown by the fact that collections of them were now made from curiosity. In Venice, which was one of the most musical cities of Italy, there were several such collections, and when a sufficient number of performers happened to be on the spot, a concert was at once improvised. In one of these museums there was a large number of instruments, made after ancient pictures and descriptions, but we are not told if anybody could play them, or how they sounded. It must not be forgotten that such instruments were often beautifully decorated, and could be arranged in a manner pleasing to the eye. We thus meet with them in collections of other rarities and works of art.

The players, apart from the professional performers, were either single amateurs, or whole orchestras of them, organized into a corporate academy. Many artists in other branches were at home in music, and often masters of the art. People of position were averse to wind instruments, for the same reason which made them distasteful to Alcibiades and Pallas Athene. In good society singing, either alone or accompanied with the violin, was usual; but quartettes of string instruments were also common, and the *clavicembalo* was liked on account of its varied effects. In singing the solo only was permitted, 'for a single voice is heard, enjoyed and judged far better'. In other words, as singing, notwithstanding all conventional modesty, is an exhibition of the individual man of society, it is better that each should be seen and heard separately. The tender feelings produced in the fair listeners are taken for granted, and elderly people are therefore recommended to abstain from such forms of art, even though they excel in them. It was held important that the effect of the song should be enhanced by the impression made on the sight. We hear nothing, however, of the treatment in these circles of musical composition as an independent branch of art. On the other hand it happened sometimes that the subject of the song was some terrible event which had befallen the singer himself.

This dilettantism, which pervaded the middle as well as the upper

classes, was in Italy both more widespread and more genuinely artistic than in any other country of Europe. Wherever we meet with a description of social intercourse, there music and singing are always and expressly mentioned. Hundreds of portraits show us men and women, often several together, playing or holding some musical instrument, and the angelic concerts represented in the ecclesiastical pictures prove how familiar the painters were with the living effects of music. We read of the lute-player Antonio Rota, at Padua (d. 1549), who became a rich man by his lessons, and published a handbook on the practice of the lute.

At a time when there was no opera to concentrate and monopolize musical talent, this general cultivation of the art must have been something wonderfully varied, intelligent and original. It is another question how much we should find to satisfy us in these forms of music, could they now be reproduced for us.

EQUALITY OF MEN AND WOMEN

To understand the higher forms of social intercourse at this period, we must keep before our minds the fact that women stood on a footing of perfect equality with men. We must not suffer ourselves to be misled by the sophistical and often malicious talk about the assumed inferiority of the female sex, which we meet with now and then in the dialogues of this time, nor by such satires as the third of Ariosto, who treats woman as a dangerous grown-up child, whom a man must learn how to manage, in spite of the great gulf between them. There is, indeed, a certain amount of truth in what he says. Just because the educated woman was on a level with the man, that communion of mind and heart which comes from the sense of mutual dependence and completion could not be developed in marriage at this time, as it has been developed later in the cultivated society of the North.

The education given to women in the upper classes was essentially the same as that given to men. The Italian, at the time of the Renaissance, felt no scruple in putting sons and daughters alike under the same course of literary and even philological instruction. Indeed, looking at this ancient culture as the chief treasure of life, he was glad that his girls should have a share in it. We have seen what perfection was attained by the daughters of princely houses in writing and speaking Latin. Many others must at least have been able to read it,