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A Distant Mirror

The Calamitous 14th Century

Barbara W. Tuchman

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"For mankind is ever the same and nothing is lost
out of nature, though everything is altered."

—JOHN DRYDEN,

"On the Characters in the Canterbury Tales,"
in Preface to *Fables, Ancient and Modern*

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Chapter 2

Born to Woe: The Century

When the last of the Coucys was born, his country was supreme but his century was already in trouble. A physical chill settled on the 14th century at its very start, initiating the miseries to come. The Baltic Sea froze over twice, in 1303 and 1306-07; years followed of unseasonable cold, storms and rains, and a rise in the level of the Caspian Sea. Contemporaries could not know it was the onset of what has since been recognized as the Little Ice Age, caused by an advance of polar and alpine glaciers and lasting until about 1700. Nor were they yet aware that, owing to the climatic change, communication with Greenland was gradually being lost, that the Norse settlements there were being extinguished, that cultivation of grain was disappearing from Iceland and being severely reduced in Scandinavia. But they could feel the colder weather, and mark with fear its result: a shorter growing season.

This meant disaster, for population increase in the last century had already reached a delicate balance with agricultural techniques. Given the tools and methods of the time, the clearing of productive land had already been pushed to its limits. Without adequate irrigation and fertilizers, crop yield could not be raised nor poor soils be made productive. Commerce was not equipped to transport grain in bulk from surplus-producing areas except by water. Inland towns and cities lived on local resources, and when these dwindled, the inhabitants starved.

In 1315, after rains so incessant that they were compared to the Biblical flood, crops failed all over Europe, and famine, the dark horseman of the Apocalypse, became familiar to all. The previous rise in population had already exceeded agricultural production, leaving people undernourished and more vulnerable to hunger and disease. Reports spread of people eating their own children, of the poor in Poland feeding on hanged bodies taken down from the gibbet. A

contagion of dysentery prevailed in the same years. Local famines recurred intermittently after the great sweep of 1315-16.

Acts of man no less than change in the climate marked the 14th century as born to woe. In the first twenty years, four ominous events followed one after another: the assault on the Pope by the King of France; the removal of the Papacy to Avignon; the suppression of the Templars; and the rising of the Pastoureaux. The most fateful was an assault on Boniface VIII by agents of Philip IV, King of France, surnamed the Fair. The issue was temporal versus papal authority arising from Philip's levy of taxes on clerical income without consent of the Pope. Boniface in response issued the defiant Bull *Clericos Laicos* in 1296 forbidding the clergy to pay any form of tax whatsoever to any lay ruler. He recognized in the growing tendency of prelates to hesitate between allegiance to their king and obedience to the Pope a threat to the papal claim to universal rule as Vicar of Christ. Despite formidable hostilities brought to bear on him by Philip the Fair, Boniface asserted in a second Bull, *Unam Sanctam*, in 1302, the most absolute statement of papal supremacy ever made: "It is necessary to salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman pontiff."

Philip thereupon called for a council to judge the Pope on charges of heresy, blasphemy, murder, sodomy, simony and sorcery (including consorting with a familiar spirit or pet demon), and failure to fast on fast days. At the same time Boniface drew up a Bull to excommunicate the King, prompting Philip to resort to physical force. On September 7, 1303, agents of the King, aided by anti-papist Italian armed forces, seized the 86-year-old Pope in his summer retreat at Anagni near Rome with the intention of forestalling the excommunication and bringing him by force before a council. After three days' turmoil, Boniface was freed by the citizens of Anagni, but the shock of the outrage was mortal and within a month he was dead.

The assault on the Pope did not rally support for the cause of the victim and the fact that it did not was a measure of change. The tide was receding from the universality of the Church that had been the medieval dream. The all-embracing claim of Boniface VIII was obsolete before he made it. The indirect consequence of the "Crime of Anagni" was the removal of the papacy to Avignon, and in that "Babylonian Exile" demoralization began.

The move occurred when, under the influence of Philip the Fair, a French Pope was elected as Clement V. He did not go to Rome to take up his See, mainly because he feared Italian reprisals for the French treatment of Boniface, although the Italians said it was because he kept a French mistress, the beautiful Countess of Périgord, daughter of the

Count of Foix. In 1309 he settled in Avignon in Provence near the mouth of the Rhône. This was within the French sphere, though technically not in France since Provence was a fief of the Kingdom of Naples and Sicily.

Thereafter under six French popes in succession, Avignon became a virtual temporal state of sumptuous pomp, of great cultural attraction, and of unlimited simony—that is, the selling of offices. Diminished by its removal from the Holy See of Rome and by being generally regarded as a tool of France, the papacy sought to make up prestige and power in temporal terms. It concentrated on finance and the organization and centralization of every process of papal government that could bring in revenue. Besides its regular revenue from tithes and annates on ecclesiastical income and from dues from papal fiefs, every office, every nomination, every appointment or preferment, every dispensation of the rules, every judgment of the Rota or adjudication of a claim, every pardon, indulgence, and absolution, everything the Church had or was, from cardinal's hat to pilgrim's relic, was for sale. In addition, the papacy took a cut of all voluntary gifts and bequests and offerings on the altar. It received Peter's Pence from England and other kingdoms. It sold extra indulgences in jubilee years and took a special tax for crusades which continued to be proclaimed but rarely left home. The once great impulse had faded, and fervor for holy war had become largely verbal.

Benefices, of which there were 700 bishops' sees and hundreds of thousands of lower offices, were the most lucrative source of papal income. Increasingly, the popes reserved more and more benefices to their power of appointment, destroying the elective principle. Since the appointees were often strangers to the diocese, or some cardinal's favorite, the practice aroused resentment within the clergy. If an episcopal election was still held, the papacy charged a fee for confirming it. To obtain a conferred benefice, a bishop or abbot greased the palms of the Curia for his nomination, paid anywhere from a third to the whole of his first year's revenue as the fee for his appointment, and knew that when he died his personal property would revert to the Pope and any outstanding dues would have to be paid by his successor.

Excommunication and anathema, the most extreme measures the Church could command, supposedly reserved for heresy and horrible crimes—"for by these penalties a man is separated from the faithful and turned over to Satan"—were now used to wring money from recalcitrant payers. In one case a bishop was denied Christian burial until his heirs agreed to be responsible for his debts, to the scandal of the diocese, which saw its bishop lying unshriven and cut off from

hope of salvation. Abuse of the spiritual power for such purposes brought excommunication into contempt and lowered respect for clerical leaders.

Money could buy any kind of dispensation: to legitimize children, of which the majority were those of priests and prelates;* to divide a corpse for the favorite custom of burial in two or more places; to permit nuns to keep two maids; to permit a converted Jew to visit his unconverted parents; to marry within the prohibited degree of consanguinity (with a sliding scale of fees for the second, third, and fourth degrees); to trade with the infidel Moslem (with a fee required for each ship on a scale according to cargo); to receive stolen goods up to a specific value. The collection and accounting of all these sums, largely handled through Italian bankers, made the physical counting of cash a common sight in the papal palace. Whenever he entered there, reported Alvar Pelayo, a Spanish official of the Curia, "I found brokers and clergy engaged in reckoning the money which lay in heaps before them."

The dispensation with most serious results was the one permitting appointment to a benefice of a candidate below the canonical age of 25 or one who had never been consecrated or never taken the required examination for literacy. Appointment of unfit or absentee clergy became an abuse in itself. In Bohemia on one occasion in the early 14th century, a boy of seven was appointed to a parish worth an annual income of 25 gulden; another was raised through three offices of the hierarchy, paying at each stage for a dispensation for non-residence and postponed consecration. Younger sons of noble families were repeatedly appointed to archbishoprics at 18, 20, or 22. Tenures were short because each preferment brought in another payment.

Priests who could not read or who, from ignorance, stumbled stupidly through the ritual of the Eucharist were another scandal. A Bishop of Durham in 1318 could not understand or pronounce Latin and after struggling helplessly with the word *Metropolitanus* at his own consecration, muttered in the vernacular, "Let us take that word as read." Later when ordaining candidates for holy orders, he met the word *aenigmate* (through a glass darkly) and this time swore in honest outrage, "By St. Louis, that was no courteous man who wrote this word!" The unfit clergy spread dismay, for these were the men supposed to have the souls of the laity in their charge and be the intermediaries between man and God. Writing of "incapable and ignorant men" who could buy any office they wanted from the Curia,

* Out of 614 grants of legitimacy in the year 1342-43, 484 were to members of the clergy.

the chronicler Henry of Hereford went to the heart of the dismay when he wrote, "Look . . . at the dangerous situation of those in their charge, and tremble!"

When Church practices were calculated at a money value, their religious content seeped away. Theoretically, pardon for sin could only be won through penitence, but the penance of a pilgrimage to Rome or Jerusalem had little meaning when the culprit could estimate the cost of the journey and buy an indulgence for an equivalent sum.

The popes—successors, as Petrarch pointed out, of "the poor fishermen of Galilee"—were now "loaded with gold and clad in purple." John XXII, a Pope with the touch of Midas who ruled from 1316 to 1334, bought for his own use forty pieces of gold cloth from Damascus for 1,276 gold florins and spent even more on furs, including an ermine-trimmed pillow. The clothing of his retinue cost 7,000 to 8,000 florins a year.

His successors Benedict XII and Clement VI built in stages the great papal palace at Avignon on a rock overlooking the Rhône, a huge and inharmonious mass of roofs and towers without coherent design. Constructed in castle style around interior courts, with battlements and twelve-foot-thick walls for defense, it had odd pyramidal chimneys rising from the kitchens, banqueting halls and gardens, money chambers and offices, rose-windowed chapels, a steam room for the Pope heated by a boiler, and a gate opening on the public square where the faithful gathered to watch the Holy Father ride out on his white mule. Here moved the majestic cardinals in their wide red hats, "rich, insolent and rapacious" in Petrarch's words, vying with each other in the magnificence of their suites. One required ten stables for his horses, and another rented parts of 51 houses to lodge all his retainers.

Corridors of the palace bustled with notaries and officers of the Curia and legates departing on or returning from their missions. Petitioners and their lawyers waited anxiously in anterooms, pilgrims crowded in the courtyards to receive the pontifical blessing, while through the halls passed the parade of the Pope's relatives of both sexes in brocades and furs with their attending knights and squires and retainers. The household of sergeants-at-arms, ushers, chamberlains, chaplains, stewards, and servants numbered about 400, all supplied with board, lodging, clothing, and wages.

Tiled floors were ornamented in designs of flowers, fantastic beasts, and elaborate heraldry. Clement VI, a lover of luxury and beauty who used 1,080 ermine skins in his personal wardrobe, imported Matteo Giovanetti and artists from the school of Simone Martini to paint the walls with scenes from the Bible. The four walls of Clement's own

study, however, were entirely covered by scenes of a noble's secular pleasures: a stag hunt, falconry, orchards, gardens, fishponds, and a group of ambiguous nude bathers who could be either women or children depending on the eye of the beholder. No religious themes intruded.

At banquets the Pope's guests dined off gold and silver plate, seated beneath Flemish tapestries and hangings of silk. Receptions for visiting princes and envoys rivaled the splendors of any secular court. Papal entertainments, fetes, even tournaments and balls, reproduced the secular.

"I am living in the Babylon of the West," wrote Petrarch in the 1340s, where prelates feast at "licentious banquets" and ride on snow-white horses "decked in gold, fed on gold, soon to be shod in gold if the Lord does not check this slavish luxury." Though himself something of a lapsed cleric, Petrarch shared the clerical habit of denouncing at double strength whatever was disapproved. Avignon became for him "that disgusting city," though whether because of worldly corruption or the physical filth and smells of its narrow, overcrowded streets is uncertain. The town, crammed with merchants, artisans, ambassadors, adventurers, astrologers, thieves, prostitutes, and no less than 43 branches of Italian banking houses (in 1327), was not so well equipped as the papal palace for the disposal of sewage. The palace had a tower whose two lower stories contained exclusively latrines. Fitted with stone seats, these were emptied into a pit below ground level that was flushed by water from the kitchen drains and by an underground stream diverted for the purpose. In the town, however, the stench caused the ambassador from Aragon to swoon, and Petrarch to move out to nearby Vaucluse "to prolong my life."

More accessible than Rome, Avignon attracted visitors from all over Europe, and its flow of money helped to support artists, writers and scholars, masters of law and medicine, minstrels and poets. If corrupt, it was also Maecenas. Everybody scolded Avignon and everybody came there. St. Brigitta, a widowed Swedish noblewoman who lived in Rome and eloquently deplored the sins of the times, called the papal city "a field full of pride, avarice, self-indulgence, and corruption." But corruption takes two, and if the papacy sinned, it was not without partners. In the real world of shifting political balances and every ruler's constant need of money, popes and kings needed each other and made the necessary adjustments. They dealt in territories and sovereignties, men-at-arms, alliances, and loans. A regular method was the levy for a crusade, which allowed ecclesiastical income within each country to be taxed by its king, who soon came to regard it as a right.

The clergy were partners too. When prelates were gorgeously clad, the lower ranks would not long remain somber. Many were the complaints, like that of the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1342, that the clergy were dressing like laymen, in checkerboard squares of red and green, short coats, "notably scant," with excessively wide sleeves to show linings of fur or silk, hoods and tippets of "wonderful length," pointed and slashed shoes, jeweled girdles hung with gilt purses. Worse, ignoring the tonsure, they wore beards and long hair to the shoulders contrary to canonical rule, to the "abominable scandal among the people." Some kept jesters, dogs, and falcons, some went abroad attended by guards of honor.

Nor could simony stay isolated at the top. When bishops purchased benefices at the price of a year's income, they passed the cost down, so that corruption spread through the hierarchy from canons and priors to priesthood and cloistered clergy, down to mendicant friars and pardoners. It was at this level that the common people met the materialism of the Church, and none were more crass than the sellers of pardons.

Supposed to be commissioned by the Church, the pardoners would sell absolution for any sin from gluttony to homicide, cancel any vow of chastity or fasting, remit any penance for money, most of which they pocketed. When commissioned to raise money for a crusade, according to Matteo Villani, they would take from the poor, in lieu of money, "linen and woolen stuffs or furnishings, grain and fodder . . . deceiving the people. That was the way they gave the Cross." What they were peddling was salvation, taking advantage of the people's need and credulity to sell its counterfeit. The only really detestable character in Chaucer's company of Canterbury pilgrims is the Pardoner with his stringy locks, his eunuch's hairless skin, his glaring eyes like a hare's, and his brazen acknowledgment of the tricks and deceits of his trade.

The regular clergy detested the pardoner for undoing the work of penance, for endangering souls insofar as his goods were spurious, and for invading clerical territory, taking collections on feast days or performing burial and other services for a fee that should have gone to the parish priest. Yet the system permitted him to function because it shared in the profits.

The sins of monks and itinerant friars were more disturbing because their pretensions as men of God were higher. They were notorious as seducers of women. Peddling furs and girdles for wenches and wives, and small gentle dogs "to get love of them," the friar in a 14th century poem "came to our dame when the gode man is from home."

He spares nauther for synne ne shame,
For may he tyl a woman synne
In priveyte, he will not blynne
Er he a childe put hir withinne
And perchance two at ones.

In the tales of Boccaccio, in the *fabliaux* of France, in all popular literature of the time, clerical celibacy is a joke. Priests lived with mistresses or else went in hunt of them. "A priest lay with a lady who was wed to a knight," begins one tale matter-of-factly. In another, "the priest and his lady went off to bed." In the nunnery where Piers Plowman served as cook, Sister Pernell was "a priest's wench" who "bore a child in cherry time." Boccaccio's rascally friars were invariably caught in embarrassing situations as victims of their own lechery. In real life their sinfulness was not funny but threatening, for when a friar failed so far in holiness how could he save souls? This sense of betrayal explains why the friars were so often the object of active hostility, sometimes even of physical assault, because, as a chronicle of 1327 stated simply, "they did not behave as friars ought."

According to the ideal of St. Francis, they were supposed to wander the world to do good, to walk barefoot among the poor and the outcasts bringing Christian love to the lowest, to beg for the necessities of life in kind, never in money. By a supreme paradox, the Order that Francis founded on rejection of property attracted the support and donations of the wealthy because its purity seemed to offer assurance of holiness. Upon the approach of death, knights and noble ladies would have themselves clad in the Franciscan habit, believing that if they died and were buried in it, they could not go to hell.

The Order acquired lands and riches, built itself churches and cloisters, developed its own hierarchy—all the opposite of the founder's intent. Yet St. Francis had understood the process. Replying to a novice who wished to have a psalter, he once said, "When you have a psalter you will wish to have a breviary, and when you have a breviary you will sit in a chair like a great prelate and say to your brother, 'Brother, bring me my breviary.'"

In some monastic orders the monks had regular pocket money and private funds which they lent at interest. In some they had an allowance of a gallon of ale a day, ate meat, wore jewels and fur-trimmed gowns, and employed servants who in wealthy convents sometimes outnumbered the members. Enjoying the favor of the rich, the Franciscans preached to them and dined with them and took office in noble households as counselors and chaplains. Some still went barefoot

among the poor, holding to their role, and were revered for it, but most now wore good leather boots and were not loved.

Like the pardoner, they bilked the villagers, selling them relics of inspired imagination. Boccaccio's Friar Cipolla sold one of the Angel Gabriel's feathers which he said had fallen in the Virgin's chamber during the Annunciation. As satire, this did not overreach the real friar who sold a piece of the bush from which the Lord spoke to Moses. Some sold drafts on the Treasury of Merit supposed to be stored in Heaven by the Order of St. Francis. Wyclif, on being asked what these parchments were good for, replied: "To covere mustard pottis." The friars were an element of daily life, scorned yet venerated and feared because they might, after all, have the key to salvation.

The satire and complaints survive because they are written down. They leave an impression of a Church so pervaded by venality and hypocrisy as to seem ripe for dissolution, but an institution so in command of the culture and so rooted in the structure of society does not readily dissolve. Christianity was the matrix of medieval life: even cooking instructions called for boiling an egg "during the length of time wherein you can say a Miserere." It governed birth, marriage, and death, sex, and eating, made the rules for law and medicine, gave philosophy and scholarship their subject matter. Membership in the Church was not a matter of choice; it was compulsory and without alternative, which gave it a hold not easy to dislodge.

As an integral part of life, religion was both subjected to burlesque and unharmed by it. In the annual Feast of Fools at Christmastime, every rite and article of the Church no matter how sacred was celebrated in mockery. A *dominus festi*, or lord of the revels, was elected from the inferior clergy—the curés, subdeacons, vicars, and choir clerks, mostly ill-educated, ill-paid, and ill-disciplined—whose day it was to turn everything topsy-turvy. They installed their lord as Pope or Bishop or Abbot of Fools in a ceremony of head-shaving accompanied by bawdy talk and lewd acts; dressed him in vestments turned inside out; played dice on the altar and ate black puddings and sausages while mass was celebrated in nonsensical gibberish; swung censers made of old shoes emitting "stinking smoke"; officiated in the various offices of the priest wearing beast masks and dressed as women or minstrels; sang obscene songs in the choir; howled and hooted and jangled bells while the "Pope" recited a doggerel benediction. At his call to follow him on pain of having their breeches split, all rush violently from the church to parade through the town, drawing the *dominus* in a cart

from which he issues mock indulgences while his followers hiss, cackle, jeer, and gesticulate. They rouse the bystanders to laughter with "infamous performances" and parody preachers in scurrilous sermons. Naked men haul carts of manure which they throw at the populace. Drinking bouts and dances accompany the procession. The whole was a burlesque of the too-familiar, tedious, and often meaningless rituals; a release of "the natural lout beneath the cassock."

In daily life the Church was comforter, protector, physician. The Virgin and patron saints gave succor in trouble and protection against the evils and enemies that lurked along every man's path. Craft guilds, towns, and functions had patron saints, as did individuals. Archers and crossbowmen had St. Sebastian, martyr of the arrows; bakers had St. Honoré, whose banner bore an oven shovel argent and three loaves gules; sailors had St. Nicholas with the three children he saved from the sea; travelers had St. Christopher carrying the infant Jesus on his shoulder; charitable brotherhoods usually chose St. Martin, who gave half his cloak to the poor man; unmarried girls had St. Catherine, supposed to have been very beautiful. The patron saint was an extra companion through life who healed hurts, soothed distress, and in extremity could make miracles. His image was carried on banners in processions, sculpted over the entrance to town halls and chapels, and worn as a medallion on an individual's hat.

Above all, the Virgin was the ever-merciful, ever-dependable source of comfort, full of compassion for human frailty, caring nothing for laws and judges, ready to respond to anyone in trouble; amid all the inequities, injuries, and senseless harms, the one never-failing figure. She frees the prisoner from his dungeon, revives the starving with milk from her own breasts. When a peasant mother takes her son, blinded by a thorn in his eye, to the Church of St. Denis, kneels before Our Lady, recites an Ave Maria, and makes the sign of the cross over the child with a sacred relic, the nail of the Saviour, "at once," reports the chronicler, "the thorn falls out, the inflammation disappears, and the mother in joy returns home with her son no longer blind."

A hardened murderer has no less access. No matter what crime a person has committed, though every man's hand be against him, he is still not cut off from the Virgin. In the *Miracles of Notre Dame*, a cycle of popular plays performed in the towns, the Virgin redeems every kind of malefactor who reaches out to her through the act of repentance. A woman accused of incest with her son-in-law has procured his assassination by two hired men and is about to be burned at the stake. She prays to Notre Dame, who promptly appears and orders the fire not to burn. Convinced of a miracle, the magistrates free the con-

demned woman, who, after distributing her goods and money to the poor, enters a convent. The act of faith through prayer was what counted. It was not justice one received from the Church but forgiveness.

More than comfort, the Church gave answers. For nearly a thousand years it had been the central institution that gave meaning and purpose to life in a capricious world. It affirmed that man's life on earth was but a passage in exile on the way to God and to the New Jerusalem, "our other home." Life was nothing, wrote Petrarch to his brother, but "a hard and weary journey toward the eternal home for which we look; or, if we neglect our salvation, an equally pleasureless way to eternal death." What the Church offered was salvation, which could be reached only through the rituals of the established Church and by the permission and aid of its ordained priests. "*Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*" (No salvation outside the Church) was the rule.

Salvation's alternative was Hell and eternal torture, very realistically pictured in the art of the time. In Hell the damned hung by their tongues from trees of fire, the impenitent burned in furnaces, unbelievers smothered in foul-smelling smoke. The wicked fell into the black waters of an abyss and sank to a depth proportionate to their sins: fornicators up to the nostrils, persecutors of their fellow man up to the eyebrows. Some were swallowed by monstrous fish, some gnawed by demons, tormented by serpents, by fire or ice or fruits hanging forever out of reach of the starving. In Hell men were naked, nameless, and forgotten. No wonder salvation was important and the Day of Judgment present in every mind. Over the doorway of every cathedral it was carved in vivid reminder, showing the numerous sinners roped and led off by devils toward a flaming cauldron while angels led the fewer elect to bliss in the opposite direction.

No one doubted in the Middle Ages that the vast majority would be eternally damned. *Salvandorum paucitas, damnandorum multitudo* (Few saved, many damned) was the stern principle maintained from Augustine to Aquinas. Noah and his family were taken to indicate the proportion of the saved, usually estimated at one in a thousand or even one in ten thousand. No matter how few were to be chosen, the Church offered hope to all. Salvation was permanently closed to non-believers in Christ, but not to sinners, for sin was an inherent condition of life which could be canceled as often as necessary by penitence and absolution. "Turn thee again, turn thee again, thou sinful soul," spoke a Lollard preacher, "for God knoweth thy misgovernance and will not forsake thee. Turn thou to me saith the Lord and I shall receive thee and take thee to grace."

The Church gave ceremony and dignity to lives that had little of either. It was the source of beauty and art to which all had some access and which many helped to create. To carve the stone folds of an apostle's gown, to paste with infinite patience the bright mosaic chips into a picture of winged angels in a heavenly chorus, to stand in the towering space of a cathedral nave amid pillars rising and rising to an almost invisible vault and know this to be man's work in honor of God, gave pride to the lowest and could make the least man an artist.

The Church, not the government, sponsored the care of society's helpless—the indigent and sick, orphan and cripple, the leper, the blind, the idiot—by indoctrinating the laity in the belief that alms bought them merit and a foothold in Heaven. Based on this principle, the impulse of Christian charity was self-serving but effective. Nobles gave alms daily at the castle gate to all comers, in coin and in leftover food from the hall. Donations from all sources poured into the hospitals, favorite recipients of Christian charity. Merchants bought themselves peace of mind for the non-Christian business of making profit by allocating a regular percentage to charity. This was entered in the ledger under the name of God as the poor's representative. A Christian duty of particular merit was the donation of dowries to enable poor girls to marry, as in the case of a Gascon seigneur of the 14th century who left 100 livres to "those whom I deflowered, if they can be found."

Corporate bodies accepted the obligation to help the poor as a religious duty. The statutes of craft guilds set aside a penny for charity, called "God's penny," from each contract of sale or purchase. Parish councils of laymen superintended maintenance of the "Table of the Poor" and of a bank for alms. On feast days it was a common practice to invite twelve poor to the banquet table, and on Holy Thursday, in memory of Christ, the mayor of a town or other notable would wash the feet of a beggar. When St. Louis conducted the ceremony, his companion and biographer, the Sire de Joinville, refused to participate, saying it would make him sick to touch the feet of such villeins. It was not always easy to love the poor.

The clergy on the whole were probably no more lecherous or greedy or untrustworthy than other men, but because they were supposed to be better or nearer to God than other men, their failings attracted more attention. If Clement VI was luxury-loving, he was also generous and warm-hearted. The Parson among the Canterbury pilgrims is as benign and admirable as the Pardoner is repulsive, always ready to visit on foot the farthest and poorest house of his parish, undeterred by thunder and rain.

To drawn folk to heaven with fairnesse
By good ensample was his businesse.

Nevertheless, a wind of discontent was rising. Papal tax-collectors were attacked and beaten, and even bishops were not safe. In 1326, in a burst of anti-clericalism, a London mob beheaded the Bishop and left his body naked in the street. In 1338 two "rectors of churches" joined two knights and a "great crowd of country folk" in attacking the Bishop of Constance, severely wounding several of his retinue, and holding him in prison. Among the religious themselves, the discontent took serious form. In Italy arose the Fraticelli, a sect of the Franciscan Order, in another of the poverty-embracing movements that periodically tormented the Church by wanting to disendow it. The Fraticelli or Spiritual Franciscans insisted that Christ had lived without possessions, and they preached a return to that condition as the only true "imitation of Christ."

The poverty movements grew out of the essence of Christian doctrine: renunciation of the material world—the idea that made the great break with the classical age. It maintained that God was positive and life on earth negative, that the world was incurably bad and holiness achieved only through renunciation of earthly pleasures, goods, and honors. To gain victory over the flesh was the purpose of fasting and celibacy, which denied the pleasures of this world for the sake of reward in the next. Money was evil, beauty vain, and both were transitory. Ambition was pride, desire for gain was avarice, desire of the flesh was lust, desire for honor, even for knowledge and beauty, was vainglory. Insofar as these diverted man from seeking the life of the spirit, they were sinful. The Christian ideal was ascetic: the denial of sensual man. The result was that, under the sway of the Church, life became a continual struggle against the senses and a continual engagement in sin, accounting for the persistent need for absolution.

Repeatedly, mystical sects arose in an effort to sweep away the whole detritus of the material world, to become nearer to God by cutting the earth-binding chains of property. Embedded in its lands and buildings, the Church could only react by denouncing the sects as heretical. The Fraticelli's stubborn insistence on the absolute poverty of Christ and his twelve Apostles was acutely inconvenient for the Avignon papacy, which condemned their doctrine as "false and pernicious" heresy in 1315 and, when they refused to desist, excommunicated them and other associated sects at various times during the next decade. Twenty-seven members of a particularly stubborn group of

Spiritual Franciscans of Provence were tried by the Inquisition and four of them burned at the stake at Marseille in 1318.

The wind of temporal challenge to papal supremacy was rising too, focusing on the Pope's right to crown the Emperor, and setting the claims of the state against those of the Church. The Pope tried to excommunicate this temporal spirit in the person of its boldest exponent, Marsilius of Padua, whose *Defensor Pacis* in 1324 was a forthright assertion of the supremacy of the state. Two years later the logic of the struggle led John XXII to excommunicate William of Ockham, the English Franciscan, known for his forceful reasoning as "the invincible doctor." In expounding a philosophy called "nominalism," Ockham opened a dangerous door to direct intuitive knowledge of the physical world. He was in a sense a spokesman for intellectual freedom, and the Pope recognized the implications by his ban. In reply to the excommunication, Ockham promptly charged John XXII with seventy errors and seven heresies.

In economic man, the lay spirit did not challenge the Church, yet functioned in essential contradiction. Capitalist enterprise, although it held by now a commanding place, violated by its very nature the Christian attitude toward commerce, which was one of active antagonism. It held that money was evil, that according to St. Augustine "Business is in itself an evil," that profit beyond a minimum necessary to support the dealer was avarice, that to make money out of money by charging interest on a loan was the sin of usury, that buying goods wholesale and selling them unchanged at a higher retail price was immoral and condemned by canon law, that, in short, St. Jerome's dictum was final: "A man who is a merchant can seldom if ever please God" (*Homo mercator vix aut numquam potest Deo placere*).

It followed that banker, merchant, and businessman lived in daily commission of sin and daily contradiction of the moral code centering upon the "just price." This was based on the principle that a craft should supply each man a livelihood and a fair return to all, but no more. Prices should be set at a "just" level, meaning the value of the labor added to the value of the raw material. To ensure that no one gained an advantage over anyone else, commercial law prohibited innovation in tools or techniques, underselling below a fixed price, working late by artificial light, employing extra apprentices or wife and under-age children, and advertising of wares or praising them to the detriment of others. As restraint of initiative, this was the direct op-

posite of capitalist enterprise. It was the denial of economic man, and consequently even more routinely violated than the denial of sensual man.

No economic activity was more irrepressible than the investment and lending at interest of money; it was the basis for the rise of Western capitalist economy and the building of private fortunes—and it was based on the sin of usury. Nothing so vexed medieval thinking, nothing so baffled and eluded settlement, nothing was so great a tangle of irconcilables as the theory of usury. Society needed moneylending while Christian doctrine forbade it. That was the basic dichotomy, but the doctrine was so elastic that “even wise men” were unsure of its provisions. For practical purposes, usury was considered to be not the charging of interest *per se*, but charging at a higher rate than was decent. This was left to the Jews as the necessary dirty work of society, and if they had not been available they would have had to be invented. While theologians and canonists argued endlessly and tried vainly to decide whether 10, 12.5, 15, or 20 percent was decent, the bankers went on lending and investing at whatever rates the situation would bear.

Merchants regularly paid fines for breaking every law that concerned their business, and went on as before. The wealth of Venice and Genoa was made in trade with the infidels of Syria and Egypt despite papal prohibition. Prior to the 14th century, it has been said, men “could hardly imagine the merchant’s strongbox without picturing the devil squatting on the lid.” Whether the merchant too saw the devil as he counted coins, whether he lived with a sense of guilt, is hard to assess. Francisco Datini, the merchant of Prato, judging by his letters, was a deeply troubled man, but his agonies were caused more by fear of loss than by fear of God. He was evidently able to reconcile Christianity and business, for the motto on his ledger was “In the name of God and of profit.”

Division of rich and poor became increasingly sharp. With control of the raw materials and tools of production, the owners were able to reduce wages in classic exploitation. The poor saw them now as enemies, no longer as protectors but as exploiters, as Dives, the rich man consigned to hellfire, as wolves, and themselves as lambs. They felt a sense of injustice that finding no remedy grew into a spirit of revolt.

Medieval theory intended that the lord or ruler should respond to charges of oppression by investigating and ordering the necessary reform to ensure that taxes fell equally on rich and poor. But this theory corresponded to reality no more than other medieval ideals, and because of this, wrote Philippe de Beaumanoir in 1280–83, “there

have been acts of violence because the poor will not suffer this but know not how to obtain their right except by rising and seizing it themselves.” They formed associations, he reported, to refuse to work for “so low a price as formerly but they will raise the price by their own authority” and take “certain pains and punishments” against those who do not join them. This seemed to Beaumanoir a terrible act against the common good, “for the common interest cannot suffer that work should stop.” He advocated that such persons should be arrested and kept long in prison and afterward fined 60 sous each, the traditional fine for rupture of the “public peace.”

The most persistent ferment was among the weavers and clothworkers of Flanders, where economic expansion had been most intense. The textile industry was the automobile industry of the Middle Ages, and Flanders was a hothouse of the tensions and antagonisms brewed in urban society by capitalist development.

Once united by a common craft, the guild of masters, journeymen, and apprentices had spread apart into entrepreneurs and hired hands divided by class hatred. The guild was now a corporation run by the employers in which the workers had no voice. The magnates, who married into the nobility and bought country estates in addition to their city real estate, developed into a patrician class that controlled the government of the towns and managed it in their own interest. They founded churches and hospitals, built the great Cloth Halls, paved the streets, and created the canal system. But they made up the greater part of municipal expenses from sales taxes on wine, beer, peat, and grain, which fell most heavily on the poor. They favored each other in governing groups like the Thirty-nine of Ghent, named for life and serving in annual rotation of three parties of thirteen, or the twelve magistrates of Arras, who rotated among themselves every four months, or the oligarchy of the Hundred Peers of Rouen, which appointed the mayor and town councillors each year. The lower bourgeois who made fortunes and pressed upward could frequently penetrate the monopoly, but the artisans, despised as “blue nails” and vulnerable to unemployment, had no political rights.

Beneath the cry of protest much of medieval life was supportive because it was lived collectively in infinite numbers of groups, orders, associations, brotherhoods. Never was man less alone. Even in bedrooms married couples often slept in company with their servants and children. Except for hermits and recluses, privacy was unknown.

As nobles had their orders of chivalry, the common man had the

confrérie or brotherhood of his trade or village, which surrounded him at every crux of life. Usually numbering from 20 to 100 members, these groups were associations for charity and social service as well as for entertainment and religious observance in lay life. They accompanied a member to the town gates when he went off on a pilgrimage and marched in his funeral when he died. If a man was condemned to be executed, fellow members accompanied him to the scaffold. If he drowned accidentally as in a case at Bordeaux, they searched the Garonne for three days for his body. If he died insolvent, the association furnished his shroud and the costs of the funeral and helped to support the widow and children. The furriers of Paris paid sick members three sous a week during incapacity for work and three sous for a week of convalescence. The associations' money came from dues scaled according to income and payable weekly, monthly, or quarterly.

The brotherhoods staged religious plays, furnished the music, and served as actors and stagehands. They held competitions, sports and games, awarded prizes, and invited the orator or preacher for special occasions. On feast days, after strewing the streets with flowers, the *confréries* joined in the processions, each marching in a body in the bright colors of its own costume, preceded by its banner and statue or portrait of its patron saint. Members were bound by rites and oaths; in some brotherhoods, they wore masks to conceal identity, making all within the group equal.

When the *confréries* donated church windows or commissioned murals, choir stalls, or illuminated books, the members could take pride in being patrons of art just like the nobles and rich magnates. Through their association they could buy merit as benefactors, adopting a hospital, distributing alms and food to the poor, or undertaking the charge of certain categories—as when the grocers of Paris supported the blind and the drapers supported prisoners in the city jail. The *confréries* provided a context of life that was intensely sociable, with the solace and sometimes the abrasions that sociability implies.

In 1320 the misery of the rural poor in the wake of the famines burst out in a strange hysterical mass movement called the Pastoureaux, for the shepherds who started it. Though less uprooted than the urban poor, the peasant too felt oppressed by the rich and was forever struggling against the lord's effort to grasp by one means or another more of the peasant's product or more of his services. Cases in manor courts going back to 1250 show peasants in concerted deliberate refusal to

plow the lord's field, thresh his grain, turn his hay, or grind at his mill. Persisting year after year, despite fines and punishment, they denied bondage, disposed of land without consent, joined in bands to assault the bailiff or to rescue a fellow peasant from the stocks.

Oppression of the peasant by the landowner troubled the conscience of the time and evoked warnings. "Ye nobles are like ravening wolves," wrote Jacques de Vitry, a 13th century author of sermons and moral tales. "Therefore shall ye howl in hell . . . who despoil your subjects and live on the blood and sweat of the poor." Whatever the peasant amasses in a year, "the knight, the noble devours in an hour." He imposes illicit taxes and heavy exactions. De Vitry warned the great not to scorn the humble or inspire their hate for "if they can aid us, they can also do us harm. You know that many serfs have killed their masters or have burned their houses."

A prophecy current in the time of the famine foretold that the poor would rise against the powerful, overthrow the Church and an unspecified great monarchy, and after much bloodshed a new age of unity under one cross would dawn. Combining with vague talk of a new crusade and preached among the poor by an apostate monk and an unfrocked priest, the prophecy "as suddenly and unexpectedly as a storm" swept the peasants and rootless poor of northern France into a mass marching southward toward an imagined embarkation for the Holy Land. Gathering adherents and arms as they went, they stormed castles and abbeys, burned town halls and tax records, opened prisons, and when they reached the south threw themselves in concentrated assault upon the Jews.

Peasant indebtedness to Jews for loans to tide over bad times or enable the purchase of tools or a plow was of long standing. The peasants had thought the debt wiped out when Philip the Fair expelled the Jews in 1306, but his son Louis X brought them back on terms that made him a partner with a two-thirds share in the recovery of their debts. Exacerbating an old grudge, this drove the Pastoureaux, enthusiastically aided by the populace, to the slaughter of almost every Jew from Bordeaux to Albi. Despite the King's order that the Jews be protected, local authorities could not restrain the attacks and in some cases joined them.

That the Jews were unholy was a belief so ingrained by the Church that the most devout persons were the harshest in their antipathy, none more so than St. Louis. If the Jews were unholy, then killing and looting them was holy work. Lepers too were targets of the Pastoureaux on the theory that they had joined the Jews in a horrible com-

pact to poison the wells, and their persecution was made official by a royal ordinance of 1321.

Menacing Avignon, attacking priests, threatening to seize Church property, the Pastoureaux spread the fear of insurrection that freezes the blood of the privileged in any era when the mob appears. Excommunicated by Pope John XXII, they were finally suppressed when he forbade anyone to provision them on pain of death and sanctioned the use of force against them. That was sufficient, and the Pastoureaux ended like every outbreak of the poor sooner or later in the Middle Ages, with corpses hanging from the trees.

In the woe of the century no factor caused more trouble than the persistent lag between the growth of the state and the means of state financing. While centralized government was developing, taxation was still encased in the concept that taxes represented an emergency measure requiring consent. Having exhausted every other source of funds, Philip the Fair in 1307 turned on the Templars in the most sensational episode of his reign. The result brought a curse, as his contemporaries believed, upon their country, and what people believe about their own time becomes a factor in its history.

No downfall was to be so complete and spectacular as that of this arrogant order of monastic knighthood. Formed during the crusades to be the sword arm of the Church in defense of the Holy Land, the Templars had moved from ideals of asceticism and poverty to immense resources and an international web of power outside the regular channels of allegiance. Tax exempt from the start, they had amassed riches as bankers for the Holy See and as moneylenders at lower interest rates than the Lombards and Jews. They were not known for charity and, unlike the Knights of St. John, supported no hospitals. With 2,000 members in France and the largest treasury in northern Europe, they maintained headquarters in the Temple, their formidable fortress in Paris.

Not only their money but their existence as a virtually autonomous enclave invited destruction. Their sinister reputation, grown from the secrecy of their rituals, supplied the means. In a pounce like a tiger's leap, Philip seized the Temple in Paris and had every Templar in France arrested on the same night. To justify confiscation of the Order's property, the main charge was heresy, in proof of which the King's prosecutors dragged into the light every dark superstition and fearful imagining of sorcery and Devil-worship that lay along the roots of the medieval mind. The Templars were accused by suborned wit-

nesses of bestiality, idol-worship, denial of the sacraments; of selling their souls to the Devil and adoring him in the form of a huge cat; of sodomy with each other and intercourse with demons and succubi; of requiring initiates to deny God, Christ, and the Virgin, to spit three times, urinate, and trample on the cross, and to give the "kiss of shame" to the prior of the Order on the mouth, penis, and buttocks. To strengthen resolution for these various practices, they were said to drink a powder made from the ashes of dead members and their own illegitimate children.

Elements of witchcraft, magic, and sorcery were taken for granted in medieval life, but Philip's use of them to prove heresy in the seven-year melodrama of the Templars' trials gave them fearful currency. Thereafter charges of black arts became a common means to bring down an enemy and a favored method of the Inquisition in its pursuit of heretics, especially those with property worth confiscating. In Toulouse and Carcassonne during the next 35 years the Inquisition prosecuted 1,000 persons on such charges and burned 600. French justice was corrupted and the pattern laid for the fanatic witchcraft persecutions of subsequent centuries.

Philip bullied the first Avignon Pope, Clement V, into authorizing the trials of the Templars, and with this authority put them to atrocious tortures to extract confessions. Medieval justice was scrupulous about holding proper trials and careful not to sentence without proof of guilt, but it achieved proof by confession rather than evidence, and confession was routinely obtained by torture. The Templars, many of them old men, were racked, thumbscrewed, starved, hung with weights until joints were dislocated, had teeth and fingernails pulled one by one, bones broken by the wedge, feet held over flames, always with pauses in between and the "question" put again each day until confession was wrung or the victim died. Thirty-six died under the treatment; some committed suicide. Broken by torture, the Grand Master, Jacques de Molay, and 122 others confessed to spitting on the cross or some other variation of crime put into their mouths by the Inquisitors. "And he would have confessed that he had slain God Himself if they had asked him that," acknowledged a chronicler.

The process dragged on through prolonged jockeying over jurisdiction by Pope, King, and Inquisition while the victims, hung with chains and barely fed, were hauled in and out of their dungeons for further trials and humiliations. Sixty-seven who found the courage to recant their confessions were burned alive as relapsed heretics. After futile squirming by Clement V, the Templars' Order in France and all its branches in England, Scotland, Aragon, Castile, Portugal, Germany,

and the Kingdom of Naples were abolished by the Council of Vienne in 1311-12. Officially its property was transferred to the Knights Hospitallers of St. John, but the presence of Philip the Fair sitting at the Pope's right hand at Vienne indicates that he was not left out of the arrangement. Afterward, indeed, the Knights of St. John paid him an enormous sum as a debt which he claimed from the Templars.

The end was not yet. In March 1314 the Grand Master, who had been the King's friend and godfather of his daughter, was conducted with his chief lieutenant to a scaffold erected in the plaza in front of the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris to reaffirm their confessions and be sentenced to life imprisonment by the papal legates. Instead, before the packed assembly of nobles, clergy, and commoners, they proclaimed their own and the Order's innocence. Deprived of his final justification, the King ordered both men to be burned at the stake. As the faggots flamed next day, Jacques de Molay again proclaimed his innocence and cried aloud that God would be his avenger. According to the tradition that developed later, he called down a curse upon the King and his descendants to the thirteenth generation, and, in the last words to be heard as he burned to death, summoned Philip and Pope Clement to meet him before God's judgment seat within a year. Within a month Clement did in fact die, followed seven months later in November by Philip, in the midst of life, aged 46, from uncertain causes some weeks after a horseback accident. The legend of the Templar's curse developed, as most legends do, to explain strange coincidences after the event. The symptoms reported at Philip's deathbed have since been judged indicative of a cerebral stroke, but to awed contemporaries the cause was indubitably the Templar's curse that had floated upward with the smoke from the pyre in the red light of the setting sun.

As if carrying out the curse on Philip's posterity, the Capetian dynasty suddenly withered in the strange triplicate destiny of Philip the Fair's sons. Succeeding each other as Louis X, Philip V, and Charles IV, they reigned less than six years apiece and died aged 27, 28, and 33 respectively, each without leaving a male successor despite a total of six wives among them. Jeanne, the four-year-old daughter of the eldest brother, was passed over by her uncle, who had himself crowned as Philip V. After the event he convoked an assembly of notables from the three estates and the University of Paris, which duly approved his right on the principle, formulated for the occasion, that "a woman does not succeed to the throne of France." Thus was born

the momentous Salic "Law" that was to create a permanent bar to the succession of women where none had existed before.

The death of the last of the three brothers in 1328 left the succession to the crown open, with results that led to the longest war—so far—in Western history. Three claimants were available—a grandson and two nephews of Philip the Fair. The grandson was the sixteen-year-old Edward III of England, son of Philip the Fair's daughter Isabel, who had married Edward II. She was generally believed to have conspired with her lover in the murder of her husband the King, and to exercise a malign influence upon her son. His claim of direct lineage, vigorously put forward, met no welcomers in France not because it derived through a woman but because the woman in question was feared and disliked and in any case no one wanted the King of England on the throne of France.

The other two claimants, sons respectively of a brother and a half-brother of Philip the Fair, were Philip of Valois and Philip of Evreux. The first, a man of 35, son of an illustrious father, well known to the court and nobles of France, was easily the preferred choice and was confirmed as king by the princes and peers of France without overt opposition. As Philip VI he began the Valois line. Both of his rivals formally accepted the choice, Edward by coming in person to place his hands between those of Philip VI in homage for the Duchy of Guienne. The other Philip was recompensed by the Kingdom of Navarre and marriage to the bypassed Jeanne.

Though Philip VI maintained court in great state, he had not grown up expecting to be king and lacked something of the regal character. He seemed troubled by some uneasiness about his right to the crown, which was hardly soothed by his contemporaries' habit of referring to him as *le roi trouvé* (the found king) as if he had been discovered in the bulrushes. Or perhaps the lurking rights of his female cousins threatened him. He was dominated by his wife, the "bad lame Queen," Jeanne de Bourgogne, a malicious woman neither loved nor respected although she was a patron of the arts and of all scholars who came to court. Very devout like his great-grandfather St. Louis, though not his equal in intelligence or will, Philip was fascinated by the all-absorbing question of the Beatific Vision: whether the souls of the blessed see the face of God immediately upon entering Heaven or whether they have to wait until the Day of Judgment.

The question was of real concern because the intercession of the saints on behalf of man was effective only if they had been admitted into the presence of God. Shrines possessing saints' relics relied for

revenue on popular confidence that a particular saint was in a position to make a personal appeal to the Almighty. Philip VI twice summoned theologians to debate the issue before him and fell into a "mighty cholera" when the papal legate to Paris conveyed Pope John XXII's doubts of the Beatific Vision. "The King reprimanded him sharply and threatened to burn him like an Albigenian unless he retracted, and said further that if the Pope really held such views he would regard him as a heretic." A worried man, Philip wrote to the Pope that to deny the Beatific Vision was to destroy belief in the intercession of the Virgin and saints. Fortunately for the King's peace of mind, a papal commission decided after thorough investigation that the souls of the Blessed did indeed come face to face with the Divine Essence.

Philip's reign started well and the realm prospered. The effect of famine and epidemics was passing, evil portents were forgotten, perpetually contentious Flanders was brought back under French control by a victorious campaign in Philip's first year. The crown's relations with five of the six great fiefs—Flanders, Burgundy, Brittany, and, in the south, Armagnac and Foix—were reasonably firm. Only Guienne (or Aquitaine), which the Kings of England held as a fief of the Kings of France, was a perennial source of conflict. Here the English effort to expand pressed continually against the French effort to re-absorb the fief.

As the conflict came to a head, it brought about in 1338 a marriage that connected the Coucys with yet another reigning house, the Hapsburgs of Austria. This was the union from which Enguerrand VII was to be born. It was arranged by Philip VI himself, who was seeking allies in the coming struggle with England. In 1337 Philip had declared Guienne confiscated, whereupon Edward III announced himself the rightful King of France and prepared for war. Edward's renewed claim was not so much the reason for war as an excuse to resolve by war the endless conflict over the sovereignty of Guienne. While English forces landed in Flanders to prepare for the assault, both sides feverishly sought allies in the Low Countries and across the Rhine.

King Philip was concerned not only to gather allies but to ensure the loyalty of the strategically located barony of Coucy. As a rich prize, he obtained for Enguerrand VI the hand of Catherine of Austria, daughter of Duke Leopold I and granddaughter through her mother of the equally illustrious Amadeus V, Count of Savoy. The house of Savoy were autonomous rulers of a region extending from France to Italy astride the Alps, and themselves the center of a princely web of marriage threads connecting with crowns all over Europe—and

beyond. One of Catherine's seven aunts was the wife of Andronicus III Paleologus, Emperor of Byzantium.

Marriages were the fabric of international as well as inter-noble relations, the primary source of territory, sovereignty, and alliance, and the major business of medieval diplomacy. The relations of countries and rulers depended not at all on common borders or natural interest but on dynastic connections and fantastic cousinships which could make a prince of Hungary heir to the throne of Naples and an English prince claimant to Castile. At every point of the loom sovereigns were thrusting in their shuttles, carrying the strand of a son or a daughter, and these, whizzing back and forth, wove the artificial fabric that created as many conflicting claims and hostilities as it did bonds. Valois of France, Plantagenets of England, Luxemburghs of Bohemia, Wittelsbachs of Bavaria, Hapsburgs of Austria, Visconti of Milan, the houses of Navarre, Castile, and Aragon, Dukes of Brittany, Counts of Flanders, Hainault, and Savoy were all entwined in a crisscrossing network, in the making of which two things were never considered: the sentiments of the parties to the marriage, and the interest of the populations involved.

Although the free consent of marriage partners was theoretically required by the Church, and the "I will" considered the doctrinal essence of the marriage contract made before a priest, practical politics overlooked this requirement, sometimes with unhappy results. Emperor Ludwig in betrothing his daughter before she had learned to talk, offered to speak for her and was later considered to have earned the judgment of God when she remained dumb all her life.

Rulers likewise paid no attention whatever—with predictable results—to the prohibition of consanguinity in marriage, whose risks were well understood and forbidden by the Church within the fourth degree. The prohibition was remembered only when it became desirable to break a betrothal that had become inconvenient or to discard an inconvenient spouse. For a fee or political favor proportionate to the rank of the petitioner, the Church invariably proved agreeable either to setting aside the consanguinity rule to permit a marriage, or recalling it as grounds for divorce.

To negotiate the financial terms of the Hapsburg-Coucy marriage required two treaties in 1337–38 between the King of France and the Duke of Austria. Duke Leopold gave his daughter a dowry of 40,000 livres, while King Philip assigned to her and her issue an annuity of 2,000 livres from the royal treasury. To Enguerrand VI the King made a gift of 10,000 livres plus promise of another 10,000 to acquit him of debts. Enguerrand in turn promised to settle 6,000 livres upon

his wife and, what was of the essence to the King, to lead his vassals in the royal host in defense of the realm against Edward of England.

At its start, the war hardly boded a dangerous contest, since France was the dominant power of Europe whose military glory in her own eyes, as in others', far outshone that of England or any other country, and whose population of 21 million was five times England's of slightly more than 4 million. Nevertheless, possession of Aquitaine and alliance with Flanders gave Edward two footholds at the borders of France, and lent a force of more than mere words to the insolent challenge he addressed to "Philip of Valois who calls himself King of France." Neither party could know that they were opening a war that would outlast both of them, that would develop a life of its own, defying parleys and truces and treaties designed to stop it, that would drag on into their sons' lives and the lives of their grandsons and great-grandsons, and great-great-grandsons to the fifth generation, that would bring havoc to both sides and become, as its damage spread through Europe, the final torment of the closing Middle Ages.

Enguerrand VI had barely time to beget a child before he was summoned to war in 1339. In the north the English were advancing from Flanders and a party of 1,500 men-at-arms besieged the castle of Oisy belonging to the Coucys. So ardent was the defense of Enguerrand's vassals that the English were forced to withdraw, even though their leader was Sir John Chandos, who was to prove the most notable military figure on the English side. In revenge for his setback, he burned and sacked three other towns and smaller castles within the Coucy domain. Meanwhile Enguerrand VI had joined the King in the defense of Tournai on the Flemish border, and in 1340 while a rather feckless campaign was pursuing its way, his son, the seventh and last Enguerrand, was born.

Chapter 3

Youth and Chivalry

Although doubtless precious to his parents as firstborn son and heir of a great dynasty, the infant Enguerrand VII was probably not the adored object of the coddling and tenderness that babies are by nature supposed to inspire. Of all the characteristics in which the medieval age differs from the modern, none is so striking as the comparative absence of interest in children. Emotion in relation to them rarely appears in art or literature or documentary evidence. The Christ child is of course repeatedly pictured, usually in his mother's arms, but prior to the mid-14th century he is generally held stiffly, away from her body, by a mother who is aloof even when nursing. Or else the holy infant lies alone on the ground, swaddled or sometimes quite naked and uncovered, while an unsmiling mother gazes at him abstractedly. Her separateness from the child was meant to indicate his divinity. If the ordinary mother felt a warmer, more intimate emotion, it found small expression in medieval art because the attitudes of motherhood were preempted by the Virgin Mary.

In literature the chief role of children was to die, usually drowned, smothered, or abandoned in a forest on the orders of some king fearing prophecy or mad husband testing a wife's endurance. Women appear rarely as mothers. They are flirts, bawds, and deceiving wives in the popular tales, saints and martyrs in the drama, unattainable objects of passionate and illicit love in the romances. Occasionally motherhood may break through, as when an English preacher, to point a moral in a sermon, tells how a mother "that hath a childe in wynter when the childees hondes ben cold, the modur taketh hym a stree [straw] or a rasche and byddeth him warme itt, not for love of the stree to hete . . . but for to hete the childees honds." An occasional illustration or carving in stone shows parents teaching a child to walk, a peasant mother combing or delousing her child's hair with his head in her lap, a