

THE PASSING OF THE MIDDLE AGES*

THE Renaissance, which was supposed to bring the New Learning to Western Europe, brought also a complete change in the life and manners of the people. This other side of the story needs to be emphasized today, for we are passing through a period of fundamental transition not only in the affairs of the state but also in those of the common man. Perhaps there is no epoch in the history of civilization that has been treated so one-sidedly as that of the two hundred years which divided the so-called New Birth and the Council of Trent; for the New Learning was nothing more than a continuation of the work begun by Erigena and Abélard. Long before Petrarch and Boccaccio came upon the scene there were scholars who studied the classical writers of Greece and Rome. Perhaps no one since Erigena has left a more enduring monument to the intellect and industry of a scholar.

In examining recent researches (which reveal far more knowledge than the writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries worked upon), we find that the so-called Humanism of the Renaissance was nothing more or less than the aesthetic pursuit of collecting books. Why an arbitrary line for book collectors should be set at the fourteenth century is something that has never been adequately explained, for Ptolemy himself was a greater collector than any of the people of the Renaissance. So great a scholar as Montague James points out that the library of Cassiodorus in the sixth century was not only famous but that Cassiodorus himself must be regarded as "the greatest individual contributor to the preservation of learning in the West."¹

As for Humanism, there were Greeks and Hebrews who had a much better conception of what was essentially required by man than any of the people, dating from the fourteenth century, whose works I have seen. However, it all depends upon what the student is seeking. But surely it is necessary for him to acquire a wide background of knowledge before he sets to work to establish theories such as we find in the nineteenth-century interpreters of the Renaissance and in our modern Humanists.

After two hundred years of the New Learning and medieval Humanism, we reach the period of Henry VIII, Luther, and Thomas Cromwell. What do we find? Following the dissolution of the monasteries and the Reformation, a firmly-entrenched system of landlordism, such as the world had never known before, reduced the peasantry to slaves of the soil. A tract of the times has it: "After the gluttons were starved by the thieves, what was left of religion, justice, and the public lands?" New aristocracies arose in the western countries of Europe, and they dealt mercilessly with the victims of the change.

There was a period of only one hundred forty years between the time of the land conspiracy, planned by Gaunt and his barons, and the era of the suppression of the great abbeys. It took nearly a thousand years to build, rebuild, and complete Glastonbury²—to name only one of the many perfect art monuments—but Cromwell and his friends looted and demolished it in a few months. The alleged reason for much of this thievery was that the church—or the monasteries—had become dissolute and did not serve their purpose. So, a very clever, discontented monk, a much-married, intellectual king, and an unscrupulous statesman thought the time had come to clean house by wiping the structure out of

existence. The result was that, after their work was done, the religion of the people, which had carried them through fearful vicissitudes for a thousand years, sank into an oblivion from which there was no return. This happened to a nation which, until the time of the Tudors, had scarcely ever heard the word "religion" spoken, because there was only one. It was not until the warring factions split up into sects that religions, and more religions, were heard of. These sects fought and hated, despised and punished one another just as lustily as any pagans did; indeed, as fiercely as had Saxon and Briton before Augustine brought the blessings of Christianity from Rome to England. Not that Christianity was unknown in the islands before Augustine, but Augustine marks the time when the Saxons were converted. However, long before that period, the British worshiped at the altars of the Christian faith.

A terrible period followed the work of Henry VIII and Luther. In Bloody Mary's time, the stake was the order of the day. After five years of the Counter Reformation, England was reduced to disaster, and the death of Mary alone averted a general revolt.

At any rate, whether or not Henry VIII is canonized or Luther is given the benefit of every doubt and the soul of Thomas Cromwell is white-

washed, it must be admitted that the religion of the Middle Ages died a lingering death and the mass of the population entered upon a long series of what were called religious wars. Ever since the Reformation, which really began in Central Europe as a peasants' revolt about economic grievances, every community in Western Europe has been split up into warring, discontented and fear-ridden sects. Old, religious Catholicism was superseded by an ecclesiastical bureaucracy, which has become, and is today, the most perfectly organized system of ministering to the great mass the world has ever known. It functions successfully in many of the Protestant countries. However, before the outbreak of World War II, in Italy and France, especially in the towns, one saw a sad apathy, and the condition of the churches in many places revealed a neglect that was most regrettable.

But since the Council of Trent, what bequest to science and art have the many different sects left to mankind? One order within the Catholic Church—the Jesuits—has made great contributions to science and letters. Music has been enriched by many men *in* the Church but not *of* the Church. Art and architecture were divorced from religion after the middle of the sixteenth century. At about the same time, the Council

of Trent and Michelangelo terminated two great periods: the former brought to an end the religious schools from which our science, philosophy, and art sprang into existence; and the latter—the sculptor of “Moses” and “David,” whose “Last Judgment” in the Sistine Chapel at Rome created a scandal—brought to a close the great Gothic period.

The spring and the summer of our culture were gone. What strange century bedfellows were Henry VIII and Pope Paul III, Luther and John Colet, Michelangelo and Thomas Cromwell! It was the end of the so-called Dark Ages. The Light Ages, however, have never recovered from the great springtime so much that was precious to the soul of man and which might have lessened the gross materialism, the unhealthy skepticism, and the political turmoil of so-called enlightenment.

The Reformation strengthened the Rome it contended against. It enabled the Church to correct abuses and gave it new hope; but her power as the patron of science, philosophy, and art was gone forever. She could not restore life to that which had passed away. Of our culture before Luther, all art, science, and letters were of religious birth. After him, the churches speedily became centers of dissension and distrust.

Think of Calvin, Laud, Cromwell, and Praise-God Barebone! Contrast Robert Grosseteste, Roger Bacon, Wyclif, and Cusanus with them, and try to compute the difference.

The great revival in letters under Elizabeth came not from within the Church. Indeed, it was not participated in by a single member of any priesthood. The great divines, such as Hooker, wrote only on ecclesiastical affairs, and Bacon, Hobbes, and Locke were philosophers. But the long list of Elizabethan poets and dramatists contains not a name of a man affiliated with a religious institution. Consider the great ones: Spenser, Sidney, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Drayton, Beaumont, and Fletcher! All were laymen. An exception might be Donne, but he was forty-two when he became a priest, and had already written most of his verse before he was ordained.

Michelangelo's poem on the death of his father might be taken for an obituary on the death of the Gothic:

Thou'rt dead of dying, and art made divine;
 Nor need'st thou fear to change or life or will;
 Wherefore my soul well-nigh doth envy thine.
 Fortune and time across thy threshold still
 Shall dare not pass, the which mid us below
 Bring doubtful joyance blent with certain ill.

Clouds are there none to dim for thee heaven's glow;
 The measured hours compel not thee at all;
 Chance or necessity thou canst not know.
 Thy splendor wanes not when our night doth fall,
 Nor waxes with day's light however clear,
 Nor when our suns the season's warmth recall.³

This note of sadness seems to permeate the work of the great artist and, whereas joy suffused the achievements of the poets, painters, and sculptors of Christendom's springtime, a melancholy, denoting loss—perhaps defeat—marks the work of those who realized a vital change had taken place in the mind and soul of man. The yearning for another life expressed in the sestet of a sonnet by Michelangelo reveals the tortured soul of the artist craving release from the uncertainties of time:

Burdened with years and full of sinfulness,
 With evil custom grown inveterate,
 Both deaths I dread that close before me wait,
 Yet feed my heart on poisonous thoughts no less.
 No strength I find in mine own feebleness
 To change or life or love or use or fate
 Unless Thy heavenly guidance come, though late,
 Which only helps and stays our nothingness.

'Tis not enough, dear Lord, to make me yearn
 For that celestial home, where yet my soul
 May be new made, and not, as erst, of naught:

Nay, ere Thou strip her mortal vestment, turn
 My steps toward the steep ascent, that whole
 And pure before Thy face she may be brought.⁴

And was Shakespeare conscious of the great change that had taken place? Every tragedy he wrote seems to reflect the condition of his mind—that something was lost, never to be recovered, and of a future black with doubt. These men of the grand climacteric—Michelangelo and Shakespeare—were epitaphic: one in sculpture, to wit, the great tombs of the Medici; and the other in the histories—those great dramas of the vanity of the kings and the futility of change without grace. The deep longing for rest in King Henry's speech cannot be matched. Its yearning for a simple life of security, far removed from the conflicts of ambition and time is more than the cry of a care-worn monarch; it is the craving of all distressed souls for the joys of that peace which only child-like natures ever know.

Gives not the hawthorn bush a sweeter shade
 To shepherds, looking on their silly sheep
 Than doth a rich embroider'd canopy
 To kings, that fear their subjects' treachery?
 O, yes! it doth; a thousand-fold it doth.
 And to conclude, the shepherd's homely curds,
 His cold thin drink out of his leather bottle,
 His wonted sleep under a fresh tree's shade,

All which secure and sweetly he enjoys,
 Is far beyond a prince's delicates,
 His viands sparkling in a golden cup,
 His body couched in a curious bed,
 When care, mistrust, and treason wait on him.⁵

All is envy; care bows every head; the bauble of power lingers in the hand a little while; and life dwindles away, un-lived in grace, unrealized. Every great poet of that tremendous period was deeply imbued with the sense of loss. Each felt lonely; felt a great kinship was broken; the golden link with the past severed; and the future threw no beckoning ray of hope. None knew the art of approaching the Most High; the superb artistry of each left him isolated and unrelated to the bourne of spiritual joy.

The soul of man was stricken with a haunting fear that that tegument of life which sheathed him in his tradition had been destroyed. The sense of direction, one of the dominant impulses in all fields of art, was numbed, and a weariness of the spirit afflicted all sections of society, notwithstanding the somewhat forced gaiety that broke out spasmodically even in Shakespeare's day. He seemed to crystallize the general thought and feeling of his time, and we find in his histories, and also in the tragedies, the note of

melancholy expressed with a depth tinged with a strange sadness. Hamlet is balked by

. . . the native hue of resolution
 . . . sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought;⁶

and a Romeo would

. . . shake the yoke of inauspicious stars
 From this world-wearied flesh. . . .⁷

Macbeth says:

. . . all our yesterdays have lighted fools
 The way to dusty death. . . .
 Life's but a walking shadow. . . .⁸

The Prologue to *King Henry the Eighth* marks the change, for it was penned only a few years after the Reformation:

I come no more to make you laugh: things now,
 That bear a weighty and a serious brow,
 Sad, high, and working, full of state and woe,
 Such noble scenes as draw the eye to flow,
 We now present. . . .⁹

Vasari said of Michelangelo: "Toward the close of his life there arose in him no thought which was not graven with the idea of death, when one could easily perceive that he was making his retreat toward God."¹⁰ In a sonnet, which sounds the same note heard so often in Shakespeare's soliloquies, Michelangelo says:

The fables of the world have filched away
 The time I had for thinking upon God;
 His grace lies buried 'neath oblivion's sod,
 Whence springs an evil crop of sins alway.
 What makes another wise, leads me astray,
 Slow to discern the bad path I have trod:
 Hope fades; but still desire ascends that God
 May free me from self-love, my sure decay.

Shorten half-way my road to heaven from earth?
 Dear Lord, I can not even half-way rise,
 Unless Thou help me on this pilgrimage:
 Teach me to hate the world so little worth,
 And all the lovely things I once did prize;
 That endless life not death may be my wage.¹¹

The myth of the Dark Ages is now slowly losing its significance. The farther back research goes, the deeper the fair-minded student delves into the archives of cathedral and monastery, the clearer becomes the atmosphere, so long choked with prejudice and misunderstanding. Now with the new attitude of estimating the true values of the work and thought of men of pre-Reformation centuries, we find that Hallam, Robertson, and Symonds—to mention only three writers of the nineteenth century—missed the real meaning and import of the life, thought, and labor, that built up the Gothic edifice.

Among the many men of learning who are today bringing back the Middle Age to us and

revealing its splendors, none sees with a clearer vision than Egon Friedell who, in his remarkable work, which followed Spengler's *The Decline of the West*, gives us an entirely new conception of the period from which our greatest achievements spring. Friedell says:

. . . And everywhere they saw the supreme reality, God: everything was of God. And over everything they succeeded in drawing the magic veil of their own dreams and deliriums: everything was beautiful. Hence the splendid optimism which neutralized their disregard of this world, their poverty, and their narrowness. He who believes in things is always full of joy and confidence. The Middle Ages were not gloomy, they were bright. We are entirely helpless before a Milky Way that has been dissolved into atoms by rationalism, but we can do a very great deal with a chubby angel and a club-footed devil in whom we believe whole-heartedly. In short, the life of those times had, as compared with our own, much more the character of a painting, a puppet-show, a fairy-tale, a mystery play—the character, in fact, of our childhood's life even now. It was, therefore, more sensible and impressive, more exciting and interesting, and, in a sense, more real.¹²

Further on, in the same work, he administers a well-merited rebuke to our modern philosophers who have not taken the trouble to study the Middle Ages:

But, granted that these people were children, they were nevertheless clever, gifted, mature children. The theory that they lived and worked in dull subjection will not bear examination, at least so far as the high Middle Ages were concerned. Men were clear thinkers then, bright minds, master-artists in logic, virtuosi in the poetic presentation of concepts, architects endowed equally richly with powers of construction and of calculation; and they were possessed, in all the manifestations of their life, by an instinct for style which has never since been equalled. Equally indefensible is the theory that mankind in the Middle Ages consisted of nothing but types. Neither in the State and the Church nor in art and science was there any lack of sharply outlined, uninterchangeable personalities. The confessions of an Augustine or an Abélard reveal an almost uncanny capacity for introspection and self-analysis, such as is unimaginable without the premiss of a highly developed and nuanced individuality. The portrait-statues show strikingly individual figures and at the same time demonstrate the sculptors' talent in seizing that non-recurrent individuality. . . .¹⁸

We might now turn to the nineteenth century and consider the conditions in England after three hundred years of the period of so-called enlightenment. Let us look at a work which undoubtedly influenced a deep change in thought and brought to the notice of scholars a past in England's tradition that was worthy of recon-

sideration. Curiously enough, Thomas Carlyle was the only outstanding philosopher of the middle of the last century who realized the value of the chronicle of Jocelin de Brakelond,¹⁴ published by the Camden Society in 1841. H. D. Traill, the editor of the centenary edition of Carlyle's works, says:

. . . Perhaps if one were challenged to name ten pages in which Carlyle has most brilliantly exhibited the whole array of those gifts by virtue of which he makes history live again, one would do well to seek them . . . in the two short chapters of *Past and Present* wherein he describes the canvassing of the new Abbot of St. Edmundsbury, and the final election of Samson *Subsacrista* to that exalted office. . . .¹⁵

Jocelin's Chronicle takes us back to the Abbey of St. Edmundsbury in the twelfth century. Carlyle, speaking of law and labor, still sees a morsel of God's justice to give us hope. In these days of law we seldom hear of justice. But back in the twelfth century justice was as much a living thing to Englishmen as it was to the Israelites. Then, turning to the life of manual and mental activity of the abbey, Carlyle realizes what was done under the discipline and routine of the abbot:

It is all work and forgotten work, this peopled, clothed, articulate-speaking, high-towered, wide-acred World. The hands of forgotten brave men have made it a World for us;—they,—honour to them; they, in *spite* of the idle and the dastard. This English Land, here and now, is the summary of what was found of wise, and noble, and accordant with God's Truth, in all the generations of English Men. Our English Speech is speakable because there were Hero-Poets of our blood and lineage; speakable in proportion to the number of these. This Land of England has its conquerors, possessors, which change from epoch to epoch, from day to day; but its real conquerors, creators, and eternal proprietors are these following, and their representatives if you can find them: All the Heroic Souls that ever were in England, each in their degree; all the men that ever cut a thistle, drained a puddle out of England, contrived a wise scheme in England, did or said a true and valiant thing in England. I tell thee, they had not a hammer to begin with. . . .

Work? The quantity of done and forgotten work that lies silent under my feet in this world, and escorts and attends me, and supports and keeps me alive, wheresoever I walk or stand, whatsoever I think or do, gives rise to reflections! Is it not enough, at any rate, to strike the thing called "Fame" into total silence for a wise man? . . .¹⁶

Contrast of spiritual and economic conditions was never so vividly pictured as in *Past and Present*. There is no philosopher of this day who

sees as clearly as Carlyle did what cancer is at the root of the social system.

The condition of England, on which many pamphlets are now in the course of publication, and many thoughts unpublished are going on in every reflective head, is justly regarded as one of the most ominous, and withal one of the strangest, ever seen in this world. England is full of wealth, of multifarious produce, supply for human want in every kind; yet England is dying of inanition. With unabated bounty the land of England blooms and grows; waving with yellow harvests; thick-studded with workshops, industrial implements, with fifteen millions of workers, understood to be the strongest, the cunningest and the willingest our Earth ever had; these men are here; the work they have done, the fruit they have realised is here, abundant, exuberant on every hand of us: and behold, some baleful fiat as of Enchantment has gone forth, saying, "Touch it not, ye workers, ye master-workers, ye master-idlers; none of you can touch it, no man of you shall be the better for it; this is enchanted fruit!" On the poor workers such fiat falls first, in its rudest shape; but on the rich master-workers too it falls; neither can the rich master-idlers, nor any richest or highest man escape, but all are like to be brought low with it, and made "poor" enough, in the money sense or a far fataler one.

Of these successful skilful workers some two millions, it is now counted, sit in Workhouses, Poor-law Prisons; or have "out-door relief" flung over the wall to them,—the workhouse Bastille being

filled to bursting, and the strong Poor-law broken asunder by a stronger. They sit there, these many months now; their hope of deliverance as yet small. . . . Tall robust figures, young mostly or of middle age; of honest countenance, many of them thoughtful and even intelligent-looking men. They sat there, near by one another; but in a kind of torpor, especially in a silence, which was very striking. In silence: for, alas, what word was to be said? An Earth all lying round, crying, Come and till me, come and reap me;—yet we here sit enchanted! . . .¹⁷

But what could be expected of the centuries after Cromwell? Think of the Restoration period, then William and Mary, Anne, and the four Georges! Liberty turned to license, justice to persecution, religion to sectarianism, government to aristocratic tyranny, manners debauched! The scandals of the courts of Charles II and the Georges cannot be matched in any pre-Reformation period. Think of the worst that can be said of the dying monastic system; then think of the condition of England under the Regent, afterward George IV! War, penury, and lust increased. And after the Napoleonic Wars, the mass of England lay almost destitute and forlorn, while landlords built palaces from the proceeds of the Corn Laws. Reformation!

Still, the Age of Enlightenment had to come. There was nothing to stop it. That it might have

been tempered to the shorn lamb I have no doubt, but the means of moderation—one religion for all, and its essential corollary, economic justice, were crippled almost beyond action before Elizabeth reached the throne. If by enlightenment the philosopher wishes us to think that he means scientific knowledge, then are we to conclude that the theory of the mechanistic system was the sum of achievement of the past two centuries? What else? Literature (drama, poetry, and prose) called for no reformation. Painting, sculpture, and music asked for no religious or scientific change. Enlightenment! What is left today of the mechanistic system? What has science not thrown on the scrap-heap during the past quarter of a century? Sir James Jeans says that science had better not make any more pronouncements for the present.

The other great feature of the Age of Enlightenment—Darwinism—is just about done as a theory. It was never more than a mere hypothesis anyway. Evolution suited the mechanistic notions of an industrial and commercial empire. Strangely enough, the idea of the struggle for existence was suggested to Wallace, Darwin's co-worker, by the *Essay on Population* of Malthus, a work based on so many erroneous economic notions that a schoolboy blessed with a knowl-

edge of economic fundamentals could have torn it to pieces. Of course, Huxley, who was never certain of what it all meant, was the champion of the Darwinians. The ridiculous old law (heaven save the term!) of diminishing returns has been completely shattered, and the other preposterous nostrum—"Population has a tendency to increase faster than food"—is as dead as a doornail. It was dead when Malthus tried to bring it to life again. As for Darwin's contributions to the Age of Enlightenment, scarcely anything of real value remains.

Spengler says:

There is no more conclusive refutation of Darwinism than that furnished by palæontology. Simple probability indicates that fossil hoards can only be test samples. Each sample, then, should represent a different stage of evolution, and there ought to be merely "transitional" types, no definition and no species. Instead of this we find perfectly stable and unaltered forms persevering through long ages, forms that have not developed themselves on the fitness principle, but *appear suddenly and at once in their definitive shape*; that do not thereafter evolve towards better adaptation, but become rarer and finally disappear, while quite different forms crop up again. What unfolds itself, in ever-increasing richness of form, is the great classes and kinds of living beings which *exist aboriginally and exist still, without transition types*, in the grouping of to-day. . . .¹⁸

However, it was Samuel Butler¹⁹ who attacked Darwin's theories and refuted the assumptions laid down in *The Origin of Species*. At the same time, he exposed the methods by which Darwin had put together his work. It is only within the last few years that Butler's notions on evolution have been recognized by such scientists as Professor Bateson of Cambridge.

Evolution, as a term, suited the political exigencies of the time. Reformers grabbed it, Socialists enshrined it, imperialists inscribed it on their banners, party politicians used it indiscriminately for perorations, and the liberal clergy gave it their blessing. But evolution, like all other movable things, requires a starting point, a datum line. Moreover, Darwinian evolution, to be effective, needs a thoroughly sound, upstanding specimen of what natural selection can do in the struggle for existence. Not a common, old, submerged-tenth struggle, nor a polite church-charity struggle, but a real nature struggle, the sort that wore the Dinosaur to a shred and his playmate, the Dinotherium, to a neurasthenic wreck!

The nineteenth was a great century of enlightenment. War presided at its birth, war officiated at its death. So Reformation and *Ein' feste Burg*²⁰ (the Church Militant's last mighty

Satan-song, as Spengler calls it) brought the city into prominence and depopulated the countryside. Luther's work raised a great landlord aristocracy into a position to batten on the labor of the mass. It enabled the lords of domains wider than any held in trust by abbots to cast off the *trimoda necessitas*,²¹ the obligations of the manor, and put the burdens of taxation on industry. It split up one religion of direct communication between man and God into a hundred and one sects, all jostling in the struggle for existence, which has finally forced many of them to rely on the movie and charades as attractions.

It is strange that it should be an atheist who has defined more clearly, more sincerely, than any other man of our time (save, perhaps, Nietzsche) the true worth of the piety of the Middle Ages and what was done by men and women who asked for little. In a footnote Spengler says:

In the Gothic Age entry into the cloister, the renunciation of care, deed and will, had been an act of the loftiest ethical character—the highest sacrifice that it was possible to imagine, that of *life*.²²

And no one has seen as clearly as Spengler the terrible results of the change wrought by the many issues provoked by the Reformation. He

sets the men of the Middle Ages against the men of the Age of Enlightenment. The contrasts he presents are profoundly interesting:

But the last reformers, too, the Luthers and Savonarolas, were *urban* monks, and this differentiates them profoundly from the Joachims and the Bernards. Their intellectual and urban askesis is the stepping-stone from the hermitages of quiet valleys to the scholar's study of the Baroque. The mystic experience of Luther which gave birth to his doctrine of justification is the experience, not of a St. Bernard in the presence of woods and hills and clouds and stars, but of a man who looks through narrow windows on the streets and house walls and gables. Broad God-perfused nature is remote, outside the city wall; and the free intellect, detached from the soil, is inside it. Within the urban, stone-walled waking-consciousness sense and reason part company and become enemies, and the city-mysticism of the last reformers is thus a mysticism of pure reason through and through, and not one of the eye—an illumination of concepts, in presence of which the brightly coloured figures of the old myth fade into paleness.

Necessarily, therefore, it was, in its real depths, a thing of the few. Nothing was left of that sensible content that formerly had offered even to the poorest something to grip. The mighty act of Luther was a purely intellectual decision. Not for nothing has he been regarded as the last great Schoolman of the line of Occam. He completely liberated the Faustian

personality—the intermediate person of the priest, which had formerly stood between it and the Infinite, was removed. And now it was wholly alone, self-oriented, its own priest and its own judge. But the common people could only feel, not understand, the element of liberation in it all. They welcomed, enthusiastically, indeed, the tearing-up of visible duties, but they did not come to realize that these had been replaced by intellectual duties that were still stricter. Francis of Assisi had given much and taken little, but the urban Reformation took much and, as far as the majority of people were concerned, gave little. . . .

The Reformation abolished the whole bright and consoling side of the Gothic myth—the cult of Mary, the veneration of the saints, the relics, the pilgrimages, the mass. But the myth of devildom and witchcraft remained, for it was the embodiment and cause of the inner torture, and now that torture at last rose to its supreme horror. . . .²³

The great spread of witch-hunting in the two centuries succeeding the Reformation, when enlightenment went raving mad, surpassed all cruelties and atrocities practiced in the Middle Ages. The total number of victims of the witch persecutions is variously estimated at from 100,000 to several millions. If it be true that Benedikt Carpzov²⁴ passed sentence on 20,000 victims, the former figure is undoubtedly too low.

And what about superstition and idol worship? These evidences of "abject ignorance" of the Dark Ages were not to be tolerated by reasonable folk of an enlightened age. Yet, the people of the Middle Ages were never so benighted in superstition as to worship the state. They never deluded themselves as the law-and-order patriots do. Think of the changes of military and naval superstition! Think of the superstition of statesmanship and medicine! It is difficult to think of a branch of science which calls for a deeper faith and trust in human experience than medicine. The gods we worship, no respectable artist of the Dark Ages would waste stone and chisel on for a moment. What could he make of our chief god, Progress? He would be at his wit's end to find out anything about that deity that would inspire him to creative effort.

What does it all amount to in the end—that end for which the millions strive? And when one counts heads, what do the so-called intelligentsia amount to? The striving of the millions everywhere is to reach the goal of eternal peace, and no one has described this striving in a small crystal of great beauty in finer terms than Goethe:

In the Endless, self-repeating
flows for evermore The Same.
Myriad arches, springing, meeting,

hold at rest the mighty frame.
Streams from all things love of living,
grandest star and humblest clod.
All the straining, all the striving
is eternal peace in God.²⁵

We approach the winter of our culture and, as it has been in every other great civilization, we find now the outstanding men of science seeking to satisfy a spiritual hunger, which is not at all appeased by the discoveries of the telescope, the microscope, and the atom-smasher.

The mystery deepens with every scientific advance; every recorded addition to scientific knowledge adds complexity to the system and makes us more and more conscious of the recessions from the goal. Still, there is a salvage that is immeasurable; one which is all gain. Ten or a dozen great minds—astronomers, physicists, and mathematicians—in seeking the solution of the mystery, have recaptured the spirit of reverence. They bow before the altar of universal harmony, and something resembling a prayer is humbly whispered by them. Perhaps the greatest gift they will bequeath to us poor laymen will be their example of reverence and humility.

We lost our way when veneration was taken from us, and the art of our proper attitude to

life was forsaken when we became proud. Out of the collapse of materialism will come something precious to the soul of man, so long lonely, something that will help to raise up, in fellowship, a temple of justice and love. Love without reverence, or reverence without love, is a severance in the orders of discipline and duty. Both are necessary adjuncts for the complete realization of the spiritual man. Unite duty with love, and discipline with reverence, and a combination of manly virtue is effected which will withstand the torments of passion and pride.

FOOTNOTES AND REFERENCES

* *Amer. Jour. Econ. Sociol.*, II, No. 2 (Jan., 1943), 175-92.

¹ "The library which he founded for his monks at Squillace (Vivarium, the Calabrian monastery to which he retired about 540) and the handbooks which he compiled for them to serve as a key thereto (*De Institutione Divinarum Litterarum*, and *De Artibus et Disciplinis Liberalium Litterarum*) helped to organize the literary side of monastic life. But for the existence of such a sanction for literary culture, it is quite possible that, with the exception of Virgil, no Latin classic would have reached us in a complete form. . . . His library contained all the best Latin expositors of the fourth and fifth centuries." ("Learning and Literature Till the Death of Bede," in *The Cambridge Medieval History*, III, chap. XIX, esp. 485-87.) "Cassiodorus retired to Squillace, his birthplace, where he founded a monastery and set an example of learned industry and care for books, the effect of which was incalculable." (W. P. Ker, *The Dark Ages*, [Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1904], p. 118.)

² See chap. IV, "Glastonbury in Legend and History."

³ John Addington Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, "Italian Literature" (2 parts; New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1882), Part I, Appendix VI, p. 561.

⁴ J. A. Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, "The Fine Arts" (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1882), Appendix II, pp. 526-27.

- ⁶ *King Henry the Sixth*, third part, Act II, scene 5.
- ⁷ *Hamlet*, Act III, scene 1.
- ⁸ *Romeo and Juliet*, Act V, scene 3.
- ⁹ *Macbeth*, Act V, scene 5.
- ¹⁰ *King Henry the Eighth*, Prologue, lines 1-5.
- ¹¹ Giorgio Vasari (1511-1571), *Delle Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori, ed architettori*, first published in 1550 (trans. into French, German, and English by Mrs. Foster, London, 1850).
- ¹² Symonds, *Renaissance*, "The Fine Arts," Appendix II, p. 526.
- ¹³ *A Cultural History*, I, 72; cf. also *supra* p. 152.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 75.
- ¹⁵ Died 1211 (?); English chronicler and Benedictine.
- ¹⁶ Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present*, originally published 1843 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), Introduction, p. x.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 132-33.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.
- ¹⁹ *Decline of the West*, II, 32.
- ²⁰ *Life and Habit* (Shrewsbury ed.).
- ²¹ Opening line of Luther's best-known hymn. See Spengler, *op. cit.*, II, 296.
- ²² In Anglo-Saxon law, the threefold necessary burdens that rested on the tenure of all lands (army service, repair of strongholds, and repair of bridges).
- ²³ Spengler, *op. cit.*, I, 316 n.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 297-99.
- ²⁵ (1595-1666); German jurist and author of legal works.
- ²⁶ As quoted by Spengler, *op. cit.*, I, 140.

CHAPTER TEN

THE RETURN TO MYSTICISM