



The book of the courtier: From the Italian of Count Baldassare Castiglione

Baldassarre Castiglione

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Excerpt from The Book of the Courtier: From the Italian of Count Baldassare Castiglione

The Renaissance is the name of a European movement so gradual, broad, manifold, and subtle, that any attempt to reduce it to a single expression is predestined to failure. No formula less vague and magniloquent than Michelet's - 'the discovery' by man of himself and of the 'world' - can be stretched to cover the diverse aspects of that great era of change. On all sides there was a loosening of bonds, and a widening of horizons, 'deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind.' The extension of man's territorial domain, and of his imaginative prospect, by the discovery of the New World, the shattering of his most familiar conceptions by the brilliant conjectures of Copernicus, are two signal achievements which may perhaps be taken as emblematic of all the rest. By these the mediaeval scheme of the physical universe, and with it the mediaeval theory of divinity and politics, to which it was so delicately and symmetrically fitted, were to be finally overthrown. At the same time the rediscovery and reconstruction of classical antiquity by the labours of scholars gave to imagination a new focus, and to humanity a new model.

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