

Reviews of Books

Sidney R. Packard, *12th Century Europe, An Interpretive Essay*, Amherst, The University of Massachusetts Press, 1973, pp. 362.

This is a composite work the purpose of which is to describe the 12th Century in all its aspects, one of the most significant centuries which so fundamentally shaped the subsequent history of medieval Europe. The author bases his work on the results of numerous scholarly studies that have so decisively affected our interpretation of Western European history. He himself does not delve into any research, he simply points out, collates, arranges and discusses the various aspects and problems. This method of approach naturally provides him with considerable freedom to relate the facts with great facility, to avoid any tedious minutiae or unnecessary details, and to point out the basic essentials that are so necessary for the understanding of the conditions and the institutions that were to shape the history of this vital and momentous hundred years.

The presentation of the material recalls somewhat a series of university lectures. The division of the subject matter into equal compartments, the deductive reasoning, the frequent elucidation of points, the rapid movement from one problem to the next, and the avoidance of details in secondary matters in each chapter, are factors that make the book highly readable beyond a very small circle of specialists, and it can appeal to a wide public of students and amateur historians. Moreover, the text is not cluttered by footnotes citing the sources, a fact that certainly makes the book less attractive to the specialist. Yet the author has added at the end (pp. 327-335) an excellent bibliographical note with critical comments on books that deal with the 12th Century, on publications that cover more than the 12th Century but at the same time provide useful material for a better understanding of that era, and on books or articles of special interest. The addition of an extensive bibliography (pp. 337-348) is also very useful.

The work is divided into six large chapters with an introduction and a conclusion. The author deals initially with the most basic factor that characterizes the 12th Century in Western Europe: the increase in population and the creation of an acute population problem for the period. Directly related to this phenomenon is the expansion of trade, new methods of cultivation and reclamation of land, the growth of cities and the gradual secularization of society to the detriment of the Church. The search for the causes of this population growth, varying from 10 to as much as 25 percent, depending upon the area, with the ensuing social and economic upheavals and changes in Western Europe, presents a difficult but a very engaging subject. The various interpretations given for this, such as the termination of the barbarian invasions, the greater use of protein foods, the more favorable economic conditions conducive to marriage, as well as others that leave many questions unanswered, are set out in pages 20 to 22. At all events, no convincing reason for this phenomenon has yet been given.

The economic development, within the framework of a declining feudal society of varying local shades, the rise of an urban commercial class, the increase in the power of the guilds, and the multiplication of consumer markets, exhibits and fairs, was to create the necessary climate for the growth of new factors in the religious, political and intellectual sectors, not to mention technological developments, as seen in inventions that

were to provide newer tools for tilling the land and for handicrafts as well as more modern weapons for the armies.

A large chapter (pp. 83-149) is devoted to the position of the Church in 12th Century Europe. After the Concordat of Worms in 1122 which brought an end to the interminable conflict between the Holy See and the Germanic Empire concerning «the investiture by ring and staff», the Roman Catholic Church acquired great power and repute. Its monastic orders, such as the Cistercians, the vast incomes derived from the monastic estates and the tithe, the four Lateran Councils (1123, 1139, 1179, and 1215), and the remarkably forceful Popes Adrian IV, Alexander III and Innocent III, laid the foundations of a powerful theocratic monarchy with a centralized administrative system that used feudal methods to acquire absolute power over a large part of Central and Western Europe. The author does not confine himself to the striking successes of the Catholic Church, especially over the smaller states, but points out the serious reaction and independent activities of various bishops, the righteous criticism of the wealth of the Holy See, the opposition of the Germanic Empire, the serious differences with the Eastern Orthodox Church that led to the final split in the Christian world, the rise of heretical movements, such as those of the Albigenses and the Waldensians, and the organization of the crusades and their subsequent failure.

A middle chapter deals with the intellectual world of the 12th Century (pp. 149-222). For the medievalist this is the period of a renaissance in the arts and letters. The revival was the outcome of agricultural, technological and economic advances, of new wealth and the growth of city and town life, of the renewal with pre-Christian Classical civilization through Spain, and of changes in the educational sector (p. 151). The climax of intellectual accomplishment in the 12th Century was certainly the appearance of the first universities. It was in this century that five universities were founded, Salerno, Montpellier, Bologna, Paris, and Oxford where the nuclei for the growth of future scientific learning were established. The study of Roman, canon and civil law became more intensive, and from this study the Catholic Church was to establish the legal arguments for justifying its position and attitudes. The collection of ecclesiastical edicts and decrees drawn up by the monk Gratian, the famous *Decretum*, which became the nucleus of the *Corpus Juris Canonici*, was to be used widely. Moreover, in the same period, men of letters and teachers in the universities preoccupied themselves with the precepts of Aristotelian philosophy and their relationship to theology. The two philosophical streams of nominalism and realism acquired more followers and the study of ancient classical authors (such as Plato, Virgil and Ovid) became more widespread. At the same time remarkable strides were made in astronomy, botany, mathematics, and medicine. Indeed, the 12th Century can be described as a decisive turning point in the intellectual life of mankind during the Middle Ages.

Yet it was not only the time for advances in the sciences. Much was accomplished in literature and the fine arts (Chapt. V, pp. 223-273). The national languages began to take shape. Folk literature in the popular tongue began to replace Latin. Characteristic examples of this development are found in Scandinavia, in Provence, and in the Slavic kingdom of Kiev. Of outstanding merit were the works of romance centring on the court of the feudal prince, with the knights and the aristocratic ladies as the supporting characters. These works bring out the main problem of the position of women in society of the 12th Century. It becomes very obvious that the attitude to women had undergone a considerable change. The reasons for such a change have not yet been clarified (pp. 231-238). The century is also represented by able writers and religious drama somewhat breaks away from the

strict religious traditions of the past. In architecture, new construction methods for churches and castles were introduced to accommodate the needs arising from an increase in population. The switch from Romanesque to Gothic style was undoubtedly a revolutionary innovation in medieval art that was due to a combination of many new factors (religious, spiritual and mystical, musical, economic). Moreover, sculpture was to add to the Gothic style a striking humanistic element.

The final chapter (pp. 274-321) investigates the political organization of the «States» of 12th Century Europe. The definition of the «State» assumes various shades of meaning in this century, especially depending upon the area in question. The basic problem as to whether the medieval states represented a single people or nation should perhaps have occupied the attention of the author considerably more than it has in this work. How does the national feeling or consciousness take form and how is it protected and nurtured by the political structure? Did the state come before or after the nation? This is of course a subject that has been hotly disputed by many scholars. René Fédou's recent book concerning this theme, *L'état au Moyen Age*, Paris, 1971 (P. U. F.) has much of interest to say. At all events, the author strives to emphasize the similarities or the differences in the state and bureaucratic organizations of Norman England and Sicily, the France of the Capetian dynasty, the fragmented Germanic Empire and the Italian states, the petty Spanish kingdoms, Bohemia, Poland, and Hungary, Palestine (the first example of European colonial rule), and of Russian Kiev.

This composite work by S. Packard undoubtedly reflects a profound knowledge of medieval European affairs, and the author's ability to present succinctly and with great clarity a period containing such numerous thorny problems. He moreover presents the historic realities in such attractive style that the reader never tires.

However, I have a few reservations as regards some of the author's comments and thoughts. His view, for example, that «the Orthodox Church was essentially mystical and saw little need to be practical» (p. 116), or «the Greek Church, according to some critics, is comparatively a stagnant Church, productive of much theological minutiae but of no great theologians» (p. 139), or «Orthodox monks were largely anti-intellectual» (p. 140), gives me the impression that the author is unaware of, or ignores, the great corpus of theological literature produced by Byzantium (see the works of Karl Krumbacher or G. Beck), and is unacquainted with the nature of the Eastern Orthodox Church. His attempted comparisons between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches appear not to be founded on reliable enough sources but on general works that may propound rather debatable theories and claims. This is why, in my opinion, the above characterizations of the Orthodox Church are unjustified.

And yet another criticism: I believe the author would have found much usefulness in the exceptionally good book by Leopold Genicot, *Le XIII^e siècle Européen*, Paris, 1968, (P.U.F., «Nouvelle Clío», No. 18). It deals, of course, with the 13th Century but frequent references are made to the vital problems of the 12th (see e.g., pp. 213-218 where are listed the scholarly treatises, Arab and Greek, that were brought into the Latin West in the 12th and 13th Centuries).