

## ÉMILE MÂLE AND THE SPIRIT OF MEDIEVAL CULTURE\*

FOR about three hundred years the Middle Ages were like a sealed book. After the Reformation had closed the doors on that great period, the key was lost. They say it has been missing ever since the days of the Council of Trent. Whether such deeply sincere men as William Roscoe, Henry Hallam, and John Addington Symonds thought of searching for the key, I know not, but, in their splendid researches (great contributions of knowledge and interpretation to the literature of Europe), there is not to be found the slightest notion that they knew the key had been lost; their work was centered chiefly in the Renaissance.

The man to whom all praise should be given for finding the key to the doors of the Middle Ages and, indeed, opening them to us, and who,

like a thoroughly well-informed verger, takes us through the cathedrals and abbeys far back—back to the eleventh, sometimes the tenth century—is Émile Mâle. In the beginning of his first volume, called *L'art religieux du XIIe Siècle en France*,<sup>1</sup> he says: "Thirty years ago when I began these studies with enthusiasm of youth, I had no idea of writing them—an instinct turned me towards the thirteenth century where all is order and light."<sup>2</sup>

Imagine the shock such a statement must have been to the scientist or philosopher who had been reared with the idea that the thirteenth century came in the Dark Ages, and that the Dark Ages were chaotic, obscure, and, to say the least, fearfully backward! "All is order and light." Yes, after reading Émile Mâle, one sees quite readily what he means. So far, four volumes of his work have been published;<sup>3</sup> one—the thirteenth century volume—has been done most beautifully into English by Dora Nussey. It is illustrated on almost every page, and Mâle is so careful in explaining that he does not permit you to pass from one subject to another without knowledge of the one you are leaving and preparation for the next. Here is a comparatively new subject—medieval iconography.<sup>4</sup> It is an art, the only one that can explain the Middle Ages to the student. When we

let the mind wander on all that is implied in the phrase—medieval iconography—we are amazed at the enormous world that is opened up, a world as strange to us as any found by stargazers.

The industry and output of the Middle Ages, considered from the standpoint of the iconography in stone, glass, and wood, is so stupendous that it is hard to believe that the inmates of certain monasteries and priories had become debauched and lazy. If it were possible to compile a list of the great medieval works of art destroyed during the dissolution of the abbeys, at the time of the French Revolution, and by the *Bande Noire* at the beginning of the nineteenth century, we should then realize the prodigious, artistic, and industrial feats performed by the men of the Middle Ages. Mâle says:

The true meaning of medieval art, which had grown more obscure than hieroglyphics, has had to be laboriously rediscovered in our time. To those who come without preparation, the portals of Amiens or the north porch at Chartres are a closed book. A guide is a necessity. Since 1830 many mysteries have been solved through the labors of archaeologists like Didron or Cahier, but even their researches have left secrets still undisclosed, and their work to be coordinated and welded into an organic whole.<sup>5</sup>

He gives us many instances of how the so-called experts of the last century made the most amusing errors in connection with the statues of the cathedrals. He tells us that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Benedictines of Saint Mauré, when writing of the ancient churches of France, displayed ignorance which was anything but creditable to their order's reputation for learning.

Another instance is Montfaucon, in his *Monuments de la monarchie française*. He reads into the cathedral façades scenes from the history of France and portraits of her kings. Mâle tells us that medieval art became an enigma after the second half of the sixteenth century, and he says the Council of Trent marks the end of the old artistic tradition. He brings to our notice a work by Molanus,<sup>6</sup> which proves conclusively to Mâle's mind that the Council which met at Trent had lost the key to the art of the Middle Ages.

Imagine, if you can, the method of education of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.<sup>7</sup> Everything that was laid down as essential by the theologian, the encyclopedist, the interpreter of the Bible, was expressed in sculpture or in painting glass, and Mâle shows how the craftsman translated the thought of the doctor and attempted to draw a complete picture of the liberal

education which a thirteenth century cathedral offered to all.

As the thought of the century was fully expressed in art, and the cathedral was the great center of liberal education, one can imagine how interesting is the long evolution of Christian culture and how elusive of research when undertaken by the scholar. Mâle says it is the work of a lifetime to study the subtle changes from the art of the catacombs to that of the cathedrals.

The story of the months as depicted in some of the bas-relief at Amiens and Notre Dame<sup>8</sup> is fascinating. There is a definite reason given for every symbol. There is no doubt the instructor and the sculptor of the Middle Ages knew what they were about. At Amiens, above the representation for June—a workman with a scythe—there is a plaque containing the zodiacal sign of the crab. The months and the seasons which are illustrated in stone and glass in the French cathedrals (notably at Notre Dame, Amiens, and Rampillon) convince us that the artists of the thirteenth century overlooked nothing in the domain of human activity.

The variety of conception reveals imaginative power that is extraordinary. The sculpture<sup>9</sup> of the month of July at Notre Dame—the man sharpening his scythe—is full of vivacity. There

are so many examples of the versatility of the artists in portraying the months that a student would be kept busy for a long time studying this subject. It cannot be imagined that they were designed from the same pattern. Not any of the work is stereotyped, because in various districts there are changes in the sculpture that are approximate to the early or late coming of the crops, according to the locality in which the sculptor worked. For instance, the ripe grape would be earlier in one district than in another, the corn ready for the scythe earlier in one valley than another, and so on. All these variations to which the artist was susceptible give us an abundance of imagery. It fascinates beyond description.

In no two places do we find the zodiacal signs quite alike. On Notre Dame, Aries is surrounded by the first flowers of spring, and the peasant goes forth to his vineyard. At Chartres he dresses his vines; at Amiens he digs them. At Chartres,<sup>10</sup> where the wind is cold and the sky changeable, the vine-dresser still wears his winter cloak and hood. And so on, an infinite variety is given to the bas-relief representing the months and the seasons. However, it is in the work of portraying (in stone and glass) the seven arts that we see the thirteenth-century artist at his best.

From the famous treatise on the arts by Martianus Capella, with the misleading title, *The Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, many of the artists drew inspiration. Capella, an African grammarian of the fifth century, attempted to lighten the severity of learning by the graces of the imagination. He opens his work with a romance. Mercury has at last decided to take a wife and asks for the hand of Philology; the young husband presents himself on the wedding-day with a retinue of the seven arts. Mâle tells us:

Grammar, the first figure whom he presents, comes forward dressed in the Paenula. She holds an ivory case like a doctor's case of instruments, for Grammar is a true therapeutic which cures all defects of speech. In her case are seen—among other things—ink, pens, candlesticks, tablets and a file in eight sections, marked by gold lines—symbols of the eight parts of speech. There is also a sort of scalpel (*scalprum*) with which she makes operations on the tongue and teeth to facilitate utterance.

Dialectic follows. She is a thin woman draped in a black mantle, with bright eyes shining in a pale face and hair dressed in elaborate rolls. In the left hand she holds a serpent half hidden under her robe, in the right a wax tablet and a fish-hook. Remigius of Auxerre, who in the tenth century wrote a commentary on Martianus Capella, found no difficulty in explaining the attributes of Dialectic. The subtlety of classical rhetoricians did not perplex the

medieval mind. According to him the rolled hair denotes the syllogism, the serpent the wiles of sophistry, and the hook stands for insidious argument.

Rhetoric, an armed maiden, comes forward to the sound of trumpets. She is beautiful, tall and graceful, a helmet covers her hair, and she brandishes formidable weapons. On her breast glitter precious stones and she wears a cloak embroidered with countless figures.

Geometry wears a marvellous robe on which are embroidered the movements of the stars, the shadow that the earth casts on the sky, and the signs of the Gnomon dial piece. In her right hand she holds a pair of compasses ("Radius"), in her left a globe, while before her is a table thick with greenish dust in which she draws her figures.

Arithmetic has the stately beauty of a primitive Goddess, and she seems to have come into being with the world itself. From her forehead issues a ray which dividing becomes double, then treble, then quadruple and after multiplying, it infinitely again becomes one. Her agile fingers move with unthinkable rapidity. Their movements recall those of worms ("vermiculati") and symbolise, says Remigius of Auxerre, the rapidity of her calculations.

Astronomy bursts suddenly forth from an aureole of flame, a crown of stars on her glittering hair. She spreads a pair of great golden wings with crystal feathers, and carries a bent and gleaming instrument ("Cubitalem Fulgentemque Mesuram") for observing the stars. She has also a book composed of various

metals which, according to Remigius of Auxerre, represent the various zones or Climata which she studies.

Finally Music, the beautiful Harmonia, comes forward with a train of Goddesses, poets and musicians. Around her Orpheus, Arion, Amphion, Pleasure and the graces sing sweetly while she draws ineffable strains from a large shield of gold strung with resounding strings. She is pure harmony, and at each of her movements the little golden discs on her dress tinkle melodiously.<sup>11</sup>

What the medieval artist did in his creations of these figures fills us with wonder, for there is not one of the arts which, according to the description given to the sculptor, is not fraught with almost insuperable difficulty; yet, he has succeeded in such a way that every great sculptor since his time regards his work with profound admiration. The skill with which he has overcome the inherent difficulties of the prose description of the figure commands the reverence and respect of all great sculptors—the feats undertaken by these men of the so-called Dark Ages threw Houdon and Rodin into raptures.

While we are on the subject of the Seven Arts, let us consider the number of great men who used that subject and gave it another rendering. Alanus de Insulis,<sup>12</sup> probably the greatest medieval Latin poet, took the work of Martianus

Capella and presented us with another version of it. He was a precursor of Dante; indeed, he gave us the first sketch of the magnificent edifice which Dante raised. It is most interesting to follow his presentation of the figures of the Seven Arts and note where he differs in description from his master.

Henri d'Andeli wrote a *Battle of the Seven Arts* and then Jean le Teinturier wrote a *Marriage of the Seven Arts*. The earliest representation of the liberal arts is found on the façades of Chartres and Laon.<sup>13</sup> Mâle says: "This is not surprising for in the Middle Ages few schools were as famous as those of Chartres and Laon."<sup>14</sup> The brilliant reputation of the school of the Cathedral of Chartres dates back from the tenth century. Pupils gathered there from the distant provinces of France and many came from England. John of Salisbury's name is among the famous who studied there.

At Auxerre, the liberal arts are twice represented. Thomas à Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, thought best to conclude his studies at Auxerre.

Who has seen that marvelous rose window at Amiens and has not felt a thrill of joy at the beauty of its workmanship? Perhaps the writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries never

made so many mistakes about any other decoration as about the wheel. Many of them called it the Wheel of Life, but Mâle has traced it to be a Wheel of Fortune and shows us that the subject is certainly Power, Riches and Glory, the pomps and vanities of the world. In fact, the wheel expresses the instability of these things. It was Boethius<sup>15</sup> who presented men as fastened to Fortune's Wheel, and perforce rising and falling with her. He says:

I cause a rapid wheel to turn; I love to raise the fallen and to abase the proud. Mount, then, if thou wilt, but on condition that thou dost not wax indignant when the law that presides at my games demands that thou shalt descend.

The psychomachia of Prudentius is also portrayed in stone. There are Chartres and Aulnay representations of the poem of Prudentius. Another theme that the medieval artist loved to portray was the Ladder of Virtue. This was also one of the subjects which has been illustrated in glass and in the missal.<sup>16</sup>

Another source of inspiration is the representation of the virtues in the cathedrals, which leads Mâle to say:

To feel the tremendous vitality of medieval art it is only necessary to compare cold modern allegories

of courage or justice with these little figures tense with meaning, breathing the very spirit of holiness. They still make an appeal to all who study them with sympathy. To the man of the Middle Ages they seemed to say: "Thy days pass, and thou feelest the approach of old age and death. Look at us, we do not grow old nor die for our purity gives us eternal youth. Receive us into thy soul if thou too wouldst not age nor die."<sup>17</sup>

The artist in presenting the virtues to us shows that he considered the active and the contemplative life of equal sanctity. At Chartres the active life has the place of honor, but that difference does not mean the artist thought less of the virtues of the contemplative life.

Then the cathedral recounts the history of the world, after a plan that is in entire agreement with the scheme developed by Vincent of Beauvais.<sup>18</sup> The Old and the New Testament and the Acts of the Apostles furnish the subject matter of the famous *Speculum Historiale* at Chartres. In connection with this interpretation of the artist of the Middle Age, Émile Mâle defends the sculptor against his modern critics. He shows that the artists preferred, for the most part, to adhere to the spirit rather than to the letter. Following the guidance of the instructors, the artists chose a number of Old Testament scenes and placed

them in juxtaposition with scenes from the gospel, in order to impress on men a sense of the deep, underlying harmony. Mâle says such a method of interpretation was entirely orthodox but, since the Council of Trent, the Church has chosen to attach herself to the literal meaning of the Old Testament, leaving the symbolic method in the background, and so it has come about that the exegesis based on symbolism, of which the Fathers made constant if not exclusive use, is to-day generally ignored.

The interpretation of this work by Mâle gives us a most extraordinary conception of the mind of the medieval artist and his ecclesiastical instructor, revealing a depth of thought, a poetic imagination rarely found in the art of the Renaissance. Mâle says:

God who sees all things under the aspect of eternity willed that the Old and New Testaments should form a complete and harmonious whole; the old is but an adumbration of the new. To use medieval language, that which the gospel shows men in the light of the sun, the Old Testament showed them in the uncertain light of the Moon and Stars. In the Old Testament truth is veiled, but the death of Christ rent that mystic veil and that is why we are told in the gospel that the veil of the temple was rent in twain at the time of the crucifixion. Thus it is only in relation to the New Testament

that the Old Testament has significance, and the synagogue who persists in expounding it for its own merits is blindfold.<sup>19</sup>

One can very easily imagine how the Church, since the Council of Trent, has repudiated or ignored such orthodoxy. I have not time to go into the symbolism of the Middle Ages, all that beautiful mystery which disappeared after the Reformation, but I strongly urge you to read what Mâle has to say about Origen's interpretation and how Augustine, after hearing St. Ambrose, readily overcame the difficulties of Biblical interpretation which beset him. Of course, this cannot appeal to the person whose judgment is pronounced, the person who has decided that these are themes for children; but I am of the opinion that there is no one who can spiritually afford to reject profound beauty in any of its forms, and surely a sculptor's interpretation, a painter's interpretation, of myth and legend goes a long way to make life endurable in this age of progress.

At any rate, there is a very great historical value here that should not be disregarded. In the Venerable Bede's history of the holy abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow,<sup>20</sup> it is related that Benedict Biscop went to Rome to ask for pictures to decorate the churches of his monasteries. Mâle says:

The pictures he brought back were arranged in such a way that a scene from the Old Testament was explained by a scene from the New. Isaac carrying the wood for sacrifice was opposite to the figure of Christ bearing the cross, and the brazen serpent lifted up by Moses in the wilderness was a counterpart to the scene of the crucifixion. Concordances familiar to Biblical interpreters are here recognised. In the palace chapel at Ingelheim there are Carolingian paintings which represent twelve scenes from the Old Testament opposed to twelve scenes from the New. Behind the thirteenth-century artist's love of relating the two Testaments there was a long tradition.<sup>21</sup>

This is illuminating. It tells us that the medieval artist has authority for what he was doing. It also tells us how far, after the Council of Trent, the Church departed from the traditions that animated the ecclesiastics, the sculptors, and painters of the Middle Ages.

The concordance of the Old and New Testaments furnished the doctors and artists with numbers of episodes for portrayal in stone and glass. The symbolic compositions have not been studied and explained since the middle of the sixteenth century. It is now just about four hundred years since the Reformation. Is it too much to say that for perhaps more than three centuries we were misinformed by historians and prelates as to the

meaning of the Middle Ages and the real reasons for destroying so many of its sublime wonders? Certainly we know now it is only within the past half century that anyone has attempted to break through the walls of prejudice and ignorance built up since the beginning of the seventeenth century. When we read Mâle and study the illustrations, we realize what extraordinary people they were who thought and wrought such beauty. What creative imagination, what amazing skill! Think of the lively fancy which created the symbolism of wedding the subjects, events, and characters of the Old and New Testaments!

The *Glossa Ordinaria* teaches, first of all, that Isaac is a figure of God the Son, as Abraham is a figure of God the Father. God who gave His Son to mankind willed that the people of the old covenant should catch a faint gleam of the great sacrifice yet to be. The whole of the Biblical passage, which tells of the sacrifice of Isaac, is full of mystery, and Mâle says, "Every word of it should be weighed." The three days journey which separates Abraham's dwelling from Mount Moriah signifies the three epochs in Jewish history—from Abraham to Moses, from Moses to John the Baptist, and from John the Baptist to the Saviour. The two servants who accompany Abraham are Israel and Judah, two divisions of

the Jewish people. The ass which bears the implements for the sacrifice, not knowing what it does, is the blind and undiscerning synagogue. Finally, the wood that Isaac carries on his shoulders is the very cross itself. The fertility and richness of thought of the men of the Middle Ages can be had now by anyone who will take just a little trouble to study Mâle.<sup>22</sup>

For delightful symbol-weaving it is hard to beat the gospel of the Middle Ages. Consider the miracle of the wine at the marriage at Cana. At Canterbury<sup>23</sup> there is one window devoted to this subject. All the commentators are agreed that the miracle contains, and is an example of, mystic teaching. It is evident from examination of the scenes surrounding the marriage at Cana that the symbolism of the incident was accepted by the master glass painter of Canterbury. Mâle describes the representations on the window:

. . . First of all one sees there the six ages of human life: *Infantia* (infant), *Pueritia* (child), *Adolescentia* (adolescent), *Juventus* (youth), *Virilitas* (man), *Senectus* (old age)—the six stone jars. Next come the six ages of the world marked, as by milestones, by the figures of Adam, Noah, Abraham, David, Jechonias and Jesus. Finally two lines explain the mystery. "The water pots which hold the measures of water symbolize the ages. The water contains the historical, the wine the allegorical meaning."<sup>24</sup>

If you would find amusement, in the old spiritual sense—that quiet joy which comes when we see beauty at play in sky or person, a joy which sets the heart laughing, such as we feel when our child smiles through tears, and all is well again—if you would experience something of this, read Mâle's glorious chapter on the legends which grew up with the Infant Christ and how, in the gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, when Joseph told Mary he had brought two midwives, Mary smiled. This story of the birth is a gem.

When one thinks of all the wealth of fine imagination in play during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries of which we have been deprived by the imaginative authors, it is enough to fill one with a skepticism so deep that one is inclined to question very much the value of most of the contributions to art of nineteenth-century writers on the Renaissance and the Middle Ages.

The thirteenth-century artist in portraying the wedding feast at Cana introduced an entirely new reading of the story, which is found to be according to a tradition in Venerable Bede. The betrothed pair of which the gospel says so little are believed to be St. John and Mary Magdalen. It is said St. John left his wife on the day of his marriage. The tradition is: After the feast Jesus said, "Leave thy wife and follow me," and John,

choosing a celibate life followed Him. That the artists knew this tradition is seen in the choir enclosure of Notre Dame at Paris where one of the betrothed wears the Nimbus, and Mâle says, as in medieval iconography the Nimbus is given to Saints only, the artist by this attribute evidently designates St. John.

The art of the thirteenth century differs much from that of the succeeding century; in it there is a reserve, something of the severely correct. In all the work, which is tempered in the fourteenth century by emotion, the drama of the Passion is intensified and, in some respects, loses the grandeur of the earlier work; the austerity of artistry seen in the sculptures and stained glass becomes humanized. Mâle writes:

... In the fourteenth century art grows more human and the Virgin presses her child to her heart, smiles at him, and offers him a bird or flowers. The symbolic apple carried by the grave virgin of the thirteenth century, in remembrance that she is the second Eve, becomes in the fourteenth century a plaything for the Infant Jesus. Such art is more tender but how much less impressive. Even Fra Angelico, who of all artists was most affected by his gospel-subjects might at times have seemed to old Gothic masters somewhat lacking in gravity of treatment.<sup>25</sup>

If there is one thing more than another that Spengler<sup>26</sup> has done to win our gratitude, it is in forcing upon us the notion that we have been looking at certain examples of art and not seeing them. We have not had the right perspective and, in many cases, we have not had the knowledge necessary for a true appreciation of their worth. Take this question of the cathedrals of Europe. We have looked at them for many years and have admired them, but, unless we have had a knowledge of the iconography of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, we have not understood them. What, then, have we admired? From the exterior, surely nothing more than the architectural grandeur, the towers or spires, the decoration and the symmetry of the building. The effect upon us when we are inside must, of course, be very different. I have never heard of anyone standing in the nave of a great cathedral and turning away without being impressed by the fine, aspiring columns and the singing arches, the effect of the glorious, jewel-like windows, the splendor of the choir, and chapels, where so many various crafts are brought together to unite in creating emotions which are profound and grave. Inside, everything conduces to create a deep impression.

We may not know the story illuminated in the windows. We may not know numerous sculptural

details and effects in the presentations of the passion, of the Mary stories, of the sculptures of the saints; still the interior creates an impression which lingers in the memory. Now, for the first time since the Middle Ages, we may see and know, and, knowing, learn the worth of the doctors and artists who labored in the fields of the beautiful and the ideal, so that men might enter into the spirit of the creators and for a while forget the burdens of life.

Imagine the experience of one who has seen these great monuments of art, going anew, equipped with the knowledge given by Émile Mâle! Such a person, revisiting Notre Dame or Chartres, will see with other eyes. Knowing will illuminate and enliven the vision. In such a way it is possible to bridge the gulf that lies between us and the wonders of the cathedral builders.

One of the finest works in primitive Christian literature is the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, transcribed by Vincent of Beauvais and other thirteenth-century compilers. The story is of two who rose from their graves on the day of crucifixion. Before the priests of the temple, they described the descent into Limbo. The work known to be apocryphal was accepted for its beauty both by the Fathers and the medieval doctors, who overlooked its lack of canonicity. What the thirteenth-century

artists did with this source of their inspiration can only be imagined from the glorious specimens left to us. What they were before revolution and neglect effaced so many treasures, no one knows. From what remains of this subject we can imagine what fertility of ideas was given to its presentation in stone and glass.

There must have been a mass of oral tradition now lost. Several motifs in the sculptures are repeated many times, and no one now knows how the legends concerning them arose. There is the fish on the plate before Jesus at the last supper, there is the representation of the three Magi asleep in one bed; before the thirteenth century four nails fastened Jesus to the cross—after, three nails. Why? The key to the mystery is lost.

The cult of the Virgin which grew up in the twelfth century developed in the thirteenth. The bells of Christendom began to ring the bells of the Angelus, the office of the Virgin was recited daily, and the finest cathedrals arose under her patronage. Christian thought meditating through the centuries on the mystery of a Virgin chosen of God, anticipated the dogma of the Immaculate Conception and as early as the twelfth century the mystical Church of Lyons celebrated that festival. . . .<sup>27</sup>

A history of great beauty has yet to be written on the conception of the artists of the twelfth

and thirteenth centuries of Mary as the Mother and Queen of Heaven. It never occurred to the artists of the thirteenth century, as it did subsequently to those of the Renaissance, to represent the Virgin as an abstract idea. The next time you visit Notre Dame, notice the number and variety of themes Mary yields to the sculptors: the burial, resurrection, coronation, and assumption of the Virgin are some of the loveliest sculptures of the thirteenth century.

One reason why so many errors have been made by writers on the cathedral is that they were not familiar with the apocryphal gospels, and therefore could not read much of the iconography of the artists who found in the apocryphal gospels an almost inexhaustible source of poetic and artistic inspiration. The notions of Montfaucon who, in his work, reads into the cathedral façade scenes the history of France and portraits of her kings, reveal the abysmal ignorance of the eighteenth-century writers on the Middle Ages. Vincent of Beauvais reckoned Christian history not by the deeds of kings and queens, but by the lives of saints. The cathedral, which presented history to the poor and rich alike, always placed conquerors, warriors, and emperors at the feet of saints—tiny figures, taking up little space in the

Christian picture. Vincent of Beauvais wastes no time in his history book, *Speculum Historiale*, over recording kings and queens and their activities. The real heroes of the time were abbots and anchorites, beggars and the sick. From these, miracles of conversion, healing, soothing, and feeding arise. In the eyes of the historians of that day the real work was to be found in the idea of the City of God.

The compilation of the stories of the early centuries by Jacobus de Voragine into his book, *Golden Legend*,<sup>28</sup> brought to the notice of all men stories scarcely ever found outside liturgical books. Mâle says:

The attack made on Jacobus de Voragine by scholars of the seventeenth century misses its mark. The *Golden Legend*, which they accused of being a "Legend of Lead" was not the work of a man but of the whole of Christendom. The stories were displeasing to the strict theologians after the Council of Trent, although they were universally accepted in the thirteenth century. They were read in the churches and illustrated in the windows. . . .

Anyway the *Golden Legend* remains one of the most interesting books of its time. By its aid, can be interpreted nearly all the bas-reliefs and windows which deal with legends, and, in re-editing it, Graesse rendered a valuable service to the history of art if not also the history of religion. . . .<sup>29</sup>

The more strictly theological you become, the further you pass from religion. Modern theologians do not like miracles. Take the marvelous, the miraculous, from religion and you deprive nine-tenths of the people of the very means of their understanding the purpose of religion. I like miracles, and I would not give much for a religion that contained less miracle than the universe of which we know so little. Miracles are always happening, but we are so scientific, so matter of fact, so proof against proof that we have destroyed our sense of recognition of the miraculous. The miraculous work of binding a man to an invisible God is surely taking place somewhere. And if that can be done after all the theological and sectarian work let loose since the Reformation, I think any miracle is easy. What is it about the miracles of the Middle Ages that offends folk? Not the impossible. No wise man is brave enough now to say what is and what is not possible. The wise man today has learned to reserve his judgment. There is something of a miracle in that. But what offends? Surely not the incredible, because we accept on trust a thousand things a day that we know next to nothing about—electricity, ether-waves, electrons, protons, photons, mental telepathy, and hundreds of other things.

Before we switch on the light in a dark room we remember the difficulties we have experienced in accepting the story of the Virgin birth, so we ponder the reality—actuality, if you like—of the cause of the particular electricity which is to flood the room with light if the lamp is not burned out. One hundred years ago electricity suddenly turned on in any sensible town in England would have given the folk material enough for as many miracle stories as the *Golden Legend* contains. Then there was the cable miracle. In laying the cable in mid-Atlantic the thing broke. In the office of the cable company on the Irish shore stood the instrument, the receiver of the broken cable. One dark night many years afterwards, it started to speak. The lone clerk, a first-rate scientific telegraphist, left the room. He admitted he felt "funny." He thought a miracle had happened. Steadying himself and summoning all his nerve, he set to work at the instrument and learned the broken cable had been recovered and was in use again.

In my opinion there is only one way to deal with miracles, and that is the perfectly-tested and long-tried way of the ancient Arabians. But to benefit by the means, if you adopt it, you must be a scientist, a religious man, and an artist, all in one. Just do what the men of the Middle

Ages did. They felt that man—springtime man, man of an early culture—is never satisfied with a simple fact; his mind is too active, too fertile, for ordinary occurrences such as birth, death, and usual existence. Therefore he furnishes fact with poetry and imagery, and then sets to work as an artist to present the fact clothed with the rich fancies of his mind. Hence, sculpture, painting, stained-glass, carving, iron work, and so on. As a scientist he discovers what is in the tradition and tests his findings, adopts, unites, or separates versions of the story, selects drama for his character, places it in a new environment, transports it to another age, gives it powers over life and death, such as he craves for himself, empowers it with skill for healing disease, overcoming pain, curing the blind and the halt. His Saviour, Messiah, Hermit, Saint, Mother of Jesus, whatever his hero or heroine, must be no earth-born creature like himself, possessing the frailties, the susceptibilities, and the envies of mere human kind. He has to think in terms of the eternal, because he is an artist and desires above all things the fellowship of the most high and all the angels of heaven. So he works the miracles and presents them in histories striving always to outdo the versions of those before

him by adding to the beauty of the conception tributes of joy and adoration from his own soul.

All miracles are man made, and none but poets can make them. They are produced for lesser poets, folk who have poetry in their souls but have not the art to give it visible expression. They—the artists of the Magian and Christian cultures—never dreamed of asking to accept their works people so wise that they would demand proof of a miracle. They did not know such people would ever exist. So it is not a matter of the miracle itself, so much as it is a matter of the quality of mind to which the miracle is presented. Creative imagination seeks a poetic soul for its offerings. And let us remember that the cathedral was the Bible of the poor. It gave all the education necessary for the poor to have. It showed in sculpture and other artistic works how poor men might overcome the weaknesses of the flesh and take joy in the promises of heaven.

Let any really human creature study the *Golden Legend* and the works of the thirteenth-century cathedral, and he will learn how marvelous a thing was the imagination and artistry of the creators of that time. He will discover pictures of human life, a summary of the world's history, hidden from him too long by the skeptics

of a civilization fast becoming mechanized in all that makes man the slave of prejudice.

All art worth the name is a religious manifestation of an adoring soul. Without religion there is no science of sculpture, painting, or stained glass. Of all sciences, art science is the indispensable. Sculpture and music are religious arts both born in cathedrals, and the greatest of musical instruments is surely the Gothic organ.

Victor Hugo says: "In the Middle Ages men had no great thought that they did not write down in stone."

According to the Council of Nicea, in 787, the Fathers said: "The composition of the religious imagery is not left to the initiative of artists, but is formed upon principles laid down by the Church and by religious tradition."

Then think of the marvelous variety of interpretations of the artists! Perhaps the greatest miracle the mind and hand of man have produced is the cathedral; certainly it is the sublimest monument raised by our culture.

#### FOOTNOTES AND REFERENCES

\* *Amer. Jour. Econ. Sociol.*, II, No. 1 (Oct., 1942), 15-34.

<sup>1</sup> Deuxième éd.; Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1924.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, Preface, p. i.

<sup>3</sup> *L'art religieux de la fin du Moyen Âge en France* (2e éd.; Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1922); *L'art religieux du xiii<sup>e</sup> siècle en France* (5e éd.; Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1923); English trans. (London: J. M. Dent & Sons; New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1913); *L'art allemand et l'art français du Moyen Âge* (nouvelle éd.; Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1922).

<sup>4</sup> See excellent bibliography in *The Cambridge Medieval History*, VIII, 988-1003.

<sup>5</sup> *L'art . . . du xiii<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Préface, ii; A. N. Didron, *Iconographie chrétienne* (Coll. doc., Paris, 1843; Eng. trans., London: Millington and Stokes, 1886); C. Cahier et A. Martin, *Mélanges d'archéologie, d'histoire*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1847-56); *ibid.*, *Nouveaux mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1874-77); *ibid.*, *Vitraux peints de Saint-Etienne de Bourges*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1842-44); *ibid.*, *Les caractéristiques des saints dans l'art populaire*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1866-68).

<sup>6</sup> *De historia sanctorum imaginum et picturarum* (1st ed., 1580; Louvain: Paquot, 1771).

<sup>7</sup> See W. P. Ker, *The Dark Ages* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and sons, 1904).

<sup>8</sup> Durand, *Monographie de l'église de Notre-Dame, cathédrale d'Amiens*, 3 vols. (Amiens, 1901-03); A. Marignan, *La décoration monumentale des églises de la France septentrionale du xiii<sup>e</sup> au xiii<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1911).

<sup>9</sup> V. Terret, *La sculpture bourguignonne aux xiii<sup>e</sup> et xiii<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris, 1914).

<sup>10</sup> E. Houver, *Cathédrale de Chartres*, 7 vols. (Chelles, 1920-21); M. and E. Marriage, *The sculptures of Chartres cathedral* (text in English and French, Cambridge, 1909).

<sup>11</sup> Martianus Capella, *op. cit.* (Teubner, 1866), Bk. III, 223; Bk. IV, 328; Bk. V, 426; Bk. VI, 580 and 587; Bk. VII, 729; Bk. VIII, 811; Bk. IX, 909, as quoted in Mâle, *L'art . . . du xiii<sup>e</sup> siècle*, pp. 77-78.

<sup>12</sup> Alan of Lille (Alanus de Insulis) was born *circa* 1128 and died in 1202 (1203?) at Cîteaux. His book was entitled *Anticlaudianus*. In his own age he was called *doctor universalis* for his wide learning; in modern times he has been compared with Spinoza. See *The Cambridge Medieval History*, V, 810; Hauréau, *Mém. de l'Acad. des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, XXXII, 1886, 1 et seq.; *Hist. littér. de la France*, XVI, 396 et seq.

<sup>13</sup> d'Andeli was a *trouvère*, an ecclesiastic, supposedly attached to the cathedral of Rouen. His works were edited by M. A. Héron in 1880. See Y. Delaporte (with illustrations by E. Houver), *Les vitraux de la cathédrale de Chartres* (Chartres, 1926); A. de Florival and E. Midoux, *Les vitraux de la cathédrale de Laon* (Paris, 1882-91). The façades are reproduced by M. Viollet-le-Duc in *Dictionnaire raisonné du mobilier français de l'époque carolingienne à la Renaissance*, 6 vols. (Paris, 1872). At Laon a glass window (*rose du nord*) is still consecrated to the Liberal Arts. It is reproduced by C. Cahier et A. Martin, *Mélanges d'archéologie, d'histoire*, IV.

<sup>14</sup> *L'art . . . du xiii<sup>e</sup> siècle*, pp. 80-81.

<sup>15</sup> *The Consolation of Philosophy*, with the Eng. trans. of "I.T." 1609, revised by H. F. Stewart (London: William Heinemann; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1918), p. 181. This translation reads as follows: "I turn about my wheel with speed, and take a pleasure to turn things upside down. Ascend, if thou wilt, but with this condition, that thou thinkest it not an injury to descend when the course of my sport so requireth."

<sup>16</sup> M. R. James, *An English Bible-picture book of the fourteenth century* (Holkham MS 666); in *Walpole Society Annual*, Vol. XI; E. G. Millar, *English illuminated manuscripts from the xth to the xiii<sup>e</sup> century* (Paris and Brussels, 1925).

<sup>17</sup> *L'art . . . du xiii<sup>e</sup> siècle*, p. 130.

<sup>18</sup> Died about 1264. *Speculum Historiale*, third part of the *Speculum Majus* (1st ed.; Strasbourg, c. 1473-76; Douai, 4 vols., 1624).

<sup>19</sup> *L'art . . . du xiii<sup>e</sup> siècle*, p. 135.

<sup>20</sup> *Lives of the Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow*, ed. Giles (1843); also Everyman's Library (London & Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd.; New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1930), pp. 349-53.

<sup>21</sup> *L'art . . . du xiii<sup>e</sup> siècle*, pp. 144-45.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142, *passim*.

<sup>23</sup> C. Heaton, *Origin of the stained glass in Canterbury cathedral*, in *Burlington Magazine*, XI, 172; J. D. Le Couteur, *Notes on the great north window of Canterbury cathedral*, in *Archaeologia Cantiana*, XXIX (1911), 323; P. Nelson, *Ancient painted glass in England, 1170-1500* (London, 1913).

<sup>24</sup> *L'art . . . du xiii<sup>e</sup> siècle*, p. 197.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202.

<sup>26</sup> *Op. cit.*

<sup>27</sup> *L'art . . . du xiii<sup>e</sup> siècle*, p. 233.

<sup>28</sup> Jacobus de Voragine was a Dominican, bishop of Genes, born about 1230 and died in 1298; his *Legenda Aurea* was written c. 1275; 1st ed. (in Latin), c. 1470; Eng. trans. from French (Caxton), 1483.

<sup>29</sup> *L'art . . . du xiii<sup>e</sup> siècle*, p. 275.