

CT. 134

ERASMUS:

HIS LIFE, WORKS, AND INFLUENCE
UPON THE
SPIRIT OF THE REFORMATION.

A Lecture

DELIVERED BEFORE THE
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BY

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SYLLABUS.

Intellectual and Ecclesiastical condition of Europe about the beginning of the sixteenth century. Characterised by the awakening of the human mind from the long slumber of the Middle Ages, stimulated mainly by three memorable events :—

1. The invention of the Printing Press (1440).
2. The dispersion of Scholars on the fall of the Eastern Empire of the Romans (1453).
3. The actual discovery of the shape and smallness of the Earth through the voyages of Columbus and Vasco de Gama (1492-7), and Magellan's Squadron (1522).

Sketch of the Life of Erasmus (1467-1536). His visits to England and the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. His friendships with Colet, Linacre, Grocyn, More, Fisher, and others of our learned men. His zeal and travels for restoring the culture of Classical Literature. His Works—'Praise of Folly,' 'Adages,' Edition of the Greek Testament, 'Familiar Colloquies,' 'Complaint of Peace,' Editions of Classical Authors and Christian Fathers, &c.

Rise of the Reformation, and its outbreak (1517) through the intrepid preaching and conduct of Luther. His controversy with Erasmus. Divergence of their views.

Two aspects of the Reformation :—

1. Theological—A contest respecting the standard of Religious Truth. Ended in the substitution of an assumed infallible Book for an alleged infallible Church. (Luther.)
2. Historical—The emancipation of the human reason from the yoke of ecclesiastical authority through the revival of learning. Still in progress by the advance of culture and the freedom of discussion. (Erasmus.)

Syllabus.

Erasmus's 'Greek Testament' (*editio princeps*) 1516, followed by Robert Stephens's third (first critical) edition, 1550; Elzevir's (*textus receptus*), 1624; Mill's, 1707; Wetstein's, 1751; Matthæi's, 1782-8; Griesbach's, 1796; Scholz, 1830-6; Lachmann's, 1831; Tischendorf's, 1841, and other critical editions, embracing the collation of upwards of six hundred manuscripts, and the discovery of more than one hundred thousand various readings, and no "immaculate" text, necessitates the science of biblical criticism, *i.e.*, the application of scientific truths and tests, methods of inquiry and canons of evidence to the investigation of the genuineness, authenticity, and true interpretation of the Christian Records.

Illustration of various readings—First Epistle General of John, chap. v., verses 7, 8.

Concise account of the following ancient existing Scripture Manuscripts :—

LANGUAGE.		SOURCE OF TEXT.	DATE.
Greek.	Latin.		
Codex Alexandrinus . (in the Gospels) }	Codex Brixianus	Byzantium	{ 4th to 7th Cent. A.D.
,, Vaticanus	,, Versio Vulgata .	Palestine .	
,, Cantabrigiensis .	,, Vercellensis . . .	Alexandria	

The Spirit of the Reformation—the assertion of the principle of private judgment arising from Reason and the Moral Sense, in opposition to the practice of persecution resulting from the spirit of dogmatism—is hostile to Priestcraft, but friendly to Truth, by respecting the rights of conscience, and encouraging the fearless advancement of Religious Knowledge through Liberty of Inquiry, Freedom of Thought, and Honesty of Expression.

ERASMUS:

*HIS LIFE, WORKS, AND INFLUENCE UPON THE SPIRIT OF
THE REFORMATION.*

THROUGHOUT the greater part of the times historically known as the Middle Ages, down to so late a period as the end of the 15th century, the Christian Countries of Europe were ruled in reality by the Popes of Rome. They were mapped out into Ecclesiastical Provinces, each presided over by a Roman Archbishop; Provinces were divided into Dioceses, and these into Parishes, each with its Romish Priest, forming altogether an ecclesiastical network, the strings of which were grasped at Rome by the Pope and the College of Cardinals. In addition to this clergy there were numerous orders of begging Monks and Friars, Benedictines, Cistercians, Dominicans, Franciscans, and Augustinians, whose numbers swarmed everywhere; there being in most towns from one to half-a-dozen Monasteries or Religious Houses.

The Power wielded through this ecclesiastical system was enormous. Kings even were not secure of their crowns till they had the sanction of the Church; for, by whatever jesuitical casuistry Vatican Decrees are now sought to be explained away, in the days we are speaking of, Sovereigns were dethroned, their kingdoms laid under interdicts, and their subjects were absolved from their allegiance, by the usurped deposing power of the Pope. The Roman Catholic Clergy alone baptized and married, and buried, or refused Christian burial, they alone disposed of dead men's goods. No man's Will could take effect until proved in an Ecclesiastical Court. If their claims were disputed remonstrants were handed over to the secular arm or Civil Power, which acted in abject submission to the arbitrary dictates of the Church.

The Revenues of this Priesthood were immense.

6 *Erasmus ; his Life, Works, and Influence*

Even the Monks, under their vows of poverty begging alms for bread in return for prayers, obtaining boundless wealth from the superstitious credulity of those who thought that by giving them their property they could save their souls.

But the ecclesiastical was not the only power in Europe that was Roman. The whole learned world was linked to Rome through the subtleties of the scholastic system. All scholars talked and wrote in Latin, the language of Rome. Learned people of all sorts were looked upon as belonging to the Clergy. In England, a man charged with crime, if he could only show such a modicum of learning as being able to read and write, could claim "benefit of clergy," that is, be tried in an ecclesiastical Court, which practically amounted to an exemption from the punishments of the criminal law of the Land. This tended to give all learning a clerical caste, so that matters of real knowledge or science, which could only be proved by observation of the facts of Nature,—such, for instance, as, whether the Sun moved round the Earth, or the Earth round the Sun, were settled by texts taken from the Bible! Whilst, as to the Christian Religion itself, it had ceased to be what it was in the days of Christ and the Apostles, an affair of the heart; it had become a Theology, which is a thing of the head.

About the beginning of the 16th century the restlessness of the human mind under this servile system becomes very observable, and is distinctly traceable to the influence of certain memorable events, which were then of recent occurrence. One was the invention of the Printing-press, which occurred in about the year 1440, and which operated in two ways—in the multiplying and cheapening of books, thereby diffusing knowledge, and in substituting reading or private study for oral instruction. Previously to the invention of Printing, books were in manuscripts, comparatively so few in number, that teaching was of necessity chiefly

carried on by means of Lectures or Sermons. Now, the oral teacher unavoidably exerts over his audience a sympathetic influence, imbuing them with the bias of his own views, and the gain to Truth must have been considerable, when the solitary student, intent only on its pursuit, could acquire knowledge through the mute medium of the printed page, and exercise upon it his own powers of reflection, unprejudiced by the presence of a personal Instructor. Thus it was that the Printing-Press came to deprive the Pulpit of its supremacy, and to subordinate the Sermon to the Newspaper.

Another event was the taking of Constantinople by the Turks, in the year 1453. This celebrated city had been the home, or the refuge, of learning since its foundation by the Emperor Constantine in the year 330. On its fall, learned Greeks and Jews, driven from the East, were dispersed over Europe, and mostly settled in Italy. The Greek and Hebrew languages were again studied, and thence there resulted a remarkable revival of classical learning, and there arose an intelligent criticism of the Latin credentials of the Roman Catholic Faith. What (said the faculty of theology in Paris), what will become of our religion, if the study of Greek and Hebrew be permitted? Time has verified this prophetic fear of the Romish Church, and has shown, that the prevalence of the Latin tongue was an essential condition of her power.

The third event I shall advert to was the discovery of the rounded form, and relative smallness, of our Earth, through the Voyages of Columbus and Vasco de Gama in the years 1492-7, and of Magellan's expedition in the years 1519-1522. The effect on the human mind of this physical discovery must have been very powerful, since it shocked directly some of the most cherished religious notions of those days. Fact had now falsified faith; for the infallible Church had transmuted a geographical problem into a theological dogma, by committing herself against the figure of the Earth being round. Her

8 *Erasmus ; his Life, Works, and Influence*

teaching was now shown to be untrue, and the authority of her fervid Fathers Lactantius and Augustin proved to be worthless, by the astounding achievement of the actual circumnavigation of the Globe !

It should be observed that the spread of knowledge at the period we are referring to was remarkably rapid. Schools of learning were numerous, many of them dating from their foundation by Charlemagne in the ninth century ; and Europe was dotted over by Universities, all of which were more or less in close connection with one another. The one language, Latin, was common to them all, and students passed freely from one to another, flocking often in great numbers to an University where there happened to be a famous Professor.

Such, shortly, was the ecclesiastical and intellectual condition of Western Christendom about the time of the advent of the illustrious scholar, whose career we are going slightly to trace. It was a time, when :—

“ Much was believ'd, but little understood,
And to be dull was constru'd to be good ;
A second deluge Learning had o'er-run,
And the Monks finish'd what the Goths begun.
At length Erasmus, that great injur'd name,
(The glory of the Priesthood, and the shame !)
Stem'd the wild torrent of a barb'rous age,
And drove those holy Vandals off the stage.”

Desiderius Erasmus was born at Rotterdam in about the year 1467. His parents were, one Gerard, a native of Tergouw, and Margaret, the daughter of a Physician at Zevenbergen in Brabant. Gerard in the Dutch language signifies “beloved,” and the son, following a quaint fashion of the times, called himself by its Latin and Greek equivalents—that is “Desiderius” in Latin and “Erasmus” (more accurately *Erasmios*) in Greek. As a boy he was considered slow at learning, and was early placed in the choir of the Cathedral of Utrecht, but at the age of nine he was removed to a then distinguished school at Deventer, a town on the Yssel, where he had as a schoolfellow a future Pope, Adrian the VI., and where

he made astonishing progress, causing Zinthius, one of the masters, to prophecy that Erasmus would eventually reach the highest pinnacle of learning. On leaving school he was, much against his will, induced by his guardians (he was already an orphan, having lost both his parents), to enter the Augustinian Monastery of Steyn, and to become a Monk. Whilst an inmate, he was allowed by way of solace, to occupy the greater portion of his time in study, especially of such of the Greek and Latin classics as could there be met with. His deliverance from the monastery was owing to his accomplished scholarship, and happened thus. In the year 1491 the Bishop of Cambray, being about to set out for Rome in the hope of becoming a Cardinal, was in search of a scholar to be his secretary and companion, and he selected Erasmus. From Cambray Erasmus (leaving the service of the Bishop, who did not go to Rome after all) proceeded to Paris, and mastered the studies that were then taught to the students of its University (chiefly the scholastic philosophy or science of sophistry, a metaphysical jargon enabling doctors of theology endlessly to confute one another), living very poorly, and more or less in pecuniary difficulty, supported partly by presents, that it was customary for the rich and noble to make to students, and partly by begging, which was a common practice of the Monks of the Mendicant Orders. In 1498 Erasmus visited this country, remaining here until the year 1500, employing his time a good deal at the University of Oxford, and in making the acquaintance of the most learned and noted Englishmen of that day, especially Thomas Linaere, Physician to Henry the 8th, William Grocyn who was engaged at Oxford in giving Lectures on the Greek Language, Thomas Latimer the theologian, Thomas More, afterwards Lord Chancellor, and Colet, Dean of St Paul's and founder of St Paul's School. Erasmus appears to have been greatly delighted with this visit to England, and was much impressed with the

number of our learned men, and they too were equally taken with the varied scholarship of their visitor, almost inducing him to settle at Oxford and give lectures there. On leaving England, Erasmus was struck down by fever at Orleans. He recovered, he says, through the intercession of Saint Genevieve, *though not without the help of a good Physician*. In the year 1506 Erasmus paid a second visit to this country, staying about a year, renewing his intercourse with his old friends, and visiting for the first time the University of Cambridge, where he was made a Bachelor of Divinity. Leaving England he again visited Paris, and afterwards crossed the Alps to see the Cities of Italy, Turin, Venice, and Rome, always pursuing his studies, and making the acquaintance of great men and scholars, with whom he carried on a voluminous and instructive correspondence. He now obtained from the Pope a release from his monastic vows. It seems to have long been his ambition to pay a visit to Italy, then renowned through the world for her antiquities, her arts, and her learning, where the old classical memories had never died out, and where, in the days of Erasmus, they were recovering their influence.

In the year 1509 we find Erasmus again in London, living with his friend Sir Thomas More, and it was whilst with him that he produced one of his most brilliant works—one, indeed, of the most famous satires of world. Erasmus, reflecting on the name of his friend the More, thinking how strange so wise a man should bear the name of fool—(More being the Latin for folly)—thinking too how many fools there were in the world, and what various forms folly assumed, conceived the idea of satirising and turning the weak side of all classes of men into ridicule, under the pretence of eulogising folly. Such was the origin of his book 'Encomium Moriae,' or 'Praise of Folly.' In this masterly performance, abounding in wit and eloquence, the superstitions of the Monks of his time, the pride, avarice and

tyranny of the Nobles are exposed in a vein of scathing satire. The Miracle-mongers, the traffickers in Pardons, and the theologians generally are attacked with great force of humour, and exhibited in lights that make them appear really ridiculous; the schoolmen, the Mendicant Friars, even the Pope himself, being handled in a vein of sarcastic pleasantry. The fame of this remarkable book was immense. In a few months it went through seven editions; Kings, Bishops, Cardinals appear to have been delighted with it, the great Pope Leo the 10th reading it through from beginning to end. Of course it was attacked, though it was long before the Monks broke silence. Their dull brains did not at first take in the fact that they were being turned into ridicule, and that, (to use the expression of Dorpius), their heads were being fitted with asses' ears.

The enlightening influence of this little book, in rousing men to a consideration of the ecclesiastical state of things around them, forcing them to ask themselves whether all that they had been taught to believe could be true, must have been very great.

Soon after this second arrival of Erasmus in England he was invited to Cambridge University by Fisher the then Chancellor, a very learned man and a warm patron of letters, and who was labouring to improve the studies of the University, which were scarcely so advanced as those of Oxford in the culture of the great classical authors and the Greek Language. At Cambridge Erasmus gave the first Lectures ever given there on Greek, and was appointed Lady Margaret's Professor of Divinity. His stay at Cambridge was, however, comparatively short; he complained that the living and bad wine did not agree with him, and we soon find him again travelling about the world, particularly at Ghent, at Strasburg, and at Basle.

In the year 1508 there appeared from the printing-press of Manutius Aldus in Venice, in a greatly improved edition, another very remarkable work of

12 *Erasmus ; his Life, Works, and Influence*

Erasmus termed the 'Adages,' that is, proverbs, or impressive sayings and maxims, which he had laboriously culled from the whole compass of classical and polite literature, for the most part derived with difficulty from hidden and defaced manuscripts, many of them in the Greek language. A perfect cyclopædia of wit and wisdom, interspersed with reflections and dissertations of his own, exposing, with admirable humour and irony, the superstitions and follies of monks and kings. The Proverbs collected in this vast magazine (one of the most astonishing monuments of literary diligence existing in the world) amount to upwards of four thousand. An immense number of copies were sold, and distributed amongst the thinking portion of the European Public. In allusion to the Printing-press, as the unconscious agent in this diffusion of book-knowledge, Erasmus finely remarks, "whilst the vast Alexandrian library of the great Ptolemy was confined to the walls of a single building, Aldus our printer is constructing a library which will have no limits but those of the literary world!"

Bearing in mind that these brilliant and attractive Works of Erasmus, diffusing a knowledge of classical literature, assailing (under the mask of playful wit) the conduct of Popes, Monarchs, and Ecclesiastics, and satirising the vices, impostures, and scandals of the Church and Court of Rome, were being published during the years immediately preceding the rise of the Reformation, we cannot doubt how much they effected in preparing the world for coming events.

But the prodigious learning and resources of Erasmus were far from being exhausted, and, in the year 1516, he gave to the learned world, through the printing press of Froben at Basle, the entire New Testament in Greek, with a Latin translation and annotations. The work was dedicated to the Pope, with an account of the ancient manuscripts that had been used in its production. They were indeed few in number compared with those that

have since been discovered and collated, and, with reference to the Apocalypse, there was but one Greek manuscript, and that so defective that Erasmus had to make up the Greek version by translations of his own from the Latin. The book was not indeed, in several particulars, faultless, yet, having regard to the time when it was composed, to the existing means of accomplishing so great a work, to the fact that it was the "editio princeps," or first edition, of the Greek Testament that had ever been printed (for, at the time when Erasmus produced his Greek Testament, as well as for centuries before, the Church Bible was a Latin version of the Scriptures), and, judging it even by all that has been effected by the research and accomplishments of the numerous subsequent critical editors, it is impossible to deny, that it was a very marvel of ability and industry. The sale of it was very rapid; upwards of 3,300 folio copies were disposed of almost immediately. At length Scholars and Divines, and Princes and Nobility, were enabled to possess an actual copy of the Christian Scriptures in their original tongue. Of course curiosity led to translations into the vernacular languages which soon followed, and, it is hardly possible to exaggerate the debt which we, living now, owe to Erasmus for this splendid monument of his scholarship, of which, as I shall have occasion again to refer to it, I will only now remark, that the annotations are distinguished by that boldness of criticism which in our day is denounced as rationalistic. As usual, the book provoked enmity and censure, again the malevolence of the Monks was aroused. In reference to his emendations of the vulgate or Latin text they accused him of impiety in presuming to correct the Holy Ghost. "Is every fool then," he retorted, "to be permitted to corrupt the manuscripts of the gospels, and a scholar to be declared impious for restoring what has been corrupted?" It was also bitterly attacked by rival scholars, but, when his Greek was charged with want of elegance, Erasmus simply

14 *Erasmus ; his Life, Works, and Influence*

replied, "The apostles did not learn their Greek from the orations of Demosthenes."

The next work of importance that engaged the pen of Erasmus was an edition of the 'Life and Works of St. Jerome.' This was published in July, 1516, in nine splendid folio volumes. As in former works, so in this, Erasmus accompanied the text with learned scholia, that is, brief critical and explanatory notes, in which all the resources of his vast erudition were called into requisition to elucidate obscure and doubtful points. The work was dedicated to Warham, Archbishop of Canterbury, and speedily passed through three editions. During all this time Erasmus was continually travelling about, making ceaseless journeys to Churches, Monasteries, and Universities containing rare or noted manuscripts, thereby rescuing for the Printing Press those immortal works of the wise ancients that were hourly perishing with the worm-eaten parchments on which they were traced. He had left England for Basle in 1515, but we find him back here again in 1517. Still however he declined to remain amongst us, partly, he states in a letter to the Physician of the Cardinal of York, on account of the sweating sicknesses, plagues, and contagious fevers that were of so frequent occurrence here in the 16th century, arising chiefly, according to Erasmus (whose observations exhibit considerable sanitary knowledge), from our disregard of the laws of health, in the filthy and stifling state, and defective ventilation, of the ordinary residences of the people.

This year 1517 signalled the outbreak of the Reformation in Germany, and Erasmus was at once involved in correspondence with Luther, Cardinal Wolsey, Albert Prince Elector and Cardinal Archbishop of Maintz, and with the Pope himself. He appears to have been indecisive in his theological opinions, and desirous to bring about some middle course between the antagonistic views of the Church and the Reformers ; but the quarrel

soon became too embittered for mediators, and Erasmus, though clinging to the Roman Church, incurred severe censure from both sides. As I shall presently more particularly discuss his position in relation to Luther, I pass on to the consideration of his principal remaining literary productions.

There is a work of Erasmus I must mention, for it shows clearly his humane nature and correct moral principles. This was his book called 'The Complaint of Peace.' No man ever detested war more cordially than he did, and, even in that warlike age, he lifted up his voice loudly against it. Nothing, he shows, can be more utterly at variance with war than Christianity, whose founder is emphatically called "The Prince of Peace." He is powerfully severe on the Clergy of his time for the way in which they foment the warlike passions of princes and people. "Priests and Bishops," he observes, "leave their churches and follow armies to the field, waving above the contending hosts the holy Cross, thus made the symbol of war by those whose mission it is, before all things, to preserve peace. Their prayers must indeed be a mere mockery to God, when their very cannon are named after the Apostles, and engraved with the images of the Saints!"

In 1524 Erasmus published a paraphrase of the New Testament, which was esteemed so highly that a copy of it, translated into English by Nicholas Udal, Master of Eton College, was, by an order in Council, directed to be placed in every Parish Church in this Country beside the Bible.

The last work of the great Scholar I shall mention was that which is the best known of all—viz., 'The Familiar Colloquies,' published in 1526, professedly designed for the instruction of youth, and long deservedly much read in our schools. It consists of a large number of conversations on a great variety of subjects, conducted in the most natural manner, full of delicate humour, keen irony, and subtle wit. In it the

16 *Erasmus; his Life, Works, and Influence*

clergy are everywhere represented as idle and corrupt. Indulgences, auricular confession, and eating fish on fast days, are satirically laughed at. Again and again the coarse, overfed, ignorant monks are lashed with ridicule, and their lives and conduct exposed. The indignation of the clerical world was now really roused to resentment, but the success of the work was splendid. It is related that a publisher in Paris, Colineus, hearing that it was about to be condemned by the University, printed no less than 24,000 copies, and sold them all. However, in the end, the reading of the book was prohibited by the Faculty of Theology, on the grounds, amongst others, that Christians are discouraged by it from becoming monks, that grammatical is preferred to theological erudition, and that it contained "erroneous, scandalous, and impious propositions, in which the author, as though he were a heathen, ridicules, satirises, and sneers at the holy ceremonies and observances of the Christian Religion."

From this time Erasmus became the object of attack by theologians on all sides, and had to defend himself from the censures of the Sorbonne in Paris. There can be no doubt that these controversies, and the works from which they proceeded, had much effect in undermining the power of the monkish party, in laughing down their superstitions, and bringing their whole system into contempt. But it was not only the monks that were to blame. Erasmus saw, he says, a new set of fanatics arising on the reformed side, as ignorant, as presumptuous, as hostile to liberal culture as the fanatics of the Church. He dreaded lest the world, instead of being freed from the yoke of superstition, should merely experience a change of masters. This new Gospel (he writes of the views of the ignorant adherents of Luther) is producing a new set of men, so impudent, hypocritical, and abusive, such liars and sycophants and ranters, agreeing neither with one another nor with any one else, so universally offensive and seditious, in short, so distasteful

to me, that if I knew any city in which I should be free from them I would go there at once.

The enemies of Erasmus of course increased with the bitterness of his scornful attacks upon their miserable superstitions, and their gross illiterate ignorance. "Every goose now hisses at Erasmus" (he writes). But, in his retreat at Basle, on the banks of the Rhine, the great champion of literary culture still carried on the theological feud. One of his most characteristic pieces is the letter of farewell to his assailants that he published in 1525, in which they are contemptuously styled "certain impudent jackdaws, young men, whose ignorance is matched only by their arrogance."

In the year 1529 the progress of the reformed faith, and the violence of the mob, in attacking and defacing the members and Churches of the Roman Catholic Religion, compelled Erasmus to remove to Friburg. His account of his flight, given in a letter to a friend, is extremely graphic and sarcastic. "The rabble," he says, "heaped such insults on the images of the Saints and the Crucifix itself, that it was astonishing there was no miracle, considering how many there always used to be whenever the saints were even but slightly offended."

In the year 1534 affairs were sufficiently quiet to enable Erasmus to return to Basle, where,—whilst reposing in the hospitable home of his friend Jerome Froben, the famous printer, and engaged in revising, "ægra manu" (he tells us), his latest works, and shortly after hearing of the tyrannical murder of his eminent friend Sir Thomas More,—Erasmus was summoned to meet his last enemy, and on the 12th of February, 1536, being in the 69th year of his age, he there succumbed to the attack of death.

Though of the Roman Catholic Faith, no priestly mummeries were enacted round his death-bed. "He has died," exclaimed the illiterate monks in their dog-Latin, "sine Lux, sine Crux." But the liberal and beneficent city of Basle knew better how to celebrate the

18 *Erasmus ; his Life, Works, and Influence*

event of a great man, whatever his creed, having closed his career in their midst. The Magistrates, with the Professors and Students of the University, shared among them the envied honour of carrying to their last resting-place in Basle Cathedral (a sanctuary for the literary dead) the remains of the great luminary of the age, the greatest scholar perhaps of any age, lamented by all lovers of learning, respected by every crowned head in Europe, hated only by ecclesiastics incapable, through ignorance, of appreciating his merits—merits, which, on any candid review, must ever appear most remarkable. His attainments were indeed stupendous, and, in his own age, his powers of reason, imagination, and caustic wit were unmatched. Though neither physically nor mentally cast in the heroic mould of Luther ; quite unable, like him, to have stood alone against the united power of Church and State, yet, with pen in hand, and surrounded by his books, the whole learned world in expectation of what he should utter, Erasmus reigned supreme ! His sarcasms were hurled against vice, ignorance, and error, with crushing effect. At a time when literary ignorance was the besetting sin, his variety of erudition, and unrivalled powers of diffusing knowledge and inspiring the love of literary culture, were invaluable. The faculty of humour appears to have been his most original mental quality. That civil irony, by whose unsparring use he succeeded in making the superstitions of his day supremely ridiculous, has never been surpassed. The dogmas of theology were his aversion. The sum of our religion, he avers, is Peace, which is to be preserved by defining only primary points, leaving the rest to every one's own judgment. That a man's Faith should be looked for in the life he led, not in the creed he professed. His desire was to correct the abuses of the Church without rebelling from her authority, to reform her discipline, and recall religion from ritualistic rites and ceremonies to the simplicity of the Gospels. His great weapon for effecting such reform

was knowledge combined with common sense and the use of reason. Far before his own age, he embodied in himself what we now term the modern spirit—the spirit of doubt and free enquiry. Like the Broad Churchmen of our day, he had outgrown the narrow orthodoxy of his Church, and, like them, he conscientiously refused to separate himself from her communion. He broke off from Luther, as we shall presently see, when Luther's dogmatic theology and impetuous conduct threatened rebellion rather than reform, and when reason, literary culture, and freedom of speech were becoming stifled by the violent conduct of the Reformers. The sagacious mind of Erasmus was rather sceptical and critical than affirmative and dogmatic. In religious strife, the arena of argument and discussion was his vantage-ground, and to aid in educating the mind to the skilful use of these intellectual weapons by means of his well-reasoned writings was no insignificant contribution to the religious crisis of his age, the great contest with the fanaticism of the 16th century.

Of the person and manners of Erasmus his friend Beatus Rhenanus has told us that he had a cheerful countenance and an agreeable utterance, was a pleasant companion, a constant friend, generous and charitable.

Leaving the grave of our incomparable scholar, we must now revert to events which my narrative has somewhat outstripped.

In the year 1517 the magnificent taste of John de Medici, Pope Leo the 10th, was engaged in, amongst other splendid works, the erection of the Church of St. Peter's at Rome, and he was pressed for supplies of money. To replenish his exhausted exchequer he commissioned Tetzal, a Dominican Friar, to preach throughout Germany a sale of Indulgences, that is, a remittance from the pains of purgatory and all other punishments of sin, in consideration of money payments made to the Pope. A sale of Indulgences for the perpetration of sin, however nefarious, was nothing novel. It was a recog-

20 *Erasmus ; his Life, Works, and Influence*

nised practice of the Roman Catholic Church ; but the proceedings of Tetzal, who had been created an Inquisitor to give more influence to his mission, were conducted with unusual indecency and audacity. Travelling through towns and villages, hawking them about at fairs, market places, and taverns, his conduct resembled that of a mountebank or quack doctor, and the temper of the times was foreboding some intellectual explosion. Tetzal's profanity appears to have excited deep disgust and indignation in the mind of an Augustinian Monk, Martin Luther, who first remonstrated and then publicly denounced Tetzal's whole proceedings as a gigantic scandal. Drawing up propositions denying the right of the Pope to pardon sin, denying that Indulgences could possibly be more than a release from the censures of the Church, he reduced these to the form of scholastic theses for discussion, and, on the 31st Oct., 1517, nailed them publicly to the door of the Church at Wittenberg, with a challenge to Tetzal and all others whom it might concern to come forward and publicly confute them. This slight, but significant, act of an almost obscure Monk was the outbreak of the Protestant Reformation ! Almost all Germany, who had no idea of allowing their money to be drained to Rome, took up the cause of Luther, who proceeded to denounce numerous other religious rites and ceremonies as errors and superstitions of the Romish Church.

The Pope, failing methods of conciliation, on the 15th of June, 1520, issued a Bull, in which Luther's opinions were condemned as heresies, and his books ordered to be publicly burnt. This proceeding of the Pope was instantly met by Luther, in a manner and with a spirit, that at once showed the intrepid and imperious character of the man. Causing a huge bonfire to be lit within the walls of Wittenberg he, on the 20th Dec., 1520, committed the Pope's Bull to the flames, together with the Canons and Decretals that set forth the Pope's supremacy.

All communion with the Church of Rome was thus forever renounced, and the reformed churches date their origin from this transaction.

Now, for many years previously to this outbreak, long before Luther was heard of, Erasmus had been working for the reformation of the Church; but a reform, not a revolution, had been his cherished idea, to be brought about by the advancement of learning, and the diffusion of a knowledge of the Scriptures, but to be so effected as not to create schism, and so that the unity of Christendom under one head should remain unimpaired. The reckless impulse of the dauntless Luther, who had sought to shatter the fabric of the Papacy at a single blow, simply shocked the nervous Erasmus, causing him to conclude that the advance of knowledge, through peaceful discussion, and the consequent reform of abuses, the improvement of morals, and extinction of superstitions, would be retarded, rather than aided, by Luther's defiant acts.

These illustrious characters were undoubtedly actuated originally by like motives, and were, at the outset, sincerely desirous of acting in concert, mutually discussing their respective views in a serious written correspondence; but Erasmus, unable to agree with the Augustinian theology of Luther, and terrified by his extreme course of action, had broken off from him, and now indeed stood aghast at the conflagration, moral and material, that was spreading from the burning of the Pope's Bull.

The religious questions at issue between Rome and the Reformers were thenceforth discussed in Diets or Political assemblies. The Reformers and their tenets were condemned by an edict of the Diet of Worms in 1521, which excommunicated Luther and all his adherents. At the first Diet of Spires in 1526 it was resolved that the cruel and persecuting Edict of Worms should not be carried out, but, at the Second Diet of Spires in 1529 the decision of its First Diet was ruthlessly reversed. The iniquitous decree of this Second Diet of Spires was

22 *Erasmus ; his Life, Works, and Influence*

solemnly *protested* against by the Elector of Saxony, the Landgrave of Hesse, the Prince of Anhalt, and other political powers and great men, whence, as you may remember, the Reformers derived their designation of Protestants, by which term all Christian sects that differ from Rome have ever since been styled.

The religious dissensions still continued, followed, as always has been the case, by holy wars! in which the excesses of German peasants and Dutch Anabaptists were extinguished in the blood of 80,000 victims; but they were ultimately brought to an end in the year 1555 in an imperial Diet, which decreed that Protestants who embraced the theological propositions known as "The Confession of Augsburg" should be entirely exempted from the jurisdiction of the Roman Pontiff. And thus at last was reached the first stage of what religious rulers have termed Toleration, which is, the insolent permission of men in power, granted to other men to think and believe on religious questions, and to worship the Deity, as their reason and conscience may dictate.

The grand Protestant Reformation, whose historical outline I have so barely sketched, in order to be understood must be considered under two aspects, the Theological and the Historical.

Theologically regarded, the Reformation was the result of a contest respecting the standard of Religious Truth, that is to say, whether it was to be found in the Church or in the Bible, and it has hitherto been, practically, very little more than a change of theological dogmas; for, though it effected the abolition of Saint Worship, and the ceremony of the Mass, the destruction of images, the eradication of Monkery and the free circulation of the Scriptures, it ended in imposing upon the human mind theological propositions stereotyped in ecclesiastical creeds, confessions of faith, and articles of Religion dialectically deduced from the language of an assumed infallible book, but substituted as bonds, in the

place of other theological propositions that had been dogmatically decreed by an alleged infallible church. Yet, to this extent, it was an immense step in advance, and even now, notwithstanding all our scientific and moral progress, a large majority of protestant Christians firmly adhere to the religious conclusions that were then arrived at, the basis of which, as the ultimate standard of theological faith, is thus forcibly described by Chillingworth writing in the year 1637:—

“The Bible I say, the Bible only, is the Religion of Protestants. Propose me anything out of this book, and require whether I believe it or no, and, seem it never so incomprehensible to human reason, I will subscribe it with hand and heart, as knowing no demonstration can be stronger than this—God hath said so—therefore it is true.”

Regarded historically, the essential principle of the great Reformation appears to be of a more profound and general nature. In the struggle that is ever progressing between the efforts of the human reason, on the one hand, to assert its own freedom, and, on the other hand, the coercion exercised over it by ecclesiastical power, a struggle that, in our day, is rapidly attaining the proportions of an impending conflict between Superstition and Science, the Reformation may be described as the sudden expansion of the human mind, invigorated through the revival of learning, to burst asunder the bonds of priestly tyranny; to assert the right of every man to exercise his own judgment in matters of the highest importance to him; to inquire into and discuss them, and to seek for Truth, unfettered by any dogmatic authority whatsoever, and in the freedom of his individual reason and conscience.

Seen from this historical point of view, it is not the dogmatic and unlettered Luther, “bellowing in bad Latin,” but rather, the cultured and rationalising Erasmus—

“Sapping a solemn creed with solemn sneer,
The lord of irony, that master spell—”

24 *Erasmus ; his Life, Works, and Influence*

who appears as the chief apostle of the Reformation, and the principles abounding in his writings to be those to which we now owe our present liberty of religious thought. He, though but the precursor of bolder prophets than himself, was the first distinguished enemy to ignorance and superstition, the first restorer of morality on the Gospel precepts. If, as was said at the time by the monks, "Erasmus laid the egg, but Luther hatched it," we may now add, that the continued and still soaring flight of its vigorous offspring is owing to the prolific power of the parent, and to those principles of nurture which the prophetic genius of Erasmus described. It is to the development of that culture of the understanding which he had at heart, and to the freedom of intellectual discussion which is its natural fruit, that the enlightened religious opinions of our own day are chiefly owing, and their resistless advance in this country, since the days of Chillingworth, is remarkably conspicuous, when read in the light of the judgment of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council delivered, in *Wilson v. Fendall*, the case of *Essays and Reviews*, on the 8th of February, 1864. By virtue of that well-advised and authoritative declaration of the law, all, both cleric and lay, are secured in their liberty, as respects the interpretation of the Bible, to accept "as parable, or poetry, or legend, the story of a serpent tempter, of an ass speaking with man's voice, of an arresting of the earth's motion, of water standing in a solid heap, of an universal deluge dried up by the wind, of the personality of Satan, together with many other alleged miraculous events." All are by that judgment legally entitled advisedly to maintain and affirm, that "the Scriptures are not entirely God's Word, though the Word of God is contained in Scripture, and that the dark patches of human passion and error that form a partial crust upon it, are to be separated and distinguished from the bright centre of spiritual truth within."

Now our present more accurate knowledge of the nature

and contents of the Bible has resulted from the progress of Biblical Criticism, a secular science, for which, in its origin, we are very much indebted to the great learning and labours of Erasmus. Almost the very first general demand that was created by the revival of letters was to obtain a sight of the Christian Scriptures, but at that time they positively had no existence for the people at large, for they were to be found only in manuscripts in the Greek, Syriac, Latin, and other ancient or oriental tongues, few in number, and buried in the sacristies of Churches, and the libraries of Monasteries and Universities scattered over Europe. It was the work of Erasmus, by means of unwearied travel and incessant toil, to copy and collate some of the more important of these, and to publish the first printed edition of the New Testament in its original tongue. This gigantic task accomplished, the rest has been comparatively easy. Thousands of copies of this first edition of the printed Christian Scriptures were issued and disseminated, and translations into the vernacular languages were immediately made, and then, to some extent, the people at large obtained the opportunity of reading them, and comparing with their simple spiritual and moral teaching the pompous ceremonial, and ritualistic apparatus, of the Romish Church. Other editions also rapidly followed. Industrious scholars vied with one another in a critical examination of ancient manuscripts, and in publishing the results. In 1550 the renowned printer Robert Stephens published his 3rd edition of the Greek Testament, which contained in the margin notes of the various readings of the manuscripts he had consulted. This, the first critical edition, was succeeded by others on a similar plan, the chief of which you will find specified in the syllabus in your hands, and a conclusion has been thereby arrived at, which, stated in its simplest form, you will probably think sufficiently striking, viz., That the careful collation of upwards of 600 ancient manuscripts of New Testament Writings exhibits a total

26 *Erasmus; his Life, Works, and Influence*

of more than 100,000 various readings, and the discovery of no single text that can be selected as immaculate.

Such was the condition of things which brought into existence that most important branch of modern scholarship, the secular science of Biblical Criticism, which may be defined as an intellectual method or discipline, based on reason and evidence, for applying the truths, the tests, the logic and canons of proof, of the more exact sciences to the investigation of the genuineness, the authenticity, and the true interpretation of the Christian Records. The light which is now flowing in upon us from the free, but conscientious, pursuit of this important study, especially in Germany, Holland, France, and England can hardly be exceeded. It has made its way in this country where, a generation or so ago, it would have been thought incredible. It has shown that our authorised version of the Bible, in many respects indeed most admirable, is nevertheless so imperfect, that two companies of translators appointed by authority are now engaged in revising and correcting it.

Of the various readings in the ancient manuscripts I will call your attention to one, as the discussion of it chiefly dates from the publication of Erasmus's Edition of the Greek Testament. It is the passage contained in the 7th and 8th verses of the 5th chapter of the first General Epistle of St John, known controversially as "The Text of the three heavenly witnesses." It is commonly found in the Latin, but not in the Greek Manuscripts.

In your Bibles you will find it in these words—"*in heaven the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. 8. And there are three that bear witness in earth.*" These words you observe are wanting in the original Greek. It is a text almost crucial with reference to the theological dogma of the Trinity, and the controversy respecting it has been, whether the Trinitarians interpolated it, or the Arians expunged it. The passage in question was omitted by Erasmus from

his first and second editions, but was inserted by him in his third edition, on the presumed authority of a single Greek manuscript, which was pressed upon him by Edward Lee, Chaplain to King Henry the 8th and afterwards Archbishop of York. This manuscript, the Codex Montfortianus, now in the library of Trinity College, Dublin, was not, apparently, ever seen by Erasmus himself, and is believed to have been forged between the years 1519 and 1522 for the express purpose of betraying Erasmus into making the desired alteration in his printed text. At any rate, since the decisive controversy between Professor Porson and Archdeacon Travis in the year 1790, respecting the genuineness of this text, the ablest critics are unanimous in rejecting it as spurious, all the Greek manuscripts of undoubted antiquity and integrity alike omitting it. As, notwithstanding such rejection, our authorised English version, though professing to be translated from the original Greek, at present retains it, it is a matter of expectant curiosity to see what our "New Testament Company of Translators" will do with it.

A concise account of some of the most ancient existing manuscripts of the New Testament will place in perhaps yet stronger light the source of, and necessity for, the science of biblical criticism.

The autographs or manuscripts that were written by the Apostles or their amanuenses have long since perished, and we have no information whatever concerning their history. No manuscript of the Scriptures now extant can be traced higher than the fourth century after Christ.

At the commencement of the Christian era the Latin, as a general language, was gradually supplanting the Greek, and it appears from the testimony of Augustin that the Latin Church possessed numerous versions of the Scriptures in the Latin language made at the first introduction of Christianity. Hence, of the most ancient now existing manuscripts of the New Testament Scrip-

tures, some are in Latin, and some are in Greek ; and it has not been possible to ascertain with certainty which of these are the oldest.

The interesting subject of the date, integrity, and authenticity of the numerous manuscripts of the Christian Scriptures is involved in so wide a controversy and variety of critical opinion, that even the few facts I shall allege in such observations as I can now venture to make must be accepted partly as probabilities only, in which very eminent scholars concur.

Of the most ancient and important existing Greek manuscripts, there are three, respectively known as the Codex Alexandrinus, the Codex Vaticanus, and the Codex Cantabrigiensis or Bezae ; and there are three, equally in some respects, important Latin manuscripts, probably as ancient, or perhaps more so, than the three Greek ones—viz., the Codex Brixianus, the Versio Vulgata, and the Codex Vercellensis. None of these manuscripts are perfect, and all differ more or less from one another. They exhibit, however, three distinct classes of text, respectively traceable to the territories whence they were originally derived—viz., Constantinople or Byzantium, Palestine, and Egypt or Alexandria. Viewed under this threefold distribution, the ancient Latin manuscripts coincide so remarkably, in style and arrangement of language, with the ancient Greek ones, that I can conveniently group them together in the following remarks.

The Greek Codex Alexandrinus is a manuscript preserved in our British Museum, where part of it may be seen open in a glass case. It consists of four volumes, three of which contain the Old, and the fourth the New Testament and other writings. Its Pedigree has been traced with singular success. It was a present to King Charles the First from Cyrillus Lucaris, Patriarch of Constantinople in the year 1628. Cyrillus found it in a monastery on Mount Athos, and took it with him to Alexandria, whence he brought it to this country. It

was written, according to tradition, by Thecla the martyrress, a noble Egyptian lady, shortly after the Council of Nice, which assembled in the year 325. Its delicate penmanship is characteristic of a female hand. It is written on vellum in uncial or capital letters, an acknowledged mark of high antiquity. A fac-simile of so much of this manuscript as contains the New Testament was published in London in 1786 by the late Dr. Woide, with types that were cast for the purpose.

The ancient Latin manuscript that corresponds with the Codex Alexandrinus in the Gospels is the Codex Brixianus, a manuscript of great beauty and of the most expensive character, being written on purple vellum in silver characters. It is attributed to the learned Philastrius Brixianus, who was Bishop of Brescia in Italy in the year 381, and it is preserved at Brescia in the church there of his name. It has often been inspected by scholars. The text represents the ancient Italic version of the Scriptures previously to its revision by St. Jerome, in the latter part of the 4th century.

These Codices Alexandrinus in the Gospels, and Brixianus entirely, are exemplars of what is termed the Constantinopolitan recension, or Byzantine Text.

The Greek Codex Vaticanus is a manuscript preserved in the Library of the Vatican at Rome. It is written on vellum in uncial letters, in three columns in each page, but without any division of chapters or verses. The uniform shape of the letters and colour of the ink seem to show that it was written throughout by the same hand. This manuscript contains, with some exceptions, the entire Bible, and is thought to contest the palm of antiquity with the Codex Alexandrinus already referred to. It has been repeatedly collated. Fac-similes of parts of it have, from time to time, been published, and an entire printed edition of it appeared a few years ago at Rome under the auspices of the Cardinal Angelo Mai—a version that has been received with a not unnatural shyness on the part of Protestant Divines.

30 *Erasmus ; his Life, Works, and Influence*

The ancient Latin manuscript that corresponds with the Greek Codex Vaticanus is the *Versio Vulgata*, which is a manuscript representing the Latin text as it was corrected by St. Jerome at the instance of Pope Damasus, who flourished about the year 366. It is also preserved in the library of the Vatican, and forms the foundation of the Roman Catholic authorised Bible, declared to be authentic by the Council of Trent, and which, as many of you know, is still, as it has always been, a book in the Latin language styled '*Biblia Sacra*.'

These *Codices Vaticanus* and *Versio Vulgata* are archetypes of the Palestine Text.

The Greek Codex *Cantabrigiensis* or *Bezae* is a manuscript preserved in the Library of Cambridge University (where it can be seen under a glass case), to which it was presented in the year 1581 by Theodore Beza, a French Protestant and refugee. In his letter of presentation Beza states that it was found in the monastery of St. Irenæus, at Lyons, where it had evidently lain for a long time. It contains only the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. It has, of course, been often collated, and an exact facsimile of it was published under the patronage of the University in the year 1793. It is also written in uncial letters, and is confessedly of a very high antiquity, written probably between the fifth and seventh centuries.

The ancient Latin manuscript that corresponds with the *Codex Cantabrigiensis* is the *Codex Vercellensis*, a manuscript that has been immemorially ascribed to Eusebius, Bishop of Verceli, as being the result of a revision of the then existing text, undertaken by him at the desire of his friend Pope Julius, who flourished about the year 331. It is deposited among the relics which are reverently preserved and shown in St. Eusebius's Church at Verceli in Piedmont. There is no reason to doubt its extreme antiquity, or its originality.

These *Codices Cantabrigiensis* and *Vercellensis*, and parts of the *Codex Alexandrinus* are now the most ancient existing source of the Egyptian or Alexandrine Text.

These several manuscripts, with the Codex Sinaiticus (discovered by Tischendorf in a monastery on Mount Sinai in 1859, probably the oldest MS. extant), and one of the ancient Syriac version (of which time does not permit further mention), carry the critical inquirer as near to the source of the sacred writings as it is now possible to ascend. Not one of them can be accepted as exhibiting an immaculate text. The utmost that an orthodox critic of the highest authority, the late eminent scholar Dr. Bentley, could say with reference to the textual veracity of Scripture is, that the real text of the sacred writers does not now (since the originals have been so long lost) lie in any single manuscript or edition, but is dispersed in them all. Whilst another accomplished critic, Dr. Nolan, in his learned work on the integrity of the Greek Vulgate, has declared, that "the notion of a literary identity between the present manuscripts of the inspired text and the originals which were published by the sacred writers is a vulgar error, with as little foundation in reason as justification in fact."

The truth seems to be that the Scriptures, in common with all other ancient writings, have been preserved and diffused by human transcription; hence the admission of mistakes has been unavoidable. These, increasing with the multitude of copies, necessarily produced a great variety of different readings, the majority of which, it should however be observed, are very minute, and, did they not relate to a book of which, though it be but a modern version of the lost original, it has again and again, and still continues to be, solemnly asserted by our evangelical theologians that every word of it is inspired, would be regarded as of a trifling and insignificant character.

Returning to the argument of the Lecture, I conclude by affirming that the essential Spirit of the Protestant Reformation, and its cardinal principle, are to be sought for under that which I have characterised as its his-

torical aspect, with which are associated the name and labours of Erasmus, and that they are manifested in the irrepressible aspirations of the human mind, enlightened by advancing Science, to establish the right of every individual to judge for himself, that is, to follow, in matters most deeply affecting his welfare and peace of mind, the decisions of his reason, and the dictates of his moral sense, thereby to emancipate himself from the yoke of ecclesiastical systems, and the thralldom of theological creeds, which superstition has invented, and sacerdotalism has transmitted, and which, all history assures us, have ever been enforced by the pestilent practice of Religious Persecution. This Spirit of the Reformation, however hostile to priestcraft, is friendly to Truth, by respecting the rights of conscience, and by encouraging the fearless advance of religious knowledge, through liberty of inquiry, freedom of thought, and outspoken honesty of expression.

And, whilst we have amongst us men like Darwin, Huxley, Tyndall, Carpenter, to keep alive the lamp of Science ; others, like Dean Stanley, and Bishop Colenso, to rival the illustrious Erasmus in sacred scholarship and in critical acumen ; others again, like the single-minded and unselfish Voysey, who, however much resenting the tyranny of the letter, are moved by the spirit of Truth to proclaim for all the loving Fatherhood of God, we may rest assured that the sceptre of knowledge must, eventually, be wholly wrested from the grasp of superstition, and that, meanwhile, the Progress of the Reformation cannot be stayed.