REVIEWS

HUMANISM IN ENGLAND DURING THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY. By R. Weiss. (Blackwell; 15s.)

The term Humanism may be used to convey both an attitude to the study of the Graeco Roman classics and an emphatic individualism based on a fresh conception of the possibilities natural to man. Both were to mark the twelfth century renaissance in the Anglo-French culture of North France and Angevin England, the fifteenth-century renaissance that had its centre in Italy, the *Aufklärung* of eighteenth-century Germany. It would be of interest to determine how far the two were necessarily connected.

A section of the classics had remained the quarry for all post-Roman thought since the fifth century. The tradition remained unbroken. Almost inevitably the *De Amicitia* of Cicero was to be the primary source of much of Aelred of Rievaulx, and Ovid was to provide the *matière de Rome* for Chretien de Troyes. But the *De Amicitia* is intentionally transformed for the settings of a Yorkshire Abbey and the 'Ars Amatoria' is transmuted by conventions of 'l'amour courtoise.' They were sources, but they were not models.

But already in the twelfth century Aelred and Chretien belong unconsciously to an older school. The new literary movement represented by John of Salisbury or Giraldus Cambrensis, Walter Mapes or the anonymous authors of the English *Comoediae* had a much wider range of classic reading and a different quality of approach. It was the quality not the quantity that differentiated them. It was not merely that they had read Terence or Lucan, Juvenal or Sallust, but that they could attempt to recapture style and standpoint. They were their sources, but they were also their models. In the *De bello Troiano* Joseph of Exeter could achieve a passage almost indistinguishable from Lucan, the best of the verses of Giraldus echo Maximian, in 1130 it would have seemed fantastic that 'Baucis et Thraso' should be written in England fifty years later. And the return to the long forgotten conception of Good Letters synchronised with a self-conscious development of the human personality which would seem 'Romantic' rather than 'Classical' in scope. From Abelard to Giraldus the leaders of the twelfth-century renaissance are individually and utterly themselves, as interested in self as they are self-revealing.

Abstraction conquered, twelfth-century humanism faded before the new organised studies of the thirteenth-century university and the thirteenth-century achievement was to be greatest when most impersonal. It is characteristic of the change that we should know so much of a Giraldus, so little of an Aquinas. But when the achievement lessened the impersonality remained. It was not until the fif-

teenth century that the second renaissance came across the Alps from the Italy of the late *Trecento*. Dr. Weiss has provided a definitive study of the origins of this Renaissance in England, and the first coherent analysis of its impact on the English social structure. His period sense is equally alive for Italy and for England, his scholarship has long been recognised and is meticulous, his knowledge of the unpublished manuscript sources is unique. It is at last possible to reconstruct the means by which the Italian renaissance came to England. Socially parasitic, and at best the fitting appanage to the household of some great lord, the stray Italian humanist in the north had little opportunity to cultivate his own idiosyncrasies. He was differentiated from the English clerk of his time less by the nature of his studies than by his approach to them. The movement is analogous to that of the twelfth century, for once again it was an attempt to recapture not only a style but a standpoint. But this time its effect was to be lasting. The Latin translation of Plutarch in the Duke of Gloucester's household is at the root of so much that has since been characteristically English; the Shakespearean search for a hero, the Philip Sydney standards, and that central national ideal, the Tudor variant of The Magnanimous Man.

For at last analysis the two senses of the term Humanism would seem inseparably linked. For the attempt of post-classical man to recapture a classical standpoint must imply a conscious severance from contemporary preconceptions which will lead naturally enough to a self-conscious and therefore often ego-centric individualism. While the sense of personality, always so much deeper than the individualism which is so often its abuse, will come with the choice of model. For the primary inspiration of each renaissance has been Graeco-Roman from the dying Republic or the early empire. Its ideals have been those of the silver age of a culture, its heroes those imagined in a world order in full flux—Lucan's Cato, the Thrasea of Tacitus, Plutarch's Philopoemon—conceived as isolated precisely by the strength of personality; alone, outlined against the dark.

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DEATH AND LIFE. By M. C. D'Arcy, S.J. (Longmans; 5s.)

In this age of windy emotionalism and intellectual sterility, publishers must, more than most people, appreciate the financial difficulties involved in the publication of a serious work on a religious topic. A public whose mental food is habitually predigested by sales-minded editors soon loses its taste for the stronger meat of reading which demands the intelligent co-operation of the reader. One can only suppose that it is a kindly desire on the part of Messrs. Longmans not to frighten off the prospective purchaser, which leads them to describe Fr. D'Arcy's latest book as one which '*everyone* can read with ease and pleasure.' Most unfortunately, relatively few