

THE
MEDIAEVAL MIND

A HISTORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT
OF THOUGHT AND EMOTION
IN THE MIDDLE AGES

BY
HENRY OSBORN TAYLOR

IN TWO VOLUMES
VOL. I

FOURTH EDITION

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PREFACE TO THE FOURTH EDITION

THE second edition of this book was carefully corrected and revised. The third (American) edition was reprinted from the second. Since then, for my fourth edition, I have altered a few statements and inserted some recent references, but without trying to include a full list of books and articles upon the Middle Ages, which have appeared in the last years. I have seen nothing, however, suggesting any material change in my attempt to portray the mediaeval culture or, as I have phrased it, the development of thought and emotion in the Middle Ages.

HENRY OSBORN TAYLOR.

NEW YORK, *March* 1925.

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

WHEN through some years of happy labour one has written a book after his own plan, and has set forth in it the things which were to him interesting and valuable, there is no keener pleasure than to have others likewise find them so. The reception of *The Mediaeval Mind* has been very gratifying. My thanks are due to those reviewers who have praised it above its deserts, and to those whose salutary criticisms have been availed of for the present edition.

The book has been carefully reconsidered throughout, and some statements have been changed or amplified. A new chapter has been introduced upon the Towns and Guilds and the Crusades, regarded as phases of mediaeval growth. My translations from the Latin have been examined and the slips corrected. Although occasionally abridged, I have tried to keep them literal, and free from thoughts not in the original.

HENRY OSBORN TAYLOR.

NEW YORK, *January* 1914.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

THE Middle Ages! They seem so far away; intellectually so preposterous, spiritually so strange. Bits of them may touch our sympathy, please our taste; their window-glass, their sculpture, certain of their stories, their romances,—as if those straitened ages really were the time of romance, which they were not, God knows, in the sense commonly taken. Yet perhaps they were such intellectually, or at least spiritually. Their *terra*—not for them *incognita*, though full of mystery and pall and vaguer glory—was not the earth. It was the land of metaphysical construction and the land of spiritual passion. There lay their romance, thither pointed their veriest thinking, thither drew their utter yearning.

Is it possible that the Middle Ages should speak to us, as through a common humanity? Their mask is by no means dumb: in full voice speaks the noble beauty of Chartres Cathedral. Such mediaeval product, we hope, is of the universal human, and therefore of us as well as of the bygone craftsmen. Why it moves us, we are not certain, being ignorant, perhaps, of the building's formative and earnestly intended meaning. Do we care to get at that? There is no way save by entering the mediaeval depths, penetrating to the *rationale* of the Middle Ages, learning the *doctrinale*, or *emotionale*, of the modes in which they still present themselves so persuasively.

But if the pageant of those centuries charm our eyes with forms that seem so full of meaning, why should we

stand indifferent to the harnessed processes of mediaeval thinking and the passion surging through the thought? Thought marshalled the great mediaeval procession, which moved to measures of pulsating and glorifying emotion. Shall we not press on, through knowledge, and search out its efficient causes, so that we too may feel the reality of the mediaeval argumentation, with the possible validity of mediaeval conclusions, and tread those channels of mediaeval passion which were cleared and deepened by the thought? This would be to reach human comradeship with mediaeval motives, no longer found too remote for our sympathy, or too fantastic or shallow for our understanding.

But where is the path through these footless mazes? Obviously, if we would attain, perhaps, no unified, but at least an orderly presentation of mediaeval intellectual and emotional development, we must avoid entanglements with manifold and not always relevant detail. We must not drift too far with studies of daily life, habits and dress, wars and raiding, crimes and brutalities, or trade and craft and agriculture. Nor will it be wise to keep too close to theology or within the lines of growth of secular and ecclesiastical institutions. Let the student be mindful of his purpose (which is my purpose in this book) to follow through the Middle Ages the development of intellectual energy and the growth of emotion. Holding this end in view, we, students all, shall not stray from our quest after those human qualities which impelled the strivings of mediaeval men and women, informed their imaginations, and moved them to love and tears and pity.

The plan and method by which I have endeavoured to realize this purpose in my book may be gathered from the Table of Contents and the First Chapter, which is introductory. These will obviate the need of sketching here the order of presentation of the successive or co-ordinated topics forming the subject-matter.

Yet one word as to the standpoint from which the book is written. An historian explains by the standards and limitations of the times to which his people belong. He judges—for he must also judge—by his own best wisdom. His sympathy cannot but reach out to those who lived up to their best understanding of life; for who can do more? Yet woe unto that man whose mind is closed, whose standards are material and base.

Not only shalt thou do what seems well to thee; but thou shalt do right, with wisdom. History has laid some thousands of years of emphasis on this. Thou shalt not only be sincere, but thou shalt be righteous, and not iniquitous; beneficent, and not malignant; loving and lovable, and not hating and hateful. Thou shalt be a promoter of light, and not of darkness; an illuminator, and not an obscurer. Not only shalt thou seek to choose aright, but at thy peril thou shalt so choose. "Unto him that hath shall be given"—nothing is said about sincerity. The fool, the maniac, is sincere; the mainsprings of the good which we may commend lie deeper.

So, and at *his* peril likewise, must the historian judge. He cannot state the facts and sit aloof, impartial between good and ill, between success and failure, progress and retrogression, the soul's health and loveliness, and spiritual foulness and disease. He must love and hate, and at his peril love aright and hate what is truly hateful. And although his sympathies quiver to understand and feel as the man and woman before him, his sympathies must be controlled by wisdom.

Whatever may be one's beliefs, a realization of the power and import of the Christian Faith is needed for an understanding of the thoughts and feelings moving the men and women of the Middle Ages, and for a just appreciation of their aspirations and ideals. Perhaps the fittest standard to apply to them is one's own broadest conception of the Christian scheme, the Christian scheme whole and

entire with the full life of Christ's Gospel. Every age has offered an interpretation of that Gospel and an attempt at fulfilment. Neither the interpretation of the Church Fathers, nor that of the Middle Ages satisfies us now. And by our further understanding of life and the Gospel of life, we criticize the judgment of mediaeval men. We have to sympathize with their best, and understand their lives out of their lives and the conditions in which they were passed. But we must judge according to our own best wisdom, and out of ourselves offer our comment and contribution.

HENRY OSBORN TAYLOR.

NEW YORK, *January* 1911.

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BOOK I
THE GROUNDWORK

VOL. I

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CHAPTER I

GENESIS OF THE MEDIAEVAL GENIUS

THE antique civilization of the Roman Empire was followed by that depression of decadence and barbarization which separates antiquity from the Middle Ages. Out of the confusion of this intervening period emerged the mediaeval peoples of western Europe. These, as knowledge increased with them, began to manifest spiritual traits having no clear counterpart in the ancient sources from which they drew the matter of their thought and contemplation.

The past which furnished the content of mediaeval thought was twofold, very dual, even carrying within itself the elements of irreconcilable conflict; and yet with its opposing fronts seemingly confederated, if not made into one. Sprung from such warring elements, fashioned by all the interests of life in heaven as well as life on earth, the traits and faculties of mediaeval humanity were to make a motley company. Clearly each mediaeval century will offer a manifold of disparity and irrelationship, not to be brought to unity, any more than can be followed to the breast of one mighty wind-god the blasts that blow from every quarter over the waters of our own time. Nevertheless, each mediaeval century, and if one will, the entire Middle Ages, seen in distant perspective, presents a consistent picture, in which dominant mediaeval traits, retaining their due pre-eminence, may afford a just conception of the mediaeval genius.¹

¹ The present work is not occupied with the brutalities of mediaeval life, nor with all the lower grades of ignorance and superstition abounding in the Middle Ages, and still existing, in a less degree, through parts of Spain and southern

I

While complex in themselves, and intricate in their interaction, the elements that were to form the spiritual constituency of the Middle Ages of western Europe may be disentangled and regarded separately. There was first the element of the antique, which was descended from the thought and knowledge current in Italy and the western provinces of the Roman Empire, where Latin was the common language. In those Roman times, this fund of thought and knowledge consisted of Greek metaphysics, physical science, and ethics, and also of much that the Latins had themselves evolved, especially in private law and political institutions.

Rome had borrowed her philosophy and the motives of her literature and art from Greece. At first, quite provincially, she drew as from a foreign source; but as the great Republic extended her boundaries around the Mediterranean world, and brought under her levelling power the Hellenized or still Asiatic East, and Africa and Spain and Gaul as well, Greek thought, as the informing principle of knowledge, was diffused throughout all this Roman Empire, and ceased to be alien to the Latin West. Yet the peoples of the West did not become Hellenized, or change their speech for Greek. Latin held its own against its subtle rival, and continued to advance with power through the lands which had spoken other tongues before their Roman subjugation; and it was the soul of Latium, and not the soul of Hellas, that imbued these lands with a new homogeneity of civic order. The Greek knowledge which spread through them was transmuted in Latin speech or writings; while the great Latin authors who modelled Latin literature upon the Greek, and did so much to fill the Latin mind with Greek thoughts, recast their borrowings in their own style as well as language, and re-tempered the

France and Italy. Consequently I have not such things very actively in mind when speaking of the mediaeval genius. That phrase, and the like, in this book, will signify the more informed and constructive spirit of the mediaeval time.

matter to accord with the Roman natures of themselves and their countrymen. (Hence only through Latin paraphrase, and through transformation in the Latin classics, Greek thought reached the mediaeval peoples); until the thirteenth century, when a better acquaintance was opened with the Greek sources, yet still through closer Latin translations, as will be seen.

Thus it was with the pagan antique as an element of mediaeval culture. Nor was it very different with the patristic, or Christian antique, element. For in the fourth and fifth centuries, the influence of pagan Greece on pagan Rome tended to repeat itself in the relations between the Greek and the Latin Fathers of the Church. The dogmatic formulation of Christianity was mainly the work of the former. Tertullian, a Latin, had indeed been an early and important contributor to the process. But, in general, the Latin Fathers were to approve and confirm the work of Athanasius and of his coadjutors and predecessors, who thought and wrote in Greek. Nevertheless, Augustine and other Latin Fathers ordered and made anew what had come from their elder brethren in the East, Latinizing it in form and temper as well as language. At the same time, they supplemented it with matter drawn from their own thinking. (It was thus that patristic theology and the entire mass of Christianized knowledge and opinion came to the Middle Ages in a Latin medium.)

A third and vaguest factor in the evolution of the mediaeval genius consisted in (the diverse and manifold capacities of the mediaeval peoples): Italians whose ancestors had been very part of the antique; inhabitants of Spain and Gaul who were descended from once Latinized provincials; and lastly that widespread Teuton folk, whose forbears had barbarized and broken the Roman Empire in those centuries when a decadent civilization could no longer make Romans of barbarians. Moreover, the way in which Christianity was brought to the Teuton peoples and accepted by them, and the manner of their introduction to the pagan culture, reduced at last to following in the Christian train, did not cease for centuries to react upon the course of mediaeval development.