CHAPTER I.

THE QUATTROCENTO AND THE BEGINNINGS OF HUMANIST EDUCATION[1].

It is scarcely necessary to affirm the need of approaching the study of Education upon the method of historical enquiry. Like any other complex body of facts—whether in the form of an institution or of organised knowledge or beliefs—it may be attacked by way of direct analysis or by following down the lines of historical development and expansion. It may reasonably be argued that where circumstances admit of it, the historical method will always prove illuminating; that we shall understand chemistry the better for tracing the growth of the science from alchemy; or astronomy, by working down from Greek theories of the universe through mediaeval astrology to Copernicus and Kepler. But there can be no hesitation in agreeing that a complex phenomenon which is essentially concerned with the adaptation of conviction and knowledge to varying social states must be studied upon such method to be rightly apprehended. For "education" is an evolution; its principles, its organisations, and its practice are the products of a long series of experience; and of this experience certain historical areas at any rate can be closely studied, and in particular within the limits of modern Europe—Europe since Petrarch—can be very faithfully studied.

[1] In the notes throughout this book authorities are quoted under brief titles. The *full title* of each work referred to in the text or notes is given in the bibliographical appendix.

Such examination quickly reveals one obvious law. The aim and the curriculum of education are dependent upon and vary with the ideals and interests of successive ages. The school and the school-master only express the dominant intellectual and social aim of their time: they follow and obey; they do not lead or control. Nor is this truth inconsistent with the conservatism which so often marks educational progress. For the necessary adjustments in social order are never in automatic correspondence to the ideas which give rise to them. Strong personalities, an overmastering wave of religious or intellectual conviction may, and sometimes do, hasten the process. In education, as we well know, continuity of tradition is of the nature of a virtue; methods and instruments acquire intrinsic merit without regard to changing aims; the pressure of the outer world in normal times is but slowly felt. But in creative epochs the barriers no longer serve. The old fabric must adjust itself to the new need. If, entrenched behind traditional repute, or vested interests, it resist for a time (often enough with a sense of right), new organisation and reformed curriculum, expressing changed ideals, ultimately take rise. In whatever ways, the social demand is met and instruction corresponds to the dominant thought of the time. Trojan yields to Greek.

It is obvious that such a method of enquiry as is here suggested involves a wide connotation of the term education. For if education be treated as belief, thought, and social ideal in their application to the up-bringing of youth, the study of its history implies of necessity acquaintance with the ethical and religious concepts, the literature, the politico-social environment of the period whose schools and teachers are under review. Hence the claim is reasonably made that the history of education is primarily a liberal rather than a professional subject. It provides, indeed, a standpoint—and a particularly instructive one—from which to regard the culture of a given epoch. And, conversely, it is no less true that the edu-

cational ideas of such an era as the Italian Renaissance can be rightly apprehended only in the light of a sound perception of the related aspects of that most complex phenomenon. Nor would any one doubt that the attempt to grasp the significance of the education of an Athenian youth or of a well-born Roman boy, without a parallel knowledge of ancient Society, must end in producing a distorted impression of the facts. At the same time, the student of educational history may fairly contend that he is concerned, not with the genesis of the culture of a given age, nor even with the question of its abstract worth. It is enough that he takes the environment of a given epoch—spiritual, aesthetic, social—as he finds it set out for him by authorities, and examines its effects upon the educational end as then conceived, and the curricula, instruments, and methods by which the age attempted to realise it.

The Revival of Learning is but one factor in the Renaissance, although it is impossible to isolate it from the rest. For example, it was rendered possible by the general social progress of north Italian communities, and itself reacted upon their aesthetic development, each of these being further elements in the Renaissance. But the origins of that marvellous forward movement in northern Italy are outside the scope of this enquiry. It is enough to say that the soil was prepared, politically and socially, for a new spiritual advance, and that its form was determined by the simultaneous outburst of interest in the ancient history, language and literature of Rome.

The characteristics of the Revival will appear in the following chapters. They have been the subject of a vast literature, in which England has taken a not unworthy share. But it is perhaps right to admit that we have no historian or critic of this great age to be placed on equal rank with Burckhardt or Voigt, Reumont or Pastor. The work of the first named writer, which is worthily translated into English under the title of *The Civilisation of Italy in the time of the Renaissance*, is

the finest critical presentation of a complex culture-epoch in literature.

Two motives stand prominently forth as the sources from which was born the enthusiasm for antiquity which is the characteristic of the Quattrocento. The first is that of patriotic sentiment, the second aesthetic attraction. Both were united in Francis Petrarch in whom the nascent revolution found both its impulse and its first expression. It is of importance to recall the significance of the fact that the Italian of the Renaissance regarded himself as the direct heir of the glories of Rome. To restore the magnificence of Roman culture, and therewith the virtue of the Roman citizen and the Roman polity, was his inspiring aim. Patriotic feeling was not content with claiming past glories; it preached the duty of their renewal, and idealised the Augustan period as the Golden Age of mankind which could be brought back again by laborious study of the thoughts and deeds of its great exemplar. It was beyond doubt a sincere enthusiasm which inspired Petrarch, Salutati, Niccoli, Ambrogio, and the notable group of Florentines who stand on the confines of the old culture and the new. The difference between the humanism which they represent and the mediaeval instinct of reverence for Rome is partly that which divides a conscious and critical apprehension of historic continuity from a traditional dependence upon a mysterious, quasi-magical past. The distinction is that between Vergil as Bruni or Vittorino expounded the poet, and the myths of the later middle age of Vergil the necromancer. Partly, moreover, the new patriotism owed its characteristic to the objective standpoint which scholarship began to make possible, whereby the great past was seen in a certain detachment from accepted ideas of conduct and belief. The men of the early Renaissance were ready to initiate a new age, to take up the chain of historical unity where the barbarian had snapped it, to claim the entire antique culture as the due possession of modern Italy. Hence a vivid realisation of classical tradition, which rendered overt

imitation and reproduction of the past inevitable to that age and intelligible to ourselves. The outward form of life notably in building, in public speech, or in names must be made the symbol of the antique spirit by which humanity might again aspire to perfection. And no truer expression of the new ideal could be found than the forms and methods of the education of imperial Rome.

Yet the instinct of the eagerly advancing spirit of the north Italian people for grace and harmony, for rhythm, for the fullness of grave and dignified emotion, in which they were to find the deepest satisfaction of their aesthetic sense—this responded not less readily than the patriotic sentiment to the treasures, artistic and literary, of ancient Rome, as they were now for the first time rightly known. Like Petrarch, the educated Italian revelled in "eloquence," fell straightway under the dominion of the majestic Vergilian hexameter, yielded himself as to a caress to the flowing periods of the rhetorical moralist. The Augustan literature appealed to him like the early imperial sculpture and the proportioned spaciousness of Roman buildings. All was reasonable, comprehensible, charming the senses by virtue of line and form or of impressive rhythm. Thus the Revival revealed to him, with all the charm of the unexpected, both a new field of aesthetic enjoyment and an unconscious capacity for it. The finer minds of Florence had, before the fourteenth century was out, exhausted the culture of their time; they were, not knowing, groping for a fuller world. When, almost by accident, it opened out before them in the form of their historic past they leapt forward to make it their own. For the age was ripe: intelligence, artistic potentiality, many-sided human vitality, sheer vigour of personality, the social and material environment, were all ready, and could be satisfied with nothing less than the absorption of a whole civilisation. The genius of the time which might, under other circumstances, have pushed forward scientific enquiry, or religious reform, or national unity, or foreign exploration, was irresistibly drawn to

antiquity and to the great arts of speech, of building, of painting, in which this enthusiasm found constructive expression. Progress on other lines was suspended for a century; and the social order as it advanced—in the home or the state, in language, in fine art, in leisure, in education—took a cast in which antique suggestion was the dominant motive.

That this reliance upon ancient standards involved a profound spiritual revolution was clearly seen by a few, doubtfully suspected by others, but for the most part cheerfully ignored. In truth, the Christian presumption of the supremacy of the passive virtues had, broadly speaking, never been more than formally accepted by the Italian spirit. Hence the function of the Revival was primarily to reveal the Italian to himself, to exhibit the characteristics of his personality displayed on the most striking scale, viz., that of an entire culture, in process of rediscovery before him. Hence the Revival of ancient learning appealed to every genuine child of Italy. For in it he saw enforced his own innate self-assertion, his love of fame and distinction, his deep-seated sense of individuality. The virtue of the mediaeval Church was submission, suppression of personality. The Graeco-Roman ideal, as he interpreted it, was a diametrically opposite estimate of life. Development of personal force, with its corresponding assertion in society, in politics, in letters, or art, was in reality the *virtù* of the Renaissance. It illustrates its strength, and no less explains its foibles. The artifices of expression, skilful imitation of things worthy as a substitute for becoming worthy, was the inevitable outcome of the ideal when it had passed its noon.

Patriotic sentiment, aesthetic attraction, and the instinct for individuality united, therefore, in creating a new standard of "the knowledge that is of most worth" in the Italy of the Quattrocento. Progress meant a restoration of a past perfection, not the evolution of a new idea. To attain it, moreover, the methods of antiquity were not less authoritative than its achievements. The re-creation of ancient virtue, with

the prosperity, national pride, culture, and peace, which were its outcome, was to be attained in no other way than by restoring the training of Greece and Rome. There was, there could be, no question as to the sanction of such a restoration. 'Where lay the secret of Alexander's wisdom, of Trajan's virtue, but in the fact that Aristotle and Plutarch moulded their youth?' Hence the passionate belief that the new age depended first and foremost upon the adoption of a right education, of that education, in other words, which had been handed down, though now wholly forgotten, by the wise masters of antiquity.

The concept of a new education as the natural product of humanist feeling took its rise in those centres which were foremost in cultivating the study of antiquity. Florence, above all, with its associations of Dante and Boccaccio, its strenuous civic life, its progressive and ambitious merchants; Venice, the centre of trade with Greek lands; Padua, the meeting-place of scholars from every country of Europe, proud of its intimate associations with Petrarch, stand in nearer relation to the new studies at the beginning of the century. Chrysoloras was called from Constantinople to lecture in the revived University of Florence by invitation from the city in 1396, and stayed three years there, until driven away by Niccoli's jealousy. Vergerius and Barzizza, who had Vittorino da Feltre for his pupil, laid the foundation of the humanist tradition in the University of Padua. At Venice, patricians were ready to engage humanist teachers for their sons and, when Padua came under the dominion of the Republic, took a keen and intelligent interest in their new-won University, which was thereafter attended by a large proportion of the youth of the old Venetian houses.

There were forces making for the spread of classical enthusiasm which can be identified. Vergerius had written his most attractive treatise on the principles of the new education, *De Ingenuis Moribus*; Guarino translated Plutarch's tract on the bringing-up of children; Bruni and Francesco Barbaro

were framing the humanist ideal of instruction suitable for a woman. But above all other influences, the Council of Constance had indirectly brought about the re-discovery of forgotten works of classical antiquity—amongst them, Quintilian's *Education of the Orator* (1417), destined to prove the most significant of them all. With this fruitful research in south Germany, and notably in St Gallen, the name of Poggio, humanist and Apostolic Secretary, is for ever associated.

The influence of the treatise of Quintilian, great as it was in imperial Rome, was still more fruitful of results in the Renaissance. It is not too much to say that it was left to the Quattrocento to render him full appreciation. The mediaeval writers, who knew Quintilian only imperfectly through mutilated MSS., regarded him sometimes as a moralist, sometimes as an orator, and only here and there as a school-master. But humanists from Petrarch downwards seized his importance as the prime authority upon the Roman educational ideal. It should be noted that neither Plato nor Aristotle contributed to any marked extent (in the case of Vittorino only does this statement need qualification) to form the education of the Italian Revival before 1470. Greek literature on the subject was mainly represented by Plutarch, who writes as a Roman in Greek dress. Hence it is to Quintilian that M. Vegius, Poggio, Guarino, Vergerius, Palmieri or Alberti consistently look for guidance; as does also the most distinguished of all the teachers of the early Renaissance, Vittorino da Feltre[1].

[1] Authorities for the statements given in the text relative to Vittorino da Feltre are to be found in Woodward's *Vittorino da Feltre*, to which recourse may also be had for versions of the tracts of Vergerius, Bruni and B. Guarino mentioned in this chapter. Students will gather much valuable information from Bassi (on Quintilian) and Luzio-Renier (on humanism at the court of the Gonzagas) in the *Giorn. Stor. d. Lett. Ital.*; Gerini, Rösler, Creighton, Sandys (*Harvard Lectures* and the *History of Scholarship*) may also be added to the authorities enumerated in the bibliographical list of writers quoted in *Vittorino da Feltre*.

"Quintilianum ut optimum vitae atque eruditionis auctorem miris laudibus extollebat," says Platina of Vittorino; whose favourite pupil, Ognibene da Lonigo, became under his guidance a renowned authority upon the *Institutio Oratoria*. Indeed in the Mantuan School is to be found an exposition of the precepts of Quintilian adapted to modern Italian life. Every educator of the Revival, whether man of theory or man of practice, whether on Italian or Teutonic soil, Aeneas Sylvius or Patrizi, Agricola, Erasmus, Melanchthon, or Elyot, steeped himself in the text and in the spirit of this treatise.

Quintilian describes indeed what may appear at first sight to be a somewhat restricted type of training, viz., that of an orator[1]. But his ideal orator falls in nothing short of the concept of the highly educated man, with the added qualification that he is expert in forensic or public speaking. It was an education adapted to all who were born, or aspired, to place in society, with its consequent duty of social service. In Italy at the Renaissance, with its multiform political units, republics, city-states, highly-organised despotisms, their diplomacies, and civil services, a large proportion of the upper and educated class was inevitably concerned in duties and careers in which a sound intellectual training, coupled with skill in expression, was essential to success. Oratory then, not less than in ancient Rome of the period of transition, was the practical exhibition of knowledge and personality in its application to affairs. Philosophy and "eruditio" generally were handmaids to the many-sided arts of government. Hence Cato defined an orator as a man of sincerity expert in speaking. Only a "good man" can be a perfect orator. The name of the Orator is sacred, and his ideal takes the place filled in Stoicism by the "perfectly wise man." Quintilian, therefore, appealed to the moralist from his insistence on truthfulness as the foundation of education; to the man of learning from his

[1] Upon Roman education, as it actually was, Wilkins' *Roman Education* should be read.

demand that the orator must be versed in the entire circle of available knowledge, to the man of affairs from the ultimate end which he set before his pupils, that they should become competent, as logical and persuasive speakers, to place both character and wisdom at the service of the community. Hence one characteristic note of early humanism, that knowledge is desirable in proportion to the use which can be publicly made of it, and that wisdom hoarded up and not expressed partakes of selfishness. From such an attitude to that of approval of display for display's sake the step is not a far one.

It is necessary thus to lay stress upon the position of the humanist school-masters in relation to Quintilian. The education of the Italian Revival has often appeared as a sudden growth, abnormal in its swift ascent to completeness. But we must bear in mind that early in the fifteenth century Quintilian was fully available: and that his judgment upon instruction was accepted as final and authoritative where circumstances admitted of its application. The secret of antique perfection—literary and political—was held to be embedded in the doctrines of Roman education. It is typical of the general feeling that Erasmus (1512) should apologise for touching upon methods or aims in teaching "seeing that Quintilian has said in effect the last word on the matter."

Vittorino was born in 1378 at Feltre, in the Venetian Alps, and was a student at Padua when the influence of P. P. Vergerius began to make itself felt in the University. Vittorino worked under, and afterwards with, Gasparino Barzizza, the pioneer scholar of the Renaissance, who from 1407 professed for several years Latin Letters at Padua. From Guarino da Verona, whose work is dealt with in a subsequent chapter, Vittorino learnt Greek, during intermittent residence at Venice between 1414 and 1418. Before 1420 he set up a boarding-house at Padua, for students to whom he acted as tutor in Latin and Mathematics, in which subject he was an exceptionally