

A "CATHOLIC HISTORY"

WE like the method the author of *A Catholic History of Great Britain** has proposed to herself of emphasizing, that is to say, "leading ideas" rather than "unimportant facts," it is the only method for treating history on so compressed a scale. But we confess to some disappointment at the result. Perhaps we expected too much. The test of a general survey consists of its presentment of Constitutional and Social development and of Foreign Relations. Here the one strikes us, more particularly in the earlier part, as wanting in clearness of outline—it is crammed with small detail—and the other as lacking the essential elements of connection and continuity.

The Saxon *ceorl*, for example, described as a farmer, an agriculturist (p. 20), serves as a key to Anglo-Saxon society if his position as occupying the lowest rank of free landowner, midway between the noble class on the one hand and the slave class on the other, is clearly brought out. To trace the effect of growing feudalization on the status of the ceorlish man in the age immediately preceding the Conquest, and his subsequent identification with the unfree villein of Post-Conquest days following the introduction of the fully organized Feudal System into England by the Conqueror, is to grasp the successive stages through which Englishmen passed from an order where the middle-class man, in the person of the *ceorl*, was free, but had below him a slave class to a society where he himself had become debased and had lost his independence, but the community at large rested no longer on a substructure of slavery. The Saxon *theow* had gained where the Saxon *ceorl* had lost, and progress was justified of her children in the dying institution of slavery.

The rendering of the much-disputed *burh-geat-setl*

* *A Catholic History of Great Britain*, by E. M. Wilmot-Buxton, F.R.Hist.S., with an Introduction by C. C. Martindale, S.J. (Burns, Oates & Washbourne, Ltd. 5s. net.)

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text describing the steps by which the Saxon ceorl could thrive to thegn-hood—"if a ceorl owned five hides of land, and had built a church, a kitchen, a belfry, or a castle gate, he could claim a 'thegn's seat' in the hall of the king" (p. 20)—destroys the whole significance of the explanation now accepted by students of history which lays down as a principle that in addition to the five hides of his own land, church and kitchen, the ceorlish man must have bell-house and burh-gate—the outward and visible signs of that jurisdiction of which they were the symbols—seat also and special duty in the king's hall *before* he could be "of thegn-right worthy." Possession of the five hides, the normal holding of a thegn, did not of itself suffice for thegn-hood; with the territorial must go other qualifications implying nobility of service, conferring distinction of blood. The author has inverted the process.

The description of feudalism as "a society of fighting nobles, linked together as lord and overlord, and supported by villeins, free to some extent, but bound to render service as payment for their land" (p. 58), is misleading in the connection it appears to set up between the unfree state and the obligation of service. Under a system, which is essentially that of land-tenure rather than of land-ownership, the obligation to serve was binding on all classes alike, on the "fighting noble" no less than on the villein. It is not there that we shall find the distinction. The fundamental basis of all was tenure. The difference in the service—obligatory on all—arose from the difference of tenure, and the character of the service determined the status. He who held by military tenure and acquitted himself by military service was *liber homo*, he who held by base tenure and performed servile works could not be free. And while we acknowledge that the precise implication of the terms freedom and servitude in the Middle Ages is likely enough beyond

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textbook definition, we can yet say briefly that the villein was not "free" in the sense in which Domesday defines freedom, he "cannot go with his land," he is tied to the soil (*adscriptus glaeba*), and on sale of the estate passes with the land to the new lord. Nevertheless, he is not a slave and enjoys certain definite rights and privileges. The hereditary principle, whether by right of primogeniture or junior right, was applied to his holding equally with the estate of the lord, and in effect the villein's holding belonged to him; as the Russian serf expressed it, "our backs are our lord's, but the land is our own." The heriot demanded of the villein's son for re-grant of the holding on the death of his father was similar in principle to the sum paid by the lord's heir on entering his estate. By the way, what does the author mean when she speaks (p. 58) of the Feudal Incidents as arising from the Oath of Salisbury?

History is not a Study in Still Life; like the delectable Toddie we "want to see the wheels go round," and think that a clue might have been given as to the origin of those subsidiary classes, the cotters, etc., who flit across page 59, and come under the generic term of villein. Recruited not only from the former slave class, but composed of the younger sons and relatives of the villein whom the system of restricting the hereditary descent in land in single succession threw out, these classes included the section of smallest tenant who contributed no oxen to the plough-team of the manor and owned only his homestead and bit of ground attached for which he gave in return the occasional and seasonal services the varying nature of the agricultural year demands. Recent research on the part of eminent French scholars* has discovered

* André Réville (*Le Soulèvement des Travailleurs d'Angleterre en 1381*) and his Editor, M. Ch. Petit-Dutaillis, who summarizes the conclusions in *Studies Supplementary to Stubbs*, vol. II.

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in this class of labourer, who hired out his services to different masters, the main cause of the Peasant Revolt of 1381. Rejecting the conclusions of the late Thorold Rogers as to its origin, they have endeavoured to show that it sprang from the jealousy of the villein smallholder, regarding himself as the aristocrat of his own class, at the prosperity his inferior comrade, the hired labourer, had managed to secure as the result of repeated and successful demands for higher wages in the general dearth of labour following the ravages of the Black Death, coupled with his indignation at the action of the landlords in endeavouring to maintain the existing servile obligations and in pressing the still legal disabilities of the serf, which the wave of increased comfort, even luxury, spreading from the towns and invading all classes rendered none the less galling. The villeins as a result abandoned their holdings in wholesale numbers with the object of becoming hired labourers. But the whole perspective of the social, political, and economic organization of the system is lost by such phrases as the "unpaid services" of the villein which is again and again repeated (pp. 132-35).

Such points are organic in character. They lay bare the system. They are the answer to the enquiry of the general reader who desires to "cut the cackle and get to the 'osses," and asks what was the condition of our Anglo-Saxon forefathers, what effect had the advent of the Normans on that condition, and where, if at all, may progress and an avenue of escape towards freedom be found in so cast-iron an organization as Feudalism? These are things that concern us all, and for some of us they are among the only matters that count in the story of the past.

Mr. Belloc's reading of that Chapter in *Our Dreadful Past*, the Anglo-Saxon invasion (we do wish that Mr. Morrow would oblige with a picture—A CONGENIAL

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TASK : *Mr. Belloc lecturing the Anglo-Saxons, figuring King Ine and Alfred, St. Bede and St. Oswald, Caedmon, etc., on their "barbaric incompetence"*), is apparently unreservedly accepted by the present author. The theory finds a strange bedfellow in Dr. Stubbs's view of the survival of the Saxon Witenagemot in the Post-Conquest Feudal Assembly of the Vassals also incorporated in the present work. The radical difference in the two Courts, not merely in composition, but in vital structure, has been generally recognized. The line connecting our present institutions with those of our Saxon past passes through the outer and not the central machinery of government, through the institution of the Courts of the Shire and of the Hundred, not of the Witan. The remark that in Norman times every tenant-in-chief "had the right to attend" the Feudal Assembly (p. 63) camouflages an obligation to do so. Suit at the court of the vassal's superior was as essential an obligation as military service; refusal to attend the summons ranked as contumacy, as King John found to his cost when, in default of his appearance at the court of his suzerain, the King of France, to answer to the charges laid against him concerning Arthur, Philip invaded Normandy, and the duchy was henceforth lost to the English Crown.

The description of *Curia Regis* as "a new court" (p. 63), without any relation to the Great Assembly of the Vassals represented here as the old Saxon Witan, ignores the concentration of political, judicial and administrative function in the *Curia Regis* as the one great central institution of Norman times which, under the form of the Great Assembly or *Magnum Concilium*, met regularly on the three great festivals of the year, Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost—when the ceremony of the Crown Wearing took place, and the Conqueror appeared to his new subjects "very

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dignified" (and we hope affable)—and again under the form of the smaller and more permanent Council, the *Commune Concilium*, carried on the functions of government and administration in the intervals. But whether great or small, both Councils were but varying forms of the same institution and differed only in size, says Mr. G. Burton Adams.

The quotation of Ramsay's *Foundations of England* as a general authority reminds us that much has happened since 1898, when that excellent work appeared, based for the most part on the views of a school represented by Dr. Stubbs. The most significant feature of the last twenty years, historically speaking (we think), has been the advance of the American school of history, which bit by bit, and in union with the younger English historians, is rebuilding the old edifice of historical thought with material drawn from a source neglected by the generation of Stubbs, Freeman, and Green, and whose conclusions are obtaining home circulation via Harvard and Yale. We cannot afford to ignore the work of, say, G. Burton Adams, of J. F. Baldwin, of W. A. Morris, to cite only three names distinguished in American annals, while the work of H. M. Chadwick seems preliminary to any study of the Anglo-Saxon period.

As regards that other spring of the arch, contact with the Continent, Foreign Relations, we might remember in connection with the argument based on the arrival of the first Anglo-Saxon invaders in "three boatloads" that, according to the *A.-S. Chronicle*, the Northmen made their first appearance in 787, in "three vessels." Curiously enough the latest discovery that the Roman-British town of Silchester was abandoned and never destroyed, which might lend itself to the theory "that there was apparently no destruction of the Roman-British civilization"

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(p. 6), is not mentioned either by Mr. Belloc or the present author. The assertion that the effect of the Danish influx was to restore to the English nation "a spirit of hardness, enterprise, and energy" (p. 44) is hardly borne out by the evidence. Only steady deterioration of national character can account for the gulf which separates the treacherous and short-sighted policy of Ethelred the Unrede and his advisers from the counsels of Alfred, who refused to abandon the struggle so long as the enemy remained unbeaten and afterwards stood sponsor for his adversary at the Font, who drew a line dividing Christian from uncivilized warfare by restoring to Hasting, the old pirate who had broken out again, his wife and two sons "because one of them was his godson." What other explanation is there of the falling off in quality from the ealdormen of Alfred and his son, who fought and fell in their high places, the thegns "slain within the gates," whom the Lady of the Mercians mourns "among those most dear to her" in the hour of her triumph when the burh of Derby is captured, to the traitorous ealdorman, Edric Streona, "typical traitor of his day," as the author very truly names him? The energy of Æthelflæda herself finds no later counterpart as she moves steadily on, accomplishing her warfare, extending her battle line from burh to burh, in enemy territory, striking now on her right at the men of the Danelagh, now on her left at the unsubdued Welshmen. Happily she did not live to see the Peace. Treachery, inability to combine against a common foe—it was no national army that marched to oppose the Norman at Hastings—hoggish self-indulgence—"drunk" stories are a feature of the chronicles of the time, especially in Danish districts—a dull indifference in religious matters which allowed the scandal of Stigand's uncanonical position, the "unlit lamp" and the "ungirt loin," such was the slackness of the

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English fibre which the Danish admixture appeared to intensify rather than to correct. It was a case, indeed, of marrying hunger to thirst.

The causes of the Hundred Years' War, as distinct from the claim made by Edward III to the French Crown which was the occasion of its outbreak, must be referred deeper and further back than the commercial breach with Flanders and the subsequent stopping of the wool trade. They are summed up in a situation which mutually impelled each country to turn to account any adverse factor in the circumstances of the other. Thus the hostility of Scotland and the southern country was converted into a weapon against England by the Franco-Scottish alliance, the traditional English policy of seeking allies in Germany and the Low Country, which became the Anglo-Burgundian alliance, originated in a plan for harassing France. The habitual practice on the part of the King of France of supporting unsuccessful claimants to the English throne when in dispute was followed by a claim put forward by the King of England to the French throne when direct descent in the Capetian line failed in the sons of Philip the Fair. The fact that at the moment the King of France was sheltering an exiled king of Scotland (David Bruce), while an exiled French prince (Robert of Artois) charged with forgery and poisoning had taken refuge at the English Court, was the outcome of a relation wherein vast domains within the realm of a French monarch were held by an English king, who owed in return to the former the fealty and homage of a vassal to his superior.* The situation is a fair illustration of the law of counteraction, and an English king crowned at Paris in 1431 is in accord with a programme which opened on Christmas Day, 1066, with a Norman duke crowned at Westminster.

* *La Guyenne pendant la Domination anglaise*, by Ch. Bémont.

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The special claim preferred for this volume is an attitude described by the author as "thinking internationally," and the writer of the Introduction interprets as the European standpoint. Henry V's conquests in France are the result of this "thinking internationally," Henry VIII's role in European politics is condemned as that of "a national ruler" (p. 144). William III, who in the building up of his Grand Alliance might be suspected of "thinking internationally," is dismissed with a bad mark as "a phlegmatic Dutchman who cared only for the success of his military plans abroad" (p. 246). Who, then, shall be saved? Was it to the general well-being—from the European standpoint—for an English king to take advantage of the weakness of the French State, torn by rival factions in the absence as yet of national unity, to impose an alien domination on France? What is the principle that underlies such an attitude? Our mastery of the narrow seas, imperilled by Lancastrian lack of good governance and Henry IV's neglect of shipping, was yet not threatened as in a later age when the marriage of Charles VIII of France and Anne of Brittany had brought about the union of the last great fief to the French Crown and had handed over the Breton ports to France. Henry VIII's reign coincided with a period when the balance of power in Europe assumed definite modern shape, ushered in by the Italian Expedition of 1494 which started "a new epoch in the policies of Europe." The politics of Henry VIII, of Francis I, of Ferdinand of Spain, of Maximilian and Charles V, are quick with the realization of the change, and the reproaches of those who reproach Henry VIII with "nationalism" fall like rain alike on the just and the unjust. It was this factor of nationalism which Elizabeth and Burghley relied on when they assumed, and assumed quite correctly, that Philip II's diagnosis

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of the situation would be that of "a national ruler" and not of a Catholic champion, and that, spite of steady and open provocation offered him by English piracy, he would yet refrain from attacking England—in France's interests. The argument that realizing "England's condition of weakness . . . their joint aim was to maintain peace at the price of honour" (p. 195) is not quite an adequate summary of a policy based on so keen an appreciation of where England's security lay, and the remark of Pope Sixtus V, "What a valiant woman, she braves the two greatest kings by land and by sea": "if she were not a heretic she would be worth a whole world," makes better history of the terrible queen.

Parenthetically the whole subject of Foreign Relations suffers from a grouping which ignores the old divisions under reigns. All chronological divisions are artificial; that of reigns is perhaps the least arbitrary as it corresponds to some occasion or, at least, opportunity for a re-focus. Up to recent times—as we may note from Mr. Strachey's study of Queen Victoria—foreign diplomacy was a field in which royal relations, royal personalities, and even royal predilections counted for much. What did not the Triple Entente owe, for example, to the personality, the mutual regard of Edward VII and the French? Even in domestic affairs the character of the sovereign was a determining factor. Mary and Elizabeth Tudor inherited similar qualities from their father alike; the absence of physical fear, the power of rising to an emergency was apparent in both. But Mary lacked one gift conspicuous in her sister—"She has no eyebrows, she is a perfect saint, and she dresses very badly," was Mary's description by a Spaniard who accompanied Philip II to England on his marriage. Elizabeth, on the other hand, was a superb window-dresser, and up to about the last decade of her reign her talent

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disguised from her subjects the fact that many of the goods were shop-soiled. But Mary had a quality original to herself. "I charge you, Sir," she said, addressing Morgan, whom she had made Chief Justice of the Common Pleas, "to minister the law and justice indifferently without respect of persons, and notwithstanding the old error among you which will not admit any witness to speak or other matter be heard in favour of the adversary (the Crown being party), it is my pleasure that whatever can be brought in favour of the subject may be mentioned and heard. You are to sit there not as advocate for me, but as indifferent judge between me and my people." This is no note of Henry VIII, it finds no echo in Elizabeth, but it breathes the desire of one of the sincerest women who ever lived, Mary Tudor, the noblest of England's queens-regnant.

But the phrase "thinking internationally" haunts us as the dream of a united Christendom haunts Europe. That it stands for a reality we know and we grope after it, but begin by discounting from it a little something of the author's attitude. Is the ear more attuned to the harmonies of Europe if it remains deaf to the echoes of Drake's Drum? Is it a necessary corollary of "thinking internationally" to be insensible to the thrill when Englishmen first heard the call of the sea? To fail to point out the greatness of the effort by which England, sometimes alone, wore down the Napoleonic domination? It should not spring, surely, from such limitation as Swift sketched when he said of Queen Anne that she had to have favourites because "she hadn't a sufficient stock of amity to go round." We would also disentangle it from the argument that "the standpoint must be European" on the ground that England is "an integral part of Europe." That rather begs the question, the narrow seas deny the epithet, and the

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Frenchman starts his study of English Institutions with the explanatory "L'Angleterre est une île." Is not the whole history of our relation with France—that is to say Europe—the history of the perpetual strain of a union between two who are unequally yoked together? Their position involves the union, but their portion in Europe, the basis of that union, is unequal in measure. England, though a part, is not integrally a part of Europe. France is not merely part, she *is* Europe. That is her calling, her vocation. Wipe out the rest of the Continent, including the British Isles, and leave France: Europe remains. But our part in Europe depends on a balance whose equilibrium is never still. The uncertainty of that balance, has been one of the disturbing elements of our foreign policy, and has been recognized by our diplomatists. "If," wrote Sir Robert Morier in 1873, "a magician would for a minute or two lend me his wand, I would dry up the waters of the Channel with a great portion of the North Sea and the Atlantic, and I would give England a land frontier towards France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, and America." Exactly.

We think, in this connection, that the book over-colours the civilization of Roman-Britain. Those who have most carefully studied the matter seem to agree in declaring that, though we may for ever dismiss from our minds the old idea that Britain never assimilated the culture of the Roman Empire, she never assimilated it to anything like the extent that France did. "Its distribution was singularly uneven in the island, and though normal in quality was defective in quantity," says Dr. Haverfield (*The Romanization of Roman Britain*, 3rd edition, 1915), and in support of this conclusion points out that Britain's five municipalities of the continental type account for barely one-eighth of the civilized part of the province. Again

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how noticeable—it is noticed—is the contrast between the reception accorded in 1416 to the Emperor Sigismund at Paris, and the reception he received in England, where though warmly welcomed by the “internationally-thinking” monarch, Henry V, he was not allowed to land till he had expressly disclaimed any right to exercise suzerainty or jurisdiction in England. However we may explain it, the marked difference remains. Is it not rather significant that when that balance, of which we spoke, inclines towards the Continent it is invariably associated with the idea of conquest, spiritual or military? But Britain was not united to the Continent because St. Augustine visited her, but because in the day of her visitation she accepted the Faith; she did not re-enter the comity of European nations because the Normans conquered her, but because she bowed herself to that law and discipline the Normans brought which she had forgotten to apply to herself. Such matters are allied to that “intimate philosophy” of a people which is decided not by conquest, but by ultimate choice. Our relation with Europe is a voluntary one and our main stumbling block is that we so frequently and so seriously forget that those voluntary relations we lawfully enter into may be as binding as those into which we were born. Moreover we have taken gifts.

Nevertheless, we prefer the term “thinking internationally” to “the European standpoint,” and thank Miss Wilmot-Buxton for it as representing something wider, deeper and, in fact, more spiritual. Like so many spiritual truths it seems based on a paradox uniting two apparent contradictions: this ought ye to do and not to leave the other undone. “True religion and undefiled is to visit the fatherless and widows in their tribulation: to keep oneself unspotted from the world.” True internationalism is to be detached, and yet to remain attached. It, too, aims

A Dead Flower

at impossible perfection—"to keep in step" and yet to "hear a different drummer."

M. M. C. CALTHROP.



A DEAD FLOWER.

NOW you are dead
And cast away
As useless things
Are every day.
Yet not in vain
Was your short breath,
Nor having failed
Come you to death.
True, that you lived
You did not know,
Nor how the breeze
On you would blow,
Blow and linger,
As if the air
Were loth to leave
You, O, so fair.
'Twas we who knew
Your slender grace
And watched you in
Your hiding-place ;
Who saw you grow
From hour to hour
Into a full
And perfect flower.
You knew it not :
Your ignorance
All that you were
Did but enhance.

But we your soft
And coloured eyes
Knew all by heart ;
How you would rise
To meet the sun
In pale dew drest,
And droop again
At night to rest ;
How peacefully
Your glances met
Our eyes astrain
With jar and fret ;
A sudden light
Our blindness knew
Unto our feet :
That light were you.
Now you are dead.
The holy scent
That was your breath
Is freely spent
Upon the world ;
So sweeter must
It be for that,
You little dust !

EDWIN ESSEX, O.P.