

**THE EARLY
RENAISSANCE
IN ENGLAND**

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The Early Renaissance in England by Mandell Creighton

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THE
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ON JUNE 13, 1895.*

BY
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THE EARLY RENAISSANCE IN ENGLAND.

IT is sometimes worth while, even for a lecturer, to look at the rock whence he was hewn, and to content himself with explaining why he exists. This is the humble purpose which I have set before myself. Other lecturers, in their yearly courses, have celebrated the advance of science, or have unfolded the development of thought. I would ask you to go back with me and consider some of the causes which made this progress possible, some of the labours of forgotten men by whose goodwill and zeal our intellectual heritage has been slowly built up. When Sir Robert Rede founded this lectureship in 1518 he did so because

he wished to enrich the University with opportunities which it had not possessed before. He wished to broaden its studies by favouring that New Learning which was changing men's views about the world and life. My object this morning is to discover the motives which probably weighed with him and explain the meaning of what he did.

The Renaissance is a familiar theme; and its history in Italy has been elaborately studied of late years. Perhaps so much has been written about it that its main features have been somewhat obscured. Italy was the home of the Renaissance movement, and attention has been chiefly given to the most exaggerated forms which it there assumed, while its simpler, I might almost say its normal, development, has been somewhat overlooked. Let me try and put before you in its simplest form the chief object of that intellectual movement which we have agreed to call the Renaissance.

The great formative power of ancient life

was the culture derived from Hellas. Culture after all means an attitude towards life, and the attitude expressed by Hellenic thought was one of clear outlook upon the world, frank acceptance of things as they were, and resoluteness in clothing them with beautiful form. These qualities of the Hellenic mind were to some degree impressed upon the sterner and more practical mind of Rome, which gave them wide dominion. But Rome, with all its capacity for action, lacked the faculty of preserving by perpetual readjustments the spiritual conceptions on which natural life must ultimately be based. Each step in Rome's expansion left it poorer in actual contents, till it fell through sheer exhaustion. In the downfall of material civilization, in the miseries of barbarian invasions, the new power of Christianity alone survived and was strong enough to build up again the life of man upon an enduring basis; but the task was enormous, the struggle was arduous, and amid the general wreckage only