

MEDIAEVAL AND MODERN WORLD

ON a bright day in June of 1376, with the mistral blowing the brown waters of the Rhone into waves, and the sunlight shining on the walls of the new palace at Avignon, a woman on horseback entered beneath the town gates and went to her lodgings in the twisting streets. The woman was one of twenty-five children of a poor Sieneſe dyer. Persuaded of her religious vocation, she had persisted in a life of chastity and self-discipline, become a Dominican Tertiary, and, while still carrying on her household duties, had acquired a reputation in Siena for sanctity and for that power, miraculous in the uneducated daughter of an ordinary citizen, of solving the most difficult problems with a sanity and common sense, a grasp of principle, and an insistence in purpose, which are the marks of great Saints alone. Her reputation had spread through Siena, through Italy, and to-day she was entering Avignon as the mediator between the city of Florence and the Frenchman Pierre Roger, become Pope at Avignon. The embassy, however, was not the main purpose in the remarkable woman's mind. She had quietly resolved in the back streets of Siena *to bring back the Pope from Avignon to Rome.*

Seventy-one years had the Supreme Pontiff lived away from the danger of his City, while seven Frenchmen in succession wore the Tiara in the city by the river, looking across the waters to the flash of French spears on the tower over against the great bridge, while the French Cardinals wound across from their lodgings in the French King's territory. The Pope was in danger of losing his universal jurisdiction, of becoming a French chaplain. This remarkable woman soon won over the Pope, and was calling him 'babbo mio dolce'—such is the force of sanctity. When he at last consented to return to Rome, in order, as he said, to recover the Papal possessions, she applauded the decision, but deplored the reasons that led to it. Her remark is important: 'Open the eyes of your intelligence,' she said; 'it is more needful for you to win back souls than

to reconquer your earthly possessions.' She led the Pope back, over the prostrate body of his father, to Rome. Such is the force of sanity.

This incident represents very well some important features of the Middle Ages. To begin with, a person was confronting a power in a way rarely seen in modern times. Gandhi before the Viceroy of India would be only a moderately close parallel. The Papacy was enormously powerful throughout Europe, the person extremely obscure in origin, but not only did the Pontiff meet the poor woman—he succumbed to her; not, as the Viceroy might do, to the representative of insurgent millions, but before the strength of a personality and the presentation of a principle. She was recalling the Fisherman to his fishing, the Pope to the purpose for which his predecessor had gained the keys. All honest men recognized that she had told the truth, had pointed out the way to follow, and this fact won her the battle. It is, perhaps, the measure of the distance we have travelled since then that nowadays no great personality emerges other than the Pope to enunciate a principle for world-powers to follow, and that there is no general conscience which would recognize the reason that guided the decision, or support the truth which it acclaimed.

I can think of no closer parallel in the modern world to this scene than that of a financier confronting a prime minister with the grant or refusal of funds to support his policy. Poverty before the Pope, the millionaire before the minister, are both bringing Authority face to face with forces which, though they are precisely opposite, have a precisely similar importance in their respective ages. The monks were the millionaires of the Middle Ages; they had, by a life of self-denial, amassed a great spiritual treasure, which gave their foremost representatives, as it gave St. Catherine of Siena, the capacity to discern instantly the truth behind appearances. The mediaeval world valued this spiritual wealth, which solved problems by discovering principles upon which to found action, just as we to-day value money which provides the means to overcome

emergencies. Poverty calls upon the Pope to save souls; the millionaire confronts the minister with the power to grant or withhold means—for what?

The Modern World, not stopping for the moment to define the term, seems to the detached observer like some huge shining car, built for and capable of enormous speed, but also capable of enormous harm if no one steers it. The car is there, brilliant with its machinery; but where is the directing brain, and where, above all, is its road and its destination? We have constructed the superb engine, but for what purpose?

The Modern World, geographically, would seem to be the countries of Europe and all those other States which have accepted or attempted Europeanization—including China and India. Culturally, those States are modern at least in this, that they present features that do not appear in any other age, together with others which have at least been absent from the historical scene for a long time. The entirely new feature is, first, the development of an organization of intercommunication through aeroplane, ship, and train, wireless and telephone, that covers the whole of this modern group of States and even extends beyond its frontiers. Secondly, all these States appear to have the disease of self-consciousness, called Nationalism, which leads them to be hostile to one another. Thirdly, they have all undergone that century-old development which has made the ordinary goods of life continually more numerous and more complicated—the immense growth of industry on the old agricultural basis of civilization. Two factors make for unity and one for disintegration—but the one is a spiritual, the other two merely material influences. The increase of the number of things and of the kinds of things, and the facilities for their dissemination, began by making the nations more interdependent. To Prince Albert and the other men of the Great Exhibition, Free Trade and Peace between Nations seemed the most obvious common sense; they were right: therefore they believed that these things would ensue; they were not right. It is forgotten that our beautiful machine has no chauffeur. Not

only is the chauffeur absent, but each particular part of the machine seems to have a private devil in charge, determined to despise his devil colleagues. It is as if in the car, the carburettor had refused to accept the petrol from the tank, the cylinders vapour from the carburettor, the magneto propulsion from the cylinders. No road, no driver, an engine at issue with itself. The machine moves, when it moves at all, in a series of jerks, following upon a menace of complete breakdown owing to the action of the devils in charge of the component parts. The millionaire speaks to the minister and the emergency yields to a compromise. A new jerk begins in some direction or other. The machine is there, but there is no God to emerge from it.

The Central Banks finance an emergency; the Saint solved a problem. One pierces to the heart of a difficulty; the other provides the means of walking round it. No personality emerges to dominate the scene: what would guide him if he did? Of old the Wise Men followed a star. But to-day everybody sees stars.

These States deserve closer examination. In them we find a thing not absolutely new, though new to the Western World and very new in its governing idea. This is the deliberately and rapidly increasing control of the State over the individual. Mr. A. P. Herbert (as ever the satirist is the first to detect the danger) has pointed out that in England a man may not eat, sleep, drink, walk or run where he likes: in Russia or Italy the State interferes more frequently and more drastically. The totalitarian State, the Communist society, these are not new or altogether vicious ideas; what is more alarming is the governing philosophy of the movement where there is one, and the lack of it where there is none. For it is not as it was in such organizations as Egypt of the Pharaohs or Byzantium of the Theocratic Basileis; where an all-embracing imperium was maintained in the name of a sacred monarch (and the religion that was the sanction of the government was also its limitation); but it is nowadays in the name of the community only that vast autocratic State-mechanisms are wielded. The point must be understood, and can be understood only in

connection with the unexpressed but none the less dominant philosophy which controls the new governors: subjectivism. As Mrs. Naomi Mitchison has recently pointed out with admirable clarity in a letter to *The Week-End Review*, they consider order and form dangerous; take your material and then, by working on it, see what ideas it will impose upon you, what forms will emerge from your striving with it. They think 'that the material, rather than the ideas, matters.' Here is no ideal of the greatest good for the greatest number. That would imply the bourgeois conception of an objective Good to which you attempted to mould your material. No, it is your material which (somehow or other) is to impose its Good upon its moulder. This is the theory in obedience to which the millions of Russia are theoretically reforming themselves. That the theory, when the material concerned is millions of men with their illimitable variation and illimitable ability to be corrupted, is perhaps not so applicable as to the materials, like marble, whose strong limitations of themselves impose inevitable restrictions on those who use them, is a point not apparently appreciated by the theorists of the modern Absolute-State concept.

Where, as in England or the United States, the same process goes on, but without a theoretical basis, the danger is less visible but no less real. Here Socialism is advancing steadily the process of the levelling out and controlling of Society. The process goes on, though in the name of no stated principle; all that the ordinary man observes is the growth of a shadowy, all-embracing Bureaucracy; he is not even sure of that. There is neither State nor Statement, Prince nor Principle. Until recently, in these two latter countries, it was legal on one side of the Atlantic to divorce but not to drink; on the other, to drink but not divorce. Neither country could say why it made the restrictions, or even what right it had to make them.

This is not a phase that looks like passing. Perhaps it is as well that it should not; but at least the ultimate limits of the process, if it advances uncontrolled as it is at present, should be clear to all. Modern scientists are already looking

further than the Marxists who would substitute State upbringing for the old Family-Life. Professor Julian Huxley, in *What Dare I Think*, forecasts the creation of all human beings by the State—the necessary germs being removed from the male and female bodies and developed by the State in the way it wants them developed, without the agency of the human body at all. Mr. Aldous Huxley, in *Brave New World*, draws a brilliant picture of the process—the bottles containing the immature foetuses being pre-natally conditioned to produce the type of person that the State desires, stunted in body or mind where they are to be servile, abnormally developed where it desires brain or brawn. Even centuplets of precisely similar beings, to perform certain standardized tasks, male, female or sexless, as the State desires them male, female or sexless, creates it them. After birth the State still conditions the infant mind by controlling its associations of ideas, so that in future the child will automatically like what the State desires it to like, and avoid what it is to avoid. There will be no need of laws, for the citizens will never think of doing anything that is outside the programme laid down for them. Small voices beneath their pillows whisper in their sleeping ears the maxims that the State wishes them to believe. The little voices whisper throughout childhood, and to enforce their lesson the State conditions the children's reflexes. The State desires a class disliking animals and bright colours. Mr. Aldous Huxley describes the scene in the State nurseries, as the State nurses set the children before bowls of flowers and animal picture-books; the children crawl to grasp them, but as they do so sirens sound loudly. The children scream; to enforce the lesson the floor is electrified; 'The screaming of the babies suddenly changed its tone. There was something desperate, almost insane, about the sharp, spasmodic yelps to which they now gave utterance. Their little bodies twitched and stiffened; their limbs moved jerkily, as if to the tug of unseen wires.' The shocks and the noise stop. The nurses offer the babies the flowers and the books again. 'But at the approach of the roses, at the mere sight of the gaily

coloured images of pussy and cock-a-doodle-doo and baa-baa black sheep, the infants shrank away in horror.'

'Observe,' said the Director, triumphantly, 'observe.'

Turn to the great centuries between Charlemagne and Charles the Fifth, and the contrast is dramatically acute. The sharp frontiers of modern nations fade and with them lines of communication, while other, more numerous but less important subdivisions, stand out on the map. The boundaries of the civilized world creep in; patches of barbarism or heathendom form black shadows on all the Eastern frontiers of present-day Germany and Austria, sweep over half of Spain and menace from the Scandinavian North. On the East the great golden lighthouse of Byzantium stands maintaining its millenary splendour of Emperors and Patriarchs, mosaics and ivories, theology, bureaucracy and intrigue. To-day that gorgeous Organism has vanished; the sickle of the Crescent has cut it down. Only its domes shine now like mighty husks of the seed they harboured, with the minarets growing like rank grass between. The West abandoned it, for the splendid Church-State had swerved by a hair's breadth from the Catholic orthodoxy that unswervingly ruled the Western World. On that hair hung the huge Empire; the sword of the Prophet cut it down. The scandal that prevented the West helping the East was not a red herring, but a Heresy.

Within the wall of barbarism and heresy, however, Europe lives an intense and international life. Boundaries fade in importance and bright points shine out from the map—castles and abbeys, counties and dukedoms, shrines and universities, small but extremely active units. We hear less of Spain, France, Italy; more of Anjou or Compostella, more of Milan, Cluny or the Prince-Bishopric of Durham. We hear less of the State and more of persons; Fulk Nerra in a life of atrocious cruelty (interspersed with penitential whippings through the streets of Jerusalem) founds the power of the County of Anjou and signals the beginning of the fury and ability of the Plantagenets. The Archbishop Adalbert of Bremen, with his world still reeling from the almost fatal invasions of the tenth century, founds

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in the eleventh a fine missionary and trading State on the north coasts of Germany to push back the menace of Viking and Slav. Margarete Maultasch defends Tyrol against Pope, Emperor and Hapsburg, and becomes the Ugly Duchess of History and Wonderland. The life in these divisions, however, though urgent, was not exclusive; where a person of ability appeared, the rulers bid for him across the world; a scholar, a saint or an administrator belonged to civilization, the governments of England and Sicily exchanged Exchequer officials; the whole of Europe flocked to Paris to hear Stephen Langton preach; two Norman Archbishops of Canterbury were Italians; in the twelfth century, Saint Bernard, having shut himself up in the woods of Champagne, had to settle disputes all over Europe, to send three countries and an Empire on Crusade, and was in turn offered the Sees of York, Rheims, and Milan.

The divisions were many, but not of importance. They designated, not hard and fast divisions, but merely subdivisions of one single body, the feudal unity of Christendom. There was, consequently, a strong feeling of unity in Europe, and, as there existed no overpowering State between the citizen and the Great Society, he found his centre in personal, not impersonal, government. The whole basis of the Feudal System was a personal relation between man and man, as the word 'Homage' implies. All-embracing though the whole organization of Society was, its action on each of its individual members was a personal action. And there were no fatal divisions; Europe quarrels on Crusade, but crusades none the less, while units of government, more numerous than nations, were less independent.

This feudal hierarchy, in theory a perfect whole, was not only a political, but also an economic order. The 'Cash-Nexus,' which is the basis of the Modern order, was at the beginning of the Middle Ages absent, from reasons of necessity rather than theory. There was very little cash anywhere, and consequently men's economic condition was one, as Maine said, of Status rather than Contract. This

theoretical economy suffered ever-increasing modification as the Middle Ages progressed, but was at the beginning closely bound up with the very political structure of Society. The return to a theory of economic Status, which seems to underlie the new schemes of Social-Credit, is the result of the unsatisfactory working of uncontrolled Contract, and differs from the mediaeval organism in this; that it is being advocated from choice, not necessity; that it foresees an apparently egalitarian, and not hierarchical Society; and that the relation between economic rights and political duties will be enormously more difficult to express in the vast and vastly complicated economic field of to-day.

The feudal hierarchy was the stronger because there was, alongside it and giving it a kind of supernatural sanction, a parallel organization of equal extent, of very similar divisions, though of immeasurably greater effectiveness—the Church. The parish-priest by the Lord of the Manor; bishop by count; Primate by King; and by the Emperor, the Pope. The great mass of men had two roles; in one, they were the vassals of the feudal pyramid; in the other, they were the Christian people. The spiritual power, equal as it was in extent, was in force greatly superior to the temporal. As an *international* power, Pope Innocent III, the most powerful of the Pontiffs, was the Depositor of Emperors, the Overlord of Kings, the Judge of the Nations, apart from his position as Bishop of the Universal Church. The picture omits his failures, but the contrast is acute between the action of the League of Nations (significant term) and the swift effectiveness of this wide and wise power.

The power of the Church was far stronger than the power of the Nations, because it rested on a spiritual basis. (Nowadays, it is the Nations that have the spiritual support—patriotism—and are, therefore, stronger than the purely material world-wide economic organism.) The men of the Middle Ages were fortunate in the Gift of Faith. God had created the Universe and controlled it, interfering in supernatural ways if He wanted to; Man was such a supernatural interference, whom God had created with the object of having beings who would voluntarily love

Him. This was the true end of Man; life on Earth was only the preparation for this final task and condition. The Church was the means appointed by which Man could achieve his august destiny—Heaven. But the Creative Love of God, desiring *voluntary* love (and giving the means to obtain and sustain it), had of necessity also given Man the ability to refuse to love. The *deliberate* thwarting of God's Will, then, *necessitated* Hell. 'All Hope Abandon,' Dante had written over its doors, for, with true mediaeval grasp of principle, he saw that those within were they who had deliberately damned themselves. The gates also announced ' 'Twas Justice made me, and the *Primal Love*.' Hell, as well as Heaven, was the consequence of the Creative Love.

Remark also the importance of appearances. Europe not only *was* one, it looked as if it was. The feudal and the ecclesiastical were alike in their general uniformity, expressing, indeed, a very real informing sense of purpose. The same keep rose over Middleham or Monemvaisir; the same monastery cultivated the dales of Yorkshire or the marks of Germany. The communes of Ghent or Pisa, the Courts of the Barons in Burgundy or in Bavaria, all attested the same kind of life and government. In the church of St. Martin of Tours, St. Mark of Venice, or the Apostelkirche of Köln, the sacrifice of the Mass demonstrated to the eye that these countries owned the same, identical, Faith. The rhythm of life did not vary and expressed itself in similar buildings, similar custom and costume.

But the Ages of Faith were also the Ages of Reason. The mind of Man perpetually sought for standards by which to measure all things and all qualities. What did you mean by 'Good'? by 'Just'? by 'Beautiful'? The capacity to argue about such things, and even to discover their solution, was the highest of Man's natural faculties, because at once the rarest and the most important. You *could* not move before discovering whither you wanted to go, but such discovery was extremely arduous. There could be no 'good life' until first you knew 'Goodness.' And the search for first principles, desperately difficult as it was, ended in-

evitably in God, as the only possible measuring rod for all things.

A thing could be 'good' only in so far as it fulfilled the purpose for which its Maker had made it. This demanded an Ultimate Maker, and an essential Purpose for all things—a dynamic conception. A thing could be 'just' only in relation to other things—to a general balance of all things. This demanded an Ultimate Mind which arranged all things—perhaps a static conception. But in the Eternity where God dwelt 'static' and 'dynamic' were the same. This ultimate and extremely arduous Goodness and Justice were clearly the only really important things—Goodness being Justice in action. But though man might determine that in God alone lay these first principles, their application, in the light of his own sin-vitiated nature, to a sin-vitiated world, was beyond his powers. That required Revelation. So the Middle Ages ascended to Heaven by the ladder of Reason and descended by the ladder of Faith.

It was, then, Reason that re-inforced the decisions of the Saints. The Church and the Gospels taught the essential doctrines; but time and the thought of the Christian doctors had brought an enormous foliage and flower to light from these essential seeds. Consequence after consequence they deduced and elaborated and applied from the simple beginnings of the Faith—time after time Reason showed how the bold intellectual subtlety of a doctrine lay marvellously implicit in the words of Our Lord, a doctrine in the clarity of a parable. In definition, in reasoning, they turned the searchlight of intelligence on the uttermost confines of the Nature of God and the microscope of deduction on the minutest intricacies of the human soul. In St. Thomas the Middle Ages reached its intellectual climax; his philosophy forms a whole as enormous and complex and interdependent as a contemporary Gothic Cathedral, whose parts sustain one another because they are all falling down. After St. Thomas the intellectual standard declines; it used to be common to accuse the later scholastic philosophers of arguing on such points as 'how many angels could stand on the point of a needle.' At least it

must be remembered that they had found such needles out of the usual hay-stack of the human mind, and that their reasoning was so exhaustive and exhausting that later ages were, quite frankly, too tired to indulge in it. The 're-discovery' of St. Thomas of recent years is perhaps the most cheering phenomenon of the Modern World.

It is not false to represent St. Thomas as the dominating intellectual figure of the Middle Ages, because there were other and less orthodox intellectual figures. His is the ruling, the conquering, idea—

*Et antiquum documentum
Novo cedat ritui.*

The new Sacrifice for the old; Grace perfecting Nature; the Word becoming Flesh; the Mind of God shaping all Matter; Faith supplementing Reason; the real reformation of all things in Christ, the restoration even *more* wonderful in love than the Creation, the World Organism renewing its youthful purity through the Divinely-imposed Organization, the Church. But dominant as this tremendous synthesis of the Universal process might be, there was another side to the life of the Middle Ages. There were other songs besides those to the Virgin, or even those sweet lyrics that fluted beside the thunders of the *Hora Novissima* like a cuckoo calling in through the church windows during the thunder of the Psalms. The South of France, still remembering the life of Greece, sung also of its Pagan love.

‘In an orchard, beneath the flowering hawthorn tree,
the lady holds her friend beside her, waiting for the
watchwoman to cry that she sees the dawn. Ah, God, how
quickly comes the dawn.

‘My sweet friend is gone, my fair friend, joyful and
courteous. But with the embalmed air that comes to me
from the garden I drink once more a sweet draught of his
breath.’

In that rich and pleasure loving society, in the orchards and under the cool round arches in the white walls of the

southern cities, the cult of love was King. And this was a fair field for the heresy that was apparently its dead opposite, the heresy, Eastern like Christianity, of the Manichees, always apparently latent in Society. Dualism denies the Incarnation; the Flesh is hopelessly sinful, only the Spirit is good. (Nowadays, apparently, Christian Science denies the *existence* even of the Flesh—Mrs. Eddy asserted that it was all a dream, and on being asked, in a narrow, mediaeval way, who was dreaming the dream, replied that it was a ‘Dream without a dreamer.’) Logically, the only course to take was suicide; many took it: for the rest, they lived their life in the sinful body until, at the end, the Consolamentum (smothering or starving to death) was administered. But within that space of sinful life, all your actions were, of necessity, sinful; no action, therefore, was good; marriage itself was an outrage on the Spirit; no vice was, therefore, worse than that. Bernard Shaw’s Inquisitor was right when he said ‘Heresy at first sight seems innocent and even laudable; but it ends in such a monstrous horror of unnatural wickedness that the most tender-hearted among you, if you saw it at work as I have seen it, would clamour against the mercy of the Church in dealing with it.’ No mercy was shown on this occasion; the Catholic Baronage of Northern France, under the father of our Simon de Montfort, descended upon the lovely but evil civilization and wiped it out, so that Southern France speaks the language of the North to-day, and Langue D’Oc is the name of a territory, not a tongue.

It is possible to continue the contrast almost indefinitely between mediaeval and modern times. Essentially, however, the contrast is between Form and Void, between the presence of Authority and Principle with their handmaids Faith and Reason, and their absence—between the River and the Flood. The Age of Order was not an age of subjection; the world hierarchy produced the most individualistic of personalities. Subjectivism, the absence of authority or reason, leads to the disappearance of personality in the flood. As Mrs. Mitchison says, speaking of subjectivism in writers, ‘This leads them to write passionately and

chaotically, not as delicate stepping individuals, but as part of life.'

This pure subjective philosophy has, however, been for the few. For the majority the cult of Man has meant the cult of the State, and the degrees of Socialist organization, ending in Communism, have been its expression. But the modern totalitarian State, unrestrained by Religion as were the old Empires of Byzantium and Egypt, has shown itself inhuman, because not Divine. Where the process has been incomplete, as in the Western Countries and the United States, where, in fact, a theoretical basis to State-control has been lacking, inefficiency and confusion have marred a partial democracy. The rhythm of an ordered society is everywhere, outside the totalitarian States, lacking. Man seeks continually in the magic order of poetry, music, the old dance, or the arrangement of colours, the rhythms stirring in the ancient, hierarchical order of life. Even in industry, his latest achievement, the limited materials he has used have forced beauty into the lines of his latest engines and their restricted nature has achieved order and beauty—almost despite Man—well before Man's infinite variety has found, in Society, the modes of rhythm and true relationship. Indeed, so far has Material preceded Man in this that, as the Pope has said, 'dead matter leaves the factory ennobled and transformed, where men are corrupted and degraded.' The egalitarian ideals of the Western World, imperfectly expressed, seem to be preparing the way only for ugly and unhappy despotisms. The nature of Man requires ordered relationships and, if not subordination, at least *gradation* and balance in the Social Order. The organization of Society must by gradation in the relation between orders of citizens express some true relationship between them as Men. In this, it is only the organization that will, imposed upon that infinitely variable and corruptible nature of Man, allow it to become an organism. Fascism can be, in the secular order, as Catholicism is in the spiritual, a release of man's powers by discipline, not a restriction. The egalitarian plan of Western democracy leaves the forces of Society to run, unruled, to waste. Status

must re-enter Society. The anointed King, the accoladed Knight, the hereditary Lord and Villein, these are not the orders to fit the vast variety of the Modern State. But status is necessary to stability, stability to the State. The stratified society of the Middle Ages failed, not because of its stratification, but because spiritually the peoples had not assimilated the Creeds, and because the politico-economic structure of Feudalism was almost pre-natally vitiated by the intrusion of a Cash Nexus. We shall hardly return to hereditary castes; perhaps psychology and the teachers will decide status—operating an educational system directed to the production not of a democracy of clerks, but of an organic commonwealth of artisans, scientists, rulers, cultivators, and priests. But the substitution of Caste for Cash will not achieve Justice, that adjustment of Law to Life. There is a bane lying at the root of human polities: ‘If there had been a law given which could give life, verily justice should have been by the Law.’ The Promise is given to a *Seed*. The perfect polity is in Christ. It is perhaps vain to hope that we shall see either ‘the Holy Kings’ return or the Great Society again embrace Christendom and Civilization. Meanwhile, let the governors at least take heed lest the Commonweal take harm. The Roman cry sounds again for Roman, common sense. We must be attentive to that urgent summons of the Guardian, as was the Avignon Pope, when, in obedience to the woman of Faith and Common Sense, he set out for Rome.

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