

PREFACE

IF there is one thesis on which the thinkers of all ages have been united, it is that man's progress upward from the lower species may be attributed to the development of the human spirit. All the great works of painting, of sculpture, of literature and of architecture, as well as music and science owe their creation to this free spirit of man. Over the centuries many epic statues and poems have been dedicated to it.

One wonders how it became shackled and why in every period of cultural decline the bonds grow stronger and heavier. Students of this problem hold out only one hope of rehabilitation, namely a spiritual rebirth, and today serious-minded people are giving heed to the probability of another renaissance. This is evident in their effort to learn something from the past. By casting light on the thought and actions of medieval times, students are attaching a new importance to the rôle of the mystics in that rebirth.

This significant trend in the thinking of serious observers is a revulsion against much of the quasi-rationalist literature of the past two generations, which ignored the history and background of ideas; considering all that was known to be the recent, all that was valuable the new. We have now reached the stage when man, once again, reveals a desire to find himself.

In these times of deep distress it is natural for the thinking individual to ask himself by what road he has traveled to the brink of disaster. And in looking back he discovers a coincidental relationship between his own conditions and those that prevailed in other times. Searching further he learns how men of previous times were able to extricate themselves from the burdens that overwhelmed them.

Perhaps here is the key to man's survival through civilizations and cultures—his ability to learn from the past.

In these essays we have a guide for modern man in his quest for the secret of the freedom of the human spirit. The chapters of this book were originally contributed as articles to *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, for the purpose of stimulating a yearning for a simple and readily understandable introduction to the early centuries of our era and to the Middle Ages. Because the author has investigated his materials exhaustively and digested them thoroughly, these illuminating vignettes present no difficulty at all for the young man or woman who has taken a course in history. They are delightfully written, in a simple, charming and persuasive style, and the interest that they arouse can be satisfied by works identified in the bibliographical footnotes—works that can easily be obtained in any good college or public library.

The many requests for reprints of the essays made known the demand that exists for this collection. It is hoped that the volume will serve a useful purpose in revealing some of the mightiest achievements in philosophy, science and art of which western civilization can boast. In addition, the discerning student will find, in the essays an indication of the direction that may be taken toward that spiritual freedom that we all seek.

WILL LISSNER

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