



DEAN COLET ON THE HIERARCHIES  
OF DIONYSIUS.



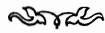
“ As for John Colet, he hath never a word to shew, for he wrote no workes.”

HARDING TO JEWELL.

“ Hujus viri cogitationes, quacunque etiam lingua proditas, optarim.”

ERASMUS JODOCO JONÆ.

*IOANNES COLETUS SUPER OPERA DIONYSII.*



TWO TREATISES ON THE  
HIERARCHIES OF  
DIONYSIUS,

BY JOHN COLET, D.D.,

FORMERLY DEAN OF ST. PAUL'S.

NOW FIRST PUBLISHED, WITH A TRANSLATION,  
INTRODUCTION, AND NOTES,

BY

J. H. LUPTON, M.A.,

SUR-MASTER OF ST. PAUL'S SCHOOL, AND LATE FELLOW OF  
ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

WIPF & STOCK • Eugene, Oregon

Wipf and Stock Publishers  
199 W 8th Ave, Suite 3  
Eugene, OR 97401

Two Treatises on the Hierarchies of Dionysius  
By Colet, John and Lupton, J.H.  
ISBN 13: 978-1-60899-608-7  
Publication date 4/5/2010  
Previously published by Bell and Dandy, 1869

## PREFACE.

THE two Treatises now for the first time made public, along with a third one entitled *De Sacramentis Ecclesiae*, are contained in a manuscript volume in the Library of St. Paul's School. This volume has been already described, in an edition of the work just referred to; so that, beyond mentioning that it is a fair copy, in one uniform hand, there is no need to give any further account of it here.

The original of the first Treatise, on the *Celestial Hierarchy*, is found in the manuscript marked Gg. iv. 26 in the Cambridge University Library; and this has afforded the means of correcting the text in some places, as well as of supplying one considerable omission.

The second Treatise, on the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, is nowhere else to be met with, so far as I am aware. Although, therefore, this is the one on which the author evidently bestowed most care, yet the fact of its existing in but one copy (and that made, as I should infer, by a not very intelligent scribe), is a disadvantage, which may be pleaded in excuse of occasional errors.

One slight change in the spelling I have made

uniformly throughout; namely, by writing *æ* for the feminine termination instead of *e*. In other respects, the original is represented with tolerable fidelity.

I have now to tender my best thanks to the Court of the Worshipful Company of Mercers, for their permission to publish the contents of the School manuscript; to the Senate of the University of Cambridge, for allowing me to borrow the valuable manuscript before mentioned; and to the Librarian, Henry Bradshaw, Esq., for his great courtesy in previously affording me ready access to it.

To Mr. Seebohm, the author of *The Oxford Reformers of 1498*, my obligations are more than can be expressed in a Preface. I am indebted to him, less even for the information I have received, great though that has been, than for the high standard of work which he has set before me. That the life and writings of Dean Colet should have such an attraction, at the present day, for one possessing no local interest in his memory, is, I think, a happy omen for Colet's obtaining at length something of that recognition which is his due, but which his faithful adherence to his own maxim, *Si vis divinus esse, late ut Deus*, has hitherto prevented him from receiving.

*St. Paul's School,*

*March 17th, 1869.*

## CONTENTS.

### INTRODUCTION.

	Page
§ 1.—Preliminary . . . . .	ix
§ 2.—On the Biographies of Dean Colet . . . . .	ix
§ 3.—On Dean Colet's Writings . . . . .	xii
§ 4.—On Colet's connection with the Dionysian Writings . . . . .	xv
§ 5.—On the Neo-Platonists of Florence . . . . .	xix
§ 6.—On the Dionysian Writings . . . . .	xxxii
§ 7.—On Colet's deviations from Dionysius . . . . .	xlv

### CELESTIAL HIERARCHY.

Dedication . . . . .	1
Chapter I. On emanation from God . . . . .	2
II. On the use of Symbols . . . . .	7
III. On the Angelic Hierarchy . . . . .	15
IV. On Angels as messengers . . . . .	16
V. On the general and special meaning of the term . . . . .	17
VI. On the nine Orders . . . . .	18
VII. On the Seraphim, Cherubim and Thrones . . . . .	20
VIII. On the Dominations, Virtues and Powers . . . . .	24
IX. On the Princedoms, Archangels and Angels . . . . .	27
X. On the mutual dependence of the Orders . . . . .	31
XI. On the attributes of spiritual natures . . . . .	33
XII. On the names Angels and Gods applied to men . . . . .	33
XV. On similitudes . . . . .	34
XVI. Supplementary; on distinctions in office, and on the fallen Angels . . . . .	36

## ECCLESIASTICAL HIERARCHY.

	Page
Chapter I. Introductory; on the earthly Hierarchy answering to the heavenly . . . . .	48
Chapter II. Part 1. Introduction to Baptism, or Illumination . . .	59
„ 2. On the Sacrament of Baptism . . . . .	61
„ 3. Spiritual contemplation of Baptism . . . . .	70
III. „ 1. Introduction to Synaxis, or Communion . . . . .	77
„ 2. On the Ante-Communion Service, and cele- bration of Holy Communion . . . . .	78
„ 3. Symbolic truth of the Holy Eucharist . . . . .	84
IV. „ 1, 2. On the consecration of the Chrism . . . . .	95
„ 3. Spiritual contemplation of the sacred Chrism . . . . .	100
V. „ 1. Introduction, to the „[Sacrament] of Holy Orders . . . . .	102
„ 2. On Consecration and Ordination . . . . .	118
„ 3. Spiritual contemplation of Holy Orders . . . . .	119
VI. „ 1. Introduction to Initiation . . . . .	126
„ 2, 3. On the Consecration of Monks . . . . .	134
VII. „ 1. Introduction to the Rites of the holy Dead . . . . .	137
„ 2. On the ceremonies of Christian burial . . . . .	140
„ 3. Spiritual contemplation of the rites of the holy Dead . . . . .	141
„ 3 § 2. On Infant Baptism . . . . .	155
DE CÆLESTI HIERARCHIA . . . . .	163
DE ECCLESIASTICA HIERARCHIA . . . . .	197
INDEX . . . . .	273



## INTRODUCTION.

### § 1.

IN some respects time has not yet done justice to the memory of Dean Colet. With the present year three centuries and a half will be completed since he passed to his rest; and though the recollection of him has never faded away during that long interval, it has been but a faint and shadowy recollection. Men have seen him, not by his own light, but as reflected by Erasmus. As the founder of St. Paul's School, indeed, wise in his enactments, no less than liberal in his endowment, he has always been held in honour by some in each generation; themselves, too, neither few nor undistinguished. But whilst one and another of his contemporaries have enjoyed a European reputation, his fame has been considered to be only local. Those who knew enough of his history to describe him as the friend of Erasmus, doubtless meant by that term one whom Erasmus honoured with his friendship. They dreamt not that his words were not yet ended; that written, if not spoken, they would still be listened to; and that by those words chiefly, as the direct expression of his mind, his place must be finally awarded him among the thinkers of his time.

This comparative obscurity has been the result of several causes, chief among which I would mention the peculiar circumstances attending his biography, and the seclusion of his writings.

### § 2.—*On the Biographies of Dean Colet.*

THAT Colet was fortunate in having Erasmus to give the world an account of him, cannot be doubted. If his portrait be but a miniature, it is from the hand of a

master, and it is drawn from the life. But the benefit must not be over-rated. Concerning much of Colet's history Erasmus was of necessity ignorant. He does not appear to have thought beforehand of writing such an account (there being but a few months' difference between their ages), nor, in consequence, to have collected any materials for it; and we find him writing from Louvain to Lancaster and Lupset, requesting them to send him such information as they could about their departed friend. The whole narrative is comprised in a single letter to Justus Jonas, the Wittemberg reformer, who seems to have been laudably anxious to gain an acquaintance with the eminent men of his time;<sup>1</sup> and of that narrative Colet occupies only half. The companion portrait, that of John Vitrier, a Franciscan monk of St. Omer, has but slight interest for Englishmen; of him far less is known<sup>2</sup> even than of Colet; and this indistinctness

---

<sup>1</sup> He had himself previously made a long and toilsome journey to see and become acquainted with Erasmus:—"per tot silvas latrociniiis, per tot urbes pestilentiae morbo infames, ad te grassati sumus, Erasme, Jonas et ego,"—writes his companion on the journey.—Knappii *Narratio* (1817), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Was he the same as the John Vitriarius, a Franciscan of Tournay, mentioned by Gieseler, whose doctrines were condemned by the Sorbonne in 1498? The question seems to me an interesting one. Erasmus tells us that he first met the Vitriarius he speaks of at St. Omer, when he had left Paris on account of the plague. This might probably be in the summer of 1500. After giving various particulars of Vitriarius's life and character, and of the truly Christian simplicity and uprightness which made him obnoxious to the rulers of his monastery, he says that he was sent by them to Courtray, to get rid of him, and that he died there. Now if a monk was thus sent from one monastery to another, as a punishment, ostensibly or otherwise, I see no reason why the John Vitriarius of Tournay, whose opinions were censured in 1498, might not have been sent to St. Omer, and be the very Franciscan whom Erasmus there met, and who afterwards died at Courtray. If this be so, then some little light will be thrown on the companion picture to Colet's. For there are given sixteen tenets of this Vitriarius of Tournay, as condemned by the Sorbonne, in D'Argentré (*Collectio*, i. p. 340); a few of which only are quoted by Gieseler. I have not space for more than two or three of these, as specimens:—(1.) "Il vaudroit mieux couper la gorge à son enfant, que de le mettre en Religion non réformée." (10.) "Les pardons viennent d'Enfer." (14.) "Il y a aucuns qui dient aucunes Oraisons de la Vierge Marie, à fin que à l'heure de la mort, ils puissent

in one half of the subject has diminished the clearness and effect of the whole.

After the lapse of nearly a hundred and fifty years, in 1661 preparations were being made by Thomas Smith, of Christ's College, Cambridge, an old Pauline, to publish some of Colet's Treatises;<sup>1</sup> but the design was never accomplished. The destruction of the School and its library, in the fire of 1666, probably put a final stop to it, if it had not been abandoned before.

At the end of another half-century, Mr. John Postlethwayte, the High Master of St. Paul's School, intended to have published a Life of Colet; but his death, in 1713, prevented that design also.<sup>2</sup>

Thus two hundred years had passed away, carrying with them into oblivion many reminiscences and traditions, if not actual memorials of Colet's own writing, which might have enriched the account of such a man. And meanwhile, little or nothing had been added to the sketch left by Erasmus. It had been translated and illustrated with notes by Smith, and repeated, in more or less modified form, by Holland and Fuller; his *Convocation Sermon* had been reprinted in the *Phoenix*; and some few additional particulars of his life and writings might be found in Anthony à Wood and Pitseus, in Polydore Vergil, Leland, and George Lily. But still Erasmus might be said to remain the only biographer of Dean Colet.

In the next few years, however, much was done in this direction. Dr. White Kennett, afterwards Bishop of Peterborough, the memorials of whose unbounded industry, as they stand amid the volumes of the Lansdowne manuscripts, I can never call to mind without veneration, had laboured hard in the mine of Erasmus's letters; and from thence, and

---

voir la Vierge Marie. Tu verras le Diable, non pas la Vierge Marie." The violent spirit of these propositions perhaps does not well accord with the character of Erasmus's Vitarius; but he might have been subdued by the censure passed on him in 1498.—See Gieseler, *Eccl. Hist.* (1855), v. p. 161.

<sup>1</sup> *A Sermon of Conforming*, &c. (1661), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Knight's *Colet*, (1823), p. 330.

from other sources, had gathered materials for a life of Colet, far more copious and varied than had yet been seen. These materials fill a folio volume (Lansdowne, 1030) of 181 closely-written leaves; and had the workman found time to complete his work, and to give shape and finish to his structure, Bishop Kennett would have been entitled to the name of Dean Colet's biographer. But more urgent duties called him away from the task; and, with his wonted liberality to other students,<sup>1</sup> he placed his collections in the hands of Dr. Samuel Knight, some time before March, 1721.<sup>2</sup> By Dr. Knight they were arranged and completed, and published in 1724. Nearly a century later, in 1823, this work was reprinted, with a few very brief additions; and here the matter rested, till the publication of *The Oxford Reformers of 1498*, two years ago, made Colet seem once more to live amongst us.

### § 3.—On Dean Colet's Writings.

IF for so long a space but scanty justice was done to Dean Colet by others, he had, or seemed to have, no writings to speak on his behalf. Although his Latin style is always forcible, and occasionally not wanting in elegance, there is

---

<sup>1</sup> "Far from engrossing any sort of knowledge to himself, he was exceedingly free, and communicative, and improving to all he conversed with, or that, far or near, desired his assistance and advice."—*Life* (1730), p. 190. This *Life*, which was anonymous, was assailed in a bitter pamphlet, entitled *Short Remarks, &c.*, which came out in the same year. Kennett's change of political principles, from Jacobite to Hanoverian, exposed him to long and violent hostility. The Rector of Whitechapel inserted his portrait, as Judas, in an altar-piece representing the Last Supper; an act of profanity which drew multitudes to the Church, till the Bishop interfered. The obloquy he underwent appears to me to have robbed him of some of the respect he deserves for his literary labours; and on this account I am desirous that his merit in the present instance should be acknowledged. See Nichols' *Lit. Anecd.*, i. p. 396 n.

<sup>2</sup> See the letter of Dr. Knight to Bp. Kennett, dated March 28th, 1721, prefixed to the MS. volume referred to; and Kennett's reply. No one can properly estimate the relative value of Bp. Kennett's and of Dr. Knight's labours, who has not well examined this important volume.

in his extant compositions a certain inaccuracy of diction,<sup>1</sup> which he seems to have felt himself, and which, Erasmus thought, had restrained him from committing his reflections to writing. "And I wish," adds Erasmus, "that this had not been the case; for I should be glad of the thoughts of John Colet, in whatever language expressed."<sup>2</sup>

By his Will, dated Aug. 22nd, 1519, Colet thus disposed of such manuscripts as he had preserved:—"Item, the new testament, and oder of myne own making, wryten in parchement, as comentis of Paulis Epistles, and abbreviations, with many such other, I will shall be disposed at the disposition of myn executors, whiche disposition I leve to their discretion."<sup>3</sup>

It does not appear that anything was published by them; and some of the manuscripts, by purchase or otherwise, eventually came into the possession of Matthew Parker, a youth of fifteen at the time of Colet's death, afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury. He bequeathed to his own College of Corpus Christi the volume (No. 355) containing Colet's Exposition of the *Epistle to the Romans*, and a portion of his Letters to Radulphus on the Mosaic account of the Creation.<sup>4</sup> In Emmanuel College Library is another volume, the gift of Dr. Anthony Tuckney, containing a like Exposition of the *First Epistle to the Corinthians*.<sup>5</sup> The archetypes of both these, which are in the handwriting of

<sup>1</sup> The author of the Latin Essay, which gained the Chancellor's Medal at Oxford in 1866, entitled *Erasmus, sive Thucydidis cum Tacito comparatio*, threw his piece into the form of a dialogue between Warham, Colet, Erasmus and More; but he prudently avoided imitating Colet's Latinity too closely.

<sup>2</sup> *Epist. Jodoco Jonæ.*

<sup>3</sup> Kennett's MSS. vol. xv. (Lansdowne, 949), f. 29.

<sup>4</sup> Partly described in the printed Catalogue (1722), p. 69. For the Letters to Radulphus, see *The Oxford Reformers*, p. 36 n. Knight wrongly describes the volume as containing the same comments as that in the Emmanuel Library.—*Pref.* p. xv.

<sup>5</sup> For a description of this I am indebted to the Rev. Octavius Glover, B.D., the Librarian. Dr. Tuckney was successively Master of Emmanuel and St. John's College, Cambridge, and Regius Professor of Divinity, and died in 1670.

Peter Meghen, are in the volume marked Gg. iv. 26 in the Cambridge University Library; a volume which appears to have been the property of Richard Holdsworth,<sup>1</sup> Gresham Professor of Divinity, who died in 1649, and which contains also the original of the *Treatise on the Celestial Hierarchy*, here published, the Letter to the Abbot of Winchcombe, printed by Dr. Knight, and a short Treatise *De compositione sancti corporis Christi mystici*. There is also among the Gale MSS. in the library of Trinity College, Cambridge, a volume (O. 4.44) written on vellum, in a hand of Queen Elizabeth's time,<sup>2</sup> which has been thought to contain a copy of some of Colet's treatises; but this is now strongly doubted.

The above, omitting the manuscript in St. Paul's School Library, of which the remaining contents are here published, comprises all the extant writings of Dean Colet, so far as I am aware.<sup>3</sup> And when it is considered how large and im-

<sup>1</sup> Knight (Pref. p. xvi) says that it seems to be the "donation of archbishop Parker." But there is pencilled at the end of the volume, "Holdsworth Collection (1649) MS. 13." Dr. Richard Holdsworth, of St. John's College, was Master of Emmanuel College in 1637, from which he was displaced in 1645 to make room for the Dr. Anthony Tuckney mentioned above. Holdsworth died in 1649, and bequeathed his books to his college.—See Kennett's MSS. vol. li. (Lansdowne 985), f. 146.

<sup>2</sup> For these particulars I have to thank the Librarian, W. Aldis Wright, Esq. M.A.—Dr. Thos. Gale, the original owner of this MS. left it to his son Roger Gale, in 1702, by whom, at his death in 1744, it was bequeathed to Trinity Coll. Camb.—Nichols' *Lit. Anecd.* iv. p. 551. A note in Dr. Thos. Gale's writing gives his opinion that it is Colet's work, from its similarity to another volume, then in the Chapter House of St. Paul's, but now no longer discoverable.

<sup>3</sup> I must here express my obligations to Signor Ferrucci, the venerable Librarian of the Mediceo-Laurentian Library at Florence, for informing me that no record of Colet is to be found among the archives under his care; and to Robert S. Collet, Esq., of The Hale, Wendover, for a like courtesy.

I take no notice of the long list of works given in Bale and Pits; the latter of whom refers vaguely to Trithemius and Sixtus Senensis as his authorities. In Trithemius, so far as I can find, there is no mention of Colet at all; while Sixtus Senensis only says that he wrote comments on the Proverbs and St. Matthew (Ed. 1610, p. 254). Walch, in his *Bibliotheca* (1757), i. p. 309, makes him to have written on the Creed;

portant a section of his works has not yet seen the light, I mean his comments on the Epistles and on Genesis; and how that, till very recently, his Treatises on Dionysius were equally unknown; it will be felt that the means of forming a true opinion of Colet have not yet been supplied; and that, in the fate of his writings, as well as in the circumstances of his biography, he has been left in an obscurity altogether undeserved.

§ 4.—*On Colet's connection with the Dionysian Writings.*

AFTER the above summary of Colet's extant works, the reader's attention will naturally be directed to the present Treatises, which, with the *Treatise on the Sacraments* as a kind of sequel to them, form a separate class of Dean Colet's writings. The reasons for assigning an early date to them have been given elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> Whether or not Colet meant to describe them in his Will by the term "abbreviations," I cannot say; but it is obvious that they are the result of a careful study of two at least of the works of Dionysius, the so-called Areopagite. There is much originality in them; Colet often leaves his author far behind, and is found expatiating on the state of the Church in his own time; but still the title gives in the main a correct description of them; they are abstracts of the *Hierarchies* of Dionysius. It becomes accordingly an interesting question, how Dionysius should exert such an influence upon him.

A German essayist on Dionysius, Augustus Meier,<sup>2</sup> is

---

and Kemp, in his *Charismatum . . . Trias* (1677), reckons him among the writers on the Proverbs, the Apostles' Creed, and the Lord's Prayer: pp. 102, 276—7.

<sup>1</sup> *Treatise on the Sacraments* (1867), *Introd.* p. 4.—To what is there said about the Latin Edition of 1498, may be added the fact that it was edited by Jacobus Faber of Etaples, who was the frequent correspondent of Erasmus, and may therefore have been probably known to Colet.

<sup>2</sup> *Dionysii Areopagitæ et mysticorum sæculi xiv. doctrinæ inter se comparantur* (1845), p. 2.

probably right in saying, that mysticism chiefly springs up and flourishes, when the established forms of religion have begun to lose their hold on men; when the instinctive longing of the soul after the immortal and divine remains, but can find nothing to satisfy it in the external rites of a failing church. "From the hard and arid system of Peter the Lombard," says Milman,<sup>1</sup> "the profound devotion of the Middle Ages took refuge in mysticism." At such a period of transition as the latter end of the fifteenth century, even without taking into account reasons to be presently mentioned, it was natural enough for any educated Englishman to be attracted to the writings of Dionysius. And though Erasmus does not speak of Colet's having begun the study of that author till he had gone abroad, about the latter end of 1493, yet in his mention of Plato and Plotinus being carefully read by Colet while at Oxford, he shews that he had made a good preparation for such a study.

But I think that, in the present case, there are faint, yet perceptible, traces of a personal history, by following out which we can connect Dean Colet almost immediately with the Dionysian writings. Without attempting to surmise what turn may have been given to his thoughts by converse with Grocyn and Linacre, both of whom had returned from Italy before he started, it seems to me highly probable that he owed to Mirandola and Ficino, if not his first acquaintance with, yet much of his early preference for, those mystic writings; and that connecting links with Mirandola and Ficino may be found in Robert Gaguin, sometime ambassador in England of Charles VIII., and Germain de Ganay.

It was the sight of a letter of Erasmus's to Robert Gaguin, the French historian, that first introduced Erasmus to the notice of Colet.<sup>2</sup> The practice of handing letters about, as evidences of scholarship, seems at that time to have been common; and Gaguin had in this manner shewn to Colet one received by him from Erasmus. The fact would seem

---

<sup>1</sup> *Latin Christianity*, vol. vi. p. 439.

<sup>2</sup> *Erasmii Epist.* (1642), v. 3; dated 1497.



to betoken a certain amount of intimacy between Gaguin and Colet. Now Gaguin, a man of letters, and the enviable possessor of a well-stocked library,<sup>1</sup> was in correspondence with Ficino. In his collected *Letters* there is one addressed to the Florentine scholar, dated Sep. 1st, 1496,<sup>2</sup> in which he compliments Ficino on the extent to which his writings were then read in Paris. His translation of Plotinus, he says, and other treatises of his, were so popular and so highly esteemed, that many a French scholar was eager "to know by sight and to gaze upon a man, from whom issued forth such noble memorials of learning." One such he mentions by name, who had resolved on a journey to Italy for that purpose, with an ardour like that which carried Plato into Egypt, or brought the Spaniard from Cadiz to Rome, for the sake of beholding Livy. This being so, there seems nothing improbable in supposing that Colet, who had previously read Plotinus at Oxford, should be interested in the writings of Ficino, through Gaguin, and possibly enough through many other channels in Paris, and so be led up to the sources from which Ficino had drawn some of his varied learning.

Again, with respect to Germain de Ganay. He too was a friend and correspondent of Ficino's. In one letter<sup>3</sup> Ficino sends him word to expect shortly some of his works, which would have been sent off before but for the transcriber's slowness; and among them "the Areopagite, the highest of all Platonists." He was the friend also of the elder Pico della Mirandola; on whose untimely death Ficino wrote to Ganay with the intelligence, as one who would be

<sup>1</sup> Thus Erasmus writes to ask the loan of Macrobius (Ep. iv. 26), of Trapezuntius and Quintilian (v. 16).

<sup>2</sup> *Roberti Gaguini . . . Epistole* (1498) f. xlv.—"Quibus omnibus plerique nostratium scholasticorum ardent te facie nosse et intueri hominem, a quo tam præclara doctrine monumenta prodierunt," etc.

<sup>3</sup> Dated Oct. 16th, 1494.—*Ficini Op.* (1641) i. p. 984 :—"Vidisses et Areopagitam simul, Platoniorum culmen, si nunc eo habitu, qui et ipsum et te decebat, accedere potuisset. Ex scriptoris et librarii negligentia impedivit accessum."

deeply affected by it.<sup>1</sup> This Germain de Ganay was Bishop of Orleans; and from a passage in a letter of Francis Deloigne to Erasmus,<sup>2</sup> it appears that Colet, when abroad, spent some time there in study. Orleans would be naturally in the route from Paris to Italy; and we find, as a matter of fact, that Erasmus went that way on another occasion.<sup>3</sup> Now it is of course mere matter of presumption that Colet, staying there for purposes of study, would enjoy the society of its learned Bishop;<sup>4</sup> but there is at least nothing improbable in it; and if this were so, then by another channel would Colet be brought into communication with the writings of Ficino and Mirandola, and through them again be pointed onwards to Dionysius.

But, not to pause longer on these inconclusive, if interesting, traces of Colet's progress, the present Treatises prove beyond all doubt that he had read some, at least, of the writings of Mirandola and Ficino. From the *Apologia* of the former he quotes a passage of some length, with scarcely a verbal alteration;<sup>5</sup> whilst the identity of several phrases, and the general tone of thought, in another place,<sup>6</sup> betray a study of the *Dialogus inter Paulum et animam* of the latter. Now it is of course quite intelligible, that Colet may have

<sup>1</sup> *Mirandulæ Op.* (1601), i. p. 274. The letter is dated March 23rd, 1494, and addressed "Germano de Ganai, Parisii [*sic*] Præsidenti." According to Greswell (*Memoirs of Politian*, 2nd Ed., p. 357), this Ganay was Rector of the University of Paris; though in another letter of Ficino's (*Op.* 1641, i. p. 987, *b*) his brother John is styled "Parisiis Præsidents." Greswell criticizes the style of this letter somewhat severely.

<sup>2</sup> *Epistolæ*, i. 13:—"Qui [Coletus] te, ut scribis, veteris amicitiae ac consuetudinis commonuit, quæ mihi cum illo non vulgaris intercessit, quum Aureliæ studiorum causa ugeremus."

<sup>3</sup> "Nam nemini, cum olim essem Aureliæ, Italiam aditurus."—*Ep.* i. 14.

<sup>4</sup> There is still in the British Museum a beautiful MS. copy of Ficino's *Comments on the Romans* (Harleian, 4695), at the end of which is written, "Le livre appartient a maistre Germain de Ganay;" and after this, in a later hand, "en son vivant, Evesque d'Orleans, frere de Jehan de Gannay, chancelier de France, et freres de ma bisayeule maternelle."

<sup>5</sup> See below, p. 109, *n*.

<sup>6</sup> *Celestial Hierarchy*, p. 36, *n*.

been attracted to the study of Dionysius by many other causes than the influence of these two Florentine scholars. Soon after he started on his travels, there was published the great Ecclesiastical Dictionary of the day, the *Liber de Scriptoribus Ecclesiasticis* of John Trittenheim.<sup>1</sup> This included notices of the life and works, not only of ancient Fathers of the Church, but of eminent contemporaries; of Ficino, Mirandola, Reuchlin, and many more. Supposing now Colet to have taken up this new work of the learned Abbot of Spanheim, with the curiosity of a young student, and the deference naturally paid to the latest authority, how would he have found Dionysius spoken of? As the convert of St. Paul; of surpassing holiness and incomparable learning; as probably the first Bishop of Athens, and certainly the apostle of France; as the author, lastly, of many illustrious works.<sup>2</sup>

With such language as this passing current, as the best information of the day, on the subject of Dionysius, it is almost superfluous to enquire particularly how Colet's attention came to be turned to his writings. But still, as the evidence of his connection with the Florentine school is unmistakeable; and as that school had a very great influence, not only in making popular the study of the so-called Areopagite, but in infusing much of his spirit into the Christianity of the time, it seems desirable to notice, in passing, two at least of the great Neo-Platonists of Florence, Pico della Mirandola and Marsiglio Ficino.

#### § 5.—On the Neo-Platonists of Florence.

THE Council of Florence, held under the presidency of Eugenius IV., which had for its chief object the reconciliation of the Greek and Latin Churches, and which closed its deliberations in April 1442, has generally been considered to be the means through which the Platonic philo-

---

<sup>1</sup> The first edition was published at Basle in 1494, and speaks of Pico, Politian and others, as still living.

<sup>2</sup> Leaf 2, b.

sophy was introduced once more into Europe.<sup>1</sup> But in reality Plato had been known to Italians a century before. Petrarch, who died in 1374, and to whose zeal in collecting manuscripts the cause of learning was in no small degree indebted, had procured several copies of Plato's works, partly in Latin translations, and partly in the original Greek.<sup>2</sup> His guide in this pursuit was Barlaam, a Calabrian monk, the fortunate possessor of still more treatises of Plato. Boccaccio succeeded to the study, and read Plato in the library of his friend Petrarch.<sup>3</sup> But the flame, if ever vigorous, seems soon to have died out. The Academy does not appear to have gained any fresh disciple of note in Italy, till the event referred to above, the Council of Florence, brought a number of learned Greeks to that country. The conversation of these men, especially of George, surnamed Gemistus or Pletho,<sup>4</sup> filled Cosmo de' Medici with an ardent desire to transplant the philosophy of Plato to Italian soil; and to his efforts must be ascribed the foundation of the Platonic Academy at Florence.

In some respects the Platonic revival is open to the charge of extravagance, and even childishness. In the enthusiasm of entering an unexplored country, so widespread and tempting, men were not likely to advance soberly and with measured steps. But we must remember what those days were, and how utterly new and untried many domains of knowledge still were. They were the days in which Politian, driven to take shelter from the rain in a chance workshop, could be urged by his fellow refugees to read aloud to them the works of a Roman poet, and could not

---

<sup>1</sup> "The synod introduced into Florence the lights of the Greek church, and the oracles of the Platonic philosophy."—Gibbon, ch. lxvi.

<sup>2</sup> This is stated by Bandinius, in his Preface to Corsius's *Life of Ficino* (1771), p. 184; where he quotes a passage from Petrarch himself, stating that he had sixteen books of Plato, or more; and that those were but a few, compared to the number he had seen in Barlaam's possession:—"Sedecim, vel eo amplius, Platonis libros domi habeo," etc.

<sup>3</sup> Bandinius, *ib.*; who refers, as authority, to Boccaccio's *Commentary on Dante* (1724), p. 231.

<sup>4</sup> The names both signify the same thing, so that there is no need to call him Gemistus Pletho.

pacify them till he had read and explained the whole.<sup>1</sup> They were the days in which Poggio could rescue the only extant manuscript of Quintilian from the hands of a German grocer, just as it was about to be torn up, to make wrappers for his commodities.<sup>2</sup> We can judge leniently, therefore, of the excesses men might run into, when the fruits of the tree of knowledge were being showered down in such varied profusion at their feet; and of their inability to judge rightly at all times of the relative value of what they gathered. No doubt much nonsense was talked at the Banquets, revived, after twelve hundred years' interval, to honour the anniversary of Plato's birth;<sup>3</sup> and questions raised, far more trivial than that which occupied the company at the table of Hermolaus Barbarus in Rome, as to whether the old ship of Theseus, when its decaying timbers had all been gradually replaced, was the same ship or a different one.<sup>4</sup> But the freedom of thought thus fostered was as the healthy action of a child at play. It was the capricious but vigorous exercise of the mind, able at last to shake off the numbness which a previous system of education had brought on.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> "Catullum autem plane universum Veronæ . . . intra officinam quampiam, quo nos pluvia coegerat, viris aliquot literatis pene cogentibus, enarravimus," etc.—*Politiani Opera*, (1533), i. p. 548.

<sup>2</sup> Varillas' *Secret History of the House of Medicis*, tr. by Spence, p. 234.

<sup>3</sup> See c. i. of the *Commentarius in Convivium Platonis* of Ficino. He gives the names of the nine guests who, in imitation of the nine muses, were assembled, one seventh of November, at the house of Bandinus, and who shared among them the parts of the interlocutors in the *Convivium*.

<sup>4</sup> The story is told by Alexander ab Alexandro, at the beginning of Lib. iii. of his *Geniales Dies*.

<sup>5</sup> No doubt there is much exaggeration in the *Epistolæ obscurorum Virorum*, but one cannot question the truthfulness of the slavish character of mind there portrayed. The very Grammar they had all been taught prepares one for the appeals to the *Catholicon* and the *Gemma Gemmarum*. Take, for instance, the first line of the universal *Alexander Dolensis*, and its commentary:—

"Scribere clericulis paro doctrinale novellis."

"Quia textus est planus, non indiget explanatione. Sed tamen pro forma servanda in sequentibus, sic construe: Ego magister Alexander paro scribere doctrinale, id est, librum dantem doctrinam, novellis cleri-

"From this period," says M. Delécluze, "freedom of thought in Europe took its rise; and from this crude medley of profound erudition and mystic philosophizing sprang the taste for the study of the moral sciences, and general literature, which opened the way to philosophy and the sciences."<sup>1</sup> And he adds that from such intellectual gatherings as those in the house of Bandinus at Careggi, came the first blows that were aimed at the scholasticism of the age.

The remarks above made will apply with special force to Mirandola and Ficino. In each we see a force of intellect, rioting in its own exuberance. At times they seem occupied with topics almost as trivial as those which amused the Della Cruscans of Florence three centuries later; and again, we seem to be reading, in the language of Cicero, arguments more sublime than the New Academy ever soared to.

Giovanni Pico, Count of Mirandola, was a few years older than Colet, having been born in 1463. In his twenty-fourth year he had already completed a course of reading so extensive, as to embolden him to publish at Rome a series of theses for disputation, enough to startle the most veteran dialectician there. Far outstripping Longfellow's Scholastic at Salern, who could say,

"There, that is my gauntlet, my banner, my shield,  
Hung up as a challenge to all the field:  
One hundred and twenty-five propositions,  
Which I will maintain with the sword of the tongue  
Against all disputants, old and young,"

Mirandola could boast of nine hundred *Questions*, on all conceivable subjects, as the literary gages he had thrown down. It would be alike beside my purpose to stay to investigate these, and presumptuous to attempt to decide on the real knowledge which they indicate;<sup>2</sup> suffice it to say, that pro-

---

culis, i. scholaribus; quasi dicat, non pro proVectis hoc opus scribitur, sed pro rudibus"—(*Ed.* 1482).

Who can compare this with Holt's *Lac Puerorum*, or with Lily's Grammar, and not feel that another generation had risen up?

<sup>1</sup> *Florence et ses vicissitudes* (1837), i. p. 239. The same testimony is borne by a writer in the *Quarterly Review* (Oct. 1862), in an article on *The Platonic Dialogues*.

<sup>2</sup> Villari, I think unjustly, speaks in disparaging terms of the learning

positions from Plotinus, Porphyry, Jamblichus and Proclus, find a place among the number at this early period of 1486.

The three great objects of Mirandola's literary labours were, as Ficino informs us,<sup>1</sup> the reconciliation of the Platonic philosophy with the Aristotelian; the explanation of the Holy Scriptures; and the confutation of astrology. The first of these objects he often alludes to in his extant letters. Thus, in one dated 1484, he speaks of having lately passed from the camp of Aristotle to that of the Academy, not as a deserter, but as a spy.<sup>2</sup> Six years later we find him writing to his Carmelite friend Baptista Mantuanus, and giving an account of his studies. "I am busily occupied," he says, "with the reconciliation of Plato and Aristotle. To that pursuit I give my whole mornings. My afternoon hours I give to my friends, to relaxation, at times to the poets and orators, and such lighter studies. Sleep and Holy Scripture share the night between them."<sup>3</sup> His nephew, John Francis Pico, makes repeated mention of this as an end which the elder Mirandola kept before him. In one passage of his great work,<sup>4</sup> for instance, after describing the increase of Aristotle's influence, which he attributes in part to the influx of the works of Averroes and Avicenna, rendered easier by the conquests of Ferdinand and Isabella, he details the efforts made by Pletho and Bessarion to call attention to Plato; and then contrasts his relative's endeavour to reconcile the two systems, with his own purpose of depreciating

---

of Mirandola. "These propositions," he says, "were after all very insignificant, and substantially contained nothing of any importance. . . . It must be confessed that his learning was not very profound, and that he was far inferior in erudition to Politian, and in philosophy to Ficino." — *History of Savonarola*, tr. by Horner, i. p. 81. In the case of one who died in his thirty-second year, an inferiority to Politian and Ficino, in the departments peculiar to each, may readily be allowed; and enough will still remain, as it seems to me, almost to justify the eulogy of Erasmus and of the elder Scaliger.

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Germain de Ganay, dated March 23rd, 1494.—*Op.* 1601, p. 275.

<sup>2</sup> *Op.* p. 250.

<sup>3</sup> *Op.* p. 243.

<sup>4</sup> *Examen vanitatis doctrinæ Gentium*, iv. 2.—*Op. Pars.* ii. p. 666.

heathen philosophy altogether, when brought into rivalry with the doctrines of Christianity.

In his love for Plato, Mirandola found a congenial spirit in one, who in personal appearance and fortune was most unlike him, Marsiglio Ficino. Born in 1433, and therefore thirty years his senior, Ficino yet addresses the other constantly as his partner in the search for wisdom;<sup>1</sup> and in the feeling letter in which he relates his death, speaks of him as "in age a son, in intimacy a brother, and in affection a second self."<sup>2</sup> To be near his friend, Mirandola hired an adjacent house, though one unequal to his rank, and resided in it for nearly three years.<sup>3</sup> It was through his entreaties that Ficino undertook the translation of Plotinus; an author whom Mirandola speaks of as worthy not only of constant perusal, but of being learnt by heart,<sup>4</sup> and who appears to have led Ficino naturally on to Dionysius, as a translation of some of his works was the next task he took in hand.<sup>5</sup>

There is one letter of Ficino's to Mirandola, unfortunately not dated, which describes so pleasingly the spirit in which they both worked, that I will give it entire. "You send me," he writes, "most welcome intelligence, my worthy friend, that you are daily advising many, and have already succeeded in persuading some, to abandon the irreligion of Epicurus, or lay aside some notions they may have gained from Averroes, and embrace the devout sentiments of our Plato touching the soul and God. For through this, as through an intervening road, they may finally reach the religion of Christ. Heaven speed you then, true fisher of men! For if they who persuade common minds seem to be catchers of fishes,—or minnows, as one may say—they who convince leading intellects are judged to be fishers

---

<sup>1</sup> "Conphilosophus suus."

<sup>2</sup> "Nam et ætate mihi filius Picus erat, et familiaritate frater, et amore prorsus alter ego."—Mirand. *Op.* p. 275.

<sup>3</sup> "Picus ille Mirandula . . . quum Florentiam venisset, ædes Marsilio vicinas conduxit, humiles admodum; quas tamen totum fere triennium habitavit."—Corsi *Vita*, p. 192.

<sup>4</sup> Corsius, p. 189, and Mirand. *Op.* pp. 79, 250.

<sup>5</sup> Corsius, p. 190.



of men. These perchance are the 'great fishes' named in the Gospel, which the net enclosed, yet for all that was not broken. Our net, *Mirandola*, is now the system of Plato; for if this be but rightly drawn beneath Christian truth, it breaks not, but remains whole while it is filled. You have read that no philosophers in former days embraced the Christian religion, but Platonists.<sup>1</sup> Rightly therefore with Platonic nets, so to speak, do you ever fish for the highest intellects for Christ. Would that our religion had were it but three such fishers in its service, that no great fishes might be left in the sea! But alas! unhappy, or rather, unfortunate that we are. 'The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few.' And the fewer we are, my dear *Mirandola*, the more frequently and the more zealously must we labour. Farewell."<sup>2</sup>

I said that it was unfortunate that this letter is not dated, as it would be desirable to know at what period of his life Ficino wrote in such terms. For the question that arises from it is one, in its wider extent, of considerable interest; as it amounts to this:—Were *Mirandola* and Ficino uniformly, through at least a considerable portion of their lives, men of such a religious spirit as the above letter would seem to imply; or were they almost wholly indifferent to Christianity, till a certain event arrested and changed their course, which event was the preaching of Savonarola?

Now far be it from me to detract from the just renown of that wonderful man. We seem to behold in him one set free from the ties that bind ordinary men to the earth, and able to hurl himself against the strongholds of iniquity. There was that fire of the Spirit in him for which enthusiasm sounds but a cold name, that can inflame the lukewarm, and fuse the stubborn, and, in Colet's language,

---

<sup>1</sup> So Bouillet, *Les Ennéades de Plotin* (1857), *Pref.* p. xxxi:—"Et, en effet, plusieurs des premiers Pères et des plus zélés Confesseurs de la foi, Saint Justin, Athénagore, Clément d'Alexandrie, étaient, on le sait, des Platoniciens convertis."

<sup>2</sup> Ficini *Opera* (1641), i. p. 956.

spread a "conflagration amid the forest of men." When he speaks, in his *Triumph of the Cross*,<sup>1</sup> of "men of science, skilled in all forms of learning, who, having drunk freely at the pure fountain of Holy Scripture, and tasted the sweetness of Christ, have abandoned their sciences, and only found happiness in His teaching," he is but describing the effects of his own words upon many in Florence.

But still I think it unjust to the fame of two illustrious men, to ascribe the formation of a Christian character in them to the influence even of Savonarola.

To speak first of Ficino. We are told by one writer, that the disposition of Ficino and others "to betake themselves to the fanciful theories of Plato, instead of to the cross of Christ for comfort, was probably a consequence of latent infidelity," engendered by the corruptions of the Church at that period.<sup>2</sup> And again, "Spondanus assures us that, under the preaching and influence of the celebrated monk Savonarola, he [Ficino] became in his latter days a humble and devout learner in the school of Christ."<sup>3</sup>

There are two facts which seem to me difficult to reconcile with this. One is, the all but entire absence of any mention of Savonarola in Ficino's numerous letters,<sup>4</sup> which

<sup>1</sup> Hill's Translation (1868), p. 123.

<sup>2</sup> Harford's *Life of Michael Angelo* (1857), i. p. 64.

<sup>3</sup> *Ib.* p. 70; where there is a reference to Schelhorn, *Amœnitates Literariæ*, i. p. 73. Schelhorn's authority is Henry Wharton (*Appendix to Cave*, 1688, p. 166), who says that Ficino "rei philosophicæ nimium deditus, religionis et pietatis curam posthabuisse dicitur, donec Savonarolæ, etc." In these questions one wants something like contemporary authority; and I suppose Wharton only drew from Spondanus (*i.e.* Henri de Sponde, a continuator of Baronius), who, in his *Annalium* . . . . *Continuatio* (1647), vol. ii. p. 230, writes:—"Cum interim Savonarola quamplurimos ad meliorem vitæ frugem reducere non cessaret. Inter quos fuit etiam Marsilius Ficinus, Canonicus Florentinus, philosophus ante Platonius magis quam Christianus." For this no precise reference is given; but the whole account, by a marginal note higher up, seems to rest on the authority of Guicciardini and Abraham Bzovius. Bzovius, a Polander, was not born till the middle of the sixteenth century; and as for Guicciardini, I can only say that, after some search, I have not been able to find any such statement.

<sup>4</sup> Savonarola is, I believe, only mentioned once in Ficino's letters;

is not what we should expect if Ficino owed so much to him; the other is the circumstance, that a distinct change of life is recorded of him by a contemporary biographer, and that change is not ascribed to the influence of Savonarola. Corsius, who was a disciple of Ficino's, speaks of a depression of mind to which he was subject in the early part of his life, fostered partly by peculiarities of constitution; and of the fruitless remedies by which he sought to alleviate it. He then speaks of a conviction growing upon him that he had forgotten Christianity in his Platonism, and of the works in which he sought to direct his philosophy to its right use, and concludes by describing him as having, "when he had now completed forty-two years of age, from a pagan, become a soldier of Christ."<sup>1</sup> Ficino was forty-two years old in 1475, the very year in which Savonarola, then aged twenty-three, left his home at Ferrara, to join the Dominican convent in Bologna. Three years later, in 1478, we find him thus writing to Hieronymus Rossius, touching his own treatise *On the Christian Religion*:—"If you find in it aught worthy of praise, give God the praise, without whose gift nothing is in truth worthy to be praised. If aught shall chance to displease you, take heed that you be not displeased on that account with Religion herself. Measure not the loftiness of things divine by the lowliness of my poor intellect; for the divine depends not on the human, but the human on the divine."<sup>2</sup>

No doubt there are many extravagances to be found in the writings of Ficino;<sup>3</sup> probably he was unable to shake

---

namely, in an epistle to Calcavanti, dated Dec. 12th, 1494 (*Op. i. p. 987*), shortly after the entry of Charles VIII. into Florence. At such a time it was most natural to call to mind the warnings which Savonarola had uttered.—See Trollope's *History of the Commonwealth of Florence* (1865), iv. p. 25.

<sup>1</sup> Corsii *Vita*, p. 188.

<sup>2</sup> In a letter in Ficino's own handwriting, prefixed to a copy of the *De Religione Christiana*, in the Library of St. Mark at Florence. The letter is dated Nov. 1st, 1478, and is quoted by Bandini, in his notes on Corsius, *ut supra*, p. 201.

<sup>3</sup> A list of them has been made out by Schelhorn, *Amœnit. Lit.* (1725), i. pp. 80, sqq.

off, even to his latest day, something of the superstitious belief in astrology, charms, and the like, which was then exceedingly prevalent;<sup>1</sup> but still in his case, as in that of Augustine, Platonism seems to have been as a porch to Christianity; and I believe the threshold was finally crossed, years before Savonarola preached in Florence.

In the case of Mirandola, as in that of his friend, a distinct change of life is recorded by one who knew him well. His nephew before-mentioned, in the *Life* prefixed to his collected works, distinctly says that the disappointment he met with, in finding his *Propositions* censured by the Pope, was the bitter lesson which sobered his thoughts, and turned him aside from the lure of youthful ambition, to listen to the voice of Christ. As Sir Thomas More translated this *Life*,<sup>2</sup> I will give the passage in his words:—"But as hymselfe tolde his nevewe, he judged that this came thus to passe by the especiall provision and synguler goodness of almighty god, that by this fals cryme untruely put upon hym by his evyll wyllers, he sholde correcte his very errours, and that this sholde be to hym (wanderynge in derknes) as a shynynge lyght, in whiche he myght beholde and consydre how ferre he had gone out of the way of trouth. For

---

<sup>1</sup> Some striking instances of this are given by Greswell (*Memoirs of Politian*, 2nd Ed. p. 350, n.). It is rash to question the opinion of Villari, when it coincides with that of Greswell. But I still think that they are both somewhat hard upon Ficino; the former in the character he gives of his work *De vita calitus comparanda*, and the latter in disputing the sincerity of the letter, in which Ficino explains to Politian what he meant to be the drift of that work. Villari describes it as "a treatise upon the influences of the stars, of stones, and of animals, together with long discourses on the occult virtues of agates, topazes, the teeth of vipers, the claws of lions, and so forth."—I. p. 64. Ficino himself describes the work as a medical one, and including, therefore, many specifics which he inserted as being popular, though he himself attached no value to them. But Greswell characterizes this as an attempt "to explain, or rather to equivocate upon, certain parts of his own writings that appear to favour the superstition in question."—P. 348. As this is partly a matter of opinion, the reader must judge for himself. Ficino's letter is in the *Epistolæ* of Politian (1522), p. 362.

<sup>2</sup> Published in 1510, under the title *Here is conteyned the lyfe of Johan Picus Erle of Mirandula*.

before this he had bene bothe desyrous of glory and kyndled in vayne love. . . . But after that he was ones with this variaunce wakened, he drew back his mynde flowynge in riot, and turned hit to Chryst." This would be shortly after 1486. His letter of fatherly counsel to his nephew,<sup>1</sup> and the fervid language in which he conversed with him in the orchard of Ferrara, have been often quoted as examples of the warm and enthusiastic piety of Mirandola, and of the change which some cause or other had wrought in his character. That this change was "wrought in measure at least by Savonarola's influence," I should not seek to deny. There seems no doubt that Mirandola met Savonarola at Reggio, when a Chapter of Dominicans was held there, and that he was so impressed with what he saw of him, that he prevailed upon Lorenzo de' Medici to invite him back to Florence.<sup>2</sup> The younger Pico also mentions that, after his uncle's death, Savonarola spoke of that event in a sermon at Florence, and related how for two years he had exhorted Mirandola to enter a religious Order. "He was wonte to be conversaunt with me," he said, "and to breke to me the secretes of his herte, in which I perceyved that he was by prively inspyracion called of god unto relygion. Wherefore he purposed oftentymes to obey this inspyration, and folowe his callynge."<sup>3</sup> The great preacher then expatiated on the loss to Mirandola himself, through not pursuing the course he had marked out for him.

We may or may not be disposed to sympathise with

---

<sup>1</sup> Dated May 15th, 1492.—*Op.* ii. p. 819. It was translated by Gauguin, and published in 1498, under the title of *Conseil pourfitable contre les ennuyes et tribulations du monde*. His words acquire a peculiar solemnity, when it is remembered that this same nephew was afterwards murdered, along with his son.

<sup>2</sup> This is stated by J. F. Pico in his *Vita Savonarolæ* (1674), vol. i. p. 20; and also by Burlamacchi, in his *Vita del P. F. Girolamo Savonarola* (1764), p. 15. The latter says that Mirandola "tanto restò preso dalla dottrina sua mirabile, che non gli pareva poi poter vivere senza lui; in modo che, trovandosi poi et ragionando di lui con Lorenzo de' Medici, amator grande degli huomini eccellenti, gli persuase che volesse con l'autorità sua operare che egli ritornasse in S. Marco."

<sup>3</sup> More's Translation, leaf C. 2.

Savonarola in this conclusion ; we may estimate his influence over Mirandola more or less highly ; but I think that in this case, as in that of Ficino, considering the express testimony of the younger Pico, it would be unjust to say that to Savonarola belongs the credit of raising Mirandola from Platonism up to Christianity ; and that the religious characters of both of them were formed, before the second Amos began to inveigh against the sins of a second Samaria.<sup>1</sup>

It may be thought that an undue share of attention is being bestowed on these eminent men, connected but indirectly, as they are, with the history of Colet. But their writings are not only quoted in these present treatises, but also directed very materially the current of thought which at that time drew the rising generation of scholars along with it. Without even going beyond the bounds of their writings, we can trace the main stream in which the speculations of the age flowed. If the study of Cicero, which was eagerly pursued by Cicero's countrymen at the revival of letters, encouraged the study of Plato,<sup>2</sup> then Plato not unnaturally led the way to Plotinus. And to the Christian reader of Plotinus, the writings of Dionysius, then not doubted to be the Areopagite, would seem to bid him welcome. "His walls," says Creuzer, "are inlaid with Plotinian mosaic. . . . The rills that water his garden-plots, are drawn from the well-head of Plotinus."<sup>3</sup> We have seen above what a reader and admirer of Plotinus Mirandola was, and that his works were translated by Ficino. It is no surprise, therefore, to find Dionysius a familiar name with both of them.<sup>4</sup> And to the Platonist, who had made his way through Dionysius, what would seem so fitting a completion of his journey as St. Paul ? To his writings, and perhaps

---

<sup>1</sup> See Stanley's *Lectures on the Jewish Church*, Part ii. (1865), p. 358.

<sup>2</sup> This is pointed out by Van Heusde, in his *Characterismi princip. Philosoph. vet.* (1839), p. 181.

<sup>3</sup> *Annotaciones in Plotini de Pulcr.* (1814), pp. 198, 205.

<sup>4</sup> In Savonarola, too, there are passages which read very much like the *Celestial Hierarchy*. See especially the *Compendium Revelationum* (1495), leaves E 6 and 7 :—"Suspiciens igitur in cœlum vidi novem angelorum chorus," etc.

also to the Epistles of St. John,<sup>1</sup> he would be inclined to turn, as most congenial to the habits of thought in which he had been trained. In reading, for example, the Epistle to the Hebrews, besides the mention of "ministering spirits," which would be so significant to him after Dionysius, he would hear familiar tones in such expressions as "the example and pattern of heavenly things:" "the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true:" "through faith we understand that the worlds were made by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." He would seem, in all this, to find again the *ideas* of his master Plato. And so we are not surprised to learn that Ficino wrote a commentary on part of the Epistle to the Romans, nor that he publicly lectured on St. Paul, as Canon of the church of St. Lorenzo in Florence;<sup>2</sup> nor finally that Colet, a student of Plato, Plotinus and Dionysius, lectured on St. Paul, on his return to Oxford.

The conclusion to which I would point, from this imperfect account, is, that the Platonic movement, in which Mirandola and Ficino were leading actors, was not an essentially pagan, as opposed to a Christian, movement; but that it directly conduced to the introduction of a purer and more intelligent Christianity. "The most zealous defenders of Christianity," says Van Heusde, "have esteemed the doctrine of Plato to be a prelude of the truest Christianity."<sup>3</sup> If it be a distinguishing feature of Plato's system, that he is ever prosecuting the search for truth, rather than laying down maxims as true; if he proceeds by analysis, and not, as moderns love, by synthesis; then was his method a most salutary one for the wants of that time. Men had long been under the sway of the opposite system: from the

---

<sup>1</sup> Gibbon, in ch. xxi. of his *Decline and Fall*, has some remarks, in his unenviable manner, about the doctrines of Plato gaining currency through St. John.

<sup>2</sup> Villari, i. p. 59; and the article *Ficino* in Herzog's *Encyklopädie*. I am indebted to Mr. Seebohm for this last reference, and for informing me that Ficino is quoted by Colet in his MS. Exposition of the *Romans*.

<sup>3</sup> *Characterismi*, p. 185.

dominant Aristotelianism they had had enough of doctrine and of definition. Weary of this intellectual thralldom, it was well for them that they had found an opener country, as it were, into which their minds could emigrate, and where their reason, confined no longer, could expatiate in purer air and ampler space. Those who think otherwise may relate how Ficino was said to keep a lamp ever burning in his study before an image of Plato;<sup>1</sup> or how Lorenzo de' Medici rejoiced at the discovery amid the ruins of Athens of a long-sought bust of the same philosopher.<sup>2</sup> But those distinguished men knew what Plato had done for them. And if Lorenzo could declare his belief that, without a Platonic training, a man could not easily be either a good citizen, or skilled in Christian doctrine,<sup>3</sup> it is only fair to presume that he looked on Christianity as after all the end; and that his encouragement of the Platonic Academy was something better than a revival of paganism.

In Colet's fondness for Dionysius, in his somewhat argumentative turn of mind, in his slight estimation of the schoolmen, we may see the influence of the Florentine philosophy; and he would probably have returned to England less armed than he was to search out and contend for the truth, and to be the great upholder of a spiritual Christianity, had he never met with the works of Mirandola and Ficino.

#### § 6.—*On the Dionysian Writings.*

WHEN Paul "stood in the midst on Mars' hill," the scene was as memorable a one in the actual history of the world, as it is striking to the imagination of the poet.

---

<sup>1</sup> Villari, i. 59.

<sup>2</sup> *Laurentii Medici Vita*, by Nicolaus Valorius (1749), p. 18. Valorius was a disciple of Ficino's, along with his brother Philip. His work, though written in 1492, was not published till the above year, when it was edited by Mehus.

<sup>3</sup> Valorius, *ib.* p. 12:—"Aiebat idem Ficinus Laurentium dicere solitum, absque Platonica disciplina nec bonum civem, nec Christianæ doctrinæ peritum facile quenkum futurum."



For though the Apostle seemed to leave Athens with but few tokens of success; though only "certain men clave unto him, and believed; among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them;" yet, in the group there assembled, we see something far more pregnant with results than would be judged from the scanty list of converts. We see the contact of the new with the old; the light as of a new dawn beginning to chase away the shadows of the past.

Such as was St. Paul, standing on the spot where once Orestes was fabled to have been tried, looking on the one hand towards the Pnyx, and on the other towards the cave of the Eumenides, such in some degree are the writings that bear the name of Dionysius the Areopagite. As he spake of Jesus and the resurrection in the midst of Athens, where the air still seemed to echo with the appeal of the orator and the debate of the school; so do these writings present a bright centre of Christian truth, encircled, and at times obscured, by the oratory and the philosophy of ancient Greece.

As their external history has been elsewhere briefly traced,<sup>1</sup> and as an able and interesting account of them has recently appeared,<sup>2</sup> I shall confine myself almost wholly to two matters, namely, (1.) the question of date and authorship, and (2.) the subject of the *Hierarchies*, *Celestial* and *Ecclesiastical*.

1. First in order, in discussing the former of these topics, must be placed the opinion of those who maintain the writings to be the genuine production of the Dionysius converted by St. Paul. This opinion, of course, requires at the outset only to be stated; for, as the burden of proof rests on those who attack it, its probability or improbability will depend on the value of the arguments brought against it.

The chief reasons, then, from external evidence, urged against the writings being genuine, are summed up by

---

<sup>1</sup> *Dean Colet on the Sacraments* (1867), Intro. p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> In an article by Mr. Westcott in the *Contemporary Review* (May, 1867), entitled *Dionysius the Areopagite*.