The OXFORD REFORMERS

by FREDERIC SEEBOHM

EVERY MAN WILL GO WITH THEE BE THY GUIDE

IN THY MOST NEED TO GO BY THY SIDE

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PREFACE

IN preparing *The Oxford Reformers* for publication in Everyman's Library, it has been thought best to omit many of the notes and some of the appendices. Those have been retained which explained or in any way added to the matter contained in the text. Those which gave the original Latin of translations or referred the reader to sources and authorities, have been omitted. In other respects this volume is reprinted from the third edition (published by Messrs. Longmans, Green & Co.), to which students must still be referred.

It is necessary, I think, to begin with this explanation, because my father's methods in all his historical work were those of a student, gathering his facts from original sources and justifying his conclusions by careful reference to them.

But in saying this, I wish to avoid giving the impression that his object was confined to providing an accurate historical record of events. It was from a full and practical life that he devoted what time he could to literary and historical research, and in this he was influenced by the belief that a better understanding of the past would shed light on the problems of the present and of the future. His days were occupied with business and with the affairs of Local Administration and Education. Throughout his life he took a serious and thoughtful part in politics, and was only prevented by the claims of business from entering Parliament.

In the endeavours and ideals that underlay the fellow-work of Colet, Erasmus, and More, described in this volume, he found much that corresponded with the desires and difficulties of our own day.[1] Added to this, his study of their thoughts and actions gave him a real admiration for their independence, and love of their characters; his vivid historical insight made him feel they had been almost his companions and friends.

The Oxford Reformers was first published in 1867, and was

[1] How much this was so the reader will see clearly expressed in the last paragraph of ch. xvi. § vii. on p. 311.

reprinted in a revised and enlarged edition in 1869. It was followed by a general historical review of the period under the title of *The Era of the Protestant Revolution*, contributed to the series of little volumes called "Epochs of Modern History." At intervals of about ten years, my father published his three studies in economic history, viz. *The English Village Community*, *The Tribal System in Wales*, and *Tribal Custom in Anglo-Saxon Law*.

The same definite purpose runs through them all, of enabling the Past to throw light upon the Present which has grown out of it. The widening of Christendom, which the Oxford Reformers welcomed in the name of the commonweal of the people as a new era, my father described as one wave of the advancing tide of modern civilisation, "the advance in the art of living together in civil society." In almost the last paragraph he ever wrote—at the end of his researches on the historical importance of customary land measures, which he did not live to see published—there is an echo, after forty years, of these very words:

"So by the labours of many fellow-workers may we hope some day to understand better than we do what is involved in the toilsome path which humanity has had in the past, and it would seem still has, to tread towards the goal of civilisation—the art of living together in civilised society."

HUGH E. SEEBOHM.

POYNDERS END, HITCHIN.

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THE OXFORD REFORMERS
COLET, ERASMUS, AND MORE

CHAPTER I

I. JOHN COLET RETURNS FROM ITALY TO OXFORD (1496)

IT was probably in Michaelmas term of 1496 that the announcement was made to doctors and students of the University of Oxford that John Colet, a late student, recently returned from Italy, was about to deliver a course of public and gratuitous lectures in exposition of St. Paul's Epistles.

This was an event of no small significance and perhaps of novelty in the closing years of that last of the Middle Ages; not only because the Scriptures for some generations had been practically ignored at the Universities, but still more so because the would-be lecturer had not as yet entered deacon's orders, nor had obtained, or even tried to obtain, any theological degree. It is true that he had passed through the regular academical course at Oxford, and was entitled, as a Master of Arts, to lecture upon any other subject. But a degree in Arts did not, it would seem, entitle the graduate to lecture upon the Bible.

It does not perhaps follow from this, that Colet was guilty of any flagrant breach of university statutes, which, as a graduate in Arts, he must have sworn to obey. The very extent to which real study of the Scriptures had become obsolete at Oxford, may possibly suggest that even the statutory restrictions on Scripture lectures may have become obsolete also.

Before the days of Wiclif, the Bible had been free, and Bishop Grosseteste could urge Oxford students to devote their *best morning hours* to Scripture lectures. But an unsuccessful revolution ends in tightening the chains which it ought to have broken. During the fifteenth century the Bible was *not* free. And Scripture lectures, though still retaining a nominal place in the academical course of theological study, were thrown into the background by the much greater relative importance of the lectures on "the Sentences." What Biblical lectures were given were probably of a very formal character.

The announcement by Colet of this course of lectures on St. Paul's Epistles was in truth, so far as can be traced, the first overt act in a movement commenced at Oxford in the direction of practical Christian reform—a movement, some of the results of which, had they been gifted with prescience, might well have filled the minds of the Oxford doctors with dismay.

They could not indeed foresee that those very books of "the Sentences," over which they had pored so intently for so many years, in order to obtain the degree of Master in Theology, and at which students were still patiently toiling with the same object in view—they could not foresee that, within forty years, these very books would "be utterly banished from Oxford," ignominiously "nailed up upon posts" as waste paper, their loose leaves strewn about the quadrangles until some sportsman should gather them up and thread them on a line to keep the deer within the neighbouring woods. They could not, indeed, foresee the end of the movement then only beginning, but still, the announcement of Colet's lectures was likely to cause them some uneasiness. They may well have asked, whether, if the exposition of the Scriptures were to be really revived at Oxford, so dangerous a duty should not be restricted to those duly authorised to discharge it? Was every stripling who might travel as far as Italy and return infected with the "new learning" to be allowed to set up himself as a theological teacher, without graduating in divinity, and without waiting for decency's sake for the bishop's ordination?

On the other hand, any Oxford graduate choosing to adopt so irregular a course, must have been perfectly aware that it would be one likely to stir up opposition, and even ill-will, amongst the older divines; and it may be presumed that he hardly would have ventured upon such a step without knowing that there were at the university others ready to support him.

II. THE RISE OF THE NEW LEARNING (1453-92)

In all ages, more or less, there is a new school of thought rising up under the eyes of an older school of thought. And probably in all ages the men of the old school regard with some little anxiety the ways of the men of the new school. Never is it more likely to be so than at an epoch of sharp transition, like that on which the lot of these Oxford doctors had been cast.

We sometimes speak as though our age were *par excellence* the age of progress. *Theirs* was much more so if we duly con-

sider it. The youth and manhood of some of them had been spent in days which may well have seemed to be the latter days of Christendom. They had seen Constantinople taken by the Turks. The final conquest of Christendom by the infidel was a possibility which had haunted all their visions of the future. Were not Christian nations driven up into the north-western extremity of the known world, a wide pathless ocean lying beyond? Had not the warlike creed of Mahomet steadily encroached upon Christendom, century by century, stripping her first of her African churches, from thence fighting its way northward into Spain? Had it not maintained its foothold in Spain's fairest provinces for seven hundred years? And from the East was it not steadily creeping over Europe, nearer and nearer to Venice and Rome, in spite of all that crusades could do to stop its progress? If, though little more than half the age of Christianity, it had already, as they reckoned it had, drawn into its communion five times [1] as many votaries as there were Christians left, was it a groundless fear that now in these latter days it might devour the remaining sixth? What could hinder it?

A Spartan resistance on the part of united Christendom perhaps might. But Christendom was not united, nor capable of Spartan discipline. Her internal condition seemed to show signs almost of approaching dissolution. The shadow of the great Papal schism still brooded over the destinies of the Church. That schism had been ended only by a revolution which, under the guidance of Gerson, had left the Pope the constitutional instead of the absolute monarch of the Church. The great heresies of the preceding century had, moreover, not yet been extinguished. The very names of Wiclif and Huss were still names of terror. Lollardy had been crushed, but it was not dead. Everywhere the embers of schism and revolution were still smouldering underneath, ready to break out again, in new fury, who could tell how soon?

It was in the ears of this apparently doomed generation that the double tidings came of the discovery of the Terra Nova in the West, and of the expulsion of the infidel out of Spain.

The ice of centuries suddenly was broken. The universal

[1] "The Turks being in number five times more than we Christians." And again, "Which multitude is not the fifth part so many as they that consent to the law of Mahomet."—*Works of Tyndale and Frith*, ii. pp. 55 and 74.

despondency at once gave way before a spirit of enterprise and hope; and it has been well observed, men began to congratulate each other that their lot had been cast upon an age in which such wonders were achieved.

Even the men of the old school could appreciate these facts in a fashion. The defeat of the Moors was to them a victory to the Church. The discovery of the New World extended her dominion. They gloried over both.

But these outward facts were but the index to an internal upheaving of the mind of Christendom, to which they were blind. The men who were guiding the great external revolution—reformers in their way—were blindly stamping out the first symptoms of this silent upheaving. Gerson, while carrying reform over the heads of Popes, and deposing them to end the schism or to preserve the unity of the Church, was at the same moment using all his influence to crush Huss and Jerome of Prague. Queen Isabella and Ximenes, Henry VII. and Morton, while sufficiently enlightened to pursue maritime discovery, to reform after a fashion the monasteries under their rule, and ready even to combine to reform the morals of the Pope himself in order to avert the dreaded recurrence of a schism,[1] were not eager to pursue these purposes without the sanction of Papal bulls, and without showing their zeal for the Papacy by crushing out free thought with an iron heel and zealously persecuting heretics, whether their faith were that of the Moor, the Lollard, or the Jew.

The fall of Constantinople, which had sounded almost like the death-knell of Christendom, had proved itself in truth the chief cause of her revival. The advance of the Saracens upon Europe had already told upon the European mind. The West had always had much to learn from the East. It was, for instance, by translation from Arabic versions that Aristotle had gained such influence over those very same scholastic minds to which his native Greek was an abomination.

This further triumph of infidel arms also influenced Christian thought. Eastern languages and Eastern philosophies began to be studied afresh in the West. Exiles who had fled into Italy

[1] See British Museum Library, under the head "Garcilaso," No. 1445, g 23, being the draft of private instructions from Ferdinand and Isabella to the special English Ambassador, and headed, "Year 1498. The King and Queen concerning the correction of Alexander VI." The original Spanish MS. was in the hands of the late B. B. Wiffen, Esq., of Mount Pleasant, near Woburn, and an English translation of this important document was reprinted by him in the "Life of Valdes," prefixed to a translation of his *CX Considerations*. Lond. Quaritch, 1865, p. 24.

had brought with them their Eastern lore. The invention of printing had come just in time to aid the revival of learning. The printing press was pouring out in clear and beautiful type new editions of the Greek and Latin classics. Art and science with literature sprang up once more into life in Italy; and to Italy, and especially to Florence, which, under the patronage of the splendid court of Lorenzo de' Medici, seemed to form the most attractive centre, students from all nations eagerly thronged.

It was of necessity that the sudden reproduction of the Greek philosophy and the works of the older Neo-Platonists in Italy should sooner or later produce a new crisis in religion. A thousand years before, Christianity and Neo-Platonism had been brought into the closest contact. Christianity was then in its youth—comparatively pure—and in the struggle for mastery had easily prevailed. Not that Neo-Platonism was indeed a mere phantom which vanished and left no trace behind it. By no means. Through the pseudo-Dionysian writings it not only influenced profoundly the theology of mediæval mystics, but also entered largely even into the Scholastic system. It was thus absorbed into Christian theology though lost as a philosophy.

Now, after the lapse of a thousand years, the same battle had to be fought again. But with this terrible difference; that now Christianity, in the impurest form it had ever assumed —a grotesque perversion of Christianity—had to cope with the purest and noblest of the Greek philosophies. It was, therefore, almost a matter of course that, under the patronage of Lorenzo de' Medici, the Platonic Academy under Marsilio Ficino should carry everything before it. Whether the story were literally true of Ficino himself or not, that he kept a lamp burning in his chamber before a bust of Plato, as well as before that of the Virgin, it was at least symbolically true of the most accomplished minds of Florence.

Questions which had slept since the days of Julian and his successors were discussed again under Sixtus IV. and Innocent VIII. The leading minds of Italy were once more seeking for a reconciliation between Plato and Christianity in the works of the pseudo-Dionysius, Macrobius, Plotinus, Proclus, and other Neo-Platonists. There was the same anxious endeavour, as a thousand years earlier, to fuse all philosophies into one. Plato and Aristotle must be reconciled, as well as Christianity and Plato. The old world was becoming once more the possession of the new. It was felt to be the recovery of a lost inheritance, and everything of antiquity, whether Greek, Roman, Jewish,

Persian, or Arabian, was regarded as a treasure. It was the fault of the Christian Church if the grotesque form of Christianity held up by her to a reawakening world seemed less pure and holy than the aspirations of Pagan philosophers. It would be by no merit of hers, but solely by its own intrinsic power, if Christianity should retain its hold upon the mind of Europe, in spite of its ecclesiastical defenders.

Christianity brought into disrepute by the conduct of professed Christians, was compelled to rest as of old upon its own intrinsic merits, to stand the test of the most searching scientific criticisms which Florentine philosophers were able to apply to it. Men versed in Plato and Aristotle were not without some notion of the value of intrinsic evidence, and the methods of inductive inquiry. Ficino himself thought it well, discarding the accustomed scholastic interpreters, to turn the light of his Platonic lamp upon the Christian religion. From his work, *De Religione Christianâ*, dedicated to Lorenzo de' Medici, and written in 1474, some notion may be gained of the method and results of his criticism. That its nature should be rightly understood is important in connection with the history of the Oxford Reformers.

Ficino commences his argument by demonstrating that *religion* is natural to man; and having, on Platonic authority, pointed out the truth of the one common religion, and that all religions have something of good in them, he turns to the Christian religion in particular. Its truth he tries to prove by a chain of reasoning of which the following are some of the links.

He first shows that "the disciples of Jesus were not deceivers," and he supports this by examining, in a separate chapter, "in what spirit the disciples of Christ laboured;" concluding, after a careful analysis of the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles, that they did not seek their *own* advantage or honour but "the glory of *Christ* alone." Then he shows that "the disciples of Christ were not *deceived* by any one," and that the Christian religion was founded, not in human wisdom, but "in the wisdom and power of God;" that Christ was "no astrologer," but "derived his authority from God." He adduced further the evidence of miracles, in which he had no difficulty in believing, for he gave two instances of miracles which had occurred in Florence only four years previously, and in which he declared to Lorenzo de' Medici, that, philosopher as he was, he believed. After citing the testimony of some Gentile writers, and of the Coran of the Mahometans, and discussing in the light of Plato, Zoroaster,

and Dionysius, the doctrine of the "logos," and the fitness of the incarnation, he showed that the result of the coming of Christ was that men are drawn to love with their whole heart a God who in his immense love had himself become man. After dwelling on the way in which Christ lightened the burden of sin, on the errors he dispelled, the truths he taught, and the example he set, Ficino proceeds in two short chapters to adduce the testimony of the "Sibyls." This was natural to a writer whose bias it was to regard as genuine whatever could be proved to be ancient. But it is only fair to state that he relies much more fully and discusses at far greater length the prophecies of the ancient Hebrew prophets, vindicating the Christian rendering of certain passages in the Old Testament against the Jews, who accused the Christians of having perverted and depraved them. He concludes by asserting, that if there be much in Christianity which surpasses human comprehension, this is a proof of its divine character rather than otherwise. These are his final words. "If these things be divine, they must exceed the capacity of any human mind. Faith (as Aristotle has it) is the foundation of knowledge. By faith alone (as the Platonists prove) we ascend to God. 'I believed (said David) and therefore have I spoken.' Believing, therefore, and approaching the fountain of truth and goodness we shall drink in a wise and blessed life."

Thus was the head of the Platonic Academy at Florence turning a critical eye upon Christianity, viewing it very possibly too much in the light of the lamp kept continually burning before the bust of Plato, but still, I think, honestly endeavouring upon its own intrinsic evidence and by inductive methods, to establish a reasonable belief in its divine character in minds sceptical of ecclesiastical authority, and over whom the dogmatic methods of the Schoolmen had lost their power.[1] Nevertheless Ficino, as yet, was probably more of an intellectual than of a practical Christian, and Christianity was not likely to take hold of the mind of Italy—of re-awakening Europe—through any merely philosophical disquisitions. The lamp of Plato might throw light on Christianity, but it would not light up Christian fire in other souls. For Christianity is a thing of the heart, not only of the head. Soul is kindled only by soul, says

[1] Villari, in his *Life and Times of Savonarola*, book i. chap. iv., does not seem to me to give, by any means, a fair abstract of the *De Religione Christiana*, though his chapter on Ficino is valuable in other respects. I have used the edition of Paris, 1510.

Carlyle; and to teach religion the one thing needful is to find a man who *has* religion.[1] Should such a man arise, a man himself on fire with Christian love and zeal, his torch might light up other torches, and the fire be spread from torch to torch. But, until such a man should arise, the lamp of philosophy must burn alone in Florence. Men might come from far and near to listen to Marsilio Ficino — to share the patronage of Lorenzo de' Medici, to study Plato and Plotinus—to learn how to harmonise Plato and Aristotle, to master the Greek language and philosophies—to drink in the spirit of reviving learning—but, of true Christian *religion*, the lamp had not yet been lit at Florence, or if lit it was under a bushel.

Already Oxford students had been to Italy, and returned full of the new learning. Grocyn, one of them, had for some time been publicly teaching Greek at Oxford, not altogether to the satisfaction of the old divines, for the Latin of the Vulgate was, in their eye, the orthodox language, and Greek a Pagan and heretical tongue. Linacre, too, had been to Italy and returned, after sharing with the children of Lorenzo de' Medici the tuition of Politian and Chalcondyles.[2]

These men had been to Italy and had returned, to all appearances, mere humanists. Now five years later Colet had been to Italy and had returned, *not* a mere humanist, but an earnest Christian reformer, bent upon giving lectures, not upon Plato or Plotinus, but upon St. Paul's Epistles. What had happened during these four years to account for the change?

III. COLET'S PREVIOUS HISTORY (1496)

John Colet was the eldest son of Sir Henry Colet, a wealthy merchant, who had been more than once Lord Mayor of London, and was in favour at the court of Henry VII. His father's position held out to him the prospect of a brilliant career. He had early been sent to Oxford, and there, having passed through the regular course of study in all branches of scholastic philosophy, he had taken his degree of Master of Arts.

On the return of Grocyn and Linacre from Italy full of the new learning, Colet had apparently caught the contagion. For

[1] *Chartism*, chap. x. " Impossible."

[2] The period of the stay of Grocyn and Linacre in Italy was probably between 1485 and 1491. They therefore probably returned to England before the notorious Alexander VI. succeeded, in 1492, to Innocent VIII. *See* Johnson's *Life of Linacre*, pp. 103-150.

we are told he "eagerly devoured Cicero, and carefully examined the works of Plato and Plotinus."

When the time had come for him to choose a profession, instead of deciding to follow up the chances of commercial life, or of royal favour, he had resolved to take Orders.

The death of twenty-one brothers and sisters, leaving him the sole survivor of so large a family, may well have given a serious turn to his thoughts. But inasmuch as family influence was ready to procure him immediate preferment, the path he had chosen need not be construed into one of great self-denial. It was not until long after he had been presented to a living in Suffolk and a prebend in Yorkshire, that he left Oxford, probably in or about 1494, for some years of foreign travel.[1]

The little information which remains to us of what Colet did on his continental journey is very soon told.

He went first into France and then into Italy. On his way there, or on his return journey, he met with some German monks, of whose primitive piety and purity he retained a vivid recollection. In Italy he ardently pursued his studies. But he no longer devoted himself to the works of Plato and Plotinus. In Italy, the hotbed of the Neo-Platonists, he "*gave himself up*" (we are told) "*to the study of the Holy Scriptures*," after having, however, first made himself acquainted with the works of the Fathers, including amongst them the mystic writings then attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite. He acquired a decided preference for the works of Dionysius, Origen, Ambrose, Cyprian, and Jerome over those of Augustine. Scotus, Aquinas, and other Schoolmen had each shared his attention in due course. He is said also to have diligently studied during this period Civil and Canon Law, and especially what Chronicles and English classics he could lay his hands on; and his reason for doing so is remarkable—that he might, by familiarity with them, polish his style, and so prepare himself for the great work of preaching the Gospel in England.

What it was that had turned his thoughts in this direction no record remains to tell. Yet the knowledge of what was passing in Italy, while Colet was there, surely may give a clue, not likely to mislead, to the explanation of what otherwise might remain wholly unexplained. To have been in Italy when Grocyn and Linacre were in Italy—between the years 1485 and 1491—was, as we have said, to have drunk at the fountain-head of

[1] See list of Colet's preferments in the Appendix.

reviving learning, and to have fallen under the fascinating influence of Lorenzo de' Medici and the Platonic Academy—an influence more likely to foster the selfish coldness of a semi-pagan philosophy than to inspire such feelings as those with which Colet seems to have returned from *his* visit to Italy.[1]

But in the meantime Lorenzo had died, the tiara had changed hands, and events were occurring during *Colet's* stay in Italy—probably in 1495—which may well have stirred in his breast the earnest resolution to devote his life to the work of religious and political reform.

For to have been in Italy while Colet was in Italy was to have come face to face with Rome at the time when the scandals of Alexander VI. and Cæsar Borgia were in every one's mouth; to have been brought into contact with the very worst scandals which had ever blackened the ecclesiastical system of Europe, at the very moment when they reached their culminating point.

On the other hand, to have been in Italy when Colet was in Italy was to have come into contact with the first rising efforts at Reform.

If Colet visited Florence as Grocyn and Linacre had done before him, he must have come into direct contact with Savonarola while as yet his fire was holy and his star had not entered the mists in which it set in later years.

Recollecting what the great Prior of San Marco was—what his fiery and all but prophetic preaching was—how day after day his burning words went forth against the sins of high and low; against tyranny in Church or State; against idolatry of philosophy and neglect of the Bible in the pulpit; recollecting how they told their tale upon the conscience of Lorenzo de' Medici, and of his courtiers as well as upon the crowds of Florence;—can the English student, it may well be asked, have passed through all this uninfluenced? If he visited Florence at all he must have heard the story of Savonarola's interview with the dying Lorenzo; he must have heard the common talk of the people, how Politian and Pico, bosom friends of Lorenzo, had died with the request that they might be buried in the habit of the order, and under the shadow of the convent of San Marco; above all, he must again and again have joined, one would think, with the crowd daily pressing to hear the wonderful preacher. Lorenzo de' Medici had died before Colet set foot upon Italian

[1] Savonarola's first sermon in the Duomo at Florence was preached in 1491.

soil: probably also Pico and Politian.[1] And the death of these men had added to the grandeur of Savonarola's position. He was still preaching those wonderful sermons, all of them in exposition of Scripture, to which allusion has been made, and exerting that influence upon his hearers to which so many great minds had yielded.

The man who *had* religion—the one requisite for teaching it—had arisen. And at the touch of his torch other hearts had caught fire. The influence of Savonarola had made itself felt even within the circle of the Platonic Academy. Pico had become a devoted student of the Scriptures and had died an earnest Christian. Ficino himself, without ceasing to be a Neo-Platonic philosopher, had also, it would seem, been profoundly influenced for a time by the enthusiasm of the great reformer.[2]

[1] Lorenzo de' Medici died in 1492; Pico and Politian in 1494. Colet left England early in 1494 probably, but as he visited France on his way to Italy, the exact time of his reaching Italy cannot be determined.

[2] The influence of Savonarola on the religious history of Pico was very remarkable.

In a sermon preached after Pico's death, Savonarola said of Pico, "He was wont to be conversant with me, and to break with me the secrets of his heart, in which I perceived that he was by privy inspiration called of God unto religion: " *i.e.* to become a monk. And he goes on to say that, for *two years*, he had threatened him with Divine judgment "if he foresloathed that purpose which our Lord had put in his mind."—More's *English Works*, p. 9.

Pico died in November 1494. The intimacy of which Savonarola speaks dated back therefore to 1492 or earlier.

According to the statement of his nephew, J. F. Pico, the change in Pico's life was the result of the disappointment and the troubles consequent upon his "vainglorious disputations" at Rome in 1486 (when Pico was twenty-three). By this he was "wakened," so that he "drew back his mind flowing in riot, and turned it to Christ!" Pico waited a whole year in Rome after giving his challenge, and the disappointment and troubles were not of short duration. They may be said to have commenced perhaps after the year of waiting, *i.e.* in 1487, when he left Rome. He was present at the disputations at Reggio in 1487, and this does not look as though as yet he had altogether lost his love of fame and distinction. There he met Savonarola; and there that intimacy commenced which resulted in Savonarola's return, *at the suggestion of Pico*, to Florence. In 1490, as the result of his first studies of Holy Scripture, according to J. F. Pico (being twenty-eight), he published his *Heptaplus*, which is full of his cabalistic and mystic lore, and betokens a mind still entangled in intellectual speculations rather than imbued with practical piety. He had, however, already burnt his early love songs, etc.; and it is evident the change had for some time been going on.

About the time when Savonarola commenced preaching in Florence, in 1491 (three years before his death, according to J. F. Pico), Pico disposed of his patrimony and dominions to his nephew, and distributed a large part of the produce amongst the poor, consulting Savonarola about its disposal, and appointing as his almoner *Girolamo Beniviені*, a devout and avowed believer in Savonarola's prophetic gifts. This was doubtless the time when Pico was wont to break to Savonarola "the secrets of his