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978-1-108-01053-5 - Medieval Panorama: The English Scene from Conquest to Reformation

G. G. Coulton

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### Medieval Panorama

First published in 1938 and reprinted many times, this book by the distinguished medievalist G.G. Coulton (1858–1947) was described by *The Times Literary Supplement* as ‘a triumph of presentation ... This survey is in short an achievement notable alike for its erudition and also for the grace with which such learning is here so lightly carried. ... it would be hard to discover a better introduction to the everyday life of England during those pregnant centuries between the Norman Conquest and the Reformation.’ Fifty-two chapters based on a lifetime of research cover every aspect of medieval life, from the emergence of feudalism to ‘the bursting of the dykes’ at the Reformation. The focus is largely on England, but the European context is also clearly defined in this remarkable synthesis: as a review in *The Observer* said at first publication, ‘There is no one else like Dr Coulton.’

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# Medieval Panorama

*The English Scene  
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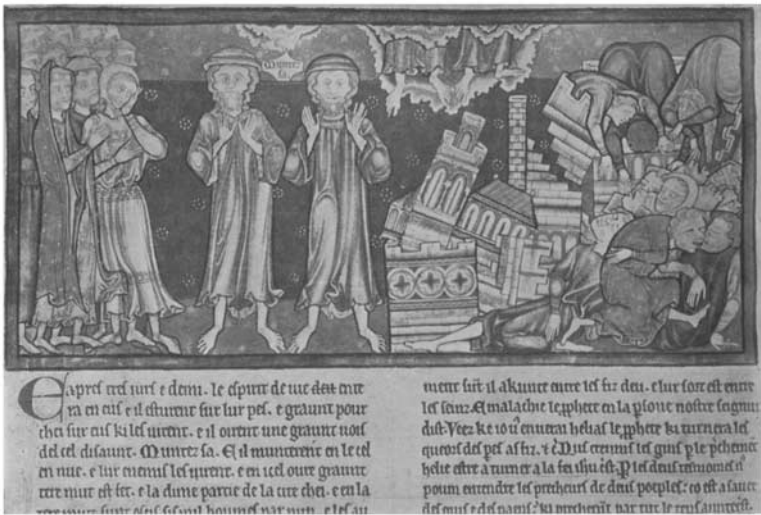
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## Plate I

Two miniatures from the Trinity College *Apocalypse*

*These illustrate the horrors which are to come in the last days of this world before the great battle of Armageddon. The top picture represents Rev. vi. 12, and the lower represents Rev. xi. 11. Readers may be interested to follow this in the old French version of this MS., which dates from about A.D. 1250*

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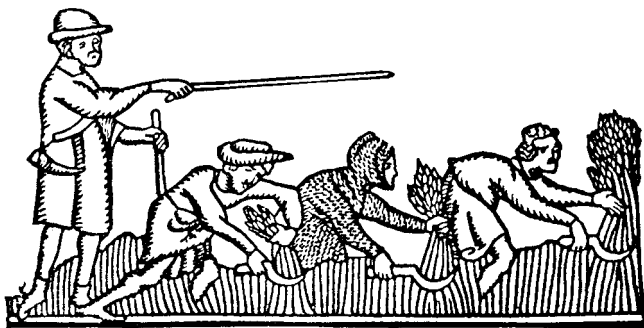
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by

G. G. COULTON



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## TEXT-FIGURES

Full descriptions are given here of the subjects and sources of these illustrations

CONDEMNATION OF HONORIUS I page 32

From Camb. Univ. MS. Mm. 5. 21. f. 328, written in 1489.

Portion of one of the lessons for the Feast of St Leo II (June 28th). It describes, in the last four lines here, how he solemnly approved the decrees of the Sixth General Council (Constantinople, 678), "in which Synod condemnation was pronounced upon Cyrus, Sergius, Honorius, Pyrrhus, Paul and Peter, with Macarius and his disciple Stephen; also upon Polychronius, a modern\* Simon; all of whom asserted or preached one will and operation in the Lord Jesus Christ, or who in future should preach or defend that doctrine" [of Monotheletism]. The post-Reformation Breviary, revised by the Council of Trent, gives only "Cyrus, Sergius and Pyrrhus were condemned for preaching one only will and operation in Christ", and there breaks off.

\* Here this present facsimile breaks off. This whole account in the Breviary is transcribed from the official *Liber Diurnus* of the ancient Roman Chancery.

MUMMERS AND MINSTRELS page 97

From J. Strutt, *Sports and Pastimes* (1810), plate xvi. (Fourteenth century.)

GRATIAN'S INSPIRATION page 125

From the folio edition of Gratian's *Decretum* by François Fradin [1510].

The monk of Bologna who, shortly before 1150, compiled that collection of decrees and decretals which, until the present century, formed the first volume of the *Corpus Juris Canonici*. This frontispiece to one of the finest early printed editions shows him writing at the dictation (spiritually speaking) of the Great Cloud of Witnesses—Popes, Cardinals, Bishops and Fathers of the Church assembled in innumerable Synods. Incidentally it represents a model bedroom-study of the later Middle Ages.

THE FRIAR page 152

From the Ellesmere MS. of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, f. 80 v°.

THE POOR PARSON 205

*Ibid.* f. 210 v°.

THE KNIGHT 235

From the early fourteenth-century windows in Tewkesbury choir; one of the great house of De Clare.

THE SQUIRE 238

Ellesmere MS. f. 110 v°.

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## THE HUNTING MONK

page 272

*Ibid.* f. 173.

## THE PRIORESS

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*Ibid.* f. 152 v<sup>o</sup>.

## MIEVEAL FORTIFICATIONS

300

Dinkelsbühl, from Merian's *Topographia Bavariae*. (Frankfurt a/m. 1644.)

Dinkelsbühl had in 1500 a population of between 5000 and 6000; perhaps nearer to the latter. Cambridge at that time had perhaps 4000, and Lynn nearly as many.

## THE KING'S DITCH AT CAMBRIDGE

page 301

From Richard Lyne's map of 1574.

Note that "Gunwell" (i.e. Gonville Hall) is named separately from Caius College, and St Sepulchre's (the Round Church) is called "St Pulcheur".

## EAST ANGLIA ABOUT 1350

page 328

From a map of that date in the Bodleian Library.

This whole map of England, Wales and Scotland is procurable at 1s. 6d. from the office of H.M. Ordnance Survey, by whose permission this portion is here reproduced.

## AUTO-DE-FE OF JEWS

page 364

From a fourteenth-century MS. of the Chronicle of Abbot Gilles li Muisis, figured in De Smet, *Corpus Chronicorum Flandriae*, vol. 1, p. 348.

## OXFORD STREETS

page 399

From H. E. Salter, *Map of Medieval Oxford* (1934), plate 3.

The shaded portions mark the present sites of two colleges and a church. Underneath these may be seen the multiplicity of medieval tenements and shops, worked out by Dr Salter's marvellous industry.

## THE TYPE AND FIGURE OF JUSTICE

page 415

From Bellenden's translation of Boece's *History of Scotland*, printed about 1536.

It is thus headed; and, below, five lines of Latin poetry are added, to the following effect:

"Behold, I, the type and figure of Justice, ascend thus mine own tribunal. With right-hand uplifted I support those who maintain truth, and this my lily is their reward. But if any man be otherwise minded, my downward left-hand sends him down to the waters of Styx, and to the edge of the Sword."

## EBRIETAS FRANGIT QUIDQUID SAPIENTIA TANGIT

page 451

Traced from the scratch in Ashwell Church, Herts., hand of fourteenth or fifteenth century.

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## ILLUSTRATIONS

## LYNN TOWN HALL

page 526

On the right, the Trinity Guildhall which Margery saw rise from its ruins after the fire; on the left, an Elizabethan addition. For this and the following figure I am indebted to the distinguished Lynn artist of to-day, Mr Walter Dexter, R.B.A.

## ST MARGARET'S, LYNN

page 527

The great parish church which a contemporary Hull official described as a "cathedral". See my *Art and the Reformation*, p. 218.

## A MASON'S SIGNATURE

page 564

From the south jamb of the tower arch at Coton, Cambs.

It reads "[compasses] Andrew Swynnnow began this first on St Wulstan's day, 1481". Swinhoe is still a not uncommon name in the neighbourhood.

## MASONS' MARKS AT GLOUCESTER

page 566

From the triforium galleries, which have always been sheltered.

It will be noted that some stones bear no marks; probably because these masons were on the permanent abbey staff, and needed to give no vouchers.

## FROM AN ARCHITECT'S NOTEBOOK

page 569

Cat and crayfish sketched for carving purposes by Villard de Honnecourt, about A.D. 1250. From plate XIII of his *Album*, edited by Lassus and Willis.

## A THIRTEENTH-CENTURY ARCHITECT

page 570

Eudes de Montreuil, master-mason at Notre-Dame-de-Paris, from a tracing of his funeral slab now destroyed. (Lethaby, *Medieval Art*, p. 252.)

## THE TUMBLER

page 581

From J. Strutt, *Sports and Pastimes* (1810), plate XIX. (Fourteenth century.)

## THE WIFE-BEATER

page 616

From a MS. of 1456 in A. Schultz, *Deutsches Leben*, fig. 344.

## THE WIFE OF BATH

621

Ellesmere MS. f. 76.

## MAIDENLY DEPORTMENT

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From T. Wright, *Womankind in Western Europe*, p. 158.

## LADIES HAWKING

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From J. Strutt, *Sports and Pastimes* (1810), plate III.

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## THE TREE OF CONSANGUINITY

page 634

From Gratian's *Decretum* (François Fradin [1510], fol. 385).

It will be seen that the right- and left-hand branches represent not only individuals, but whole classes, who cannot lawfully intermarry. This is expressed by the editor in a Latin hexameter:

“Non tangunt dextros qui stant in parte sinistra.”

“Those who stand on the left side touch not those on the right.”

## HELL-PAINS

page 712

From *The Little Book of the Dying Man* (Augsburg, Sorg, about 1480).

The text runs: “This fourth figure telleth of the great and grievous pains which the devils inflict upon damned and lost souls.”

## TWO ARCHITECTS OF ST-OUEN AT ROUEN

page 731

## WANDERING MASONS IN NORFOLK

732

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## PREFACE

*He that contemneth small things shall fall by little and little*  
(*Ecclesiasticus*, XIX. 1)

ALMOST three generations ago, Carlyle complained that historians seldom tell us how our forefathers actually lived and thought: "What all want to know is the condition of our fellow-men; and, strange to say, it is the thing of all least understood, or to be understood as matters go." Even in those days, no doubt, the public had Macaulay's classical Third Chapter; and J. R. Green's more recent work is priceless; but much more remains to do. Too rarely does any great archivist, like Siméon Luce, condescend (or, as some might say, rise) to pregnant exercises of imagination. The popularization of the linen shirt in the fourteenth century (argues Luce) marks not only an obvious advance in personal hygiene, but also an impetus presently given to the manufacture of rag-paper, and thus to literature; so that this century of social refinement became "the worthy precursor, or rather the indispensable preparative, of the age of printing".\* Right or wrong, a suggestion like this is certainly stimulating, and deserves our gratitude.

It may be natural and right that universities should spend more time and labour upon the collection and minute criticism of evidence than upon weaving the threads into historical tapestry. But the fact is so; although to-day's public thirsts more than ever, probably, for history that shall be picturesque, yet reasonably accurate. The intelligent reader—professional or business man or artisan, who has some leisure for quiet thoughtful browsing—is too often puzzled to see what it is all about, or is even driven to wonder whether the writer himself sees quite clearly. The Cinema has indeed stepped in to supply the demand, but only in its own garish fashion. The most successful film can present little more than superficialities; moreover, even among these, there is an almost irresistible temptation to falsify the proportions for the sake of spectacular effect. For many years past I felt this very strongly. Then circumstances seemed practically to command "Now, or never": and this volume marks the reaction to that

\* *La Jeunesse de Bertrand du Guesclin* (1882), p. 64.



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## PREFACE

challenge. There is little here which I have not said already before widely different audiences, during the past thirty years. Much, I need hardly say, has been learned from pupils and critics. The book makes no pretence either to exhaustiveness or to finality. It tries to bring some sort of order into a mass of details, each interesting in itself, but resting necessarily, in most cases, upon other men's researches and judgments. It looks forward to correction and amplification by others; but it hopes to supply, for the time being, the sort of scaffolding which the author would have been very glad to find before him fifty years ago.

It is difficult, even at the present day, to find one's way through the medieval jungle without a good deal of direct axe-work; but those controversial matters are relegated as far as possible to the notes. References are given only for points on which the reader might wish to verify the statement for himself from the original record; or, again, where the subject is interesting enough to tempt him farther than I have found possible to go within my limited space.

My debts are too many to acknowledge here in full; but I must specially thank Professor G. R. Potter, Professor R. W. Chambers, Mr H. S. Bennett and Mr J. E. A. Jolliffe, who have read my proofs critically. The officials of the University Press have given me the most ungrudging help and invaluable advice: and I owe warm gratitude to my fellow-townsmen, Mr Walter Dexter, R.B.A., for his admirable miniatures of Lynn Town Hall and St Margaret's Church.

G. G. COULTON

*August 1938*