S. HARRISON THOMSON

EUROPE IN RENAISSANCE AND REFORMATION

S. HARRISON THOMSON
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO

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FRONTISPIECE: *Adoration of the Magi,* detail from wood altar-screen sculptured by Veit Stoss, *ca.* 1485, in the church of St. Mary in Cracow, Poland [PHOTO BY STANISLAW KOLOWCA].

MAPS BY LOUIS M. KOBBÉ AND JEAN PAUL TREMBLAY

TO MY STUDENTS

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PREFACE

THE NEED for a volume covering the period from the extinction of the Hohenstaufen line of emperors of the Holy Roman Empire to the end of the religious wars on what is academically known as the upper-division level has been evident for some years. Each generation sees history in its many facets differently from its predecessor. The present book is an effort to portray this middle period of our European tradition within the framework of the accepted results of recent study and research. It does not claim to present startling new conclusions. Good history has been written for a long time and by many honest and competent scholars. Some aspects of the story told in this book may therefore appear to be quite conventional history. Others may be, in proportion or in obvious relationship, novel or unaccustomed. In the nature of the use to which such a book may be put in college and university teaching, the instructor will be, and certainly should be, free to adapt, reinterpret, or refocus the material here offered.

The basic assumption upon which I have proceeded is that this period, from Dante to Westphalia, is peculiarly an epoch of endings and beginnings in almost every area of European life: society, economy, religion, art, education, and letters. It has been my effort, therefore, to present an overall picture. This will explain the title: "Europe *in* Renaissance and Reformation." The book is not a history of the Renaissance in its usual sense or of the Reformation, Catholic and Protestant. These great movements take their important place in the narrative, but other things of great moment were happening at the same time all over the European scene and their history must be told. Within the covers of one book only selected aspects of the whole concourse of human life can be recounted. Another selection than the one here presented could easily have been made. It is my hope and indeed assumption that the instructor who guides a group of students in this study will, in lectures or readings, fill the gaps that are only too evident in this account.

The author of any serious work of history owes a tremendous debt to the painful labors of other scholars, some still alive and active, others now long gone to their reward. The collections of documents, monographs, and works of synthesis from which we all must draw are both a warning and an encouragement. They warn us that we are bound by the work of those who preceded us.

They encourage us to hope that those who come after may be grateful for our modest efforts. In the academic pursuit both teacher and student are joined in an endeavor to spread the knowledge of our roots, our *via vitae,* and our search for the truth about ourselves and our institutions. It is in the conviction that this middle period of European history is of living and suggestive value to the modern world in its restless quest for understanding that the present book has been written. I owe much to the generations of students, graduate and undergraduate, at a number of colleges and universities who have, by their interest and frequent questioning, taught me along with themselves the pleasures and profits of capturing the spirit and worth of their cultural heritage. My appreciation of their part in this common enterprise is barely measured by the dedication of this book.

I wish to acknowledge special debts of gratitude to a number of colleagues to whose word in various areas covered by this book I am proud to defer. Professor Roland H. Bainton read the whole manuscript, made many useful suggestions, and saved me from many mistakes. The late Professor Sidney Painter read a number of the earlier chapters, with great profit to the account. Professor Ernest Hatch Wilkins gave me generously the benefit of his profound knowledge of Dante and the early humanistic Renaissance, and Professor Berthold L. Ullman read the chapters on earlier and later humanism, saving me from many infelicities in expression and from factual errors. I am fully aware that there may be some slips that remain; they are mine and mine alone. I am indebted to Professors Allen D. Breck, Walter G. Simon, and Robert Hawkins for allowing me to impose on their time with specific questions. My debt to my wife Zome cannot easily be described. She has held me mercilessly to clarity and sequence when I might have wandered from Dante's *diritta via.* The text has also profited from numerous valuable suggestions of my son, Williell. Mrs. Aline B. Stone has been most patient with the tedious task of typing and retyping a longish manuscript.

All translations except those otherwise indicated are my own.

S. HARRISON THOMSON

Boulder, Colorado
January 1963

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CHAPTER ONE

THE WORLD OF DANTE

THE lifetime of Dante Alighieri (1265–1321), one of the supreme poets of the Western world, spanned a period in which many crucial changes took place in politics, society, religion, economics, and art. It would be difficult to conceive of a more significant phase of history than the latter part of the thirteenth century and the beginning of the fourteenth. The significance lies not only in the happenings of this period, but fully as much in the less palpable changes in spirit and motivation that underlay these events. It shall be our purpose in this study to describe the occurrences, and, perhaps more important, to try to get behind them to the spirit, which outlives the events and often brings forth new ones.

Papacy and Empire

FOR centuries before Dante's birth the whole Italian peninsula had been torn by bewildering and incessant strife. The most dramatic and spectacular aspect of this chronic contentiousness was the battle between the Holy Roman Empire and the Papacy. No less bitter, if much less consistent and comprehensible, was the strife within the manifold political subdivisions of Italy,* in which the old feudal aristocracy was pitted against the rising commercial bourgeoisie. This internecine struggle was not unrelated to the larger contention between Empire and Church. Indeed, the shibboleths and the pattern of alignment of the larger tended to be carried down into the lesser struggle; the partisans of the Papacy, called Guelphs since the early thirteenth century, faced the Ghibellines—those who favored the imperial cause. The papal-imperial issue died down after the papal victory over the house of Hohenstaufen, but the animosities remained; the field of battle was merely transferred to the social and economic arenas. The old feudal aristocracy, forced to give way, joined the ranks of the upper bourgeoisie. The aristocracy and their partisans tended to be Ghibellines. The rising commercial classes, including the artisans, were

* In this period such terms as "Italy," "Spain," "Germany," and "Russia" indicate geographical areas, not political entities.

usually Guelph. But such lines were often obscured by local rivalries and family disputes.

After the death, in 1250, of the brilliant Emperor Frederick II, the Papacy determined to crush the Hohenstaufen family, which had consistently opposed papal expansion. The Pope called in Charles of Anjou, younger brother of the French king Louis IX (St. Louis), offering him the Sicilian crown in exchange for his help. Charles invaded southern Italy. At the decisive battle of Benevento (1266) the French forces, supported by the Papacy, defeated the heirs of Frederick, led by Manfred, his natural son, who was legitimate regent and self-styled king of Naples and Sicily. Charles assumed the title of King of Naples and Sicily, ruling as Charles I of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies (1266–82).

The Papacy soon found that it had rid itself of one antagonist only to put in his place another, potentially just as troublesome. The story of the next half century is in large measure that of the Papacy's efforts to rescue itself from this dilemma. In its attempt to gain independence from outside domination, the Papacy succeeded only in preventing Italy from achieving any kind of unity. Dante was a witness and in a sense a victim of this struggle; all the leading protagonists appear on the vast stage of his *Divine Comedy*.

The grandson of Frederick II, Conradin, made a gallant, vain attempt to regain the heritage of the Hohenstaufen in Italy but was defeated by Charles of Anjou at the battle of Tagliacozzo (1268) and executed shortly thereafter. The Holy Roman Empire was in dark eclipse. During the so-called Great Interregnum (1250–73) there was no imperial rule in Italy. It was not until 1273 that a real effort was made to elect an emperor who might bring firmness into the shambling structure. Rudolf of Habsburg, elected in October of that year (Rudolf I, 1273–91), was a prince whose very inconspicuousness was his principal recommendation to the imperial electors. He proved to be something of a surprise and was the founder of a dynasty that, with minor interruptions, retained its imperial title for more than five centuries. Yet during Dante's lifetime the Holy Roman Empire, once the dominant force in Italian political life, ceased to play any significant role in the area south of the Alps; it became in reality the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation.

The Rise of National States

THE Papacy had won its centuries-long battle with the Empire, but it was destined to suffer defeat in a very short engagement at the hands of a less extensive, if more intensely conscious and powerful, antagonist: the national state. The wise rule of Louis IX (St. Louis, 1226–70) had done much to unify the French nation and make France the leading power in Europe. Louis' grandson, Philip IV (the Fair, 1285–1314), took the country still farther along the road to national unity. A nationally awakened France under his rigorous leadership broke the political power of the Papacy in a bitter struggle lasting only seven years. To make victory more sure, Philip then took the Papacy captive (see p. 53), and for almost seventy years (1308–76) the center of Christendom was at Avignon on the Rhône River. This humiliating captivity, with its grave consequences for the Church and its prestige among the common

people, was a source of bitterness and grief for Dante. He bemoaned the degradation into which the once majestic Rome of the Caesars and the martyrs had fallen. Philip was the first ruler in modern times to introduce into international relations the element of nationwide, popular support of a monarch. There was at that time no adequate counter to that support. In the face of the power of a nation's unity, the traditional defenses of the Papacy were completely outdated and useless.

In Spain and Portugal unification was gradually but inevitably proceeding. The Moors had been forced far to the south of the peninsula. Out of many petty kingdoms—León, Castile, Aragon, Catalonia, Navarre, Galicia, the Asturias—the process of consolidation was beginning to make larger and more viable political units. Two important events mark the latter part of the thirteenth century in Spain, one internal, the other external. The first was the striking growth of parliamentary institutions throughout Spain, a growth that came sooner than it did anywhere else in Europe. The second was the intervention in Sicily of Peter III of Aragon (see p. 10). Thus, after centuries of virtual isolation from events in the rest of Europe, Spain again became a factor in the international affairs of the Continent. The arrival in Italy of still another foreign conqueror made the tribulations and uncertainties of the Italian people even more painful and introduced an additional element of discord into the already tense and disturbed peninsula.

In England the changes that took place late in the thirteenth century were similar to those in France and Spain, although perhaps not so striking in their manifestations. Parliamentary institutions, representing the voice of a great section of the people, came into effective existence, and the personal power of the monarch was sharply circumscribed. The country was relatively prosperous, and commerce and urban organization were noticeably on the increase. By virtue of various marriage alliances and his vast feudal holdings in France, the king of England was playing a significant, if at times confused, role in Continental politics, just as the French and Spanish dynasties were deeply involved in Italy. The political and commercial rivalry with France soon erupted in a long and crippling war. But it is possible to discern, late in the thirteenth century, the sure foundations of the English state, based on a national administration and the common law, which was to be an example to the rest of Europe of national unity and orderly development for centuries to come.

That part of the Empire north of the Alps, which, until the extinction of the Hohenstaufen, was bound to Italy and Provence by the accident of dynastic union, went its separate way from the time of the Great Interregnum (1250–73). Dante and Petrarch were to deplore in vain the withdrawal of the bearer of the imperial title from the seat of the Caesars. But the facts of geography and growing national differences were decisive. The Empire north of the Alps was as disunited as Italy, and the separate principalities and imperial and free cities had accommodated themselves so successfully to living on their own that no emperor, however ambitious or strong, could possibly be more than a titular ruler. The best illustration of this situation was the Hanseatic League, a federation of north German cities for commercial purposes. The League included among its members at one time or another about one hundred cities and had outposts and "factories" from Novgorod in Russia to London. For almost two

centuries it was virtual ruler of the Baltic and the whole eastern shore of the North Sea. It regulated commerce, coined money, controlled ports and prices, waged war, and frequently dictated to monarchs what they should or could do.

Although the royal, or imperial, crown remained in theory elective, the princes of Germany, both lay and ecclesiastical, had grown in power until, by the middle of the thirteenth century, they were sovereign in their own right. The history of Germany in this period, and for centuries to come, is one of separatism and decentralization to the point of disintegration. There was as yet no semblance or sign of German nationalistic sentiment as we have come to understand the term. Yet this absence did not indicate any loss in national vigor. Indeed, the contrary seems to be the case. For it was precisely in these centuries of constitutional separatism that the Germans pushed eastward in a tremendous wave of colonization—along the shores of the Baltic into Prussia, to the Gulf of Finland, southeastward into Poland, along the Carpathians, into Bohemia, down the Danube, and into the plains of Hungary and south Slavonia —taking with them their town laws and organization, their technical skills, their commercial and industrial proficiency.

The parallel between the developments in Germany and in Italy in these centuries is striking. Both were politically decentralized and individualistic; both were economically and culturally extraordinarily vital and imaginative. There is, however, the considerable difference that, whereas Italy was prey to much foreign invasion and interference, no foreign conqueror set foot on German soil.

On the eastern borders of the Empire lay a number of considerable and even imposing kingdoms. For them the thirteenth century was a period of troubled uncertainty. They had their own difficulties, arising either from their geographical situation or from constitutional or dynastic growing pains, but in addition they had to adjust themselves to the pressure of the German movement eastward and to undergo, at the same time, occasional attacks originating in the East. The invasion (1240–41) of the Tartar hordes crossing southern Russia, Poland, and then, after a defeat at Liegnitz in southern Silesia, Moravia and Austria into Hungary, left an indelible memory of terror and devastation with the inhabitants of these countries. Repeated later threats of invasion from the East kept these vivid impressions alive. This fear was compounded by the vague rumblings of the almost equally terrible power of Muscovy, which, in the winter of 1242, crushed the vaunted might of German knighthood. The tough but hardly civilized Lithuanians were the only barrier left between the Western-oriented Polish kingdom and the scourges from the East.

Poland had been able, in large degree, to absorb the German influx and utilize the new blood for strengthening of the stock. But Russia's reaction to the Mongol invasion was less successful. The profound difference between the cultural potential of the Polish people and that of the Russians in later centuries can probably be traced to this period. Only toward the end of the century was there any demand in Poland for a strong central authority. The twelfth century in Poland had been a sad period of increasing dynastic dissolution, reminiscent of the worst days of the do-nothing kings of Merovingian Gaul. But a reaction set in, and with it the rise of a national Polish spirit. The fourteenth century

witnessed the impressive achievement of a united nation under a strong monarch who was at the same time a political and administrative architect of great ability.

The kingdom of Bohemia occupied a unique position in the Empire; although her king was cupbearer of the Empire and an elector, the emperor could not even set foot in the kingdom without invitation and had no rights of any sort within her boundaries. This snugly situated kingdom made great progress in the thirteenth century. She was economically and politically strong, rather more centralized than the Western kingdoms, and was led, for most of the century, by two exceptionally able monarchs of the native hereditary dynasty, the Přemyslids: Přemysl Ottokar I (1197–1230) and Přemysl Ottokar II (1253–78). Perhaps even the latter was too strong, for he excited the envy of other princes of the Empire. At the end of the century they united against him and crushed the Přemyslid state, to the advantage of the new Habsburg dynasty.

The lands of the Crown of St. Stephen of Hungary reached from the eastern limits of the Carpathians to the Dalmatian coast, including the regions later known as Slovakia, Transylvania, the Banat, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia, and Herzegovina. The rulers of Hungary prided themselves on their friendly relations with Western courts, and during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the passage of tens of thousands of crusaders and pilgrims down her beautiful Danube had had a determinative influence on Hungary's blood, her economy, and her culture. Her western boundary, the Dalmatian coast, was in constant contact with the Venetian colonies that dotted the Adriatic, and there is ample evidence that Hungary's relations with the Papacy and with the commercial cities of Italy were close and lively.

The states of the Balkans are generally regarded as having been, during most of this period, on the periphery of Western civilization. But this concept scarcely does justice to the facts. By the eleventh century the Byzantine Empire, or Roman Empire (of Greek language), was in control of the Balkans to the Danube, the Drava, and the Dalmatian coast. In the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries Greek rule was pushed back by the growing power and aggressiveness of the ruling house of Serbia, the heirs of Stephen Nemanya (d. 1200), and by the resurgence of Bulgarian nationalism. Two external circumstances contributed to the weakening of Byzantine control over southeastern Europe: the growth of Venetian commercial activity, which always involved political interference, and the disturbances incident to the Crusades. From this latter circumstance arose the conquest of Constantinople by the Frankish crusaders (1204) and the establishment of the Latin Empire of Constantinople, which lasted, somewhat precariously, until 1261. Peninsular Greece, in the meantime, had become a feudalized French subkingdom, subject to all the uncertainties and disorganization to be expected when one political society is forcibly imposed upon another of quite dissimilar base. Contemporary with the subsidence of Frankish vigor and influence in the peninsula, which would have appeared to strengthen the Byzantine cause, there occurred the rise of a hitherto unnoticed people north of the Danube—the Vlachs, or Wallachs, more recently known as the Rumanians. Their origins are a matter of dispute, but it is certain that their speech was predominantly Latin and their orientation