

# ERASMUS DESIDERIUS

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AGAINST WAR

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*Erasmus Against War:*

# Содержание

INTRODUCTION

4

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

25

# Desiderius Erasmus

## Erasmus Against War

### INTRODUCTION

The Treatise on War, of which the earliest English translation is here reprinted, was among the most famous writings of the most illustrious writer of his age. Few people now read Erasmus; he has become for the world in general a somewhat vague name. Only by some effort of the historical imagination is it possible for those who are not professed scholars and students to realize the enormous force which he was at a critical period in the history of civilization. The free institutions and the material progress of the modern world have alike their roots in humanism. Humanism as a movement of the human mind culminated in the age, and even in a sense in the person, of Erasmus. Its brilliant flower was of an earlier period; its fruits developed and matured later; but it was in his time, and in him, that the fruit set! The earlier sixteenth century is not so romantic as its predecessors, nor so rich in solid achievement as others that have followed it. As in some orchard when spring is over, the blossom lies withered on the grass, and the fruit has long to wait before it can ripen on the boughs. Yet here, in the dull, hot midsummer days, is the central and critical period of the year's growth.

The life of Erasmus is accessible in many popular forms as well as in more learned and formal works. To recapitulate it here would fall beyond the scope of a preface. But in order to appreciate this treatise fully it is necessary to realize the time and circumstances in which it appeared, and to recall some of the main features of its author's life and work up to the date of its composition.

That date can be fixed with certainty, from a combination of external and internal evidence, between the years 1513 and 1515; in all probability it was the winter of 1514-15. It was printed in the latter year, in the "editio princeps" of the enlarged and rewritten *Adagia* then issued from Froben's great printing-works at Basel. The stormy decennate of Pope Julius II had ended in February, 1513. To his successor, Giovanni de' Medici, who succeeded to the papal throne under the name of Leo X, the treatise is particularly addressed. The years which ensued were a time singularly momentous in the history of religion, of letters, and of the whole life of the civilized world. The eulogy of Leo with which Erasmus ends indicates the hopes then entertained of a new Augustan age of peace and reconciliation. The Reformation was still capable of being regarded as an internal and constructive force, within the framework of the society built up by the Middle Ages. The final divorce between humanism and the Church had not yet been made. The long and disastrous epoch of the wars of religion was still only a dark cloud on the horizon. The Renaissance was really dead, but few yet

realized the fact. The new head of the Church was a lover of peace, a friend of scholars, a munificent patron of the arts. This treatise shows that Erasmus, to a certain extent, shared or strove to share in an illusion widely spread among the educated classes of Europe. With a far keener instinct for that which the souls of men required, an Augustinian monk from Wittenberg, who had visited Rome two years earlier, had turned away from the temple where a corpse lay swathed in gold and half hid in the steam of incense. With a far keener insight into the real state of things, Machiavelli was, at just this time, composing *The Prince*.

In one form or another, the subject of his impassioned pleading for peace among beings human, civilized, and Christian, had been long in Erasmus's mind. In his most celebrated single work, the *Praise of Folly*, he had bitterly attacked the attitude towards war habitual, and evilly consecrated by usage, among kings and popes. The same argument had formed the substance of a document addressed by him, under the title of *Anti-Polemus*, to Pope Julius in 1507. Much of the substance, much even of the phraseology of that earlier work is doubtless repeated here. Beyond the specific reference to Pope Leo, the other notes of time in the treatise now before us are few and faint. Allusions to Louis XII of France (1498-1515), to Ferdinand the Catholic (1479-1516), to Philip, king of Aragon (1504-1516), and Sigismund, king of Poland (1506-1548), are all consistent with the composition of the treatise some years earlier. At the end of it he promises to treat of the matter more largely when

he publishes the *Anti-Polemus*. But this intention was never carried into effect. Perhaps Erasmus had become convinced of its futility; for the events of the years which followed soon showed that the new Augustan age was but a false dawn over which night settled more stormily and profoundly than before.

For ten or a dozen years Erasmus had stood at the head of European scholarship. His name was as famous in France and England as in the Low Countries and Germany. The age was indeed one of those in which the much-abused term of the republic of letters had a real and vital meaning. The nationalities of modern Europe had already formed themselves; the notion of the Empire had become obsolete, and if the imperial title was still coveted by princes, it was under no illusion as to the amount of effective supremacy which it carried with it, or as to any life yet remaining in the mediaeval doctrine of the unity of Christendom whether as a church or as a state. The discovery of the new world near the end of the previous century precipitated a revolution in European politics towards which events had long been moving, and finally broke up the political framework of the Middle Ages. But the other great event of the same period, the invention and diffusion of the art of printing, had created a new European commonwealth of the mind. The history of the century which followed it is a history in which the landmarks are found less in battles and treaties than in books.

The earlier life of the man who occupies the central place in the literary and spiritual movement of his time in no important

way differs from the youth of many contemporary scholars and writers. Even the illegitimacy of his birth was an accident shared with so many others that it does not mark him out in any way from his fellows. His early education at Utrecht, at Deventer, at Herzogenbosch; his enforced and unhappy novitiate in a house of Augustinian canons near Gouda; his secretaryship to the bishop of Cambrai, the grudging patron who allowed rather than assisted him to complete his training at the University of Paris – all this was at the time mere matter of common form. It is with his arrival in England in 1497, at the age of thirty-one, that his effective life really begins.

For the next twenty years that life was one of restless movement and incessant production. In England, France, the Low Countries, on the upper Rhine, and in Italy, he flitted about gathering up the whole intellectual movement of the age, and pouring forth the results in that admirable Latin which was not only the common language of scholars in every country, but the single language in which he himself thought instinctively and wrote freely. Between the *Adagia* of 1500 and the *Colloquia* of 1516 comes a mass of writings equivalent to the total product of many fertile and industrious pens. He worked in the cause of humanism with a sacred fury, striving with all his might to connect it with all that was living in the old and all that was developing in the newer world. In his travels no less than in his studies the aspect of war must have perpetually met him as at once the cause and the effect of barbarism; it was the symbol

of everything to which humanism in its broader as well as in its narrower aspect was utterly opposed and repugnant. He was a student at Paris in the ominous year of the first French invasion of Italy, in which the death of Pico della Mirandola and Politian came like a symbol of the death of the Italian Renaissance itself. Charles VIII, as has often been said, brought back the Renaissance to France from that expedition; but he brought her back a captive chained to the wheels of his cannon. The epoch of the Italian wars began. A little later (1500) Sandro Botticelli painted that amazing Nativity which is one of the chief treasures of the London National Gallery. Over it in mystical Greek may still be read the painter's own words: "This picture was painted by me Alexander amid the confusions of Italy at the time prophesied in the Second Woe of the Apocalypse, when Satan shall be loosed upon the earth." In November, 1506, Erasmus was at Bologna, and saw the triumphal entry of Pope Julius into the city at the head of a great mercenary army. Two years later the league of Cambray, a combination of folly, treachery and shame which filled even hardened politicians with horror, plunged half Europe into a war in which no one was a gainer and which finally ruined Italy: "bellum quo nullum," says the historian, "vel atrocius vel diuturnius in Italia post exactos Gothos majores nostri meminerunt." In England Erasmus found, on his first visit, a country exhausted by the long and desperate struggle of the Wars of the Roses, out of which she had emerged with half her ruling class killed in battle or on the scaffold, and the whole fabric

of society to reconstruct. The Empire was in a state of confusion and turmoil no less deplorable and much more extensive. The Diet of 1495 had indeed, by an expiring effort towards the suppression of absolute anarchy, decreed the abolition of private war. But in a society where every owner of a castle, every lord of a few square miles of territory, could conduct public war on his own account, the prohibition was of little more than formal value. Humanism had been introduced by the end of the fifteenth century in some of the German universities, but too late to have much effect on the rising fury of religious controversy. The very year in which this treatise against war was published gave to the world another work of even wider circulation and more profound consequences. The famous *Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum*, first published in 1515, and circulated rapidly among all the educated readers of Europe, made an open breach between the humanists and the Church. That breach was never closed; nor on the other hand could the efforts of well-intentioned reformers like Melancthon bring humanism into any organic relation with the reformed movement. When mutual exhaustion concluded the European struggle, civilization had to start afresh; it took a century more to recover the lost ground. The very idea of humanism had long before then disappeared.

War, pestilence, the theologians: these were the three great enemies with which Erasmus says he had throughout life to contend. It was during the years he spent in England that he was perhaps least harassed by them. His three periods of residence

there – a fourth, in 1517, appears to have been of short duration and not marked by any very notable incident – were of the utmost importance in his life. During the first, in his residence between the years 1497 and 1499 at London and Oxford, the English Renaissance, if the name be fully applicable to so partial and inconclusive a movement, was in the promise and ardour of its brief spring. It was then that Erasmus made the acquaintance of those great Englishmen whose names cannot be mentioned with too much reverence: Colet, Grocyn, Latimer, Linacre. These men were the makers of modern England to a degree hardly realized. They carried the future in their hands. Peace had descended upon a weary country; and the younger generation was full of new hopes. The *Enchiridion Militis Christiani*, written soon after Erasmus returned to France, breathes the spirit of one who had not lost hope in the reconciliation of the Church and the world, of the old and new. When Erasmus made his second visit to England, in 1506, that fair promise had grown and spread. Colet had become dean of Saint Paul's; and through him, as it would appear, Erasmus now made the acquaintance of another great man with whom he soon formed as close an intimacy, Thomas More.

His Italian journey followed: he was in Italy nearly three years, at Turin, Bologna, Venice, Padua, Siena, Rome. It was in the first of these years that Albert Dürer was also in Italy, where he met Bellini and was recognized by the Italian masters as the head of a new transalpine art in no way inferior to their own. The year

after Erasmus left Italy, Botticelli, the last survivor of the ancient world, died at Florence.

Meanwhile, Henry VIII, a prince, young, handsome, generous, pious, had succeeded to the throne of England. A golden age was thought to have dawned. Lord Mountjoy, who had been the pupil of Erasmus at Paris, and with whom he had first come to England, lost no time in urging Henry to send for the most brilliant and famous of European scholars, and attach him to his court. The king, who had already met and admired him, needed no pressing. In the letter which Henry himself wrote to Erasmus entreating him to take up his residence in England, the language employed was that of sincere admiration; nor was there any conscious insincerity in the main motive which he urged. "It is my earnest wish," wrote the king, "to restore Christ's religion to its primitive purity." The history of the English Reformation supplies a strange commentary on these words.

But the first few years of the new reign (1509-1513), which coincide with the third and longest sojourn of Erasmus in England, were a time in which high hopes might not seem unreasonable. While Italy was ravaged by war and the rest of Europe was in uneasy ferment, England remained peaceful and prosperous. The lust of the eyes and the pride of life were indeed the motive forces of the court; but alongside of these was a real desire for reform, and a real if very imperfect attempt to cultivate the nobler arts of peace, to establish learning, and to purify religion. Colet's great foundation of Saint Paul's School

in 1510 is one of the landmarks of English history. Erasmus joined the founder and the first high master, Colet and Lily, in composing the schoolbooks to be used in it. He had already written, in More's house at Chelsea, where pure religion reigned alongside of high culture, the *Encomium Moriae*, in which all his immense gifts of eloquence and wit were lavished on the cause of humanism and the larger cause of humanity. That war was at once a sin, a scandal, and a folly was one of the central doctrines of the group of eminent Englishmen with whom he was now associated. It was a doctrine held by them with some ambiguity and in varying degrees. In the *Utopia* (1516) More condemns wars of aggression, while taking the common view as to wars of so-called self-defence. In 1513, when Henry, swept into the seductive scheme for a partition of France by a European confederacy, was preparing for the first of his many useless and inglorious continental campaigns, Colet spoke out more freely. He preached before the court against war itself as barbarous and unchristian, and did not spare either kings or popes who dealt otherwise. Henry was disturbed; he sent for Colet, and pressed him hard on the point whether he meant that all wars were unjustifiable. Colet was in advance of his age, but not so far in advance of it as this. He gave some kind of answer which satisfied the king. The preparations for war went forward; the Battle of Spurs plunged the court and all the nation into the intoxication of victory; while at Flodden-edge, in the same autumn, the ancestral allies of France sustained the most crushing defeat recorded in

Scottish history. When both sides in a war have invoked God's favour, the successful side is ready enough to believe that its prayers have been answered and its action accepted by God.

Erasmus was now reader in Greek and professor of divinity at Cambridge; but Cambridge was far away from the centre of European thought and of literary activities. He left England before the end of the year for Basel, where the greater part of his life thenceforth was passed. Froben had made Basel the chief literary centre of production for the whole of Europe. Through Froben's printing-presses Erasmus could reach a wider audience than was allowed him at any court, however favourable to pure religion and the new learning. It was at this juncture that he made an eloquent and far-reaching appeal, on a matter which lay very near his heart, to the conscience of Christendom.

The *Adagia*, that vast work which was, at least to his own generation, Erasmus's foremost title to fame, has long ago passed into the rank of those monuments of literature "dont la reputation s'affermira toujours parcequ'on ne les lit guère." So far as Erasmus is more than a name for most modern readers, it is on slighter and more popular works that any direct knowledge of him is grounded on the *Colloquies*, which only ceased to be a schoolbook within living memory, on the *Praise of Folly*, and on selections from the enormous masses of his letters. An Oxford scholar of the last generation, whose profound knowledge of humanistic literature was accompanied by a gift of terse and pointed expression, describes the *Adagia* in a single sentence,

as “a manual of the wit and wisdom of the ancient world for the use of the modern, enlivened by commentary in Erasmus’s finest vein.” In its first form, the *Adagiorum Collectanea*, it was published by him at Paris in 1500, just after his return from England. In the author’s epistle dedicatory to Mountjoy he ascribes to him and to Richard Charnock, the prior of Saint Mary’s College in Oxford, the inspiration of the work. It consists of a series of between eight and nine hundred comments in brief essays, each suggested by some terse or proverbial phrase from an ancient Latin author. The work gave full scope for the display, not only of the immense treasures of his learning, but of those other qualities, the combination of which raised their author far above all other contemporary writers, his keen wit, his copiousness and facility, his complete control of Latin as a living language. It met with an enthusiastic reception, and placed him at once at the head of European men of letters. Edition after edition poured from the press. It was ten times reissued at Paris within a generation. Eleven editions were published at Strasburg between 1509 and 1521. Within the same years it was reprinted at Erfurt, The Hague, Cologne, Mayence, Leyden, and elsewhere. The Rhine valley was the great nursery of letters north of the Alps, and along the Rhine from source to sea the book spread and was multiplied.

This success induced Erasmus to enlarge and complete his labours. The *Adagiorum Chiliades*, the title of the work in its new form, was part of the work of his residence in Italy in the years 1506-9, and was published at Venice by Aldus in September,

1508. The enlarged collection, to all intents and purposes a new work, consists of no less than three thousand two hundred and sixty heads. In a preface, Erasmus speaks slightly of the *Adagiorum Collectanea*, with that affectation from which few authors are free, as a little collection carelessly made. "Some people got hold of it," he adds, (and here the affectation becomes absolute untruth,) "and had it printed very incorrectly." In the new work, however, much of the old disappears, much more is partially or wholly recast; and such of the old matter as is retained is dispersed at random among the new. In the *Collectanea* the commentaries had all been brief: here many are expanded into substantial treatises covering four or five pages of closely printed folio.

The Aldine edition had been reprinted at Basel by Froben in 1513. Shortly afterwards Erasmus himself took up his permanent residence there. Under his immediate supervision there presently appeared what was to all intents and purposes the definitive edition of 1515. It is a book of nearly seven hundred folio pages, and contains, besides the introductory matter, three thousand four hundred and eleven headings. In his preface Erasmus gives some details with regard to its composition. Of the original Paris work he now says, no doubt with truth, that it was undertaken by him hastily and without enough method. When preparing the Venice edition he had better realized the magnitude of the enterprise, and was better fitted for it by reading and learning, more especially by the mass of Greek manuscripts, and of newly

printed Greek first editions, to which he had access at Venice and in other parts of Italy. In England also, owing very largely to the kindness of Archbishop Warham, more leisure and an ampler library had been available.

Among several important additions made in the edition of 1515, this essay, the text of which is the proverbial phrase "Dulce bellum inexpertis," is at once the longest and the most remarkable. The adage itself, with a few lines of commentary, had indeed been in the original collection; but the treatise, in itself a substantial work, now appeared for the first time. It occupied a conspicuous place as the first heading in the fourth Chiliad of the complete work; and it was at once singled out from the rest as of special note and profound import. Froben was soon called upon for a separate edition. This appeared in April, 1517, in a quarto of twenty pages. This little book, the *Bellum Erasmi* as it was called for the sake of brevity, ran like wildfire from reader to reader. Half the scholarly presses of Europe were soon employed in reprinting it. Within ten years it had been reissued at Louvain, twice at Strasburg, twice at Mayence, at Leipsic, twice at Paris, twice at Cologne, at Antwerp, and at Venice. German translations of it were published at Basel and at Strasburg in 1519 and 1520. It soon made its way to England, and the translation here utilized was issued by Berthelet, the king's printer, in the winter of 1533-4.

Whether the translation be by Richard Taverner, the translator and editor, a few years later, of an epitome or selection of the

Chiliades, or by some other hand, there are no direct means of ascertaining; nor except for purposes of curiosity is the question an important one. The version wholly lacks distinction. It is a work of adequate scholarship but of no independent literary merit. English prose was then hardly formed. The revival of letters had reached the country, but for political and social reasons which are readily to be found in any handbook of English history, it had found a soil, fertile indeed, but not yet broken up. Since Chaucer, English poetry had practically stood still, and except where poetry has cleared the way, prose does not in ordinary circumstances advance. A few adventurers in setting forth had appeared. More's Utopia, one of the earliest of English prose classics, is a classic in virtue of its style as well as of its matter. Berners's translation of Froissart, published in 1523, was the first and one of the finest of that magnificent series of translations which from this time onwards for about a century were produced in an almost continuous stream, and through which the secret of prose was slowly wrung from older and more accomplished languages. Latimer, about the same time, showed his countrymen how a vernacular prose, flexible, well knit, and nervous, might be written without its lines being traced on any ancient or foreign model. Coverdale, the greatest master of English prose whom the century produced, whose name has just missed the immortality that is secure for his work, must have substantially completed that magnificent version of the Bible which appeared in 1535, and to which the authorized version of

the seventeenth century owes all that one work of genius can owe to another. It is not with these great men that the translator of this treatise can be compared. But he wrought, after his measure, on the same structure as they.

It is then to the original Latin, not to this rude and stammering version, that scholars must turn now, as still more certainly they turned then, for the mind of Erasmus; for with him, even more eminently than with other authors, the style is the man, and his Latin is the substance, not merely the dress, of his thought. When he wrote it he was about forty-eight years of age. He was still in the fullness of his power. If he was often crippled by delicate health, that was no more than he had habitually been from boyhood. In this treatise we come very near the real man, with his strange mixture of liberalism and orthodoxy, of clear-sighted courage and a delicacy which nearly always might be mistaken for timidity.

His text is that (in the translator's words) "nothing is either more wicked or more wretched, nothing doth worse become a man (I will not say a Christian man) than war." War was shocking to Erasmus alike on every side of his remarkably complex and sensitive nature. It was impious; it was inhuman; it was ugly; it was in every sense of the word barbarous, to one who before all things and in the full sense of the word was civilized and a lover of civilization. All these varied aspects of the case, seen by others singly and partially, were to him facets of one truth, rays of one light. His argument circles and flickers among them, hardly

pausing to enforce one before passing insensibly to another. In the splendid vindication of the nature of man with which the treatise opens, the tone is rather that of Cicero than of the New Testament. The majesty of man resides above all in his capacity to “behold the very pure strength and nature of things;” in essence he is no fallen and corrupt creature, but a piece of workmanship such as Shakespeare describes him through the mouth of Hamlet. He was shaped to this heroic mould “by Nature, or rather god,” so the Tudor translation reads, and the use of capital letters, though only a freak of the printer, brings out with a singular suggestiveness the latent pantheism which underlies the thought of all the humanists. To this wonderful creature strife and warfare are naturally repugnant. Not only is his frame “weak and tender,” but he is “born to love and amity.” His chief end, the object to which all his highest and most distinctively human powers are directed, is coöperant labour in the pursuit of knowledge. War comes out of ignorance, and into ignorance it leads; of war comes contempt of virtue and of godly living. In the age of Machiavelli the word “virtue” had a double and sinister meaning; but here it is taken in its nobler sense. Yet, the argument continues, for “virtue,” even in the Florentine statesman’s sense, war gives but little room. It is waged mainly for “vain titles or childish wrath;” it does not foster, in those responsible for it, any one of the nobler excellences. The argument throughout this part of the treatise is, both in its substance and in its ornament, wholly apart from the dogmas of religion. The furies of war are

described as rising out of a very pagan hell. The apostrophe of Nature to mankind immediately suggests the spirit as well as the language of Lucretius. Erasmus had clearly been reading the *De Rerum Natura*, and borrows some of his finest touches from that miraculous description of the growth of civilization in the fifth book, which is one of the noblest contributions of antiquity towards a real conception of the nature of the world and of man. The progressive degeneration of morality, because, as its scope becomes higher, practice falls further and further short of it, is insisted upon by both these great thinkers in much the same spirit and with much the same illustrations. The rise of empires, "of which there was never none yet in any nation, but it was gotten with the great shedding of man's blood," is seen by both in the same light. But Erasmus passes on to the more expressly religious aspect of the whole matter in the great double climax with which he crowns his argument, the wickedness of a Christian fighting against another man, the horror of a Christian fighting against another Christian. "Yea, and with a thing so devilish," he breaks out in a mingling of intense scorn and profound pity, "we mingle Christ."

From this passionate appeal he passes to the praises of peace. Why should men add the horrors of war to all the other miseries and dangers of life? Why should one man's gain be sought only through another's loss? All victories in war are Cadmean; not only from their cost in blood and treasure, but because we are in very truth "the members of one body," "redeemed

with Christ's blood." Such was the clear, unmistakable teaching of our Lord himself, such of his apostles. But the doctrine of Christ has been "plied to worldly opinion." Worldly men, philosophers following "the sophistries of Aristotle," worst of all, divines and theologians themselves, have corrupted the Gospel to the heathenish doctrine that "every man must first provide for himself." The very words of Scripture are wrested to this abuse. Self-defence is held to excuse any violence. "Peter fought," they say, "in the garden," – yes, and that same night he denied his Master! "But punishment of wrong is a divine ordinance." In war the punishment falls on the innocent. "But the law of nature bids us repel violence by violence." What is the law of Christ? "But may not a prince go to war justly for his right?" Did any war ever lack a title? "But what of wars against the Turk?" Such wars are of Turk against Turk; let us overcome evil with good, let us spread the Gospel by doing what the Gospel commands: did Christ say, Hate them that hate you?

Then, with the tact of an accomplished orator, he lets the tension relax, and drops to a lower tone. Even apart from all that has been urged, even if war were ever justifiable, think of the price that has to be paid for it. On this ground alone an unjust peace is far preferable to a just war. (These had been the very words of Colet to the king of England.) Men go to war under fine pretexts, but really to get riches, to satisfy hatred, or to win the poor glory of destroying. The hatred is but exasperated; the glory is won by and for the dregs of mankind; the riches

are in the most prosperous event swallowed up ten times over. Yet if it be impossible but war should be, if there may be sometimes a “colour of equity” in it, and if the tyrant’s plea, necessity, be ever well-founded, at least, so Erasmus ends, let it be conducted mercifully. Let us live in fervent desire of the peace that we may not fully attain. Let princes restrain their peoples; let churchmen above all be peacemakers. So the treatise passes to its conclusion with that eulogy of the Medicean pope already mentioned, which perhaps was not wholly undeserved. To the modern world the name of Leo X has come down marked with a note of censure or even of ignominy. It is fair to remember that it did not bear quite the same aspect to its contemporaries, nor to the ages which immediately followed. Under Rodrigo Borgia it might well seem to others than to the Florentine mystic that antichrist was enthroned, and Satan let loose upon earth. The eight years of Leo’s pontificate (1513-21) were at least a period of outward splendour and of a refinement hitherto unknown. The corruption, half veiled by that refinement and splendour, was deep and mortal, but the collapse did not come till later. By comparison with the disastrous reign of Clement VII, his bastard cousin, that of Giovanni de’ Medici seemed a last gleam of light before blackness descended on the world. Even the licence of a dissolute age was contrasted to its favour with the gloom, “tristitia,” that settled down over Europe with the great Catholic reaction. The age of Leo X has descended to history as the age of Bembo, Sannazaro, Lascaris, of the Stanze of the Vatican,

of Raphael's Sistine Madonna and Titian's Assumption; of the conquest of Mexico and the circumnavigation of Magellan; of Magdalen Tower and King's College Chapel. It was an interval of comparative peace before a long epoch of wars more cruel and more devastating than any within the memory of men. The general European conflagration did not break out until ten years after Erasmus's death; though it had then long been foreseen as inevitable. But he lived to see the conquest of Rhodes by Soliman, the sack of Rome, the breach between England and the papacy, the ill-omened marriage of Catherine de' Medici to the heir of the French throne. Humanism had done all that it could, and failed. In the sanguinary era of one hundred years between the outbreak of the civil war in the Empire and the Peace of Westphalia, the Renaissance followed the Middle Ages to the grave, and the modern world was born.

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