

THE GREATEST CENTURY

THE THIRTEENTH

By **REV. T. N. BURKE-GAFFNEY, S.J.**

** For most of the matter contained in this pamphlet the writer is indebted to Dr. J. J. Walsh's "The Thirteenth, the Greatest of Centuries." (New York: The Catholic Summer School Press.) The Front Illustration shows:- 'Rheims Cathedral: A Glory of the 13th Century.'*

THE casual reader of history will express surprise at the idea of labelling as the "Greatest" the Thirteenth Century. "Why," he will say, "the history of that century consists of a series of petty squabbles and intrigues, the result of rivalries and jealousies on the part of warring claimants to the position of Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. You see the struggles of Guelf and Ghibelline for supremacy in Germany and Italy; inter-baronial wars, wars between barons and kings, quarrels between both and the clergy in England and France; Spain struggling against the Moors; Ireland being overrun by the Normans; the Turks consolidating their hold on Palestine. If you seek true greatness, look at the Nineteenth Century: see the great advances made in the realms of science and industry; the expansion of trade and manufactures. Life would be intolerable were we deprived of these, of the Press and our political emancipation, both products, too, of this same era. Or, if you must go back to origins, go to the Sixteenth Century, and see there the revival of letters and art, the beginnings of science, the voyages and discoveries that have led to the colonization of new worlds and the foundation of empires.

But the Thirteenth! The great deeds or great names which belong to it can be counted almost on the fingers of one hand! There are the Crusades of course, and Louis IX of France [the Saint and King]; the Magna Charta, and the beginnings of Parliament, and Edward I of England; a number of Universities were founded, it is true, and Cathedrals built; and, of course, Dante and Giotto belong to that time; and Roger Bacon and St. Dominic, and St. Francis of Assisi, and St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure. . . ." And so the names go on multiplying till at length the sceptic comes to believe that, after all, the Thirteenth Century may well be termed great. It is clearly impossible to enter into every phase of greatness within the limits of this pamphlet; the enumeration of the names of famous men and women of the century, together with a list of their most important works, would alone suffice to fill the available space. We must be content with a rapid survey of some of the most outstanding features.

But where begin? Amid the wealth of interesting features worthy of notice, one is tempted to flutter lightly, butterfly fashion, from one subject to another, to follow at random the paths and side tracks that appear at not infrequent intervals along the road. The difficulty of selection may be gauged perhaps, from Dr. J. J. Walsh's "The Thirteenth, the Greatest of Centuries." He required 400 pages to discuss the century in twenty-six chapters, each dealing with a separate feature of Thirteenth Century life; and even then he felt compelled to add an appendix, entitled "Twenty-six chapters that might have been."

Let us start with the Crusades. The Crusades do not belong to this century alone; the first three—and, perhaps, the most important of all—belong to the previous century. The first began in 1095; the seventh ended with the death of St. Louis of France in 1270, though Prince Edward of England stayed for some time longer in the East. For all practical purposes, this was the last of the Crusades, though for many years afterwards, at many different dates, new efforts were made to reconquer the Holy Land.

Viewed from the practical standpoint of their avowed object, the Crusades must be set down as a failure. They did not achieve their end, which was to set up a permanent Christian dominion in the Holy Land; but they had far-reaching effects on the people of Europe. In the first place, they knit together the warring factions and gave them a common purpose and a common outlet for their war-like energy; they gave birth to the age of Chivalry, whereby the knights undertook to protect the poor and weak; they opened up to Europe the civilizations of the East; they gave an impetus to extended trade; they introduced to Europe Eastern learning and prepared the way for a wider and broader culture. Again, to raise money to support their arms, kings and princes and barons sold charters of liberty to towns within their

dominions, thus gradually breaking up the old feudal system, and leading to the consolidation of nations on a new footing.

But above all and before all—and herein lies their chief glory—they fostered that spirit of Christianity—as they were an expression of it—which is so characteristic of the Middle Ages. Then men frankly acknowledged the supernatural, as something real and personal, and as demanding public expression. Religion was part of man; it entered into every phase of his life, accompanied him from childhood into youth, right through manhood to the very gates of death. The service of the Church, and of God through the Church, was man's greatest ambition; there was a universal recognition of the superiority of the spiritual over the temporal life, and the Pope, as head of the spiritual world, was considered the superior of emperors and kings. When, as they often did, these clashed with the Pope in temporal matters; they never for an instant denied his spiritual authority. Indeed, the Popes were invoked time and again as arbitrators even in temporal affairs, and their arbitration was accepted when it was offered. Rome was the highest court of appeal. The Crusades, sponsored as they were by successive Popes, helped to foster this spirit and to increase the influence of the Church in every walk of life.

During the reign of Innocent III, indeed, every crowned head in Europe either sought his arbitration in some quarrel with a neighbouring prince, or submitted to his reproof. The Emperor Otto of Germany owed his success to the Pope's encouragement of his supporters; King Philip of France was brought to book for divorcing his wife: King John of England was forced to accept Stephen Langton as Archbishop of Canterbury; King Peter of Castile was excommunicated for divorcing his wife; Bulgaria was given a king; Portugal was granted fuller independence; the King of Hungary and his brother were reconciled; in Norway and in Sweden there was similar mediation. Innocent III has been called the greatest Pope who occupied the See of Peter; most certain it is that he did more than any other to strengthen the influence of Rome in Europe, in such sort that not till the end of the century—which opened two years after his elevation—did that influence begin to wane. Such was the spirit of the times which saw the Crusades, which gave birth to them and was in turn nourished by them.

One more effect is to be attributed to the Crusades; in the words of G. W. Greene, quoted by Dr. Walsh, "relations of fraternity, till then wholly unknown, grew up between different nations and softened the deep-rooted antipathy of races. The knights, whom a common object united in common dangers, became brothers in arms and finally formed permanent ties of friendship. . . . Stranger and enemy seemed to be synonymous, and 'the Crusaders,' say the chronicles of the times, 'although divided by language, seemed to form only one people, by their love for God and their neighbour.' And without colouring the picture too warmly, and making all due allowance for the exaggerations which were so natural to the first recorders of such a movement, we may say that human society was founded and united and Europe began to pass from the painful period of organization, to one of fuller and more rapid development."

The spirit which pervaded the Crusaders is to be found also among the trade-guilds in the same century. Like the Crusades, the guilds do not belong exclusively to this time, but unlike them, they go back very much further and remained in full vigour till abolished at the time of the Reformation—in England, at any rate—as superstitious bodies. While they retained full vigour, however, they had departed from their first principles and had in great part lost their usefulness. In the Thirteenth Century they may be said to be at their best, for it was at the end of this century that the first seeds of decay were sown by the limitation of membership.

The origins of the guilds are lost in antiquity; but in their earliest known form they seem to have been mutual benefit societies. In times of sickness the members and their families were supported from the common fund; funerals were also paid for from the common fund, and further assistance was given to needy brethren. In the Thirteenth Century, the people reorganized themselves to better their conditions and developed the guilds in the manner in which they have become best known to us. The trades were organized separately: thus there were the stonemasons' guild, the carpenters' guild, the bakers' guild, the tailors' guild, and so on through every trade. Each guild had a patron saint, if possible one connected in some way with the trade; St. Luke, for instance, was the patron of the painters' guild, which included stainers, gilders and workers in alabaster.

The religious element was strong in these guilds; the members had to attend Mass in common on the feast of the patron saint and on certain other days in the Year; work was stopped early on the vigils of the greater feasts—about 24

in the year—as well as on Saturdays. Social obligations were imposed on the members also; and defaulting members were fined. They were fined for being absent from the special religious services, as well as for being absent from the annual dinner.

The members of the guild of St. Luke at Lincoln, for example, were obliged by their first rule to assemble on the Sunday following the feast of their patron and proceed in procession to the Cathedral, carrying a large candle, which was to be offered before an image of St. Luke, each member also offering a halfpenny, or more if his devotion so moved him. Any who were absent without good reason were fined a pound of wax for the upkeep of the candle. On the same day was held the annual dinner, every member paying fourpence for himself and his wife, or, if unmarried, for his bride-to-be. Again, absentees were fined a pound of wax, which went to the upkeep of the candle. A similar fine was imposed for absence from any of the quarterly general meetings, held to confer on any matter that might need discussion, to examine work done by aspiring masters, and so forth. One interesting rule provides for almsgiving on the death of a member. On the eighth or thirtieth day after his death every other member was obliged to purchase from the Dean of the Cathedral for a fixed sum, a “token,” which he should then give to some poor person. With the money so raised, the Dean purchased a supply of bread which he distributed in exchange for the tokens. Hence the danger of abuse in promiscuous almsgiving was avoided, while each member gave a fixed sum in charity for the benefit the deceased member.

That the guilds were popular and that they influenced the life of the people may be gathered from the fact that there were thirty thousand of them in England at the beginning of the Sixteenth Century. The reasons for their popularity may be found in the number of needs to which they ministered. They provided insurance against sickness, poverty and fire; they supplied loans on easy terms; they provided for burial; they settled disputes by arbitration, and they provided a technical education which has never been rivalled. This last, perhaps, is their greatest feature; and to it is directly responsible the production of the magnificent Gothic Cathedrals, the glory of the Thirteenth Century.

A youth who was thought to have a liking for some trade or craft was apprenticed to the guild in his native town or in a neighbouring town, if it were absent from his own. He assisted the workmen in various ways, usually a particular craftsman, who supplied him with board and lodgings and clothing during his apprenticeship, but gave him no wages. If he showed no aptitude for that particular line of work, he was sent away after a year or so and began again in some other trade. After four or five years, if he had been found to have some talent for the craft, he was accepted as a journeyman, the lowest grade in the guild. Then he went from place to place getting work where he could, and picking up a great deal of new knowledge of his trade in various towns before he returned to his native town or to the place where he intended to settle down. His next endeavour was to gain full membership of the guild, to qualify as a master craftsman. He had first to produce evidence proving that he had duly finished his apprenticeship and his years as a journeyman. Having satisfied the officials on this head, he had, next, to present to them a test piece of work as evidence of his skill. If it came up to the standard he was admitted to full membership, with full rights and privileges. This sample in consequence was known as the masterpiece. The same practice was followed all over Europe as in England, and the development of skill was in large measure, and in most trades, due to the same cause: the desire to make dwellings worthy of the God who was to inhabit them.

All the arts at this time owed their inspiration to the Church, and found their highest expression in the decoration of Cathedrals. In England alone about twenty Cathedrals were erected, or in course of erection, in the Thirteenth Century, and in the Continent very many more, not all of which, needless to say, were completed within the century. Two consequences follow from this: firstly, since there was so much activity in building, those responsible for the erection of the Cathedrals had, of necessity, to rely upon local talent to a very great extent. It was impossible to get men to come from very great distances when their services were required in their own immediate neighbourhood, where they could ply their various trades to great advantage; and secondly, there was engendered a spirit of friendly rivalry.

At each centre at which a Cathedral was in the course of being erected, the people felt a certain pride about the work in hand, and they strove their utmost not only to produce something worthy of the end in view—a place for the worship and service of God—not only to produce something not quite like any other building, something distinctive, which should be characteristic of themselves and of their neighbourhood—but they tried, too, to ensure that their Cathedral would be finer and better than any other then being created in neighbouring towns. Each of these

circumstances resulted in the growth of what may well be termed technical schools in the vicinity of the Cathedrals, where the apprentices learned to produce the marvellous works of art now so much admired, where only the very best work was accepted, where, consequently, artistic skill was developed to a very high degree. The local stonemasons put their very best efforts into the production of worthy sculpture; the carpenters saw that only the very finest woodwork was produced: the workers in metal set about the construction of commonplace gates and hinges and locks and bolts, and made of them enduring works of art.

Lincoln and Salisbury, Rheims and Amiens, Sienna and Burgos, what noble monuments to the humble, nameless artists who constructed them! Where find to-day metal work of such surpassing beauty as that of the gate “de la Vierge” in the Notre Dame de Paris? What modern sculptor could reproduce the delicate traceries of Burgos? The interior fittings, the windows, the altar vessels—chalices, monstrances, reliquaries, crucifixes,—these are no less beautiful and no less typical of the century which produced them. Only in an age like that could they have been produced. Then the worker was an artist, and loved his work for its own sake; not, as today, a machine, practically, for getting things done, working simply for a wage, caring little how the work is done, coming reluctantly to work and leaving as soon as may be. The Thirteenth Century worker, on the contrary, was glad of a new day which might see the completion of one piece or the beginning of another, the perfection or touching up of last day’s work which failing light had interrupted. There was no social problem then, for men were happy, as only those can be who find contentment and pleasure in their daily tasks.

What was done for the Cathedrals, and what was done by them for the workers, was done also for, and by, the many monasteries built at this time, the public buildings and the castles of the nobles, which draw less attention now though they are well worthy of the students’ notice. The castles, of course, being built as places of retreat in time of war as well as of residence in peace, are stronger and less ornate exteriorly than are the other buildings, but the interior fittings and decoration are worthy products of their age.

Technical education was thus provided for, and in a manner at once more popular and more thorough than it is to-day. That was the education provided by the trade guilds for their members; other education—except religious instruction in the churches—they had none. Nevertheless, there were regular schools in those times. Attached to every monastery was a school where the rising generations were taught everything that was considered necessary for them in their future lives, and where those who were destined to proceed to the Universities were prepared in such fashion as to be fitted to profit by the lectures. Besides these monastic schools, which date almost from the foundation of the monasteries, Cathedral schools were instituted in the Thirteenth Century. The Fourth Council of Lateran—the Twelfth Ecumenical Council—held during the Pontificate of Innocent III, ordered such preparatory schools to be attached to every Cathedral, and, attached to the Cathedral of every Archdiocese, three chairs—of Grammar, of Philosophy and of Canon Law—were to be erected. The succeeding Popes of this century—Honorius III, Gregory IX, Urban IV, and others—interested themselves further in such schools.

The object of this was, partly, to relieve the congestion of existing Universities. This was done by withdrawing from them the younger people who were educated and prepared for University studies by their elder relatives, already following University lectures, to the detriment of both. A further object was in preparing for the institution of new Universities in these centres. A final objective was, partly, to provide for the education of those who had no intention of following University courses. This led naturally to the foundation of many Universities during the Thirteenth Century, and to the conversion into Universities, mostly in the following century, of many of the schools then opened. There were existing before this time some Universities, notably at Paris and Bologna, Oxford and Upsala, but it was only at this period that they were organized into Faculties in the way in which we know them.

The Popes, notably Innocent III, Gregory IX, and Honorius IV, played a large part in the foundation of Universities, more particularly in Italy, where they were established before the end of the century in Vicenza, Arezzo, Reggio, Padua, Naples, Vercelli, Siena, Piacenza, and Perugia. In France, besides that at Paris, the Medical School of Montpellier became a University, as did the Law (Civil) School of Orleans, while new ones were erected at Angers and Toulouse. In Spain there were Universities at Salamanca, Valencia, Valladolid and Lerida. To these may be added Modena, Vicenza, and at least the beginnings of Valentia, Cahors, Avignon, Cambridge, and Prague. No German Universities belong to this time.

The Faculties of Arts, of Law, of Medicine, and of Theology alone were recognized then; hitherto these had been for the most part separate schools, having nothing in common. Now, while each centre still specialized in one department, and drew students to its lectures in that department from all over the world, chairs in the other branches were also established. For instance, Montpellier continued to attract medical students; Orleans, students of civil law long after these subjects had been introduced into other Universities, and they remained the chief centres for these subjects for many centuries.

The Faculty of Arts consisted chiefly of the trivium and the quadrivium of the old Roman Schools, that is Grammar, Logic and Rhetoric (trivium) and Geometry, Arithmetic, Music and Astronomy (quadrivium). These were common to all the Universities; that is to say, that no one University seems to have been specially sought after by reason of its superiority over others in this respect.

There remains the Faculty of Theology, and in this Paris remained pre-eminent almost as long as Theology was a major interest in University education. The reason of this is not far to seek; the greatest theologians of all times had been professors there. This brings us to what is known as Scholasticism.

By way of preface to a review of Scholasticism, it is interesting to read the view taken of it by the writer of the article on this subject in the "Encyclopaedia Britannica," Prof. T. M. Lindsay, of the Free College, Glasgow: "The thought of God as the Creator and Preserver of all things gives a complete unity to the universe which pagan thought never reached, and gave that basis for the thought of the uniformity of nature which science demands. It was long ere Christianity could force this thought on the human intelligence, but, until it had permeated the whole round of man's intellectual work it was vain to look for advance in science. It was the task of scholastic theology and philosophy to knead into human thought Christian ideas, and among the rest the idea of the unity and uniformity of nature. Anti-Christian critics have spoken of the deadness and uselessness of Scholasticism, but its value for science and scientific enquiry can scarcely be overestimated, for it was Scholasticism which worked Christianity into every department of human and intellectual activity, and so leavened them with it that when its work was done the intelligence of man was so saturated with the Christian view of nature that it could never again forget it. When Scholasticism had accomplished its task, modern science sprang into being, dependent for its very foundations on that Christianity to which it is supposed to be so bitterly hostile."

Scholasticism, like the Crusades and the trade guilds, is not a phenomenon peculiar to this century, but, also, as it is for them, this century is its Golden Age. Its rise is generally traced back to Peter Lombard, the "Master of Sentences," in the second half of the Twelfth Century, though some put St. Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, in the Eleventh Century, or Radbert and Scotus Erigena, in the Ninth, as the founders of this method of study: for it is a method of study rather than a form of doctrine. It consisted in applying to Christian doctrine the scientific system of philosophy developed by Aristotle and thus working out Theology along scientific lines on a basis of philosophy. Naturally, such a system could not be the product of a single brain nor of a single age; like any and every other scientific method, it was capable of growth and expansion, it was built up gradually, every new achievement being a step to further progress. Consequently, at whatever period Scholasticism began, it found its development in the Thirteenth Century.

Contemporary with this development in doctrine, there was a revival of religious fervour, taking the form of reaction against the wealth and luxury of the clergy, which was an inevitable result of the high positions these held in civil affairs. Many benefices lay in the patronage of secular princes, and these too often used them as a means of providing for younger sons of noble families, irrespective of their fitness or worthiness for the charge entailed, many of them becoming little better than civil functionaries and amassing great wealth. The reaction against this led to extravagance in the opposite direction, by the formation of such sects as the Waldenses, the Humiliati, the Cathari, the Albigenses; heretics who all started out by denouncing real abuses and ended in denying articles of faith. A safe middle way for correcting abuses without falling into error was found by two men who lived during the first quarter of the century—St. Francis of Assisi and St. Dominic, founders of the Franciscan and Dominican Orders respectively.

St. Francis was the son of a wealthy merchant, and until the age of twenty-five lived much as any other young man of that time lived; he had youth and wealth and leisure, and he made what seemed to him the best use of them. But at twenty-five he fell seriously ill, and life seemed different when viewed from the portals of the grave. There was some higher object in life than living for the mere sake of living. Francis found for himself the answer to the question: Why

have I come into this world? Henceforth he would live for God, which meant that he would live for others; he would follow the example of Christ as literally as could be. And hence he renounced all he had, home, friends, wealth, to be poor with Christ; like Christ, he had nowhere to lay his head; like Him, his food depended on the Charity of stranger;. Without any previous determination to found a new Order, he saw an Order grow up around him as more and more came to him as disciples to learn by his example. Before his death the Order which was to do so much and such great work for the Church numbered its members by thousands.

What Francis did in Italy, Dominic did in Spain. Here, too, a great religious Order, founded on the principle of poverty, sprang up to combat the luxury of the age. But while Francis and his followers preached by their example chiefly, Dominic and his disciples preached by word of mouth. From the beginning, the Order of St. Dominic gave great scholars to the Church. “Strangely as the two men differed,” wrote Greene in his “History of the English People,” “their aim was the same, to convert the heathen, to extirpate heresy, to reconcile knowledge with orthodoxy, to carry the Gospel to the poor. The work was to be done by the entire reversal of the older monasticism, by seeking personal salvation in effort for the salvation of their fellow men, by exchanging the solitary of the cloister for the preacher, the monk for the friar. To force the new ‘brethren’ into entire dependence on those among whom they laboured, the vow of poverty was turned into a stern reality; the ‘Begging Friars’ were to subsist on the alms of the poor, they might possess neither money nor lands, the very houses in which they lived were to be held in trust for them by others. The tide of popular enthusiasm which welcomed their appearance swept before it the reluctance of Rome, the jealousy of the older Orders, the opposition of the parochial priesthood. Thousands of the brethren gathered in a few years around Francis and Dominic, and the begging preachers, clad in their coarse frocks of serge, with the girdle of rope round their waist, wandered barefooted as missionaries over Asia, battled with heresy in Italy and [France] Gaul, lectured in the Universities, and preached and toiled among the poor.”

From the very beginning the Dominicans and the Franciscans—the one eagerly, the other a little reluctantly—threw themselves into the intellectual movement, with the result that before long the greatest theologians of the age belonged either to the one Order or the other: Alexander of Hales, St. Bonaventure, Duns Scotus among the Franciscans; Albert the Great and St. Thomas Aquinas among the Dominicans. What theology and philosophy owe to these—what, indeed, learning in general owes to them—can hardly be appreciated even yet; but beyond all doubt, it is to them that one must turn to seek the foundations of modern theological method. Their very greatness was the immediate cause of the downfall of Scholasticism in the succeeding ages; for no one dared to imagine that he could equal, much less surpass, the teaching of these Masters, and instead of thinking for themselves the later theologians were content with writing commentaries on their predecessors’ works, referring disputed points to them, disputing over topics worn threadbare, multiplying subtleties and distinctions. Of all those theologians by far the greatest was St. Thomas; by common consent his works became the basis of all theological training, not for one decade or two, not for one century or two, but right up to our own times, till they received the stamp of Papal Authority when Leo XIII ordered that St. Thomas should be the standard of all philosophical and theological studies in all Catholic institutions throughout the world.

In his short life—he died at the age of forty-seven—St. Thomas wrote twenty folio volumes, treating every aspect of theology, sufficient, one would think to occupy every moment of a much longer life. Yet his written works represent the occupation of his leisure moments; his days were filled with lecturing in Paris or the other Universities which he visited from time to time, and with the business of his Order. His works include the “Summa Theologica,” the “Summa contra Gentiles,” commentaries on the books of Aristotle, on Holy Scripture, on Boethius, [the 6th Century Christian translator of Greek Philosophy] besides various Sermons and Opuscula [short works]. There is no subject which he treated on which he did not throw great light, no problem for which he did not find an apt solution. For the solution of modern social problems, Leo XIII recommended—more than recommended—the study of St. Thomas, and that more than six hundred years after his death.

It was only natural that the study of Aristotle, with a view to applying his system to Catholic Theology, should interest the students in the study of Natural Science; and consequently it is in no way surprising to find that many of the master-minds of that period have left works which may, in many respects, be considered as the foundation of modern science. Not unnaturally, they erred in some respects, but, when all is said and done, the errors are

surprisingly few, and the correct views set forth wonderfully true—many, having been rejected by their immediate successors, being now received again in scientific circles,—and are too numerous to be the results of lucky guesswork. It is commonly said that Francis Bacon is the Father of the Inductive Method; yet two, at least, of the Thirteenth Century Scholastics were well acquainted with it—Albert the Great and Roger Bacon. Neither believed in accepting the “ipse dixit” of any inadequate authority, especially in a matter that was capable of verification. “The aim of the natural sciences,” wrote Albert, “is not simply to accept the statements of others but to investigate the causes at work in nature.” Roger Bacon, laying down the causes of ignorance, wrote: “These are, first, trust in an inadequate authority; second, the force of custom which leads men to accept too unquestionably what has been accepted before this time; third, the placing of confidence in the opinion of the inexperienced; and fourth the hiding of one’s own ignorance with the parade of a superficial wisdom.” No better commentary on the root causes of ignorance could be made. Every one of the charges made against the Church, for instance, will be found to be due to one or more of them.

Albert the Great was a professor of Theology, first at Cologne, later at Paris; he it was who instructed St. Thomas, and who alone realized the magnitude of intellect with which Thomas was endowed. When his fellow-students called him a dumb ox. Albert replied that the bellows of that ox would yet be heard throughout Christendom. Besides his lectures on theology, Albert so devoted himself to the natural sciences that he is now regarded as the chief authority of his age on physics, chemistry (or alchemy, which then stood for chemistry), geography, astronomy, mineralogy, zoology and physiology. His numerous works on these subjects include such titles as “Meteorum,” “Mineralium,” “De Vegetalibus et Plantis,” “De Animalibus,” “De Nutrimetis et Nutribili.” If it is to be assumed—as there is no reason why it should not be—that he practised what he preached, and that he did investigate for himself the causes at work in nature, and that he verified, experimentally or by observation, in so far as it was capable of verification, whatever he heard from others, it is clear that he must have been a versatile genius. He must have had an intellect of no mean order. Granted that physical science was in its elementary stages, granted that the body of known truth was small, only a man of great brilliance could set about making himself familiar with it all at first hand, and lecturing on it, while engaged in lecturing also, and chiefly, on Theology.

Albert the Great was a Dominican; and among his disciples at Paris was Roger Bacon, a Franciscan, and equally versatile. There is hardly a branch of science which did not engage his attention and to which he did not apply his master’s formula, which he had so made his own: In natural science believe only what you can prove. Bacon looked far beyond his own times—how far he could not know—and hardly a century has passed since then in which some discovery has not been made which he had already foreshadowed. Sometimes he is said to have been the inventor of the telescope and of gunpowder. Neither is correct; but what is true is that, writing of gunpowder, which was known to him and with which he must have experimented, he foresees the use of the principle of explosion as a motive force: “Art can construct instruments of navigation such that the largest vessels, governed by a single man, will traverse rivers and seas more rapidly than if they were filled with oarsmen. One may also make carriages which, without the aid of any animal, will run with remarkable swiftness.” Elsewhere he discusses the possibility of using steam as a motive power: and again, discussing the theory of light and its reflection and refraction by lenses, he describes, theoretically, how telescopes and microscopes might be made—many years before the invention of either. It is to this, probably, that reference is made when to him is ascribed the invention of the telescope.

While dealing with the sciences, it may be mentioned that during this century it was not uncommon for priests to practise as physicians, uniting the care of their parishioners’ bodies and souls. Those whose names are known to history are such as exercised the functions of physician and chaplain to ecclesiastical or civil dignitaries—Cardinals and Bishops, princes and kings. Among them are the names of Richard of Wendover, and John of St. Giles, both Englishmen, though the latter was attached to the French Court; Gilles of Corbeil, John of St. Amand and Simon of Genoa, physician to Pope Nicholas IV. The best known of these is Peter of Spain, who became in time John XXI. He had been practising medicine as a layman, and had been physician to Gregory IX. He became a priest after his wife’s death, but continued his medical practice, and went to Rome as chaplain-physician to a returning Cardinal Legate. Later he was consecrated Bishop of Braga, in Portugal, of which country, in spite of the name by which he is known, he was a native. In due time he was created Cardinal, and, finally, elected Pope, being one of four Popes who occupied the See of Peter in the year 1276. Like his two immediate predecessors, (Blessed) Innocent V and Adrian V, his reign

was very short, for he was killed after a few months by the collapse of a room which he had had built at the Palace of Viterbo, to which he had been accustomed to retire to pursue his scientific studies. He may be regarded as the first specialist in the history of medicine, for he made a special study of the eye and its diseases, and wrote some monographs on that subject.

Theology and Natural Science were not the only subject which occupied the attentions of the Scholastics. Many of them devoted time to the composition of Latin hymns, which are not hymns only, but poetry in the strictest sense of the word. St. Thomas, for instance, wrote quite a number, the best known amongst them being the “Pange Lingua,” [‘Sing, My Tongue,’] the last two verses of which—“Tantum Ergo” [‘Down in Adoration Falling’]—form the hymn sung at Benediction all over the world. The “Adoro Te Devote,” [‘Godhead, here in Hiding, Whom I do Adore,’] part of the Office of Corpus Christi, is also from the pen of St. Thomas, in which he combines sublime thoughts on a difficult theological subject with marvellous beauty of expression. Even more so is this true of the “Lauda Sion,” [‘Praise, O Sion,’] the Sequence he wrote for the Mass of the same day. Other beautiful hymns of this period are the “Adeste Fideles,” [‘O Come, All Ye Faithful,’] which is commonly attributed to St. Bonaventure, and the “Veni Creator,” [‘O Come, Creator,’] often attributed to Innocent III., though the authorship is doubtful.

By far the finest of these hymns, however, are the “Dies Irae” [‘The Day of Wrath’] and the “Stabat Mater.” [‘Stands the Mother, By the Cross, Her Vigil Keeping.’] The former, which Professor Saintsbury calls “the greatest of all hymns and the greatest of all poems,” is also of doubtful authorship. “It would be possible,” says Professor Saintsbury, “to illustrate a complete dissertation on the methods of expression in serious poetry from the fifty-one lines of the ‘Dies Irae.’ Rhyme, alliteration, cadence and the adjustment of vowel and consonant values—all these things receive perfect expressions in it. . . . After the ‘Dies Irae,’ no poet could say that any effect of poetry was, as far as sound goes, unattainable, though few could have hoped to equal it, and perhaps no one except Dante and Shakespeare has fully done so.”

Hardly less beautiful is the “Stabat Mater,” the work, it would seem, of a Franciscan, Jacopone da Todi, though there are not wanting those who attribute it to Innocent III. It is remarkable how the authorship of so many of these hymns, themselves so well known, should be doubtful and obscure—even the “Lauda Sion” has been ascribed to St. Bonaventure. The explanation of this fact would seem to be that the composers wished only to share with others their own thoughts and feelings, and to teach them in a manner more agreeable than hard and dry reasoning. They had no thought of fame for themselves: they sought for no notoriety; so be that they gave glory to God and led others to do likewise, they were content.

This is true, also, of many who wrote epic and lyric poems, of which there are not a few. In Spain there is the “Cid,” the earliest of national epic poems in the Christian era, founded naturally enough on the exploits of a national hero warring against the Moors. In England the same place is occupied by the “Arthurian Legends” which date back further than the Thirteenth Century, but which were then cast into their present form. In Germany it is the “Nibelungen Lied” that is found, also the recasting of ancient tales. These three epics have had a profound influence on the literature of England, Germany and Spain, and through that literature on the Development of the human mind. To these must be added the Meistersingers, the Minnesingers, the Troubadours, the lyric poets who have laid the foundations of poetry in the vernacular. The work of all these poets culminated towards the end of the century in the productions of Dante, whose “Divina Commedia” did for Italy what the “Cid” did for Spain, “Nibelungen Lied” for Germany, and the “Legends of Arthur” for England. No need to stress the fact that Dante ranks with Homer and Shakespeare; no need to stress the fact that he is a product of the century with which we are concerned. If it had no other claim to greatness, this one fact alone would suffice to stamp the Thirteenth Century as great.

As the foundations of poetry are laid in this century, so, too, are the foundations of prose. For the most part the prose writings are in Latin, since this was the universal language of the times; it is the language of the schools, in which all philosophical and theological lectures were given and much other business transacted. Most chronicles and lives of the saints of the times are written in the same language. And while they have a prose style all their own and did undoubtedly influence the prose of the vernacular languages, yet it cannot be said to be the foundation on which the later prose was built. There are nevertheless some chronicles in vernacular languages, notably the “Conquest of Constantinople,” written by Geoffrey de Villehardouin, himself one of the Crusaders who took part in the expedition.

[The expedition, itself, of course was an absolute disgrace to the noble ideals which had inspired the Crusading Movement. Even today, profound apologies are expressed to our brother Christians of the East who were grossly aggrieved by the venal departure from Christian ideals.] It is written in a direct, straightforward, forceful style, likely to appeal to the reader, or the listeners, for probably it was intended to be read aloud in the castles of the nobles. On the other hand, it is not wanting in poetic description, which clearly shows the influence of the older poets. In England, at the same time, was a biographer, Jocelyn of Brakelands, who wrote an English life of a certain saintly Abbot Samson. It is said to be as vivid a picture of the Abbot and his ways as Boswell's "Life" is of Johnson.

In England, too, was Matthew Paris, who, according to Greene, is the greatest and last of the monastic historians. He was a voluminous writer and no mean artist, illustrating many of his manuscripts with his own hand. Equally noteworthy in the biographical line is Joinville's "Life of Louis IX," written by a man who knew that saintly king intimately—was, indeed, his personal friend—and who was by his side in the Crusades. Poetry and Prose, each played its part in forming and reflecting national characteristics.

The limitations of space have forbidden more than the merest mention of the names of works and writers; to those who know them already that indication is sufficient to show the lustre shed by them on the century in which they were produced; those who do not know them would be well advised to make good that deficiency—at least to the extent of learning more about them, for it is not given to all to appreciate them to the full—if they wish to know how truly great was the Thirteenth Century.

Drama, too, has roots in this same period; not in the form we know it now, indeed, but in the guise of Mystery Plays, from which by slow degrees the modern form of drama has evolved. For the most part, these plays were performed by members of the various trade guilds. They were representations of the Bible stories from both the Old and the New Testament, and no important event was omitted, though, of course, only one story was played at any given performance. Nevertheless, as the year went on, the people saw the whole Bible story unfolded before them. Quite apart from the influence these old plays had on the development of the drama, they had another importance quite as great—far greater, indeed. They kept the people in touch with religious topics, kept them occupied with high and lofty thoughts, and set before them great ideals. Then again the preparation necessary for them kept the actors busy and interested, and so prevented idleness outside the hours of work. Their educative value must have been enormous, as is that of anything which is at once recreative and an interesting form of study. St. Francis of Assisi adapted the Mystery Plays as a method of teaching the great truths of religion, and though they existed before his time, it is largely due to him and the members of his Order that they sprang into such great and lasting popularity. They had, too, their element of healthy humour, for other characters, besides those appearing in the Bible narrative, were introduced, and these were often cast in a light and fanciful mood.

If space permitted, much could be written of all those aspects of Thirteenth Century life which have come under review. As it is, only the barest outlines of any feature have been sketched in, with the hope that such a general view of the century as a whole might give some idea of the great things done, movements initiated and problems solved during that time. Great names have been omitted or hardly mentioned, such as [St.] Louis IX. of France; Blanche of Castile, his mother; St. Clare, Edward I of England, St. Elizabeth of Hungary, and many others who played important parts in life, whether political, civil or religious. Many great movements have been omitted, such as the gradual break up of the feudal system and the substitution of Parliaments, as seen in the Provisions of Oxford, Simon de Montfort's Parliament and the analogous movements in Germany and France; the development of legal systems; the beginnings of commerce, as exemplified by the Hanseatic League; the foundations laid for the establishment of colonial empires and increase in geographic knowledge by the travels and explorations of Marco Polo and of Friar Oderic and others.

Nor has anything been said of the rise of art and the work of Cimabue and of Giotto; of the foundations of hospitals and organized charities, largely the work of Innocent III; of the origins of music as typified by the "Exultet" ['Rejoice and Exult! you Heavenly Powers!'] from the Office of Holy Saturday. Nevertheless, sufficient has, perhaps, been said to convince the casual, sceptical, superficial reader of history that the Thirteenth Century is at least a century of origins, that its history is not a thing to be passed over as unimportant, that, if not the very greatest, at least it is one of the greatest, that the world has ever known.
