

## CHAPTER I

# RAMÓN LULL OF PALMA



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### I

“Infidel dog!” thundered the knight, flashing a lightning glance at his captive.—And then as a rule the knight proceeds in the same strain with his thunders and lightnings. If the captive is unlucky enough to be a Jew, he will subsequently be taken in hand by the knight’s dentist, and dental treatment in the Middle Ages was even more unpleasant than it is now. The captive is just as likely to be a Mohammedan, a Saracen, and then as often as not he enjoys the author’s sympathy and is given an opportunity of showing his superiority to the poor rude and superstitious Crusader both in culture and nobility. Indeed, the relations between Christians, Mohammedans, and Jews appeared no more complicated than this to many authors of the nineteenth century.

People of the nineteenth century showed in fact a quite extraordinary degree of incapacity when they tried to understand the men and women of the Middle Ages, even when

they went about it with the best of wills. I had almost said that in this case they failed most miserably; no misunderstanding has so disturbing an effect as mistaken enthusiasm. And in the nineteenth century people were really enthusiastic about certain manifestations of the spirit of the Middle Ages, so far as they were capable of discerning and misunderstanding it—medieval architecture for instance. People had discovered that Gothic was something more than a disorderly ugliness, a regrettable barbaric intermezzo between the representationist formality of late antiquity and the renaissance attempts to put the clock back—to cut a thousand years of development out of the history of Europe and aim at a linking-up with the ideas of a distant past, to prune Christianity right down to its roots and start again where primitive Christianity leaves off, a thing which the Reformers imagined to be possible. The Romanticists had a great fancy for medieval ruins: all over Europe they built sham ruins and restored those that remained—often according to the principle followed in tricking out a fine Swedish manor house of the early eighteenth century in Victorian Gothic. The effect of this was described by a friend of mine by alleging that he had seen this inscription set up over the brand-new feudal gateway: “Anno 1875 Wart denna Gambla Gården giorth mycket Gamblare.”<sup>1</sup> New Gothic churches and town-halls and castellated villas were thickly sown over Germany and England. And here in the North we followed the fashion as well as we could; the open-air museum on Bygdö has a lovely collection of our great-grandfathers’ Gothic chairs with traceried backs and bead-embroidered seats. And close by is the resplendent Oscarshall, white and dainty as though made of sugar.

The fashion for Gothic was of course like all fashions a symptom of a contemporary spiritual attitude. At the beginning of the century it looked as if revolution and war had made a clean sweep of the world of the immediately preceding

generations—the palaces and prisons of absolutism and the academies and ornamental gardens of the age of enlightenment. The young felt themselves to be a chosen generation, called to rebuild the world, more beautiful and better than before. Young minds of the *Sturm und Drang* period yearned for an outlook on life which should embrace the whole creation as a unity and at the same time open a way to infinity. “Through the ego leads the vast stairway, from the lichens on the rocks to the seraphs”—but the ego is not the individual ego of each little human being; it has become conscious of being a radiation from the eternal will which draws everything upward and binds everything together. It then dawned upon some of them that the outlook they were striving to formulate had points of contact with the medieval view of the world. And because they felt the need of expressing their new outlook more rapidly and more strikingly than could be done by statement and explanation, they resorted to images and symbols and parables—and discovered that much of what had been scoffed at by the rationalists as medieval childishness, crudity, and the outcome of a silly superstition, was in fact nothing but the symbols and emblems of that age. It had simply appeared meaningless to the people of the age of enlightenment in the same way as stenography looks like a meaningless scribble to those who know nothing of shorthand systems.

Nevertheless the nineteenth century only arrived at a very imperfect interpretation of the medieval shorthand signs. The reaction which set in after the Napoleonic wars, the reappearance in new forms of the ideas of the French Revolution, the iron age of capitalism, the changed character of science and the practical results it led to—all this tended to thrust an interest in the Middle Ages into the background. The historians continued to unearth, collect, and revise ever-increasing masses of material, researchers were at work on popular tradition, architects went on restoring and imitating medieval buildings,

poets chose subjects from the Middle Ages for historical dramas and unhistorical romances and ballads. But their understanding failed them on a vital point—that of the religion of the Middle Ages, in other words their very outlook on life.

To a certain extent this applies also to the Catholics. For centuries the Church had been forced back into a defensive position, even in countries where it was the only officially recognized Church. In the face of a growing absolutism in the State it had often been *compelled* to show pliancy: the Church's first duty must always be the care of the souls of those human beings who are alive here and now; they have the right to demand that it shall administer the sacraments to them and teach them the way, the truth, and the life. It can only work for the generations yet unborn through those who are to be their progenitors, so far as this can be done without detriment to the souls of the living. And the Church had superabundant experience of how effectively the autocratic kings and princes of the new age could deprive their Catholic subjects of the sacrifice of the mass and the true doctrine, when for one reason or another they themselves had broken loose from Catholic Christendom. It had seen how the Protestant national churches tended more and more to serve primarily a worldly aim—that of making people into good and obedient citizens under the autocracy, first of kings, and later of constitutions. It was not only in Norway that the royal cipher of the Oldenburgs was given rank and position in the churches equal with the cross and the Lamb of God, the chalice and the symbols of the apostles. In rendering to Caesar what was Caesar's they had thus given God almost all that He had a claim to. That all authority is of God no longer meant that the rulers merely exercise authority *by virtue of God's grace and mercy*—it tended more and more to imply that God and the Authorities were in a mystical way allied against the subjects, whose first duty was obedience. Time after time the Church was forced to be

silent and tolerant—but time after time, on the other hand, its servants were pliant to the point of complicity and indulgent to the point of shamelessness in dealing with the sins of those in power. It is not so strange therefore that the mass of Catholics, who shared the faith and the fundamental outlook on existence of the Middle Ages, but who saw the world as from an entrenchment or through the loopholes of a fortress—with an extremely limited field of view—should have fantastic dreams about the position of the Church in the social life of the Middle Ages about the time when hardly anyone doubted the objective truth of the Church's explanation of human life and destiny. At that time the Church stood in the center of living life. But the ideas that were entertained of its powerful position in the Middle Ages were false and exaggerated. It had been involved in ceaseless conflict: scarcely had the semi-barbarian hordes of the Great Migrations begun to settle down and take root in their new homes, so that the work of their evangelization could be carried on more or less according to plan, than fresh invaders broke in upon Europe from the East, Huns, Avars, Tatars, driving the fugitive peoples before them into fresh migrations. Islam conquered the Christian centers of culture at the eastern end of the Mediterranean, in North Africa and in the Pyrenean peninsula, and gained a foothold time after time in the countries north of the Mediterranean. In reality, for the greater part of the Middle Ages Christendom was like an island between a sea of hostile peoples and the ocean to the west and north. And within Christendom itself there was ceaseless revolt against the authority which the Church claimed over the faithful—the heretics denied the authority of its teaching, emperors and kings and princes denied its right to interfere in the development of social conditions. And rich and poor, high and low, laymen and the Church's own consecrated servants rebelled alike against its doctrine of morals; they defied it openly and sabotaged it in secret, and wherever

anyone started a defection from Christian morality he was followed by the cheerful crowd who think they can surely do wrong if others can. People of the last century naturally found it particularly difficult to understand this—that so many who believed the Church to be the mouthpiece of God's revealed truth should act in direct opposition to what this doctrine declared to be necessary for the salvation of their souls. The very concepts of truth and truth-seeking, in matters of faith and morality, had undergone such a change that most people assumed religious and moral truths to be things to which each individual felt his own way—in contradistinction to the truths of natural science which can be proved (and which at that time very few people imagined might be insufficiently proved owing to fallacious deductions or inadequate data). Thus one feels one's way to the sect or the personal conviction or the attitude to religion which is least liable to expose the individual to demands against which his whole nature tempts him to revolt. The hypocrite, the man who pretends to believe and love and honor what in reality he has rejected or regards with indifference, who lives and acts according to principles quite different from those he acknowledges with his lips, is not of course a type peculiar to recent times. The history of the Middle Ages swarms with political hypocrites, traitorous princes and traitorous vassals, disloyal friends and kinsmen—princes of the Church and temporal lords feign friendship, while meditating treachery against one another; in their convents monks and nuns feign obedience and brotherly love, while intriguing for election to positions and favors within their house or Order. But it would be an error to believe that even the most depraved prelates or priests of the Middle Ages were always hypocritical in preaching a faith which they did not follow in their lives. By far the greater part of them certainly believed in what they taught—and knew what they were doing when they followed their own nature, which refused to submit to the

commandments of their doctrine. There is a good deal that is misleading in what we have been told about the people of the Middle Ages being lashed into obedience by the fear of hell; many of them argued with Aucassin:

To Paradise go none but the old priests and the palsied dotards and cripples who crouch day and night before the altars and in the ancient crypts . . . folk who are naked and barefoot and full of sores, folk who are dying of cold and hunger and misery. . . . To hell go the handsome clerics and the goodly knights who meet their death in tourneys and in the sport of war . . . and thither go the fair and courteous ladies who besides their husbands have two or three friends, and thither go the gold and silver and rich furs and minever and the harpers and minstrels and all the kings of this world. With them will I go—.

Dante's hell is the place where individualism celebrates its supreme triumphs—the damned have renounced all but the ego which it is their sole desire to cultivate; they suffer punishment for their rebellion against the universal harmony of Eternal Love, but that for which they exposed themselves to damnation does not injure all-loving Omnipotence: Farinata degli Uberti retains his pride in the midst of his torments; the adulteress Francesca da Rimini soars over the gulf of hell clasped in an eternal embrace with the man for whom she gave her salvation; Brunetto Latini, who kindled the passion for beauty and knowledge and poetry in so many young minds, and corrupted certain of his favorite disciples with secret vices, runs over the glowing sands like "a victor in the races at Verona." The scoffer continues to scoff; Ciampolo, who when alive grew rich by corrupt traffic in official posts, cheats the demons who carry out the sentence upon him; "What once I was alive, that am I dead," says Capaneus, the blasphemer.

Since God gave men a free will, there *must be* a hell—for him who loves himself more than God it would be worse to have to *worship* Him in heaven. *That* was the medieval idea of the egocentric cult of personality—God’s Only-begotten Son came into the world to *win* souls, not to take them by force.

In the Middle Ages, as now and always, the place of the Church triumphant was in Heaven (and she does not force her enemies to take part in her triumph!). The Church upon earth is a Church militant. But the Church militant of the Middle Ages had a full and living sense of the Church’s unity: the Church suffering in Purgatory, the Church militant on earth, and the Church triumphant in Heaven are *one*. People did not merely believe this; it was a thing they felt in the very marrow of their souls. And many of those people of the Middle Ages who were believing Catholics and committed all the grave sins against which the Church admonished them, must have hoped they would nevertheless be saved in the end, through the intercessions of the poor which they had bought by alms, and through those of the Church for which they had also paid cash—like the man in the Gospel who was paralyzed, but whose friends brought him to Jesus on a mattress, and when they could not enter by the door of the house where the Savior was, they climbed up to the roof, made a hole in it, and let the sick man down.—*This* is, and has always been, the moral danger with Catholicism: that we all more or less consciously harbor a thought at the back of our minds that we shall not be allowed to stray quite so far from God’s purpose with us as we are struggling to do with the conscious part of our ego. Someone who has been capable of a much closer assimilation to Christ than we ourselves cared or had courage to achieve, will drag us into the presence of His mercy and lay us before His feet—some poor people whom we helped and whose gratitude was more unselfish than our generosity, a little child who died in a state of innocence, the saints whom we invoked



in moments when we had a clearer vision than usual of our real selves. It is of course a moral danger to rely on the aid of others' intercessions. But what has put the idea into people's heads that in this dangerous life of ours the most important thing of all, our religion, should be free from danger?

But in those days people did not merely pray for their dead and pray to the saints just as naturally as they went to their neighbors to borrow a light when their fire had gone out at home. They also talked about the saints as folk in all ages have talked about their neighbors. That is to say, a mass of misapprehensions and rumors were in circulation about them, which in some cases had a basis of fact and in others were pure fiction. People related legends about saints of both sexes with just as much calm assurance as the people of our day make up legends about film stars, for instance. But since the time of the Reformers, the Church had been unceasingly charged in non-Catholic quarters with dealing in lies—its dogmas were the work of men, its pretensions false, its priests and monks had stuffed the people with fables in order to keep them under and fleece them, in all times and places. In reply to such challenges as these, many of the defenders of Catholicism were not content with confuting Protestant attacks on the Catholic truths. They were ready to defend every possible or impossible individual opinion, bearing the stamp of its time, which had been put forward in the course of the ages by Catholic personages of note, as though these had been definite dogmas. And they were unwilling to admit that any romance of a saint, however fantastic, might be a romance and not a sober report of facts. For that matter their reaction was no different from that of everyone else, whenever, for instance, doubts are cast on the authenticity of a nation's legendary history.

We may be sure that the people of the Middle Ages themselves did not always take their legends so literally. It is clear that a collection of legendary material such as that which is

called in Old Norse *Mariu Sag* contains legends of at least two different types. The brief and artless narratives of some such occurrence as the extinction of a fire or the freeing of a district from a plague of wolves or the remarkable cure of a sick person after prayers had been offered for the intercession of the Virgin Mary, are evidently reports of an event as it took place, or as people believed it to have taken place. The novel-like legends of a conflict among several people, a tragic love affair, or a moral conflict in the soul of an individual, are stories of another kind. They are often told with great charm, and their denouement enforces some ethical or religious point or other. It is inconceivable that the people who wrote down these legends should not themselves have perceived that they were dealing with two different kinds of story. Of course this need not have prevented many of their readers and listeners from "believing" in the truth of both types of legend, just as for instance masses of the readers of missionary magazines and Christian weeklies "believe" not only in reports and statistics but also in the edifying serials about pious negroes and converted drunkards, without reflecting that they have before them different kinds of improving matter. It is obvious that the legends were in great part tendentious fiction. But even more than that, they were the manifestation of an eternally human tendency—the love of romancing, the desire of knowing a good deal about the private affairs of celebrated personages, and the longing of individuals to be able to say that they had had personal contact with such and such a celebrity and had proof that the great person took a special interest in one's own ego! This last factor may well have given rise to not a few stories of miracles. Local patriotism too played a certain part—"you know, the old bishop who lies buried in our parish church, he was one of the holiest of the holy; Our Lord won't say no to anything he prays for."

Insofar as this wild growth of legend-making was subjected to any criticism at all, it was the clergy who were its critics. It is characteristic that Norwegian historians, for example, have calmly assumed from one generation to another that it was "the clergy" who from motives of publicity declared that the eclipse of the sun of August 31, 1030, occurred during the battle of Stiklestad. As J. D. Landmark has shown, ecclesiastical tradition evidently knew nothing whatever of an eclipse having taken place during the battle; he has proved that the legend did not originate in Norway at all, but in Iceland, and was not known in this country until a century and a half after St. Olav's death, through the works of Icelandic poets and saga-writers. In England we have the story of the monks of Glastonbury who entirely dissociated themselves from the legend that Joseph of Arimathea was buried in their precincts, which did not deter King Edward III from causing official search to be made for the grave. In Ireland the story of St. Patrick's Purgatory is well known; it was by order of the pope that the famous cave on an island in Lough Derg was filled in, after a Dutch pilgrim believed he had discovered that the people who alleged they had witnessed strange things in the cave had only been dreaming, and that the whole affair was a fraud. Indeed, all through the Middle Ages the Papacy endeavored, directly and through the bishops, to exercise some control over those whom popular opinion declared to be holy, even if it was not until 1634 that Urban VIII decreed that no public worship was to be accorded to new saints until their case had been investigated by the Apostolic See.

But if the Catholics of last century imagined the faith of "the age of faith" as something far more tame and submissive than it was, and made an honest effort to accept literally a mass of legends which originally had certainly never been regarded as literally true, the non-Catholics were entirely bewildered by the same material. And it became proportionally more difficult

for them to understand anything of the essence of saint-worship, as the sum of Christian ideas inherited by Protestantism gradually fell to pieces—being replaced by separatist opinions and subjective convictions and religious sentiment. For the Reformers were convinced that they had grasped what the revealed God had intended to reveal so clearly and plainly that no one who did not agree with them had any notion of what true Christianity was. They then endowed their image of God with the same arrogance that caused them to decline the intercession of the saints—to them it was inconceivable that God might be willing to act through men who had become like Christ, might without jealousy transmit a part of his omnipotence to faithful servants. Nothing could be further from them than the kind of self-knowledge which caused so many saints to doubt the divine origin of all the visions they saw and all the voices they heard and the apparent miracles which they performed while alive—most saints were fully aware that the devil was able to imitate all such phenomena. The gay humility which prompted St. Francis and the first friars minor to say, as though with a shrug of the shoulders: “Well, if we work miracles it must be because God wishes to show that He can use not merely the most excellent, but just as easily the frailest instruments to do His work”—that was very remote from the Reformers’ mentality. And in proportion as the very concept of God grew more and more blurred in the Protestant world, and it was even looked upon as a sign of true spirituality to assert the impossibility of the human mind forming conceptions of God, it was entirely forgotten that the Middle Ages had preached without ceasing how incomprehensible God is: He Himself has taken the initiative and communicated to us every atom of what we know about Him, by both natural and supernatural means. The division between the uncreated Creator and all created things, from primal matter to the holy Virgin, can only be overstepped by her and by all

men because God intervenes and draws His creature back to Himself; if men may themselves work at their own sanctification and help others to sanctify themselves, it is because God has willed that it should be so. God has willed once for all that the rain should fall from clouds—He could undoubtedly have arranged the question of irrigation in another way. God could have saved mankind without taking a little Jewish girl from Nazareth into collaboration—but as it was He sent His angel to her and gave to her answer: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord,” the significance it acquired. The hypothesis that the saints are divinities in disguise rests on a misunderstanding: people knew very well that all holy men are human, not divine-born. On the contrary, the old gods sometimes had to put up with being reduced to mortals and even to being hailed as model Christians—when people continued to regard their ancient holy places with affection but asserted that no faun had ever haunted this spot, far from it: a pious Christian soldier was murdered here for refusing to deny Christ, or when they deposed the ancient water spirit of a holy well and declared that the water owed its virtue to the prayers of a pious virgin.

As State Christianity became reduced more and more to a kind of justification of the life and opinions of “decent people,” there was added a positive hatred of the sort of holiness which the saints had practiced—since it had notoriously caused them to reject a number of good things which were greatly prized by the community, to comport themselves in an eccentric fashion and to snap their fingers at custom and convention. Moreover, many of the holy men and women had such a past as we are bound to believe God may forgive, but decent people never.

People in the Protestant countries had now been disciplined for centuries into the view of the Reformation which here in Norway has been expressed so forcibly by the poet from Hadeland:

When Rome her Despot took away  
And Denmark sent thee in his place  
An earthly God, a crownèd Friend,  
Began for thee the crownèd days.

It is true that since Sören Möller's time our views of Christian III's benefactions to Norway and of the worldly divine dynasty of the Oldenburgs as a whole have changed not a little. There has even appeared a sporadic inclination to recognize the men of the Catholic hierarchy under the first kings of united Denmark-Norway as in some sort pioneers of Norwegian nationalism. This is an error. No doubt the policy of these Norwegian churchmen was marked throughout by distrust of the Danes, but otherwise it is vague enough, or at any rate we find it difficult to trace any clear lines in it. But naturally the task of the clergy was in the first place to preserve the true faith among the people, and to defend the liberty of the Church against the encroachments of the worldly authorities—and the clergy's weakness was the eternally human disposition to confuse private aims with a life's mission. It is true that the clergy was more national in the sense that in Norway both secular priests and conventuals were drawn from the most various classes of society, whereas after the Reformation there arose before very long what were called clerical families, in which sons and sons-in-law commonly acquired a sort of prescriptive right to succeed their fathers in office. And as the ministry was now nothing but a department of officialdom, it received in common with other departments a very scanty supply of fresh blood from other sections of the community. Now this is undeniably a state of things which occurs fairly constantly wherever a priesthood is not hindered by a rule of celibacy from forming dynasties—and even within the Roman Catholic Church the obstacle was evaded in many ways: by nepotism, by dispensations from the rule that priests must be

of legitimate birth, so as to admit illegitimate sons of priests to the service of the Church, by families who had founded prebends or given estates to monasteries contriving to assert a kind of prior claim whereby their members could enjoy these prebends or be cared for in these monasteries. One of the causes of the decay of monastic life in the late Middle Ages was in fact the endowment of religious houses with all these revenues, which in reality might almost be regarded as family bequests. Nothing therefore can be more unhistorical than the assertion that the *people* in different countries wished to see the celibacy of the clergy abolished—it was the discontented and misplaced priests and monks and nuns who wished it. The people were indignant that the rule was *not* enforced; what they demanded was a clergy that kept its vows, priests who were really willing to be everything to everyone, monks and nuns who were really poor and chaste and kept watch in their prayers for all weak and sick and sinful Christian souls. And where the people actually saw the old ideals realized there was no change in their feelings towards them—in countries like England, for instance, where monastic life was still to a great extent healthy, it was precisely the mass of the people in the countryside who were most ready to hazard their lives in the struggle against the tyranny of the despoilers of the Church.

What above all necessitated the energetic anti-Catholic propaganda was that the “Reformation” which ensued was no reformation of the Church but a new formation, which was in keeping with the taste and feelings of the rising middle class. It *needed* a vast and unscrupulous propaganda before it could make any pretense of being an “improvement” of the Church in other circles than just that section of the nobility which received its share of Church and monastic estates, and on the other hand the middle-class townsmen. The revolts of communistic character which at the time of the Reformation