

Irish Church Quarterly

The Movement towards Catholic Reform in the Early Sixteenth Century by George V. Jourdan

Review by: H. C. L.

The Irish Church Quarterly, Vol. 8, No. 32 (Oct., 1915), pp. 347-349

Published by: [Irish Church Quarterly](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30067550>

Accessed: 14/06/2014 22:37

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Irish Church Quarterly is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Irish Church Quarterly*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

much knowledge on the part of the hearers. No doubt the lessons read in Church are often unprofitable for the want of some such explanation. But these notes are too critical; their appeal is limited too much to the intellect, and they contain too little that is of human interest, to hold the attention of an average congregation.

W. P. W.

THE MOVEMENT TOWARDS CATHOLIC REFORM IN THE EARLY SIXTEENTH CENTURY. By George V. Jourdan. (John Murray.) 7s. 6d. net.

It is pleasant to find a country clergyman of the Church of Ireland bringing out a book which shows wide reading and diligent research. This book deals with a most interesting and momentous period of Church history, the period immediately preceding the Reformation. It is written in an attractive style, and shows an intelligent appreciation of the attitude of those men whom Dr. Jourdan calls "Catholic Reformers."

At the close of the 15th century the Western Church had reached perhaps its lowest depths. Gross abuses and superstitions were rampant. In the papal chair was seated Rodrigo Borgia, Alexander VI., a man utterly dissolute in morals, and in religion a pagan. Small wonder that thoughtful and religious men in every country longed ardently for reform, while the revived study of the New Testament showed them how great was the contrast between the Church as it then existed in Western Europe and the Church of the Apostles.

Of these Catholic Reformers, the most notable were John Colet in England, Erasmus in Holland, Lefèvre in France, and Reuchlin in Germany. The precursor of these Reformers was the great Florentine preacher, Savonarola. "He was the first to translate into spoken language the thoughts that were taking shape in the minds of his contemporaries." Dr. Jourdan believes that Colet was directly influenced by Savonarola, although in his writings he never mentions the Florentine's name. About the end of 1496 Colet began to lecture on the Bible at Oxford in a manner quite unusual in those days. The scholastic method of interpretation was to select a text and treat it apart from its context, applying it in a number of senses, allegorical, mystical, and symbolical. Colet in his lectures sought to bring out the original meaning of the writer. "He lent a wholly new charm to the Pauline Epistles. He brought into clearness the course of the Apostle's thoughts, and narrated the events of the Apostle's life." While still busily occupied in the work of the exposition of the Scriptures, Colet was in 1505 nominated by Henry VII. to the Deanery of S. Paul's, London. "Hitherto all his powers had been exerted in the furtherance of Biblical studies. Now

there came upon him in addition the burden of correcting ecclesiastical abuses." The worldliness and covetousness of the clergy of the Cathedral Chapter, and their neglect of their duties were notorious. This state of things Colet endeavoured to correct, with the result that "his tenure of the Deanery was one prolonged conflict between the ideals of the Dean and the practices of the clergy." Colet's name is chiefly remembered as the founder, or perhaps rather the reorganizer, of the Grammar School of S. Paul's. The number of scholars was limited to 153, Dr. Jourdan does not know on what grounds, but tradition has it that it was to correspond with the number of fishes that were drawn to land by St. Peter.

By far the greatest of the Catholic Reformers was the Dutch scholar Erasmus, who was through life a close friend of Colet. Erasmus first visited England in 1499 and remained for some time at Oxford, where he attended some of Colet's lectures on the Bible. "Too much emphasis can hardly be laid on the influence of Colet's mind over Erasmus." No man did so much to prepare the way for the Reformation as Erasmus. Colet's work was entirely confined to England, but the influence of Erasmus was European. In printing the Greek text of the New Testament, and in bringing out a new edition of the Latin Vulgate, Erasmus laid the foundation of the science of textual criticism. In his *Annotations to the New Testament* and other works he did not attack the doctrines then considered orthodox, but "he voices shades of thought that only found full expression in the teaching of the later Protestant Reformers."

Jacques Lefèvre, though he wielded enormous influence in his day, has been now almost forgotten. His work in France was very similar to that of Colet in England, and like Colet he was the first to direct the minds of his fellow countrymen to the intelligent study of the Scriptures. Dr. Jourdan points out an interesting parallel between the attitude of such men as Colet and Lefèvre to the Catholic Church of that day, and that of those scholars and critics who are now called "Modernists." "We wonder, sometimes impatiently, why the Modernists do not leave the communion of Rome. But the lesson from their life, as well as from Lefèvre's, is surely that a passion for sincerity and truth in religious teaching and practice does not necessarily involve that tendency to 'split,' which has disintegrated and weakened the Churches of the Reformation."

The chief German precursor of the Reformation was John Reuchlin, who was the first to introduce the study of the Old Testament in the original Hebrew to Western Europe. Reuchlin was the pioneer of Biblical study in Germany. The Bible was in those days practically an unknown book. Martin Luther never saw a Bible till he was twenty years of age, for, as Rashdall says, "a student in Arts would be as little likely to read the

Bible, as he would to dip into Justinian or Hippocrates." It was the revived study of the Bible that was mainly instrumental in bringing about the Reformation.

These men, and others like them, died in the communion of the Roman Catholic Church, although in many things they sympathized with the Protestants. In one respect they failed in their aim, which was to bring about a reform of the abuses which were rife in the Church; and their failure proves that the great schism of the Reformation was inevitable, if human thought was to be liberated from tyranny, and religion from the yoke of superstition.

We congratulate Dr. Jourdan on his work, and heartily commend it to our readers.

H. C. L.

MAGAZINES.

The Hibbert Journal. (July. Williams and Norgate.) Prince Eugene Troubetzkoy: "Unity beneath the Present Discord" (suggestive); Prof. Norman Smith: "The Moral Sanction of Force"; Cloudesley Brereton: "A Spiritual Balance-sheet of the War" (interesting); S. M. Mitra: "War Philosophy, Hindu and Christian" (good); Colonel A. Keene: "War and How to Meet It: The Views of British Thinkers"; J. A. R. Marriott: "The War and the Theory of the State"; Joseph H. Crooker: "America's Bondage to the German Spirit" (suggestive); Eva Madden: "Behind the Scenes"; Bernard Holland, C.B.: "Some Inscriptions"; Canon J. M. Wilson: "Christ's Sanction as well as Condemnation of War" (unconvincing); Prof. E. A. Sonnenschein: "The Golden Rule and its Application to Present Conditions."

The Interpreter. (July. R. Scot.) T. H. Bindley: "The Relation of the Fourth Commandment to the Christian Sunday"; A. C. Bouquet: "Christology in the Making"; The Author of "Pro Christo et Ecclesia": "Our Conception of God"; The Editor: "By Products of War: Fellowship."

Expository Times. (July—October. Clark.) M. Gaster: "The Lord of Hosts"; James Baikie: "Pre-Hellenic Civilization"; A. E. Garvie: "The Pioneer of Faith and of Salvation. A Study of the Personal Experience of Jesus as presented in the Epistle to the Hebrews"; E. W. Hirst: "The Implications of the Golden Rule"; Cavendish Moxon: "Jesus' Teaching and Modern Thought."

The Modern Churchman. (July—September. W. Parr.) H. Symonds: "The Kikuyu Statement"; H. H. Henson: "Chris-