

and unworthy of the Catholic population. In an article contributed to the *Ecclesiastical Review* (July 1931) the Rector of the University says:—

What support has been given the Catholic University of America as compared with that given other members of the Association of American Universities? To-day the average endowment of member institutions in the Association of American Universities is \$38,920,598. This does not take into account the item of State grants which are made to many of these universities. . . . The Catholic University is often challenged to explain why its graduates are not more frequently seen in responsible public posts, such as are occupied by the graduates of Harvard, Stanford, Yale, Chicago, and Princeton. One reason is obvious—the fact that Yale has unencumbered endowments forty-two times as large as those of the Catholic University; that Chicago University has, besides \$25,000,000 in lands and buildings, additional resources of \$84,000,000; that Cornell represents an investment of \$40,000,000; and Stanford, \$43,000,000. Both of these latter schools receive occasional grants for special purposes. . . . Even some of the so-called minor schools of the country have so expanded as to make the resources of the Catholic University seem insignificant. Oberlin, an institution of the Congregational Church, has resources amounting to \$16,876,000. Berea, in the hills of Kentucky, under Baptist supervision, a college almost unheard of twenty years ago, has productive endowments of \$12,000,000. Not long ago the Catholic University and the Rochester University (originally a Baptist institution) were on a financial parity. To-day Rochester represents an investment of \$62,000,000, while the Catholic University gets along on less than a tenth of that amount.

It must not be concluded, however, that America is not able to support the Catholic University. Since 1915 the Catholic Church in this country has expended more than \$400,000,000 in institutions of higher learning; and it has spent approximately \$2,000,000,000 on church buildings and parish schools.

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THE "DARK AGES" AND IRELAND

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THE progress of modern civilization is no longer the unassailable dogma that it was in the days of our grandparents. The superb Philistinism of the nineteenth century is a thing of the past, and in many quarters there is a tendency to react in the opposite direction and to concentrate attention on the deformities and stupidities of the modern world. But even though we can no longer regard the culture of the nineteenth century as the peak of human achievement, we still owe it a debt of gratitude for its own services to the past. It was, after all, that self-satisfied and Philistine era that rediscovered the Middle Ages and first taught us to appreciate mediaeval art and culture, and yet more important, mediaeval religion and thought. To the men of the Augustan age Gothic was a term of abuse; scholasticism was a bad joke; and the whole Middle Age from the 5th to the 15th century was regarded as a desert of barbarism and stupidity when

"Much was believed but little understood

And to be dull was construed to be good;

A second deluge learning thus o'erran,

And the monks finished what the Goths begun."

And this view is not merely the result of Protestant prejudices; after all, Pope himself, whose lines I have just quoted, was a Catholic of a sort, and he voices the common opinion of his age—that of Catholic France no less than that of Protestant England.

No doubt the rediscovery of the Middle Ages was one of the factors that contributed to the success of the Catholic revival in the nineteenth century, but it was in

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no sense the consequence of that movement. It owed more to Sir Walter Scott than to de Maistre and more to Ruskin than to Newman, while it was the Prussian and Protestant historians of the school of Ranke who laid the foundations of the scientific study of mediæval history.

Consequently I do not believe that there is much ground for Dr. Coulton's strictures on Catholic historians for their uncritical cult of the Middle Ages. No doubt there is a great deal in Montalembert, for example, that justifies Dr. Coulton's criticisms, but Montalembert was far more representative of the Romantic Movement than of the Catholic tradition. He has the faults of his school and of his age, and every one of them can be paralleled in the work of contemporary Protestant historians, such as Leo, who were the real inaugurators of historical mediævalism, even in its most uncritical forms.

No. The real criticism that we deserve is that we have neglected the study of our own past too much and left to others the task of vindicating mediæval Catholicism from the depreciation and misunderstanding of later times. And this is above all true of the early middle ages that are so rich in saints and in monastic activity and so poor in secular culture. These are the centuries that are still commonly described as the Dark Ages, and from the point of view of the secular historian they deserve the title. But for Catholics and above all for the Catholics of Ireland and England they are not so much "dark ages" as ages of dawn, for they saw the conversion of the North, the golden age of Christian Ireland and the birth of mediæval Christian culture. Nevertheless they remain *terra incognita* to the ordinary educated Catholic, and the revival of interest in mediæval studies has had practically no effect so far as these centuries are concerned.

Consequently we owe a real debt of gratitude to Professor Laisner, the American scholar, for his recent book on *Thought and Letters in Western Europe, A.D.*

400-900.¹ It is not, of course, intended to take the place of the first volume of Dr. Manitius' monumental work on mediæval Latin literature, nor has it the charm of W. P. Ker's brilliant little book *The Dark Ages*. It is a scholarly handbook, based on the researches of writers like Traube and Manitius and Lehmann, whose works are none too well known in these islands, as well as on a first hand knowledge of the subject. Its only serious fault is that there is not enough of it. It stops a century too soon and leaves its survey incomplete; the end of the Carolingian age does not mark the end of Carolingian literature. There is no literary or intellectual break between the 9th and 10th centuries, and it is not until the 11th century that a new age in literature and thought can be said to begin.

These centuries are by no means lacking in literature; but there is no literature that is less read or, it must be admitted, less readable. Nobody, I imagine, has ever read for pleasure the 100 volumes or so into which Migne has crammed the literary remains of the period, and the number of writers who still preserve their vitality can be counted on one's fingers—Boethius, Bede, Adamnan, Einhard, and perhaps Gregory the Great and Gregory of Tours. For the rest, it is a literature of schoolmasters whose very quotations are not original, but have their ultimate source in the writings of some grammarian or epitomist of the later empire.

It is significant that the most popular of all the works produced during the period seems to have been the Etymologies of Isidore of Seville—that amazing compilation of miscellaneous information in which the encyclopædic and pedagogic tastes of the age found complete satisfaction. Isidore was no doubt the most learned man of his age and thus deserved the praise which Braulio of Saragossa and Ildephonsus of Seville lavished upon him. But it was at best a secondhand and second rate

¹ London: Methuen. 1931. 15s. net.

Laisner's book

learning. All those quotations from Pacuvius and Afranius and Ennius and Livius Andronicus, which suggest to the innocent reader that Isidore was deeply read in the works of the early Roman poets and dramatists that we no longer possess, are really lifted without acknowledgment from Servius and Festus.

This lack of originality is the most striking feature of later Latin literature. It has nothing to do with the "monkish obscurantism" of 18th century legend. It was due to the exhaustion of the secular culture itself. Indeed it is in the secular and not the religious literature of the age that this exhaustion is most evident. It is the literature of a dying society that distracts itself with trifles, as Verlaine describes in that fine sonnet of his on the Rome of the decadence:—

Je suis l'Empire à la fin de la décadence,
Qui regarde passer les grands Barbares blancs,
En composant des acrostiches indolents
D'un style d'or où la langueur du soleil danse.

Ah ! tout est bu, tout est mangé ! Plus rien à dire !

It is only the religious literature of the time that has in it the seeds of life. The liturgical poetry of Romanus of Emesa is worth all the learned epics of Colluthus and Musaeus and the rest, and the hymns of Venantius Fortunatus—the *Pange lingua* and the *Vexilla regis*—are incomparably superior to the secular verse on which, no doubt, he would have preferred to stake his reputation. Still, as Professor Laistner observes, the remarkable thing about the poetry of Fortunatus is not its intrinsic qualities, but the fact that it is there at all; for it was no small achievement for a classical poet to win a hearing in the barbaric society of the Merovingian age. And this is not an isolated phenomenon. Professor Laistner does not mention the curious outburst of literary activity which took place in Africa at the court of the last Vandal kings where the Latin anthology preserved in the Codex

Salmasianus was produced. And a similar movement of culture seems to have existed in Spain under the West Gothic kings, Sisebut and Chindaswinth, the first of whom was himself a poet of a sort.

There is, in fact, no reason to suppose that Western society was barbaric in the sense that it was hostile to literature. Secular literature perished not from neglect so much as from pedantry. The tradition of secular letters ends in the morass of sham erudition in which the amazing Virgilius Maro of Toulouse disported himself like a hippopotamus at play. No doubt there is much to be said for Professor Laistner's view that his writings are not intended to be taken seriously and that they are an elaborate skit on the pedantry of the grammarians.

Certainly it is difficult to suppose that Virgilius Maro is in earnest when he tells us that fire is called *quogniabin* ("quod incocta coquendi habeat ditionem"), and his master, the great Galbungus, who disputed about the vocative of *ego* for 14 days without stopping, might well be a kinsman of the teachers of Gargantua. Nevertheless his writings were taken seriously enough by the Saxon and Irish scholars of the following period, such as Aldhelm, Meisechlainn, Cruindmel and Clement, and even considered as satires, his works throw a curious light on the intellectual standards of the 7th century.

The extravagances of the grammarians are quite enough to explain the famous outburst of St. Gregory in the preface of his *Morals* ". . . ipsam loquendi artem quam magisteria disciplinae exterioris insinuant servare desepi . . . non mytaciismi collisionem fugio, non barbarismi confusionem devito, hiatus motusque etiam et praepositionum casus servare contemno, quia indignum vehementer existimo ut verba caelestis oraculi restringam sub regulis Donati."¹

It is easy to parallel this attitude in patristic literature from St. Augustine's "what is to us what the grammarians

¹ Migne 76, 610.

want?" to the "O beata rusticitas" of the author of the life of St. Viventius in the 9th century.¹ It finds a particularly convincing expression in the well-known passage in St. Patrick's Confession, for there we feel that the Saint is not repeating a traditional sentiment, but is attempting to vindicate his own right to speak as a plain man of the things that are nearest to his heart against the contempt of the "lordly rhetoricians."

If the Church had admitted the claims of the grammarians and the rhetoricians, she would have forfeited her own claim of universality—her right to speak, as St. Jerome puts it, "not to the leisured schools and the scanty audience of the philosophers but to the universal human race."² This is the reason of the constant insistence of the Fathers and their successors on the absolute transcendence of the Christian tradition and its independence of the graces of form and style.

But on the other hand they were quite ready to accept the classical tradition as an instrument of Christian education and the vehicle of Catholic culture. And it was in fact this adoption of the classical tradition by the Church which saved it from the sterility and emptiness that had destroyed its secular vitality and gave it a new social and spiritual purpose which ensured its survival and its transmission to the new peoples. If the culture of the Carolingian monks is a culture of schoolmasters, they were the schoolmasters of Europe, and the whole subsequent achievement of mediæval civilization is dependent on their work. Hence the real interest of the period lies not so much in the actual achievements of the learned classes, which are at best artificial products, but in the gradual

¹ The expression is attributed by the author to Bishop Agilmar of Cliffronk, "qui venerabilis pontifex sapientis religiosæ conversionem ne actus S. Viventii similes ac pæne incultos atque inertes sermoni descriptos doctissimæque dicebat: O beata ac benedicta priorum rusticitas, quæ plus studuit optima operari quam loqui, et magis novit sancta honestaque esse quam dicere." Acta Sanctorum 13 Jan. 1., 813, in E. Norden. *Die Antike Kunstproben*, p. 531.

² Ep. 21, 42.

penetration of the higher culture to the barbaric peoples and the resultant modification of their own culture.

This subject lies outside Professor Laistner's treatment, which is concerned almost exclusively with Latin literature, but he considers it briefly in a final chapter that is devoted to the vernacular literatures. The whole chapter is however devoted to the Teutonic languages, and Irish is excluded on the ground that the bulk of the existing material dates mainly from the 10th and following centuries.¹ This is regrettable, for however uncertain and obscure may be the literary evidence, there can be no doubt that Ireland was the earliest country to develop the new vernacular culture, and that it is in Ireland that the roots of the whole process are to be found. The Irish monastic culture was the source and model of the parallel development of vernacular Anglian culture in Northumbria, and this in turn transmitted its influence to Germany and became the basis of the new movement of vernacular culture in Central Europe. Moreover it is now generally admitted that the Irish culture had a direct influence on the new developments of Scandinavian culture, alike in literature and in art, in the 10th and 11th centuries.² The fact is that Ireland was the only country in which the classical tradition met the native culture on relatively equal terms, and consequently it was there that a synthesis of the two elements was achieved which resulted in the formation of a vernacular Christian culture and literature.

The rise of this new culture marks the turn of the tide of barbarism in the 7th and 8th centuries. It infused new life into the continental Church and the decadent classical tradition, and was the dynamic spiritual element in the

¹ There is moreover no reference, in either the bibliography or the notes, to Dr. J. F. Kenney's *Sources for the Early History of Ireland* (1929), which is indispensable not only for the study of the rise of Christian culture in Ireland but also for the Irish contribution to the continental development that is Professor Laistner's subject.

² Cf., e.g. A. Orlrik. *Viking Civilization*, Eng. trans. 1930.

rise of the Carolingian culture. Nevertheless this brilliant movement of expansion was only a temporary phase. On the continent it was gradually replaced by the Carolingian culture that it had done so much to create. Medieval culture as a whole is based, not on the Irish and Anglo-Saxon tradition of vernacular culture, but on the Carolingian tradition that had superseded it, and it was on this new foundation that the medieval vernacular cultures of the continent were finally developed in the 11th and 12th centuries. In England the Anglo-Saxon culture gradually came under the sway of continental influences, until it was finally overwhelmed by the Norman conquest and forcibly incorporated in the new Western unity. In Ireland, on the other hand, the older tradition of vernacular culture was too strong to be forcibly uprooted, and it preserved its continuity unbroken through the Viking and Anglo-Norman invasions. But in consequence Ireland lost touch with continental culture and was isolated from the dominant medieval tradition to such an extent that by the 12th century St. Bernard can speak of the old pioneer of Christian culture as an outer land of barbarism.

off to Viking
No doubt the ravages of the Viking invasions weakened the insular culture in Ireland, though probably not to the same extent as they did in England; but the fundamental cause of the change was the divergence between continental and insular civilization that followed the formation of the Carolingian culture. Though the latter had received so much from Ireland, it gave little in return, and even as early as the 10th century the two cultures were beginning to drift apart. One of the earliest evidences of this is the curious poem of Dubduin of St. Gall which is preserved in a 10th century MS. :—

These are the illustrious saints whom our noble island of Hibernia reared as her glorious children; where grateful faith, virtue, honour and blameless life hallowed these palaces and lofty pleasant houses. They strewed over the fields of England the seeds of faith, and now ye gather the ripe fruits into your

storehouse. And we are their brothers sprung from the same stem as they; we whom ye arrogantly despise as pitiful weaklings, ye princes and swollen up members of the world; rather should ye appear as members of Christ. . . . Here the prudent man stops, nay Gall himself is also buried here; the bright flame of the Scots has risen to the skies. . . .¹

It is perhaps not without significance that the first serious attempt to transform the German vernacular into a vehicle of culture—I mean the translations of Notker Labeo, "the father of German prose"—should be associated with St. Gall, the monastery which was one of the chief points of contact between Irish and continental culture in the 9th and 10th centuries. So too in Iceland and Scandinavia the Irish influence contributed to the rich development of vernacular prose literature which took place in the 11th century. But as Professor Olrik remarks, in the work to which I have already referred, this Irish element in Scandinavian culture did not coincide with the main current of Christian influence which was derived from the continent. "It appears rather as an enrichment and expansion of the native North European stage of civilization than as a part of the new trend that accompanied the introduction of Christianity." And thus, though it was itself Christian in origin, it "somewhat impeded the rapid absorption of the North into Christian Europe."²

The existence of these two currents in the culture of post-Carolingian Europe is a most significant phenomenon in the history of the period, although its importance has not hitherto been sufficiently recognised. Both of them were founded on the culture of the Church and the monasteries and on the classical tradition, but while in the British Isles these traditions were fused with those of the native vernacular culture, on the continent they united with the tradition of the Christian Empire to form an

¹ J. M. Clark, "The Abbey of St. Gall," p. 20. M. Espósito in his *Bibliography of Latin Irish writers* (Strouds 11., p. 608) places Dubduin in the 9th century. According to Clark, however, his death occurred after 901. Cf. *op. cit.*, p. 31.

² Olrik, "Viking Civilization," p. 120.

international Latin ecclesiastical culture, which was common to France and Germany and gradually extended its influence westward to England, northward to Scandinavia and eastward to Bohemia and the Slavonic borderlands.

Thanks to the labours of scholars such as Manitius and Traube and the rest, whose results are summarized by Professor Laistner, it is now possible to study the intellectual development of this movement. But unfortunately this is not the case with the earlier movement that led to the formation of the vernacular Christian culture in Ireland and Anglo-Saxon England and which is in some respects the most interesting of the two. Here much of the preliminary spade work still remains to be done, and scholars have hardly begun to consider the central problem of the transmission of the classical tradition to the vernacular culture and the interaction of the two elements. This is perhaps inevitable, since the scholars who are learned in the classical tradition are, as a rule, ignorant of Gaelic, while the Gaelic scholars have concentrated all their attention on the native element in Irish culture and have tended to neglect the influence of the classical tradition. The result is that no synthetic history of Irish culture in the great centuries exists, and we must go to Germany for the standard editions of writers like Columbanus and Adamnan. Professor MacNeill has shown in his recent articles in *STUDIES* on "The Beginnings of Latin Culture in Ireland" how philology throws a light on the most obscure problem of all, the problem of origins, and there is no lack of similar problems that await solution in the following centuries for which so much more literary material is available. No doubt it will be a very long time before it is possible for anyone to write a History of Thought and Letters in Ireland from A.D. 400 to 900, but until that day comes our knowledge of the origins of mediæval culture must inevitably remain one-sided and incomplete.

CHRISTOPHER DAWSON

HOMES FOR THE PEOPLE

BY FERGAL MCCRATH, S.J.

WHATEVER may have been thought of other features of the recent Budget, there was one feature which can hardly have failed to elicit widespread approval, the apportioning of £5,000,000 to the housing of the working class. The City Manager of Dublin is reported in a press interview to have said that this grant would give reality to many proposals which had up to this had existence only in theory. In view of the fact, therefore, that there is every likelihood of the Five Year Plan of the Dublin Corporation being put into considerable effect, and also in view of the impending Town Planning Bill, it will not be out of place to set down a few considerations concerning an aspect of the housing problem, which is peculiarly vital in Dublin, the vexed question of building houses on virgin soil *versus* building flats on cleared slum areas. So much has appeared on this question, in the course of all the discussions that took place on housing last year, that further discussion might at first seem useless. But I do not think it is. Almost everything I have read on the subject has been written with a violent prejudice towards either one or the other view, the slum clearance party calling the virgin soil party impractical idealists, and the virgin soil party hurling at the slum clearance party the accusation of creating new slums. What has happened in practice is that the slum clearance policy has almost altogether prevailed with the Housing Committee of the Corporation. It may be taken that the present intention is to build about 80 per cent. flats on former slum areas to 20 per cent. houses on virgin soil. Of course, slum clearance does not essentially involve the building of flats; but in practice it does, owing to the high price of