

HUMANITIES

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649609192

Humanities by Thomas Sinclair

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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THOMAS SINCLAIR

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BY

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"QUEST," "GODDESS FORTUNE," "THE MESSENGERS," "LOVE'S TRILOGY,"
"THE MOUNT," ETC.



LONDON:

TRÜBNER & CO., LUDGATE HILL.

1886.

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TO * * *

THE MOST INSPIRING OF CORRESPONDENTS.

[See page 131.]

96-20014
3-14-39

PREFACE.

CRITICISM of Roman subjects reaches by short path the pressing questions of the most advanced of present European nations. In politics, the contest of aristocracy and democracy for rule; in social science, the importance attached to sanitarian engineering for the public health; in religion, the problems of toleration and equality rather than of dogma and organisation; in philosophy, the discussion of pessimism or optimism as the diagnosis of human life, and stoicism or hedonism as its cure; in literature, research upon themes of origin, development, genealogy, ethnics; in poetry, distinct but unproductive faith in the value of myth; and in art, the dangerous encouragement and admiration of foreign in preference to native impulse—create a remarkable parallelism with Rome of the modern country whose hegemony for centuries cannot be questioned. It is those elated with the busy enthusiasm of the merely local knowledge which is nearly always the

chief cause of national vanity, who assume that the ancient masters of the world had nothing to teach us in practical affairs of town and country. Aqueducts and sewers, not to mention such leaden and other pipings as were used for public baths of the very largest proportions, were examples of an infinity of similar developments. But if there is rivalry between the Græco-Roman civilisation and that of our day in material things, even to perfection of feasting, in mental kingdoms there is still greater wealth by which to test respective advance. It is not by ages that progress ought to be reckoned, but by the heights of particular civilisations, in whatsoever place or period they may have occurred. The essential requirements of individual life could have been reached to as great an extent under Priam in his capital of Troy, by Pericles in the republic of Athens, or by Latin writers in the provincial town of Pompeii on the bay of Naples, as in the Paris or London of to-day. If such is the probability, nothing can be more mistaken than the charlatanic celebration of our own times for not much more certain reason than that the living dog is better than the dead lion. But misconception of causes and effects, and of the relative superiorities of civilisations, is nowhere so glaring as among those committed to the cruder dogmas of Pauline

Christianity. Their base treatment of what they call paganism and heathenism, as hardly worthy to be dark background for the Jews to figure on as lords and gods of light, is utterly unworthy of Europeans who have had the slightest introduction to what scholars call the humanities. To have read an ode of Horace ought to correct for ever the delusion that Hebrew sentiment could be essentially worthy of the most momentary superiority over Latin thought and refinement. It is only now that a few of the English people are getting dimly aware that they are arriving nearer to the breadth of the Augustan culture, and nothing can be more helpful for private ennoblement and everyday benefit than sympathy with that cardinal height of human activity. Many are beginning to see that the conquest of Europe by Hebraism was quite as great a calamity to civilisation as the supremacy of Moslemism would have been in the time of the Saracen attack upon Spain or of the Turkish advance on Austria. They were equally Semitic barbarisms, determined to override European sanity, with its accurate instinct for art in all departments, from architecture to music. There is no such thing in Europe as Christian or Hebraic art. All that has been done, even to the work of a Fra Angelico, was in bitter artistic antagonism to the Semitic

formula, born of the tent and the desert, that beautiful form is idolatrous evil. Nothing but pattern was admissible to either Hebrew or Arab, and the whole series of Madonnas and Holy Children, of St. Sebastians and St. Catherines, were obscured Venuses and Cupids, Mercuries and Dianas, from the intrinsic European mind, which had to become for so long the unhappy slave of eastern fanaticism in its moderated papal form. Because of their too excellent logical faculty, the Scottish people are the most Judaised section of Christendom, and to them at some periods music itself as art was an unclean thing. Of all the nationalities, England has kept her native ground best against the deluge of Hebraic barbarism which the Goths (to their own intense misery, till Luther gave them a fractional home freedom and spiritual life) were the chief means of spreading. The early Norman kings checked the arrogant assumptions of universal supremacy by papal Hebraism, and the Restoration saved us from Adamitic Puritanism, which was a still more inhuman, because less mixed, form of the Judaic spirit of exclusiveness, fanaticism, and intolerance of beauty.

To the peoples now (though comparisons with such pure European soul as that of Greece and Rome, embodied in thousands of forms of art, have great educative value) there is the prime necessity

of each perfecting its own special civilisation as far as racial and language qualities can allow. The true humanism consists in keeping off foreign culture except what can easily be subordinated, and giving fair play to the native element to rise to its full natural height and intensity of charm. If political cataclysm breaks in, there is no help for it, because the way of life to individuals or nations leads seldom to the highest possibilities. Humanism from the English basis promises, if we continue faithful, fortunate, and dominant over religious fanaticisms, to equal and perhaps surpass that of Greece and Rome, in poetry and all other forms of art, from the house to the constitutional and infinitely graded state.

SOUTH KENSINGTON, 1886.