

The Youth of Catalonia

AT THE TIME WHEN, IN 1213, THE ARMED FORCES OF France had defeated the Provençal armies, taking full advantage of the Papal excommunication and the consequent preaching of the Crusade, a small boy of five years was living in captivity, under the custody of Simon de Montfort, the head of the victorious French. This boy, Jaume (James) by name, was the son of the late King Pere of Aragon and of Countess Maria of Montpellier. During his early childhood Jaume saw the horrors of one of the most inhuman wars within memory. And he learned the great lesson that no power could stand against the combined efforts of Italy—the Church of Rome of his time—the ruthless pugnacity of the French, and the diplomacy of Castile. When some years later he succeeded to the throne of Aragon, he carefully avoided being involved in any conflict which might league against his country the former enemies of his father. At times he was of necessity drawn into conflict with one or other of the powers which had defeated the people of Languedoc, but he never exposed himself to hostilities with two of them at the same time. To be on good terms with France, he was forced to abandon his rights to his own country, the lands of Provence; this was a slow process which culminated in the signing of the treaty of Corbeil in 1258, by which he transferred to Saint Louis, King of France, all his rights over Southern Gaul, excepting only his own town of Montpellier. This treaty was the last of a series of events bearing witness to the masterly diplomacy of the Queen-mother of France, the former

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Princess Blanche of Castile. Every attempt of the Southern noblemen or of the King of Aragon during the minority of King Louis found Blanche vigilant and ready for action. When the army of King Henry III of England was defeated by the French at Taillebourg and Saintes in 1242, the last hope of the Provençal lords was abandoned. The royal house of France was to be the only sovereign of ancient Gaul.

The policy of King Jaume I should be regarded realistically. He knew the dangers which his country underwent in his father's time, mainly through having lost influence in the Vatican; therefore, in order to be on good terms with the Church, Jaume admitted to his country the Order of St. Dominic and a new form of spiritual control, the Inquisition, recently introduced in France, Italy and Germany. To prevent new troubles arising from foreign agents, the Churchmen who were to be in charge of this religious instrument were from the beginning chosen from his own countrymen only; great care was also taken to select men combining a true Franciscan modesty and charity with that great capacity for work and organizing ability which are characteristic of the best Dominican tradition.

RAMON DE PENYAFORT

The first great figure of that period and one of the outstanding representatives of Catalan mentality of all times, was Ramon de Penyafort. His individual contribution to the consolidation of Catalan nationality and to the development of Western civilization was of such importance as to call for some account of his personality here. During his lifetime the efforts of his country changed their direction: troubles in Gaul were at an end, but instead there came expansion into the lands occupied by the Saracens. In 1229, the Balearic Isles were taken

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from the Moors, and Catalans settled in their place. Thus they repeated in Majorca the policy of Louis le Debonnaire, who more than five centuries before had settled Provençals in Catalonia. Since that time the Majorcans have been pure Catalans, for they did not mix with the Mohammedans, whom they expelled in a ruthless manner. In 1238 the Moorish kingdom of Valencia was conquered by the armies of King Jaume I. This time the Aragonese joined the Catalans and populated the places the former had occupied, mainly to the south of Aragon. The language of these regions is now modern Aragonese, which may be considered a dialect of Castilian or Spanish. The rest of the kingdom of Valencia was populated by Catalans; this explains why eight-tenths of that land is and has been Catalan through history.¹ During these years of expansion Ramon de Penyafort was the King's Counsellor and his figure dominates the whole of Jaume's life.

Penyafort was born near Barcelona in 1175. He first studied in Barcelona and later went to the University of Bologna to learn jurisprudence. In 1222 he entered the Order of St. Dominic which had recently been introduced in Catalonia. In 1232 Pope Gregory IX expedited the Bull *Declinante jam mundi vespere*, by which the Inquisition was established; the Bull was sent to Espàrrac, Archbishop of Tarragona, but no further steps were taken in Catalonia until 1242 when Penyafort prescribed the rules by which the 'perquisition' or 'inquisition' was to be carried out in Catalonia. Had the system been followed as it was established by him, the Inquisition would never have developed into the scandalous institution of later days. Heretics under examination were to be treated humanely, because the final object of the investigation was to reform *ut vita*. In cases of doubt no sentence was permitted, and a single testimony or conflicting testimony charging a man with heresy, or

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conflicting testimony of several witnesses, was considered insufficient evidence for punishment. With individual understanding for every possible religious fault, heretics were to be advised and helped morally; also, they were to be provided with sufficient food to prevent starvation during imprisonment. The historian of the Spanish Jews, James Finn, writes: 'Raymond de Penyafort is allowed by all to have gained the esteem of the Jews by his kingly conduct.'² Shortly before Penyafort had completed this task, he renounced his Dominican activities in order to devote himself to the more practical and less dogmatic duties of another newly-founded order, the Order of Mercy.

According to the rules he had left, religious disbeliefs were to be so handled as to prevent their being invoked as a cover for foreign designs against Catalonia. They would be watched, averted or corrected by fellow country-men in Holy Orders, under regulations laid down by the Catalans themselves. This measure was to prove so successful that centuries later, when the Castilian kings of Spain extended their sway to Catalonia, the most efficient assertion of the new Castilian hegemony was the disbanding of the Inquisition of the Aragonese kingdom to make way for that of Castile—exactly the same policy as Innocent III and France had applied some years before Catalonia took the wise precaution of submitting the Inquisition to national control.

When the child-king Jaume held his first reunion of the *Corts* or parliament in Lleida in 1214, Ramon de Penyafort was appointed confessor and tutor of the King. He fulfilled his duties to the full satisfaction of the nation, inculcating into the mind of his royal pupil his well-balanced judgement and his love of freedom and progress. A characteristic example of the open-minded fairness shown by Penyafort and his fellow friars has been handed down in record. With the object of converting adherents

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of other religions to Christianity, public discussions used to be held, in which friars and Mohammedans or Jews would explain their respective points of view. On one occasion a Christian called Pau Crestià had a controversy with a prominent Jew, Bonastruch de Porta; and after the public debate, the bishop of Girona advised Bonastruch to publish his arguments, which he did. The officials of King Jaume thereupon prosecuted the Jew for publishing a heretical pamphlet—but, thanks to the protection of the Catalan friars, Bonastruch was firmly and effectively supported against the king's authority.³

Another example of the progressive outlook of Penyaafort is to be found in the proposal by Arnau de Segarra—the Catalan head of the Provincial Chapter of the Dominicans which was summoned at Toledo in 1250—who, advised by Penyaafort, recommended the learning of Oriental languages as a means of propagating the Faith. This idea of Penyaafort's and the approval of the Provincial Chapter of the Dominicans laid the foundation stone on which Ramon Lull built his School of Oriental Languages in Majorca some years later, a school which proved an inspiration to Cardinal Ximénez de Cisneros when he founded the University of Alcalá in 1507, and to Erasmus when he started the Ecole de Trois Langues in Louvain in 1518. This new scholarly contact with the Oriental sources of our religion was to have its share in preparing the way for the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation in the sixteenth century. At the time of Penyaafort it served to convey to the West many scientific and practical subjects already mastered by the Arabian and Jewish peoples, and henceforth there were to be found Christians capable of exploring the Oriental world beyond that first knowledge of it given by Jewish or Mohammedan translators.⁴ In Penyaafort's time, the mercantile activities of the Catalans were already highly developed. The *gremis* or

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Guilds of Barcelona, Perpignan, Tortosa, Valencia, Majorca and other cities were sharing with other classes of citizens the responsible administration of municipal life; the maritime laws called *Consulat de Mar*, laid down in a written code by the Catalans in the thirteenth century, were not only the official maritime regulations of this nation of sailors, but were accepted as well by the other sea powers.⁵ The earliest extant text of the laws of this 'Consulate of the Sea' has been handed down to us in Latin; there exists also a manuscript in Catalan dating from the fourteenth century; the original Catalan text is unfortunately lost. Catalan consuls were established in all important centres throughout the known world, from Alexandria and Baghdad to Bruges and Ghent.⁶ To this society of traders, industrialists and sailors, Ramon de Penyafort offered the moral code in which these medieval merchants could find spiritual support. In his little book *Modus iuste negotiandi in gratiam mercatorum* Penyafort came to the assistance of the Christian merchants at a time when feudal pride considered commerce an inferior occupation justifiable only to Jews. Penyafort relieved the Catalan members of the Guilds—open only to Christians of both sexes—of the doubt whether, as merchants, they were transgressing Christian principles in making money by commerce and banking.⁷ He reassured them and gave them courage in their struggle against the nobles by the attitude taken in his book.

But the greater contribution of Ramon de Penyafort to the economic prosperity of Catalonia was the founding of the Order of Mercy. As trade with the Saracen peoples increased, many sailors and merchants were captured and reduced to slavery by the Berbers. The apprehension caused thereby among possible future victims might, had it persisted, have deterred many of them from trading with the rich centres of the Near East. In 1192, several Catalan knights formed a congregation under the pro-

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tection of King Alfons II, with the object of rescuing Christians imprisoned by Mohammedans. The results do not seem to have corresponded to the intentions of the founders, so a better remedy had to be found. This was the mission, among others, conferred on the Order of Mercy.

Pere Nolasc, a knight of Languedoc (1189-1256), had been entrusted by Simon de Montfort with the early education of Prince Jaume during his captivity. When Jaume entered into his kingdom in 1214, Nolasc accompanied the young King and remained in Barcelona. In 1218, both Nolasc and Penyafort declared that they had a vision of the Virgin ordering them to create an order for the redemption of Christians enslaved by the Moors. King Jaume, who had had a similar vision, approved of the idea and obtained the collaboration of the bishop of Barcelona, Berenguer de Palou, who tried to secure the Pope's consent; but difficulties arose which delayed the Vatican's authorization. Nevertheless, a gathering of Catalan knights under the leadership of the King and the spiritual guidance of Penyafort was summoned in the Cathedral of Barcelona; to start with, a military order of thirteen knights was founded. The names of these first nobles are of interest, for they show that their bearers still represented the Provençal-Catalan lands: En Guillem de Bas, Lord of Montpellier; Arnau de Carcassonne, son of the Viscount of Narbonne; Bernard de Cabrera; Ramon de Montoliu; Ramon de Montcada; Pere Guillem de Cervelló; Domenec d'Ossó; Raymon d'Utrecht; Guillem de San Julià; Huc de Mata; Bernard d'Essona; Ponç Soleres, and Ramon Blanc.

In 1230 Ramon de Penyafort, using his great influence with Pope Gregory IX, at length obtained the official consent of the Church and the consecration of the Order of Mercy as a religious body. In 1241 Pere Nolasc took monastic vows: and from the central friary of Barcelona he and a succession of great men after him directed, for

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more than three and a half centuries, the fortunes of this humanitarian and practical community.⁸ Ramon de Penyafort, who had been elected Director General of the Dominicans, devoted all his attention, on retiring from the Dominican friary in 1240, to the newly-organized Catalan institution.

The Order of Mercy rescued thousands of Christians, paying ransom for them. Travelling among the Saracens, these enterprising friars established durable and friendly relations with the Mohammedan princes. Penyafort himself was a good friend of the king of Tunis, thus setting an example of frequent intercourse between Christian and Mohammedan peoples. These links were among the principal reasons for Catalan expansion, and they likewise enabled the Catalans to improve their knowledge in many fields. Since the foundation of the Order, the Friars of Mercy bore on their breast the Catalan Bars and the Cross of Barcelona, granted to them by King Jaume the Conqueror.

Penyafort's personal contribution to literature is also important. His *Summa de penitentia* ranks as high in the juridical field as St. Thomas's *Summa contra gentiles* in philosophy and theology.⁹ The great work of St. Thomas was written at the special request of his great friend St. Ramon de Penyafort. But it was work of a different kind which made Penyafort a figure of universal renown: the recompilation of the *Decretales* entrusted to him by Pope Gregory IX. Penyafort worked tirelessly in Rome for three years until the enormous task was completed. His selection of ancient documents was, for nearly seven centuries, the Code of the Roman Catholic Church, up to the modern publication of the Canonical Code.

Together with another great Catalan of his time, Vidal de Canyelles, Penyafort contributed by his example and advice to the increase of democracy in the Catalan lands. Under their guidance the Aragonese, too, became pro-

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gressively fitted for popular government. As for the Catalans themselves, a fully democratic regime could be foreseen for the near future, as a consequence of the continuous rise of merchants, lawyers, doctors, sailors, and artisans to the administration of the country. From the reunion of *Corts* in Vilafranca in 1218 and the new rules for the municipal government of Barcelona promulgated in 1257, to the full development of democracy was a short step only; this was achieved in 1283, when the son of King Jaume established the constitution known as 'Once a year'.

Meanwhile, the decline of the Languedoc or Provençal people as such was continuing rapidly. The great extension, wealth and population of the Provençal lands changed the original mentality of the Northern French as they gradually absorbed the South. In the process France and Frenchmen became what they are today. But it was not mere coincidence that the *Marseillaise* owes its name and fame to the battalion of Provençal volunteers who sang it when they stormed the Tuileries; nor that Montaigne and Montesquieu were born in the country between the Garonne and the Pyrenees. So the tears and mourning of the Provençals when they were abandoned by King Jaume I to the hands of the French have not, perhaps, been justified. In the long run, the old Provençal people succeeded in making all France what it is to-day: an enlarged version of the original free, gay, intelligent, refined Provence. And the parallel may be driven further: a number, too, of the great defects of the Provençal race—such as excess of individualism and the disruptive lack of national unity—are now found throughout contemporary France.