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I.

RECENT DOGMATIC THOUGHT AMONG THE PROTESTANTS IN AUSTRIA-HUNGARY.*

WE are not so fortunate as to be able to avail ourselves of sources lying ready at hand to obtain a correct impression of the dogmatic tendency or tendencies which have prevailed among the Protestants of Austria-Hungary since the middle of this century. Besides some scattered articles in brochures and church papers, as, for example, in Schenkel's *Allgemeine kirchliche Zeitschrift*,† there exists no treatment of the subject of any kind which can be called in any way comprehensive or exhaustive. Moreover, the isolated studies which exist, are written from very diverse standpoints, and therefore make no uniform impression. We shall endeavor to give the American theological public some information concerning the subject indicated in the title, drawn partly from experience and partly from periodicals and brochures of all kinds. If the reader will glance at a map of Austria-Hungary, he will perceive a very extensive tract. From the Russian-Turkish boundary to the Tyrol, from the northernmost part of Bohemia to the Adriatic sea, stretches the territory, and Protestant congregations are found everywhere in it. In some places they stand forth as mere ruins of former greatness and glory, as in the German-Slavic countries; in others they are more compact, as in Hungary, along the Theiss and around Debreczin.

In Hungary the gospel has never had to submit to be entirely

* [For the translation of Dr. Böhl's paper our readers are indebted to the competent hand of the Rev. Charles S. Barrett, M.A., of Baltimore, Md.—
EDITORS.]

† See for the year 1863, 4 Heft.

V.

LAURENTIUS VALLA: A PIONEER OF HISTORICAL CRITICISM.*

LAURENTIUS VALLA (Lorenzo della Valle) is one of the leading humanists of the fifteenth century, and best known in history for his bold attack on the hierarchical fiction of the donation of Constantine, or the origin of the temporal power of the papacy. He was born in Rome, 1406, and died there, 1457. He taught as professor of classical languages in Padua, Naples, and Rome, and was secretary of Pope Nicholas V, the great patron of humanism and founder of the Vatican library. He held, also, several ecclesiastical benefices, a canonry of San Giovanni in Laterano, where he was buried. Yet this man was at heart an infidel, or, at least, a skeptic, and an indirect advocate of Epicurean morality. His monument of marble with his bust and eulogy was destroyed at the restoration of the Lateran Church under Clement VIII.

Valla was the best Latinist and the most independent scholar of his age. His work on the *Elegancies of the Latin Language*, in six books, is a grammar and rhetoric of a high order, and gives direction for good style with innumerable examples gathered from the classical authors at first hand. It was for a long time the best introduction to Latin composition and a treasure house for scholars. He was proud of the dominion of the Latin tongue, which perpetuated the dominion of old Rome. "Romans," he says, "still rule by our language a great part of the earth: Italy is ours, France, Spain, Germany, and many other nations are ours, for where the Roman language rules, there is the Roman empire." He was also a good Greek scholar. He translated Thucydides (for which Pope Nicholas V paid him 500 gold scudi), Herodotus, and Homer's *Iliad*

* Laur. Vallæ *Opera*, Basel, 1540; L. Vallæ *opuscula tria*, ed. by J. Vahlen, Wien, 1869. These three new works from Vatican MSS. are (1) *An Inaugural Address in Praise of the Latin Language*, delivered before the Roman University; (2) *A Dialogue between Valla and a Monk, De professione religiosorum*; (3) *A Translation of the Oration of Demosthenes on the Crown*. I found several excellent MSS. of the works of Valla in the Vatican library during a recent visit to Rome (April and May, 1890), and examined especially that on the *Donation of Constantine*, Vat. Lat. 5314, which was finished "septimo idus Decembris MCCCCLI."

(but in prose, and only to the end of the sixteenth canto). He combined classical and theological erudition, and attained a fame and influence almost equal to that enjoyed by Erasmus in the sixteenth, and Voltaire in the eighteenth century.

Valla is chiefly known in Church history as a pioneer of skeptical and destructive criticism. He was a born critic, and accepted nothing on mere authority and tradition. He cut right and left, and spared nobody, not even Virgil and Cicero. In controversy, he exhausted the vocabulary of abuse. He achieved the first victory of humanism over the established orthodoxy, and barely escaped the condemnation of the Roman inquisition by hypocritically declaring that he believed as mother Church believed. He delighted in paradoxes and in attacks upon current superstitions. He denied to the monks the monopoly of being "religious," as well as their claim to higher morality and reward, and opposed to their boasted obedience, poverty and celibacy, the equal or higher virtues of wise ruling, proper use of wealth and continence in married life. He did not condemn monasticism as such, and admitted it to be one way of attaining salvation, provided only it did not lay claim to higher merit, which, after all, was the very foundation of the system.

In his dialogue, *De Libertate Arbitrii*, he showed the agreement of human liberty with divine foreknowledge, and attacked philosophy as the fountain of all heresies. He ventured in his *Annotations to the New Testament*, which Erasmus first fully appreciated and published in 1505, to criticise Jerome's Vulgate and to correct its numerous errors from the Greek original, with the aid of Cardinal Bessarion. He showed a disposition to treat the manuscripts of the Greek text with the same freedom as the manuscripts of heathen authors. He rejected, as a forgery, Christ's letter to King Abgarus of Edessa, reported and accepted as genuine by Eusebius. He denied the apostolic origin of the Apostles' Creed, which was held almost as an article of faith equal with the creed itself.

He exposed the hierarchical fiction of the donation of the Emperor Constantine, who was supposed to have given not only the Lateran palace, but the temporal power of Rome, Italy, and all the West to Pope Sylvester, as an act of gratitude for his baptism. Even Dante believed this tradition, but doubted the right of Constantine thus to dispose of half of his dominions; and he dated from it all the corruptions of the Church.

" Ah, Constantine ! of how much ill was cause,
Not thy conversion, but those rich domains
That the first wealthy pope received of thee."

Valla calls this fiction, "contradictory, impossible, stupid, barbarous, and ridiculous," and refuted it with irrefragable testimonies, from

the intrinsic improbability of such an act of folly, from the mediæval character of the language, and from authentic history which informs us that Constantine was not baptized by Sylvester in Rome, but twenty-four years later by Eusebius of Nicomedia, on his death-bed (in 337). The fact that so many popes for centuries had believed in the genuineness of the forged document only proves their ignorance and credulity; but if they entertained any doubts, it was to their interest to suppress them.*

Valla is not satisfied with refuting this fictitious document, which is embodied in the pseudo-Isidorian Decretals, but he makes it the occasion of an attack upon the whole temporal power of the papacy which was based upon it. He thus shook the very foundation of the mediæval theocracy. He equals in boldness and violence the antipapal writings of Luther. He did not, indeed, go so far as to deny the spiritual power and divine institution of the papacy, but he charges the Bishop of Rome with having turned Peter into Judas, and having accepted the devil's offer of the kingdoms of this world. He reminds him of Paul's sentence that the love of money is a root of all evil. He makes him responsible for the political divisions and miseries of Italy, for rebellions and civil wars—herein anticipating Machiavelli. He maintains that the princes have a right to expel the pope from his temporal possessions which he had long forfeited by his abuses. If Israel was allowed to fall away from David and Solomon, who were anointed by prophets, why should Christians not have a right, he asked, to cast off the tyranny of those who are no kings at all, and who from shepherds of the lambs have become thieves and robbers? He calls Pope Eugene IV a tyrant, and his chief adviser, Cardinal Vitelleschi, a bloodhound and a monster, because they attempted to undermine King Alphonso and to restore the house of Anjou. He threatens them with a more severe attack, and closes with the ardent wish that the pope might be content to be the vicar of Christ and not of Cæsar, and to promote peace instead of war.†

* *De falso credita et ementita Constantini Donatione*, first published in 1440 (in the sixth year after the rebellion of Rome, which forced the pope to flee, June 24, 1434). The tract is printed in his *Opera*, 761-95, and in a collection of antipapal monarchical essays, which appeared at Basel, 1566 (pp. 728-80). Ulrich von Hutten published it with an ironical dedication to Leo X, in 1517. Luther received a copy through a friend in February, 1520, and was much strengthened by it in his opposition to popery, which he attacked unmercifully in the summer of that year in his *Address to the German Nobility* and his *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. See Strauss, *Ulrich von Hutten*, 211 sq. (4th ed. of 1878). On the history of the donation, see J. Friedrich (Old Catholic), *Die konstantinische Schenkung*, München, 1889.

† "Utinam, utinam aliquando videam . . . ut papa tantum vicarius Christi sit, et non etiam Cæsaris. . . . Tunc papa et dicetur et erit Pater sanctus,

The circumstances under which this fierce polemical tract was written throws suspicion on the motive and detracts from the courage of the author. He composed it in defense and under the protection of Alphonso of Naples, who was then quarreling with Eugene; but when the king was reconciled to the pope, Valla ceased his warfare; he even entered the service of the papacy under Nicholas V, and enjoyed its benefices.

Unfortunately, Valla's ethical principles and conduct were no recommendation to his theology. He was a cautious advocate of the heathen tendency of Humanism. In his three Ciceronian dialogues on *Lust*, written in 1431, he compares, through different speakers, the relative claims of the Epicurean, Stoic, and Christian morality.* He gives the ultimate victory to the last, but represents the first through the mouth of Beccadelli and papal secretaries in a most seductive form, and shows his own leaning towards it in the introduction. The Dialogues are an indirect attack upon Christian morality, and an apology of the philosophy of sensual enjoyment. What nature demands, is good and laudable; for the voice of nature is the voice of God. Wine is the teacher and father of all pleasures. Celibacy is ridiculed as a crime against nature. The inventor of nunnery ought to have been banished for such a monstrosity to the ends of the earth. The Platonic community of wives is plausibly defended, and the *hetærxæ* of Greece are said to have done more good than the sanctimonious nuns.† Thus vice is turned into virtue, and virtue into vice. When Valla was charged by Poggio with having debauched the maid of his brother-in-law, he admitted the charge without shame. The Dialogues gave just offense. In a second edition (1433), Valla omitted the introduction and changed the title, calling it *De Vero Bono*, but not the sentiments.‡

Still further, in the direction of heathenish immorality, went his friend, Antonio degli Beccadelli (born at Palermo in 1394, whence

pater omnium, pater ecclesiæ; nec bella inter Christianos excitabit, sed ab aliis excitata censura apostolica et papali majestate sedabit. Dixi." This is the conclusion of the MS. copy in the Vatican.

* *De Voluptate (et de vero Bono)*. In the first edition, Antonio Beccadelli (Panormita) defends Epicureanism; Leonardo Bruni, Stoicism; Niccolo Niccoli, Christianity. Afterwards he fell out with one of them, and introduced other speakers.

† "Melius merentur scorta et prostibula de genere humano quam sanctimoniales virgines et continententes."

‡ Voigt says of the Dialogue (*Wiederbelebung des classischen Alterthums*, Vol. i, 469): "Ohne Zweifel ist der Kern des Buchs eine Verherrlichung der sinnlichen Lust, wenn auch am Begriffe der Lust gedeutelt wird und ihr Sieg nicht gerade als letzte Moral erscheint. . . . Die Lizenz, die dem Menschen immer so lockend erscheint, hier wird sie in einem wohlgerundeten System als ein natürliches Recht vorgetragen. Dass ein Mann, der auf den Namen eines Christen Anspruch machte, solche Sätze nur auszusprechen wagte!"

his name Panormita), who laid off the mask, and in a collection of epigrams, called *Hermaphroditus* (c. 1431), surpassed in literary elegance and shocking obscenity every production of that or any other age. It outheathens the heathen.* Yet neither did Beccadelli suffer serious inconvenience from such scandalous publications. Open heresies would have been punished by death, but open immoralities were allowed to pass unpunished. The hierarchical Church was very indulgent towards the moral weaknesses of the humanists and even rewarded them, as was the case with Valla and Poggio, by high dignities.

Laurentius Valla is one of the ablest representatives of the heathen tendency of that great Revival of Letters which flourished in Italy during the fifteenth century, and which bears the name of Humanism, from its aim to develop man as man. Humanism was a revival of classical literature, and, at the same time, a revival of the religion and morality embodied in that literature. It prepared the way for the Reformation by emancipating the mind of Europe from the shackles of tradition and spreading a knowledge of the Greek and Roman languages, philosophy, poetry, and art, which had prepared the way for the original introduction of the gospel. The Reformation was a revival of primitive Christianity, and saved the Church from relapsing into a new heathenism. Without the Renaissance there could have been no Reformation, and without the Reformation there could have been no Counter-Reformation. It was the Protestant Reformation and the papal Counter-Reformation which checked the paganizing and infidel tendencies of Humanism. But Humanism, under a new form, reappears again in modern culture, which, to a large extent, especially on the continent of Europe and in Roman Catholic countries, is hostile or indifferent to the Church. Modern infidelity can only be overcome by a deeper apprehension and application of the Christianity of the New Testament. The religious movement of the sixteenth century is not the last of the pentecostal revivals which God has in store for His Church. The next century may see a much greater religious movement in the ever-advancing march of the kingdom of Christ.

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* Voigt (Vol. i, 481): "Das Buch liess in einen Abgrund der Lasterhaftigkeit sehen, aber es umkränzte ihn mit den zierlichsten Blumen der Poesie. Also nicht nur diejenigen geschlechtlichen Sünden wurden besungen, in denen das Weib zum Spiel der Lüsternheit wird, auch die Päderastie, diese Schande, dieser Fluch der alten Welt und des Orients, über den die christliche Religion einen ihrer vollsten Triumphe errungen zu haben meinte, auch sie lebte wieder auf und nicht nur im Dunkel des vereinzelt Verbrechen, sie war bereits zur wohlbekanntten Sitte geworden." The book, often found in manuscript, was printed at Paris, 1791, under the title, *Lusus in Venerem*, then at Coburg, 1824.