The Message of the Middle Ages to the Modern World

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M.A. (LOND.), D.SC. (EDIN.)

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PREFACE

THE Essex Hall Lecture was founded by the British and Foreign Unitarian Association in 1892, with the object of providing an opportunity for the free utterance of a selected speaker on some religious theme of general interest. The list of those who have lectured on this foundation includes the names of the Rev. Stopford Brooke, the Rev. Dr. J. Estlin Carpenter, Professor Sir Henry Jones, the Rev. Dr. James Drummond, the Rev. Dr. W. R. Inge, Dr. Claude G. Montefiore, Bishop Gore, Dr. L. P. Jacks, Viscount Cecil, and the Earl of Oxford and Asquith.

The present Lecture was delivered in the Milton Hall, Manchester, April 18th, 1929, in connection with the first meeting of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches.

A few paragraphs were unavoidably omitted in delivery.

Essex Hall, London,
April, 1929.

" And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the Everlasting Gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people."

Revelation of St. John.

THE MESSAGE OF THE MIDDLE AGES TO THE MODERN WORLD

THE traveller under Italian skies who enters for the first time the Duomo in Milan sometimes receives an impression of darkness, which is by no means due only to a contrast between the garish brilliancy without and a "dim religious light" within. The impression is due to the sheer vastness of the space into which he enters: too vast to be illuminated even by the serried ranks of great windows, each with its expanse of many-coloured glass. If for a few moments, forgetting where he is, the traveller falls into a dreamy mood, he might imagine that he is beholding a vision, where fragments of massive forms seem to rise out of the dim and the dark: here the glittering crystal tomb of a famous Archbishop; there and there portions of the fifty-two mighty columns which support the roof; elsewhere white figures

seeming to emerge—some of the four thousand statues which the cathedral is said to contain; and, far away, as it were the gleam of floating colours—from the eastern windows over the choir. And then, as the visionary mood faded, he would begin to apprehend the manifold greatness of the reality before him.

It is often thus with our apprehension of the past, and not least with those ten centuries, from the fifth to the fifteenth, miscalled the "Middle Ages": miscalled, because there are no water-tight compartments in history, no final endings, no absolutely new beginnings. The unquestioned assumption used to be that these centuries were a long, level stretch of time, with mankind stationary, spell-bound under the authority of the Church, absorbed in war or monastic dreams; or that they were a period of retrogression—in the words of Dean Inge, "the longest and dreariest set-back that humanity has ever experienced within the historical period." By those who take this view the Middle Ages are usually spoken of as the Dark

Ages. If any age of the past seems to us a dark age, we may be sure the darkness is as much in ourselves as in the facts. We have carried into it the garish sunlight of the passing day, or the dreamy moonlight of some earlier age, and are blind to the manifold greatness of the reality before us.

In one respect the illustration fails. The Middle Ages were no period of clear-cut convictions, settled institutions, and majestic repose. These thousand years embrace the long-drawn-out death agony of the secular power of imperial Rome, the fierce life begotten by the young northern races over the ruins of the ancient world, and the resurrection, as from the grave, of the spirit of that old world with power to mould in countless ways the mind and heart of the new. It is just this strange combination, with its startling inconsistencies, which gives the story of these centuries its charm and pathos, and arms its lessons with penetrating power. Its messages to the modern world are manifold.

Our subject must therefore at once be

limited and defined in order to bring it within the bounds of a lecture. I shall speak only of those movements which culminated in the thirteenth century: the century of Dante; when the nation-states of western Europe to-day were beginning to form themselves; when England, for example, having gained her Great Charter, was working out the beginnings of her system of trial by jury, her circuit Courts of Justice, her Parliament; when the tragic conflict between these young nations and the cosmopolitan internationalism of the papacy reached its height; when the constructive effort of the great Catholic thinkers had borne its finest fruit; when the art which created the glory of the cathedrals had done all that it could do, and an art going beyond these traditions, and a literature inspired by the lay spirit, began to arise. And here a remarkable fact emerges. The spirit, character, and achievements of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were practically unknown to the Protestant Reformers and their Renaissance Catholic contemporaries

—unknown to Luther and Calvin, and even to Erasmus and Thomas More. The work of these men belonged to the waning of the Middle Ages, and all they knew was the period of decline and decay. Luther in his Catholic days was an earnest student of the last of the great scholastic thinkers, the famous Oxford Franciscan, William of Occam, "Doctor Invincibilis," whose relentless logical analysis shattered the constructive work of his predecessors, and left Faith with a wholly non-rational basis on which alone it could rest.

To follow up these issues here would lead us far afield. Returning to the genuinely creative century, we find that out of the heart of it comes a threefold message to the world of to-day, dealing in the first place with the *limits and value of natural knowledge;* in the second place, with the *ideal of chivalry* and the chivalrous life; in the third place, with the *ideal of Christendom as a united realm.*

I

We must first point out a striking contrast with the classical Greek world as it was at its best—the Greece of which we think when we speak of Greek architecture, Greek sculpture, Greek literature. Among the Greeks, the capacity for knowledge—not merely knowledge as information but as the rational understanding of the causes and consequences of things—was believed without question to be man's highest endowment, and its development to be at once a duty and a delight. Plato expressed this conviction in his own way when he said, " It is a happy genealogy which makes *Iris* the daughter of *Thaumas* " —*i.e.* which treats the messenger of the gods, the winged thought which passes to and fro between heaven and earth and brings them into communion, as the child of Wonder, the impulse to know and to understand. Aristotle believed that the highest life is a life of mental self-realisation, of truth-seeking and truth-seeing, ever successful, yet perennially interesting. These are voices from

" the glory that was Greece." Afterwards the enthusiasm which created such ideals died away; and for later Greek thinkers knowledge was valued chiefly as a guide to human good in a dying civilisation. In our modern world there are many who value science only as it ministers to human welfare. Yet it is a fact assured by all the testimony of man's experience of study, that not upon the grounds of economy and the usefulness of knowledge to man's physical and social wants, but by some sense of a preciousness inherent in itself, of a fitness between it and the nature of man, of a privilege in seeking it and a delight in finding it for its own pure sake—that only so have all the great revelations of truth come to mankind.

On the other hand, we find early traces of a very different view, where knowledge is regarded as only one among other kinds of human excellence or superiority, and the desire to acquire all or any of these various kinds of excellence is brought under the duty of *moderation.* To know more than is enough (*quam sit satis*), said Seneca, is a kind of

intemperance. This doctrine has an interesting history; but we are here concerned with its inner meaning. It leads to a conclusion which is logically inevitable and from every point of view momentous. It is no question of the possibility or the difficulty of knowledge. The conclusion is that *there are things which we can know but which we ought not to try to know.* And why not?

The greater thinkers, in the period of which we are now speaking, gave cautious answers to this question. Saint Thomas Aquinas said that it is lawful to pursue any kind of knowledge which contributes to the purpose for which man was created—the supreme end of man, to glorify God and enjoy Him for ever. But this covers a great deal. It allows for the mind's love for God; and in the commandment to love God "with all the mind," "mind" was taken to imply a specifically intellectual power or faculty, different from the "heart" and "soul" and "strength." Other thinkers were less cautious. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, for example, writing a century earlier than

Aquinas, laid great stress on the *motive*. To pursue knowledge purely for the sake of knowing, is to yield to an impious and dangerous curiosity. To pursue knowledge for the "edification" of others is charity; for the "edification" of self, prudence. And in all cases Christian moderation must prescribe the conditions under which knowledge is to be sought. Many such utterances might be quoted. They show the drift of mediæval thought and feeling. And the conclusion is that there are things which it is not lawful for men to try to know. It is not God's will that men should know them. This conviction was naturally wrought into the general belief of the time, that mankind is beset by unseen powers, beneficent and malignant. Unlawful knowledge could only be acquired by intercourse with the powers of darkness. So far was this suspicion from being the invention of priests, that a priest was more likely than anyone else to be the object of it; and some of the greatest churchmen did not escape. A remarkable example is that of Gerbert of Aurillac, a

man of extraordinary attainments, considering the meagre material with which he had to work; insisting on the importance of study of nature, devoting himself to logic, mathematics, astronomy, mechanical invention; an ecclesiastical statesman of the first rank, dying early in the twelfth century as Pope Sylvester II. How could mortal man, in such an age of widespread ignorance and barbarism, have mastered such a range of knowledge? Although a Pope, he was believed to have acquired it by unlawful means. After his death, legends grew up round his name. Among his mechanical inventions was a figure of metal, or the head of one, which could *speak*. All through the Middle Ages we find this recurring interest in the manufacture of mechanical men. Gerbert's figure not only spoke, but, what is much more remarkable, always spoke the truth: with the unhappy result that the Pope misunderstood one of its oracles, and died in consequence.

Such quaint and pathetic legends are illustrative. The superstitious form which

they assume was natural and inevitable in such an age; but when we penetrate to their inner meaning, we find their root in an assured conviction that God has given us means of acquiring such knowledge as is necessary for the welfare of daily life. More than that is, so to speak, not authorised. Again we press the question, Why not? The answer is, Because it is dangerous. There are ways by which men may acquire it, but *they are not to be trusted with it.* If they acquire it, they will use it to the destruction of their bodies and souls. Such was the mediæval assumption. The entire rejection of any such assumption by the modern world is obvious; and on this ground there comes a direct challenge from the world of a thousand years ago to the world of to-day. Let me, greatly daring, try to put it as if some powerful mind from that distant age were speaking to us. There really were, in those days, some minds powerful enough, not, indeed, to understand the growth of knowledge during centuries after their own, but to grasp its results in imagination if

unfolded before them as it were in vision. Let us think of such a one as speaking to us.

"Men of a distant age," we seem to hear him saying, "men of an age which we dreamed would never be, our voice now comes to you from an age which you dreamed was dead. Our lives were laid in centuries of bitter hardship, of constant war, of devastating pestilence, of paralysing fear, of furious passion. Through the fires of fierce adversity and the waters of penitential discipline we purged ourselves of our more enormous sins, and, though we knew it not, prepared the way for you—for you, in a larger world than ours, a world of new oceans and unsuspected continents, of easy movement and easy learning: and yet a smaller world than ours, no longer the centre of all things, but an insignificant planet revolving round a minor star. You have multiplied inventions and discoveries and the means of living. You have gained a power over the things around you so great that the borderland between nature and miracle has faded away. And the promise of far greater power

lies before you, and the hope that at length you will master the essence and origin of power, when the world which we believed to be God's world will be in your hands, to re-create or to destroy, as you will. As you will; for now on your desires and purposes all these things depend. We, in our time, did not play the coward: we eagerly sought for light; at a great price we bought all that we learnt to know. But we believed that God had revealed to us eternal truths by which we could live and die; and we believed that there were truths God did not trust us with, because we were not fit to be trusted with them.

"Men of a distant age! Our vision of your world is in part a vision of death, of shattered resources, of waste places, of ruined lands. Have you made yourselves fit to be trusted with the power which the accumulation of your knowledge has given into your hands? Is the wisdom and morality of your world great enough to bear the burden of its power? Can you handle it to the glory of God and the well-being of your kind?

Miracles of death-dealing, undreamed of by us, undreamed of by yourselves only a lifetime earlier, are now within your grasp: *si in vividi ligno haec faciunt, quid in arido fiat?* [1] The natural man in your world is what he was in ours: he is a creature of good and of evil mingled together. In your world he has sought out things for which in ours he would not have dared to seek; and as you think on all these new powers, brought forth by the seeking which you name Science, let the word of the ancient Scripture be heard again: 'I call heaven and earth to witness this day, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse: therefore choose life, that thou mayest live, thou and thy children.'"

It may be a hard saying, but it is a true one. The growth of Science is a blessing or a curse, according to the use which is made of her findings. Science is a blessing if she is to be devoted to the humanising mission of recreating our shattered resources, reviving our waste places, and endowing and

[1] Luke xxiii. 31 (Vulgate).

enriching the common life of mankind. Science is a curse if she is to be diverted to the further elaboration of the mechanics and chemistry of destruction and resolving human life into a form of organised suicide.

If ever the mediæval mind was shaken in its belief that we ought not to know too much, it was in face of the invisible, mysterious, devastating terror of pestilence. There are fragmentary accounts of many outbreaks of epidemic disease during the period, in one district or another; but there is no indefiniteness in the records of the most terrible of all these visitations—the Black Death, which broke out in the middle of the fourteenth century. The Black Death was bubonic plague in its most virulent and infectious form. It came from Asia through Russia, following the great trade routes, and invaded Italy, France, England and Ireland, Belgium, Holland, and Germany. The mortality was terrific: but the people of that time could not conceive or imagine how it was propagated from one person to another. The conventional theological explanations—

by reference to divine retribution for human wickedness, or the malignant agency of demons—were not questioned; but the panic-stricken instincts of the populace were not satisfied thus. The belief spread (as though it were itself an epidemic) that there were individuals and societies who were carrying medicaments in order to propagate the plague. And the cry arose, "Where is the Hidden Hand? Where are they by whose deliberate design this calamity has come upon us? Where are they, that we may wreak our vengeance upon them?" And an immense number of innocent victims —especially Jews—suffered in this way. It was the emergence, in a tragically hysterical form, of a recurring delusion in times of public calamity: that these disasters must have been deliberately planned and brought about of set purpose by individuals. The truth is that some of the worst calamities which have afflicted the world are the results of human action, but not designed or even foreseen by any.

Fifteen years ago a Black Death of another

kind began in Europe, and under very different conditions of knowledge and experience. But there too I seem to see the working of the same delusive instinct. We heard the cry, " Where is the Hidden Hand? Who deliberately designed this thing and brought it about? Whom may we conscientiously denounce and revile as the authors of it all? " It seemed heroic to denounce the holders of power as public criminals who brought this disaster on the world. It may have been heroic, but it is foolish and blind; for it does not touch the root of the trouble—the pervading disease of mistrust, suspicion, and fear.

II

The message of the Middle Ages to the modern world is like a threefold cord which binds our world to theirs. We have separated out one strand in it. We have heard a challenging question which arises as soon as we begin to understand their feeling for the value and limitations of natural knowledge.

Turning now from the reflective to the active life of the period, another of its characteristic ideals rises before us : that of *Chivalry*.

Historically the word stands for the whole knightly system of the central mediæval period, with its peculiar social and religious customs. That system was the offspring of what is called *feudalism*. Look at this for a moment. Feudalism has been roughly defined as a system under which a military person—usually a bully and a tyrant—held land, on condition of stated services rendered to another military person, usually a worse bully and tyrant than himself. Facts, however, are more instructive than rhetoric; and, as a matter of fact, feudalism came into existence during the dark and dreadful ninth and tenth centuries, as the only means of defending western Europe against invading hosts of Saracens, Slavs, Magyars, and Danes, who threatened Christendom with extinction. Based upon the armour-clad knight and the fortified castle, it had taken shape almost spontaneously, in England and on the continent, as a system of local protection, at a time when the central govern-

ment, so far as there was any central government at all, was too weak to organise an effective resistance to the aggressors. What were wanted, and what in the circumstances were evolved, were tremendous bullies, overflowing with animal courage and martial fury —men good at the battle-cry and with the battle-axe. During the eleventh century the struggles with the invaders settled themselves, in a way (we may observe in passing) which created some of the hardest problems of the peace conferences of 1919 to 1921. But the feudal knights remained the dominant military force in Europe—their castles impregnable, their cavalry invincible; they were constantly at war among themselves, and on the whole the most dangerous obstacle to peaceful industry and centralised government. They had in full measure the virtue of martial courage and were utterly contemptuous of danger and death; but at the same time they were treacherous and disobedient to their kings, impious and profane in matters of religion, cruel and brutal in their dealings with common folk and with women. Of such a time—according to the

Anglo-Saxon Chronicle—" men said openly that Christ and his saints were asleep." The problem was, how to find, for such a knighthood, something better to do—in a word, how to civilise it—and at length the Church took the matter in hand, and created chivalry.[1]

The word stands for a historic way of life and also for a spirit and an ideal. It arose from the largely successful endeavour of the Church to Christianise the feudal knighthood. Historically the results of the endeavour are seen at their best and at their worst in the Crusades; but what interests us now are the ideals of this attempt to Christianise the knighthood. We think at once of the knights of the Round Table; but it is more instructive to turn to Chaucer, whose picture of the knight whom he describes must have been drawn from life :—

" he loved chivalry,
Truth and honour, freedom and courtesy."

There is no description of the pomp and glamour of knighthood, although the tale he

[1] See *Chivalry : its Historical Significance,* by Members of King's College, London, 1928.

tells is of chivalrous love and tourneying and death. Chaucer was not interested in the romances of chivalry, some of which were as far removed from poetry as from reality. Much might be said of these, but they do not tell us what now we want to know. Let us turn to Chaucer again. In this connection he indicates the ideal of true gentility. He makes no parade of disparaging birth or "high kindred"; but he does not place it first. He places *first things first:* he who claims to be of gentle birth must show himself the follower of Christ, from whom, as from the "first Stock," all virtue grows. The virtues of Christ are named: they include the familiar ones—familiar in word, at any rate—but two other virtues are added: "freedom" (meaning liberality) and ceaseless labour. This is in the little poem called *Ballad of Gentilesse*:— [1]

The first Stock, father of gentilesse,
What man that claimeth gentil for to be
Must follow his trace, and all his wits dress [2]
Virtue to serve and vices for to flee.

[1] The spelling and some of the words have been modernised. [2] Order all his thoughts.

For unto virtue belongeth dignity,
And not the reverse, saufly dare I deem,
All wear he mitre, crown, or diadem.

This first Stock was full of righteousness,
True of his word, sober, pitiful, and free,
Clean of his spirit, and loved business,
Against the vice of sloth, in honesty ;
And but [1] *his heir love virtue, as did he,*
He is not gentil, though he rich seem,
All wear he mitre, crown, or diadem.

Vice may well be heir to old richesse ;
But there may no man, as man may well see,
Bequeathe his heir his virtuous noblesse ;
That is appropred unto no degree,
But to the first Father in majesty,
That maketh him his heir that will him queem, [2]
All wear he mitre, crown, or diadem.

These qualities are found in the " perfect gentil knight," and some of them might stand as motto for the Knight's Tale, especially " pity,"—no mere sentiment, but an effective understanding pity.

Chaucer has revealed the ideal of chivalry as a spirit and an ideal. Its very essence was enthusiasm of an unselfish kind. In the hour of investiture the true knight made his vows : to renounce all greed and gain of every kind; to do nobly for the mere love

[1] *Unless.* [2] *Who is well-pleasing to him.*

of nobleness; to be generous of his goods; to be courteous to the vanquished; to draw his sword in no quarrel but a just one; to make his word his bond; and above all things to protect the helpless and to serve women. The investiture of a knight was no less truly a consecration to a high unselfish aim than was the ordination of a priest; and the Church played an essential part in it.

Why was it not more effective? The human, all too human, contrast between the ideal and the real was never greater than in the case of chivalry: why was this? We described it as an endeavour to Christianise a non-christian order. Even in its ideal form it remained a blending of two diverse influences, one springing from the Christian spirit, and the other from the Northern spirit. The unselfishness, humility, forgiveness of injuries, indifference to worldly wealth, and personal purity, which formed ingredients of the chivalrous ideal, were Christian. The reverence for woman, the scrupulous sense of honour, the obedience to laws, the truth-

fulness and loyalty to persons, the love of battles and feats of arms for their own sake, respect for knighthood as a form of consecration—all these no less essential elements of chivalry were Northern. The endeavour to blend these Northern influences with the distinctively Christian ideal raises some searching questions.

In the first place, what we have called the Northern as distinct from the Christian factor in chivalry is itself a composite thing. Its ideals of loyalty and honour may exist and be active and influential quite apart from war or fighting of any kind. And when we think what honour means, as an inward quality of mind and heart, then we are compelled to ask whether the personal qualities of which honour is a type are recognised at all in the New Testament or in any traditional scheme of Christian ethics? Honour, thank God, is not dead in the modern world; and if any one can find a distinctively Christian virtue which can take its place, let him find it.

In the second place, the Northern spirit

contributed the love of battles and fighting for its own sake. Chivalry sought to infuse into this the utmost possible generosity towards adversaries or competitors, showing as much consideration and regard for their welfare as are compatible with the purposes and conditions of the conflict itself. But we are thinking now not of all the different kinds of human conflict, but of that kind of conflict between groups and nations which is called War. And the whole history of war, from that age to this, is a gradually more conclusive proof that war and chivalry cannot be combined. In modern war the opportunities for chivalry are so occasional, so accidental, as to be negligible. Modern war and chivalry are utterly incompatible things. To infuse the spirit of chivalry into war, to Christianise war, would be to end war: as truly as when Paul unwittingly pronounced the doom of slavery in the ancient world when he bade his friend receive back the fugitive slave as a "brother beloved." The object of war is destruction and nothing but destruction; any constructive results from

it are remote and non-military. The Northern races loved it because it was a school of strenuous life and heroism. What we now need to discover in the social realm is the *moral equivalent of war*—something which will appeal to men as universally as war has done in the past, and yet will be as compatible with their spiritual selves as war has proved itself to be incompatible.

One factor in the ancient ideal of chivalry finds ample field for exercise in the modern world, and that is its active, understanding pity for the weak and the helpless. Let me put this in the inimitable words of Herbert Henry Asquith: "Behind and beneath the surface of society there are sights—terrible, appalling, and yet inspiring for those who have eyes to see. The labourer who tills the fields, which are not his own, season after season with patient industry, with no hope for his old age beyond the precarious bounty of public or private charity; the work-girl, old before her time, who lives a life worse than that of a mediæval serf in the squalor of a sweater's den; the little child who

cowers in the cold and darkness while it listens in terror for the unsteady step which is to it the signal of its parent's home-coming—these are figures which, if we could only recognise it, are more appealing to the imagination than any vision that ever inspired crusader or knight-errant. While these things remain there is work to be done. There are spurs to be won by every soldier who has enlisted in the army of progress. You and I, who have taken service in its ranks, this day renew our fealty to that great cause of which justice is the end and freedom the instrument, and with whose fortunes are bound up the best hopes of the future of the world."

III

One strand yet remains in the cord which binds us to that far-away age : the ideal of a united Christendom.

The *unity of mankind* was an assured conviction in the Middle Ages : an organic unity with a spiritual basis, since all mankind derives its origin from a single Creator.

Christendom, which in destiny is identical with mankind, is set before us as a single universal community, founded and governed by God Himself. This was not a distinctively Christian idea. It was the offspring of the speculative genius of Greece and the political genius of Imperial Rome, and was enormously strengthened under the working of the equalised and equalising Roman law, when national distinctions, in the countries round the Mediterranean coasts, were being merged in the experience of a common empire. Here is a statement of it as an ideal based on an ethical monotheism: "And there shall no longer be one law at Athens, one at Rome, one law to-day, another to-morrow; but the same law, everlasting and unchangeable, shall bind all nations at all times; and there shall be one common master and ruler of all, even God, the creator and arbitrator of this law; and he who will not obey it shall be an exile from himself, and, despising the nature of man, shall by that very act suffer the greatest of all penalties, even though he may have escaped from all other penalties

which can be imagined." These are the words of the Roman statesman Cicero, written in later life, when he had seen the destruction of all his old republican hopes and the victory of the imperialism which he dreaded.

Such ideals did not die when the Roman Empire broke up. Mediæval thinkers inherited them, directly and through the writings of the Christian Fathers. Moreover, as the power of Imperial Rome passed away in the west, the power of papal Rome increased. The barbarian kings were won over to the Christian faith through the monks and missioners sent out by the Pope; and before the end of the eighth century the unity of the Catholic Church had succeeded to the unity of the Roman Empire. The Latin mind could not imagine the entire extinction of the Roman dominion. Rome was the eternal city, and the empire of Rome in some form, under Emperor or Pope or both, must endure for ever. Thus in the eighth century the barbarian kingdoms of western Europe were not only bound to-

gether by actual communion with the Roman Church; they were also joined together as a revived Roman Empire, in a union which became real or merely nominal according to the strength and character of the Emperor appointed. The result was the rise of a second power along with that of the papacy, and with this the rise of a series of problems which, though they appeared to be matters of theology or theory, were really of immense difficulty and great practical importance. "Whence did the Emperor derive his authority—from heaven or from men; and if from heaven, was it at the hands of the Pope? What was the relation of the Empire to the papacy? Was the Emperor the servant of the Pope, or the Pope the servant of the Emperor, or were they equal and co-ordinate, each being supreme in his own sphere?"

One thing was clear throughout: they would not surrender the ideal of a united Christendom and an earthly Kingdom of God. The leaven of the old conviction, coming down from Greece and Rome, was working

still. It meant to them what it had meant to Cicero. The one universal Law of which he spoke was a principle of Justice and Order belonging to the nature of things—a truth always there, waiting to be discovered. They believed it had been revealed to the Romans, as the Gospel had been revealed to the Jews. Hence the Popes of the Middle Ages claimed not only ecclesiastical jurisdiction, but also control of all secular concerns. "All kings and governors were baptised Christians, and as such subject to the authority of Rome. Politics, commerce, industry, education, art, literature, philosophy—these, like every other field of human activity, had their religious aspects, and were to be made subservient to the laws of the divine kingship; and in the multitude of Catholic Christians, of all nations and tongues, organised under bishops, and governed in the last resort by the earthly Vicar of Christ, the Kingdom of God was seen in being and in power." Never was this papal regency so nearly realised as it was in the early years of the thirteenth century under Pope Innocent III; never was it more

arrogantly and dogmatically asserted than at the end of the same century, by Pope Boniface VIII, when its tragic failure was evident to all.

Again I seem to hear a voice from that troubled time speaking to ours. Let us listen to it, remembering that if it is impossible to bring an indictment against a nation, it is equally impossible to bring an indictment against an age; we cannot against them, nor can they against us :—

"Men of a distant age! It was no ignoble aim that we set before us: to erect a presiding power common to all Europe, a power which should not dethrone the king, but treat him as an hereditary viceroy, a power which should be specially charged to prevent strife between kingdoms, and to maintain the public order of Europe by being not only the fountain of international law, but also the judge in its causes and the enforcer of its sentences. Such was our ideal of the Church in its relation to the world, an ideal to be embodied in the occupant of the Chair of Peter. But we

believed that the office and the power with which it endows the holder of it are one thing, and the personal character and aims of the holder a very different thing. Our reverence for the sacred office did not make us blind to the sins of those who held it. There were some in the Chair of Peter whose fearlessness and justice were worthy of their office. There were others who, through their evil example, by their misuse of religion as a means to service, by their cupidity and ambition, have corrupted clergy and laity alike; who have made their holy office an incitement to war, and placed the spiritual symbol of the keys on their war banners; who have turned the curia into a place where everything is sold and Christ is daily put up for auction; whose bishops and priests have taken pattern by themselves and turned to the service of mammon, and made the rites of religion of none effect.[1] All these things, and more, can be charged to the

[1] Dante believed the Popes to be the chief authors of the prevailing corruption; compare, for example, *Inferno*, canto xix, line 104; *Purgatorio*, xvi. 103; *Paradiso*, xviii. 120–132, xxvii. 20–25 and 40–55.

Church of our time; but not to these do we now look for the ruin of our ideals. Forces were growing up in our midst which we did not understand. Nations were growing up in our midst, each with a language, a character, of its own; nations, growing more and more different from one another in habits and institutions; nations which would not yield in their strength what they had won in their weakness; again and again involved in war with one another, or torn within by insurrections and devastating civil wars. We could not destroy nationality nor overcome the antagonisms which it created.

"Men of a distant age! Our vision of your world is in part a vision of discordant, mistrustful, suspicious, scheming Sovereign States, each as it were a pack of wolves with a central force to direct the prowling and preying upon other packs. We see the Sovereign State as a predatory force. We see even the nobler sort of men allowing themselves to be carried away in crowds or in the mass by ideals and policies, for the supposed good of the country, which they

would never entertain for their own private ends. We see a nationalism which has come to embody, and partly to depend upon, an industrialism which has withdrawn men from work of a really human and intrinsically interesting kind and crowded them into huge factories and hideous cities for labour of the most mechanical and soul-destroying kind. The rise of the Sovereign State was the destruction of our ideals; and now we see the Sovereign State, eager to be self-sufficing, filled and inflamed with the cupidities of boundless money-getting and immense material prosperity."

We who are born of this modern world know that there is more to be said; but we know that the message comes straight home to us, and defines the central problem of our modern civilisation to-day. This is not an assertion that we have made no progress in five hundred years: it is an assertion that progress is at bottom of a kind or type which is even capable of a geometrical illustration. Metaphorical illustrations of historical progress have often been borrowed from geometry.

One of them—that of forward movement in a straight line—is obviously false. The only value of such illustrations is to call attention to some essential or at least important aspect of the facts; and a continuous forward movement is not found in the history of man. If we think of a line at all in this connection, it must be a zigzag line, as of a ship tacking against the wind: this admits forward movement on the whole, with irregularity of direction from one point to another and even for retrograde movement at times. Much more suggestive as an illustration is the *ascending spiral*, as of a winding stair. This admits a real upward and onward movement with constant changes of direction; but its most important and interesting feature is that any point in the spiral is vertically over a corresponding point below. In other words, the problems which have faced humanity in the past may, and often do, recur or repeat themselves, but at a higher point of view, where they can be faced again with more adequate resources.

Seven hundred years ago all thoughtful

men knew as well as we do—perhaps better—that apart from some effective international organisation the nations *taken as separate units* live in a condition of complete anarchy, where self-preservation and justice, for self or for others, can only be secured by the strong hand of the nation which has the will to make these principles effective.[1] But the mediæval mind could not conceive such an organisation except as an international State or Super-state, with a single central source of authority; and they could not conceive that supreme international State save in closest union with a supreme international Church. Such a Church was in their midst, in all the fulness of its accumulated powers. It is not my intention to make any theological declaration here, unless this be one—that the modern world has decisively rejected the stupendous claim on which the power of that Church was based, and on which whatever real power it possesses to-day is still

[1] See *The Moral Basis of the League of Nations*, by the Rt. Hon. Viscount Cecil (Essex Hall Lecture, London, 1923).

based. And the ideal of a Super-state, with a single central source of power, may be for ever impracticable. In the present condition of the world it certainly is impracticable. Mere negations, however, settle nothing; and these negations only make the challenge of history more urgent to the people of to-day.

You may reply, What of the Protestant Reformation? The men who made the Protestant Reformation were not indifferent to the secular welfare of nations; but they concentrated their conviction into one sublime truth—that only by the soul can nations be great and free; and they concentrated their appeal to the souls of men. And through their preoccupation with a Book, a thoroughly oriental Book, which they did not know how to read, they lost even a distant vision of that ideal, the greatest legacy of the ancient pagan world, pointing to an eternal principle of Justice and Order, part of the very nature of things, demanding embodiment in human life on earth in the form of an organised community.

A fitting conclusion here will be an

endeavour to appreciate Dante's dream of one united Christendom. It is a current doctrine in recent psychology that dreams are often the disguised expression of unfulfilled desires. Dante saw the condition of the world represented in his own beloved Italy. Weary of the endless strife of princes and of cities, and of the factions within every city against one another, seeing even municipal freedom—the only mitigation of turbulence —vanish with the rise of tyrants within the cities, he raises a passionate cry for some power to still the tempest, not to destroy liberty or supersede self-government, but to correct and moderate them, and restore unity and peace. To him it was no dream, but at once a strenuous argument, an uplifting vision, and a glorious prophecy. If to us it is a dream, the unfulfilled desire is not far from the kingdom of our hearts—a monarchy of the world which shall be a reign of peace and Christian brotherhood.

Dante begins with first principles. Man was created in order that all his capacities, contemplative and active, may be realised;

and this can only be achieved under universal peace.[1] Now man's nature is twofold, mortal and immortal; the object of his existence is therefore twofold, active virtue on earth and the enjoyment of the vision of God hereafter. Both these ends are divinely ordained. God has made man subject to two orders, the temporal and the spiritual, and given him two guides, reason and faith—philosophy and revelation—the works of sages and poets, and the gospel. Each of these two guides must be embodied and represented in human life on this earth, one providing for man's earthly blessedness, the other for his heavenly blessedness. To these ends man must come by diverse means. For to the first we come through the teachings of reason, provided we follow them by acting in harmony with the moral and intellectual virtues; to the second by spiritual teachings, provided we follow them by acting in harmony with the theological virtues, Faith,

[1] Dante, *De Monarchia*, i. 5: "Pax universalis est optimum eorum quae ad nostram beatitudinem ordinantur."

Hope, and Charity. But in spite of reason and revelation, which make these ends and means known to us, human self-will would reject them, "were not men, like horses, held in the way."

At this point is made the transition which seemed natural and indeed inevitable to the mediæval mind, and which seems strange and impossible to us. Granting that every organisation, if it is to be effective, requires a centre into which all is gathered and by which all is controlled, granting that God has ordained as it were two kinds of order in this world, the temporal and the spiritual, each of these must be a kingdom with a central source of order within it, which must be embodied in a single Person—the Emperor in the one case, the Pontiff in the other.

Historically this conclusion was of great importance. Vital to it was the assumption that the temporal and the spiritual authority are equally and directly God-given. The whole contention was a sustained protest against the assumption of any temporal

power on the part of the papacy; and it is not surprising that Dante's book *De Monarchia* was at length placed on the Index of Prohibited Books. None the less, his doctrine of the twofold monarchy underlies much of the symbolism of the *Divina Commedia*. The journey through hell, purgatory, and paradise is man's journey after the double object of earthly and spiritual happiness. Vergil, his guide through hell and purgatory, represents reason and the temporal order; Beatrice, the supernatural aid without which, he believed, man cannot attain to his supreme end—to glorify God and enjoy Him for ever.

The question which is inevitably pressed by the modern mind still remains: why must the temporal or the spiritual order be embodied in a single Person here on earth? The idea of *representative government* as we understand it could scarcely have been grasped by the mediæval mind. The arguments by which Dante defends his ideal of personal monarchy are amazing; but through the cumbrous and pedantic reasonings we seem to discern the

unfolding of a prophetic vision. The picture ceases to be that of any historic person : it is that of a coming Messiah. We are vividly reminded of the ideal king portrayed by Isaiah and the Hebrew prophets of the eighth century before Christ : " A Man shall be as a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest ; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." At times the picture ceases altogether to be that of a person and comes to be that of a type or a principle. The ideal monarch or emperor is Justice, the foundation on which the order revealed in earth and heaven rests, now personified, throned and crowned, invested with majesty and honour ; and we seem to feel again the force of the ancient saying : " Human Ministers of Justice fail—but Justice, never." The just ruler is not only one who deals fairly, he is one whose rule proves his kingdom to be part of the eternal harmony on which the universe is built. When a tyrant reigns, it is as if a stroke of confusion disturbed the order of Nature or a shiver ran through the world, as once when the

Veil of the Temple was rent in twain; but when Justice reigns, all is at peace.

The great jurists of the period worked out in theory what the position of such a monarch must involve. His task is threefold: he must be the representative of spiritual unity; he must be the preserver of peace; he must be the source of that by which alone among mortal men peace is preserved and restored—law and justice:—

"The first of these three objects was sought not only on religious grounds, but also from that longing for a wider brotherhood of humanity towards which, ever since the barrier of Jew and Gentile, Greek and barbarian, was broken down, the aspirations of the higher minds of the world have been constantly directed. Placed in the midst of Europe, the Emperor was to bind its tribes into one body, reminding them of their common faith, their common humanity, their interest in each other's welfare.

"He was therefore above all things, professing upon earth to be the representative of the Prince of Peace, bound to listen to

complaints, and to redress the injuries inflicted by sovereigns or peoples upon each other; to punish offenders against the public order of Christendom; to maintain through the world that supreme good without which neither arts nor letters, nor the gentler virtues of life, can flourish.

"And that he might be the peace-maker, he must be the expounder of justice and the author of its concrete embodiment, positive law, chief legislator and supreme judge of appeal. . . . It is therefore by him alone that the idea of pure right, acquired not by force but by legitimate devolution from those whom God Himself had set up, is visibly expressed upon earth."

This explanation, which sets forth the inner meaning of the mediæval ideal in its simplicity and its greatness, was given by the late Lord Bryce in one of his best known works.[1] He points out that it was an ideal theory to be approached so far as human weakness permitted, but kept alive as an ideal. The practical evil which it was

[1] James Bryce, *The Holy Roman Empire*, Chapter XV.

intended to meet was that of wars, and hardly less ruinous preparations for war, between the States of Europe. The remedy which it proposed has been to a small extent provided in the construction and reception of international law. And the greater problem of constructing a tribunal to adjudicate and decide, with the power to enforce its decisions, is now under trial.

If we remove from the mediæval ideal of Empire all reference to a single person as the centre of the organisation, then in truth it answers to all that we dream of or desire when we think of a League of Religions, a League of Nations, a League of Classes, a League Co-extensive with mankind. The mediæval problem of central authority and guidance is the same as ours. And as the problem appears in Dante's vision, it might well have seemed a desperate one in the European world of his time, and his solution of it a forlorn hope at the best. Yet to him it is no dream—no forlorn hope. He speaks with the confidence of Isaiah of old. On what does this confidence really rest? As we have

tried to bring this and the kindred mediæval ideals before our minds and understand them in a natural human way, we have seen and marked, many times, the working of a Greek and Roman along with a Jewish and Christian ideal. The Jewish and Christian ideal is that of Brotherhood and Love, based on the common relationship of all men to God. The Greek and Roman ideal is that of Justice and Order, as part of the nature of things, demanding realisation in Man's embodied life on earth. And each of these two ideals strengthens and informs the other as they are united. Under the limitations of our human experience they are not the same. Justice is not the same as Love, Order is not the same as Brotherhood. Neither of these can take the place of the other. Let them live in separation, and what happens? Justice and Order may be hard, mechanical, secular in the worst sense of the word. Brotherly Love wanders like a disembodied spirit, seeking contact with the reality which it would transform, and unable to grasp it: entering, indeed, into the souls of men and moving

them to heroism and high desire, but unable of itself to give them wisdom and knowledge even how to begin to change the world. The world needs Justice and Order inspired by Love, and Love strengthened and made wise by these. I wonder how many of the disappointments and apparent defeats of Christian idealism are due to this—if it is true, and I am profoundly convinced of its truth—that love, even the utmost love that can enter into the heart of man, though it can fit the soul for heaven, cannot of itself and by itself build up the Kingdom of Heaven on earth?

In the closing lines of the *Paradiso* Dante tells us, with entire simplicity, how it was granted to him at the supreme point of his journey to realise what eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, what hath not entered into the heart of man. He realised all things and all their relations to one another, not in fragmentary incompleteness but as one perfect whole. And in thus realising, as one, the whole essential being of the universe, there was naught but the simple limpid flame of the

divine all-embracing Love, " the Love that moves the sun and all the stars." The constancy of the heavens in their courses were to him the sign and symbol of the everlasting Order which is one with the everlasting Love. The mystic vision of the Supreme, the sense of the totality of being in which we and all exist, is a direct and permanent fact of the higher life of our souls. It may formulate itself in a thousand ways, theological or philosophic; it may strive to justify itself by creeds, or to support and stimulate itself by sacraments, but it is a primary and direct experience, the antecedents of which we may endeavour to discover, the implications of which we may strive to unfold and formulate, but which is itself the central experience of the religious life. We belong to the universe; it is our home, and its life makes a responsive throb in ours. Its message is the unity of what otherwise comes to us as it were in broken fragments. In this mood Saint Francis hailed " Brother Sun " and " Sister Moon," " Brother Fire " and " Sister Water " and

"Mother Earth," as akin to himself, because they lived and moved and had their being in the same universal life of which he was a part.

In the life and work which is ours to carry on from day to day and year to year it is otherwise. Ideals and tasks and duties come to meet us all separately. They seem to be as separate from one another as sun and moon or earth and fire and water. Our loyalty is called for in many different ways at once, and it is hard to satisfy them all. Knowledge and Compassion and Justice and Love seem to fall apart; and yet we know that they are all needed to help one another. We have heard the spirit of a far-away time speaking to ours, telling how the men of that time tried to unite them. Our place in the long, ascending spiral of history seems now just over the place where the men of that time stood. In the light of a clearer day than was theirs, with a wider field and a keener vision, we will take up the old task with dauntless hearts, and work out our own salvation, for it is God that worketh in us.

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