

Meet symbol of the senses and the soul,
And the whole pile grim with the Northman's thought
Of life and death, and doom, life's equal fee.—
These were before me and I gazed abashed,
Child of an age that lectures, not creates,
Plastering our swallow nests on the awful past,
And twittering round the work of larger men,
As we had builded what we but deface.

Italian painting, which grew into such a long roll of famous masters, took its rise in the Thirteenth Century with Ciambue and his pupil Giotto, who is said to equal Raphael in creative genius. Da Vinci, Raphael, Fra Angelico, and Michael Angelo, while not appearing until a century or two later, may in a sense be considered products of the Thirteenth Century, inasmuch as their work was largely inspired by its sentiments.

The political, social, and economic condition of Europe in the Thirteenth Century was immeasurably in advance of that of any previous period, and, in fact, was not in any equalled until the advent of the Nineteenth Century. Its intellectual life is comparable to that of any of the great eras of enlightenment. But in the essential element of civilization, the moral element, what time can compare with the Thirteenth Century?

It would be sufficient commentary on the moral condition of the people of Western Europe in the Thirteenth Century, to say that all the great men of that time were saints, and all the saints great men. I am not seduced by my admiration for those times into thinking that Europe was then enjoying a long reign of sinless blessedness. No, the old Adam was then rank in men, as it has been since the sin in Eden. But what can be said is, that there has been no other period since time began when the supernatural held such sway over the minds and hearts of men. Religion then was not separated from morality. Deeds were the expression of creed. Religion was the supreme affair. The world beyond the grave was an ever-present reality. Men held most intimate commerce with it. Faith, the time spirit of the age, co-ordinated all their energies in every field of activity and gave a definite motive to their life and institutions. Saints were the heroes of those times. The saints engrossed all the popular attention. Men in all the walks of life—kings and peasants, poets and tradesmen, architects and monks,—were all alike urged to action and guided in their conduct by the spirit of faith, a spirit which they tried, as men at no other time tried, to externalize in their lives and work.