

WIND THE CLOCK

If an inquisitive visitor from another planet were to stop Mr. J. Twentieth-Century Democrat in the street and ask him—after indulging in the requisite pleasantries—which is the greatest period in human history, there is little doubt that the aforesaid gentleman, puffing out his chest, would swear by all his gods that the present era is the greatest. And, indeed, he would have many facts to support his stand. Even if Mr. J. knew—as of course all in this enlightened age do know—that progress is relative since each age is able to build upon the foundations raised by the toil of preceding centuries, he would still have good reason for favoring his own lifetime. Surely no earlier period has seen such dynamism, such progress. Radio and television have revolutionized communication. The automobile and the airplane have wrought a tremendous change in transportation. Radar and other electronic devices have given further indication of the brilliance of contemporary science. On the less pleasant side, science has also produced such terrors as the submarine and the tank, the dive bomber and the atom bomb. Even these, however, manifest the awful power of science. Nor is there any dearth of great names in every field of endeavour. There have been warriors like Hindenburg, Foch and Montgomery; statesmen like Lenin, Churchill and Roosevelt; scientists like Freud, Rutherford, and Einstein; philosophers like John Dewey, Bergson, Bertrand Russell; artists like Matisse, Picasso, and Epstein, writers like Shaw, Mann, and Hemingway, and pioneers like the Wrights, Lindbergh and Byrd.

This, however, is but one side of the picture, the side which most judge to be bright. The impartial judge must see as well the reverse side in all its gloom—the shattered houses, the emaciated bodies, the drab bread lines, the mad swirl of rudderless lives caught in the vicious vortex of uncontrollable forces, the brutal police state, the monotony of the assembly line, and, above all, the great spiritual void. Looking through the glass darkly we see a man who can not control himself, even though he can control much of nature. Life is disorganized, and there is no unity of purpose running through all the manifold activities of the day. Indeed, men cannot agree even as to the meaning and end of life.

The present age, then, displays great technological progress, but it also reveals quite clearly the inability of the men of this period to control the very forces they have produced. With consummate technical skill we have created a robot which we find ourselves unable to control. The

present century is thus by no means complete and perfect, and it might be that some other era has in reality been greater. If an age could be found possessing as many striking evidences of brilliance and yet lacking the obvious disabilities that we now have, this age would truly be great. But where are we to look for such a period? What about the Christian centuries, so contemptuously dubbed by "enlightened" moderns the "Dark Ages?" The greatest of these, the last of the true Middle Ages, was undoubtedly the glorious Thirteenth Century, which witnessed the full flowering of Christian civilization and the complete embodiment of Catholic culture in that civilization.

There is always a certain tendency to idealize the past and this danger is most acute when dealing with a "romantic" period like the Middle Ages. Yet there are very definite facts of history which prove conclusively the greatness of the Thirteenth Century. We cannot hope, by comparison with all other ages, to prove in the space allotted us here that the Thirteenth was the greatest of all centuries (as we believe it was), but we can prove that it was a very great period.

Let us, for example, look at the education of this age. It is a common belief that widespread educational opportunities began within the last century, but, proportionate to the population, there were at least as many students attending schools and universities in the Thirteenth Century as there are now. The universities of Paris, Bologna, and Oxford were tremendous institutions, perhaps even larger than they are now. Almost every cathedral in Europe had a school connected with it, and all of the monasteries were centers of learning. Besides being a center of learning, each university was also a center of original research. In medicine and, indeed, in all the physical sciences, great strides ahead were made. Friar Roger Bacon, the foremost scientist of the time, is one of the greatest scientists of all history, and Albert the Great, his teacher, was also far advanced in natural science. Roger Bacon experimented in mathematics, astronomy, optics, biology, and chemistry. Nor did the great men of the century stay in one university, but travelled from one to another, thus diffusing their knowledge.

Artistically the Thirteenth Century was no less noted. Printing had still not been invented, and the extensive libraries were all of manuscript books. Because of their beautiful illumination, many of these are now prized as great works of art. The center for painting was Italy, where Florence rose above all other cities. Here Cimabue broke from the Orientalism which had held painting in thrall for centuries, and here, too, worked Giotto, his pupil. It is

generally acknowledged that in creative genius Giotto was at least the equal of the great artists of the Renaissance. All art, however, was not confined to Italy. By far the greatest achievement of the time in the realm of art was the construction throughout Europe of the peerless Gothic cathedrals, works of architecture which have never been surpassed even to this day. These magnificent edifices were the creation of entire communities, and are monuments to the religious fervor of the age.

The Thirteenth Century was an age of exploration and of advance in geography. The most famous traveller is undoubtedly Marco Polo who reached far-off Cathay, but there were a number of others who visited the same area. Many of the thinkers of the time were convinced that the earth was round.

It was in literature that the real brilliance of the Century shone forth. The mystery plays which began about this time are the origin of the drama. National literatures also originated in this period. There were three great epics—the Cid, a Spanish ballad; the Holy Grail, the work of the English clergyman Walter Map; and the Nibelungen Lied, a German ballad. The love lyrics of the wandering minstrels of the Century are still a treasured part of literature. Then, too, great Latin hymns like the Dies Irae, the Stabat Mater, and the Pangue Lingua which were composed at this time are regarded by scholars as more expressive of the genius of Latin than the work of Virgil and Horace. But above all was the supreme genius of Dante, whose only equals in all the literature of the world are Homer and Shakespeare. His **Divine Comedy** is the greatest creative work of the century, and is a true expression of the culture of the age.

Besides metrical compositions, there was also a great deal of prose work, most of it in Latin. There were three great creative works which are classed among the classics of literature. There were also many treatises on science, copious chronicles and biographies, and innumerable philosophical and theological works. The Thirteenth Century was certainly the Golden Age of philosophy. St. Thomas, perhaps the most brilliant mind of all ages, was its chief luminary, but scarcely below him are St. Albert the Great, St. Bonaventure, Alexander of Hales, and Duns Scotus. The Scholastics, as they are called, brought philosophy to such a peak of excellence that it has scarcely advanced since.

The real greatness of the Thirteenth Century is not to be found, however, in these more superficial manifestations but in the way of life of the time. We shall discuss this under its economic, political, and social aspects.

The economic system of the Middle Ages surely provides a great contrast to the capitalistic structure of the present day. In the Thirteenth Century there was no assembly-line technique of production. Then every artisan was an artist, that is, he produced what he himself conceived in his own mind. Men were, therefore, happy in their work, for each one was working for himself and was expressing himself. There was no overproduction, for production was for use only. Thus no huge surpluses were piled up, and dumping food was unheard of. Each man worked in a creative way, and each artisan had well-founded hope that some day he might be a master workman. (A youth began first as an apprentice, in which position he learned the trade; then he became a journeyman; finally, if he had displayed any skill, he might become a master). There were no labor unions, but the rights of the workers were protected by the merchant and craft guilds. These organizations were not merely for the protection of their members, but rather had the much more positive purposes of mutual prayer and charity. They performed much good work, including the founding of numerous schools. In the country serfdom had been almost completely abrogated, and the peasants lived on their holdings and worked out their destiny in peace and contentment. The most important achievement economically, however, was the balance between town and country. Youths from rural areas went to the towns to learn the crafts and to become educated. Then they returned to their communities equipped with learning for the tasks of leadership. This was decentralist culture.

Politically, too, all was well. The states of the Century achieved that happy medium between liberalism and totalitarianism which under the name of the "via media" we long for today. The king was the protector of the people against the nobles, most of whom had had their claws removed by this time. All public power was limited—by institutions of representation (for this age saw the beginning of parliaments), by charters given to towns, by feudal contracts, by a Church watchful of its liberties and conscious of an authority divinely given, and above all by the desire of the sovereigns to govern according to the common good. Princes all over Europe realized the highest ideal of kingship. Edward I of England was a good example. The greatest of the kings, however, was Louis IX, king of France for nearly fifty years, who has since been canonized by the Church. St. Louis had a passionate devotion to the three great needs of humanity in his time—education, justice, and charity. He completely reformed the legal system of France and provided justice for those of all ranks. He patronized education very extensively, and he

personally looked after the poor. His private life was even more admirable, for he lived a life of strict piety. His last years were spent in a crusade in the Holy Land. St. Louis was the greatest of the great princes in this great Century.

Society generally presented a strongly corporate aspect, and the vast majority of men were members of corporate entities or functional groups, of which not the least important were the guilds. There had not yet been the tearing asunder of the community which in modern times has created a huge class of unorganized individuals. There was a well-knit social fabric.

There is one fact above all others that would give the Thirteenth Century claim to transcendent greatness. There was in all society at that time a unity of purpose, resulting from a common philosophy of life. Everyone in this age agreed that man was a rational animal, a being possessing a soul created in the image and likeness of God. Men realized that the brotherhood of man was possible only under the fatherhood of God. Thus society was not composed of individuals and groups striving at cross purposes. All directed their efforts towards the same ultimate end. As one rationalist was forced to admit: "There was one common creed, one ritual, one worship, one sacred language, one Church, a single code of manners, a uniform scheme of society, a common system of education, an accepted type of beauty, a universal art, something like a recognized standard of the Good, the Beautiful, and the True. One half of the world was not occupied in ridiculing or combating what the other half was doing." Thus it was that men as different from each other as Louis IX and St. Francis, Giotto and Dante could work harmoniously towards a single goal; they were altogether working out the same task. Truly there was in this age a Christian culture informing completely a Christian civilization, as fully as the soul informs the body.

The sixteenth century at length brought to an end the great medieval social order, but even before that signs of rupture were not lacking. The real decline began in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries with the advent of the self — individualism. This individualism resulted in the upsurge of capitalism and then in the great Revolt of the sixteenth century in which the social fabric was torn to shreds. The old universal functional society was gone; henceforth the pendulum would swing between individualism and state absolutism.

What is our purpose in considering the society of the past, even if it be as great as that of the Thirteenth Cen-

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ture? Can we turn back the clock? Is it possible to restore thirteenth century society in the world? Our answer must be that the complete social structure of the Thirteenth Century cannot be restored, for it was the result of the peculiar conditions of the time; but we must recognize that it is possible—and not only possible, but necessary—to restore the spirit of the Thirteenth Century. The civilization of Thirteenth Century was not the only possible expression of the Catholic culture; it was merely the expression that was most suited to that century. We may choose to express it in another way. The important thing is to express that culture. We must restore the organic state, the state that will achieve the happy balance between individualism and totalitarianism, the state whose center will be an animated Christianity. The clock of Western civilization cannot be turned back; but, if it is to continue running at all, it must be wound with the key of Catholic culture.

—MARK MacGUIGAN '51

THE ANGLER

Perhaps no individual is more misunderstood, more scoffed at, or more ridiculed than the angler. He belongs to that great confraternity of sportsmen who practice with great assiduity the ancient and glorious piscatorial art.

From all appearances, the angler would seem to be an ordinary and normal individual. For eight or nine months of each year, he devotes himself with energy to his particular avocation and pursues it with painstaking care and profound interest.

As I have said, for eight or nine months of the year, the confirmed angler acts and reacts as a normal human being. But for days and weeks before the federal or provincial authorities proclaim the date for the opening of the fishing season, the angler's attitude towards life undergoes a decided change. His interest in his business or professional life is of secondary concern; there is a far away look in his eye; he searches out his fishing rods, which he values almost as much as his casting arm, and his case of flies, which he guards and protects more jealously than his money wallet.

After gathering from attic or closet, garage or cellar, his cherished paraphernalia, his whole household is plunged into a state of turmoil, for the angler has cast aside or forgotten all the rules and regulations pertaining to a well

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