

ment on policy or by subjection to its discipline. Above all, it is dangerous to assume—as, to the confusion of the United States and its allies, the Central Intelligence Agency seems to assume—that where the Communists are a part of a coalition, as in Laos or Cuba, the coalition is necessarily a Communist ‘front’. This may be so in particular cases but each case needs to be looked at with some care. It is assumed that, for example, the Communists use Dr Castro for their own purposes; but it is also conceivable that Dr Castro is using the Communists; and it is not even any longer sensible to assume that the purposes and policies of particular Communist parties are clear and unambiguous. At one time it was very clear that one could assume a preoccupation with the aims of Soviet foreign policy and the extension of Soviet power. This can no longer be assumed without argument. Mr Khrushchkev, at least, has learned this the hard way.

J. M. CAMERON

ENGLISH FRIARS AND ANTIQUITY IN THE EARLY XIVth CENTURY, by Beryl Smalley; Basil Blackwell; 45s.

In his famous Rede lecture on the Two Cultures, literary and scientific, which divide our society Sir Charles Snow did not call the literary culture ‘humanist’. There was no reason why he should; ‘humanist’ in its special literary sense is an archaic word except in history books, and Sir Charles was not much concerned with past history. He avoided even the more abstract, less historical term ‘humanism’. And yet that powerful lecture of his often came into my mind as I read Miss Smalley’s learned and witty study of the mental climate of the early fourteenth century.

This may seem odd. It is a far cry from Sir Charles’s very contemporary pre-occupations to that little group of late medieval English friars whom Miss Smalley has rescued from what may seem to have been a perfectly natural oblivion. But the truth is that she has given us one of those rare pieces of specialized scholarship which do really illuminate the course of history outside their particular field of observation—in this case the span of time between the age of Aquinas and the age of the Renaissance, that elusive and complex period in between when humanism emerged as the cultural rival to scholasticism. It is only with its earlier stages that Miss Smalley is concerned in this book; and even then only as an issue subordinate to her main concern; but her judgment is so clear and she has prepared her ground so well that what she in effect provides might serve as a useful *prolegomenon*, from a new and unexpected angle, to the whole history of post-medieval humanism.

The ground is prepared in the ‘central block’, as she calls it, of her book, a study of the biblical lectures and commentaries of seven English friars (five Dominicans and two Franciscans), all writing between about 1320 and 1350. She calls them ‘the classicizing group’ for the interest they took in pagan antiquity, an interest which in the two most gifted of them, Thomas Waleys O.P.,

and Robert Holcot O.P., led to very striking results. Waleys was a remarkable scholar, a genuine researcher who 'steeped himself in primary sources and gave exact references'. Miss Smalley demonstrates his importance in the recovery of the text of Livy. He probably knew more ancient history than any medieval man before Petrarch, certainly more than any other friar. It is interesting to note that what chiefly started him off as an explorer of pagan antiquity was the *De civitate Dei*; Waleys set out to explain to fourteenth century readers the many allusions to events, traditions and books which St Augustine could presume were understood by his own contemporaries nine centuries earlier. The same task had already been attempted by Nicholas Trevet O.P. (who died, very old, about 1330), but Waleys 'learned enough to put Trevet in the shade'. He learned it mostly abroad, in the libraries of Avignon and Bologna, a circumstance that brought him closer to the budding continental humanism than any other member of the English classicizing group. His contemporary Holcot was a lighter character and an unsteadier mind. Learned, humorous, candid—making no secret of his scepticism with regard to the proofs for the existence of God and the immortality of the soul—Robert Holcot seems a curious type of Dominican to meet in the early fourteenth century. Less solid as a scholar than Waleys, his brains and a touch of genius yet ensured him a certain fame; and Holcot on Wisdom was to be found in one or more copies 'in almost every good library in England and in the rest of Latin-speaking Europe' in the later middle ages.

And yet this interesting group had no heirs among the friars, whether in England or on the Continent. It was curiously self-contained and as a movement it did not last. Its youngest member, John Lathbury, a Franciscan, probably died in the 1360s; and his scholarship shows a steep decline from that of Waleys or even Holcot. The classicizing movement among the English friars 'petered out', says Miss Smalley; and 'humanism came later and as a foreign influence'. Notice that she is careful not to call her group humanist. That term, used in an historical sense, she, like the rest of us, reserves (so far as the fourteenth century is concerned) to the pioneers down in Italy, led by the 'arch-humanist' Francis Petrarch.

What exactly was the difference? What was it that the humanists had and that the classicizing friars, for all their talent and learning, did not have? Miss Smalley does not shirk this question; indeed, as I have suggested, much of the value of her brilliant book lies in the way she answers it, or suggests answers to it, in the final chapters.

After our close look at the Englishmen we are taken to France in chapter 10, for a much quicker survey of the field there; and then to Italy in chapters 11 and 12. The Frenchmen studied are all friars, except an eccentric Cistercian, Pierre Ceffons, and a Benedictine, Pierre Bersuire who got sufficiently interested in classical mythology to feel the need to pick Petrarch's brains, which he did in conversations with the poet at Vacluse some time before 1341. Partly no doubt because of this contact with the best scholar of the time, Bersuire's class-

icism seems less medieval than that of most of the friars, French or English; while that of the bizarre Ceffons (who wrote a long letter, as our Lord's secretary (*notarius*), to the reigning Pope, Innocent VI) combined a fervent enthusiasm for the pagan heritage with a philosophical scepticism that resembles Holcot's—with this interesting difference that whereas the scepticism of Holcot was based on abstract logic and 'had no necessary link with his classicism', the scepticism of Ceffons 'seems to grow out of' his classical studies. But not even Ceffons is reckoned a humanist by Miss Smalley; and still less the French friars, whom she finds much more conservative than their English *confères* of the classicizing group. Here I use the term conservative to indicate the medieval background from which the humanist movement detached itself; but we have to bear in mind that there were several ways of being an innovator in the fourteenth century and that humanism was only one of these. The critical scholasticism of Ockham and his followers was anti-traditional, but not humanist; it was indeed far more dangerous to the traditional faith than humanism. And of course Wyclif was no humanist ('Wyclif cared nothing for ancient Rome. He looked back to the Gospels and the Garden of Eden'). Established modes of thought were under frequent attack from critics who had nothing to do with each other and who fought with utterly different weapons. The humanists' weapon was not logic but classical learning and rhetoric, and an appeal to moral and religious values which they looked for in vain in the scholastic culture of their time. Petrarch's assault on Aristotelianism—which he tended to identify with Averroism—had a genuinely religious inspiration. It went with his cult of the Fathers, particularly of St Augustine. If this cult was humanist as well as Christian, that was because Petrarch could not separate Augustine from Cicero; the great critic of pagan culture was also, for him, its greatest heir. Petrarch's Christian humanism, was, in a sense, an ultra-conservatism; he would have liked to cancel most of the past between himself and the age of the Fathers. Yet from another point of view, of course, this anti-medievalism implied a profound revolution in man's reading of history. Humanism, as an innovation, was essentially a new reading of history.

This is the essential point, and it is excellently, though briefly, stated in Miss Smalley's final chapters. What Petrarch discovered was historical perspective. One might say it was he, the anti-medievalist, who discovered the middle ages; he was the first European scholar clearly to see classical times as distinct from post-classical; with him began that division of Western history into the periods which we take for granted to-day. Many elements, 'many shades of thought and feeling', as Miss Smalley says, blended in Petrarch's idea of the past, converging upon his discovery of historical perspective; and no one of these elements was in itself new. He was the most learned man of his time (if we leave out of account his indifference to scholastic philosophy and theology) but it was not his learning that made the difference. Waleys had plenty of classical learning, but he did not see the past *historically*, as Petrarch saw it. And other men shared Petrarch's distrust of scholastic metaphysics and logic and his longing for a reform of the

Church; or, in the literary field, his desire to return to classical models in the writing of Latin, to revive *eloquentia*. All these things may be found elsewhere; it was only in the great scholar-poet's mind that 'personal and general causes of dissatisfaction added up to something new'.

What has all this to do with the point from which we started, Sir Charles Snow's lecture on the Two Cultures? An answer to this question would call for an article, and even then much would be left unsaid. Here I would only make two suggestions. First—and this I suppose would be generally admitted—the literary culture of which Snow speaks was born in the classical revival of the late middle ages, in that humanism which began as a literary fashion and resulted in the discovery of historical perspective. And secondly—and this, I think, is not so generally recognized—that revival of letters, in so far as it was anti-scholastic, was in tendency also anti-scientific. Petrarch turned his back on the science of his day. To be sure, it was rather crude science by later standards; but it was at least a systematic attempt to understand the natural order, the physical cosmos. And Petrarch would have none of it. Dividing the body from the soul in terms which would have horrified St Thomas, the arch-humanist turned from the exterior world to the interior, from the natural physical order to a pure cultivation of the spirit; to a moral and religious ideal which had as little as possible to do with the corporeal universe. Here is perhaps Petrarch's most striking difference from Dante. Dante's great religious poem embraces, delightedly, the whole physical order as he knew it. But Dante was an Aristotelian, and by the standards of his time a competent scientist. In his poem scientific curiosity is inseparable from the quest for moral perfection, and each is an aspect of the human spirit's movement towards God, of the 'natural thirst', as he called it. In Dante the two cultures sang together; in the voice of Petrarch we hear only one.

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**HUGH THE CHANTOR:** *The History of the Church of York 1066-1127*; edited and translated by Charles Johnson; Nelson; 42s.

The period of time covered by this history is almost exactly as long as that which separates this present work of Charles Johnson from his first learned publication in 1902. And just as the defence of York against Canterbury was lively as ever in 1127, so Mr Johnson's work loses nothing in vigour with the years. For instance, '*Nequam regis ecclesie retribucio*' of the original, is rendered by him as, 'It was a shabby return for the king to make to the church'; and '*cartam vero illam rex antea multum improbaverat*' becomes 'The king had previously scouted the charter'. 'Scouted' seems to me to capture exactly the sense of the Latin. But I am not so happy about eminent cardinals and bishops, dwelling together, being termed 'colleagues and messmates'; and I think there is a real misunderstanding on p. 119 where 'preces' is taken to mean 'prayers' when the context requires it to be understood as 'requests' or 'petitions'.