

RENAISSANCE NEWS

A quarterly newsletter published by Dartmouth College Library
for the American Council of Learned Societies

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Address the editor, Postoffice Box 832, Hanover, New Hampshire

Annual subscription: domestic \$1.00, Canada and foreign \$1.25

VOL. IV	WINTER 1951	No. 4
MACHIAVELLI'S VIRTU		53
NOTES ON PUBLICATIONS		55
W. S. Heckscher: Fussell's <i>Farming Books</i>		
PROJECTS AND NEWS		56
CONFERENCES		65
LIBRARIES		67
DISCUSSION		70
G. B. Parks: Sellery's <i>Renaissance</i>		
E. M. Sanford: Goldschmidt's <i>Renaissance</i>		

On Machiavelli's Idea of Virtù

BY FELIX GILBERT

THE following observations are hardly more than a footnote, but a footnote to one of the most discussed questions of Machiavelli's thought, to his concept of virtù. When scholars became aware of the central importance of this term in Machiavelli's thought, they also realized that virtù was a most elusive term to which it was difficult to assign a precise and definite meaning; the term seemed to contain a great variety of meanings.¹ In recent times, almost each new interpretation of Machiavelli's thought has implied a new interpretation of his virtù-concept, or, at least, has stressed the decisive significance of one particular factor among the various elements which went into the making of this concept. An example is the stimulating study by L. Olschki.² Olschki's main thesis is that Machiavelli approached politics in the spirit and with the methods of a modern scientist; in proof of this thesis, he points out that the term virtù has a strictly scientific function in Leonardo da Vinci's notes on dynamics where it designates the motive power in a