

COMMENTARY

TWO INAUGURAL LECTURES. It is a useful tradition in British academic life that a newly-appointed professor should devote his inaugural lecture to a general survey of the scope of his chair rather than to the display of his own specific erudition. At a time of intensified specialization in the universities, such occasional reminders of the place of particular disciplines within the *universitas* of learning are valuable. The Regius Professor of Modern History at the University of Cambridge, Dr David Knowles, faithful to this tradition, devoted his recent inaugural lecture to 'The Historian and Character', and the published text (Cambridge University Press, 2s. 6d.) displays on the cover an interlinear quotation—*Quid est homo quod memor es ejus? Minuisti eum paulo minus ab angelis*—which is in fact the best commentary on his account of the historian's function. 'The historian, when conditions are favourable, can see the act and the man sometimes more clearly than most of his contemporaries saw them, and he describes what he sees. He neither condemns nor acquits, he neither censures nor praises, but he presents what he sees.'

So humane an understanding of the historian's task lies apart from the extremes of moral judgment on the one hand and of the ethical neutrality of the scientific investigator on the other. The historian's dilemma is indeed a real one, for while it is not his responsibility to judge, yet he writes always of men, who must await judgment here or hereafter. And as Dr Knowles shows, a single man—a St Francis or a Wesley—whose life is wholly without political concern, may yet profoundly shape the material which it is the historian's field to describe and to interpret. The problems of human character are themselves so often at the root of the events men determine, and, while the historian can never usurp the functions of God, he must nevertheless want to understand a man as he is; he must beware 'of confusing a man's cause or party or religion with his character'.

Dr Knowles' lecture is, then, a cool and measured appeal, never more welcome than now, for a recall to the true theme of history which is man. 'Long ago, when the recorded human story was in its infancy, the Greek poet saw that of the many

marvels in the world none was stranger than man. The psalmist also, in an age still earlier than that of Sophocles, marvelled that man had been made little less than the angels.'

At Cardiff, Dr Edward Sarmiento, appointed to the first professorship of Spanish in the University of Wales, dealt with 'The Pleasures of Spanish Literature' in his inaugural lecture. (University of Wales Press, 2s. 6d.) He might have been tempted to speak of this recognition of the importance of Spanish in the modern world, of that 'commercial value', which in Wales particularly can be too often the criterion of academic usefulness. Instead his lecture is an appeal for the rights of the imagination, a protest against 'the heavy emphasis laid on the purely historical and secondary aspects of literature and on the informative and ethical content of poetry and fiction, so that the enjoyment of literature as a fine art seems in danger of being overlooked'.

Spanish literature is indeed a rich territory for the illustration of Professor Sarmiento's theme, and his consideration of the imagination in the work of Góngora, Cervantes and Calderón is an eloquent defence of a literature in its own right, most welcome as a reaction against the desiccated preoccupations of the specialists who can so easily forget that what they study was made for delight. But Professor Sarmiento is far from being an aesthetic escapist. In a profound analysis of the true role of the imagination he finds the final explanation in St John of the Cross, the mystic who is a poet too, for whom 'the great destiny of the imagination . . . is to see, not God, but as God'. And hence, 'No better guide for the writer than to remember that the imagination whence he so largely draws and with which he gives so much of his pleasure is destined for *gloria* hereafter and may be filled with *esperanza* now. . . . The practice of Christian literature is the exercise of hope and the prophylaxis of accidie.'

So it is that at Cambridge, and at Cardiff, in the study of history and of literature alike, Professors Knowles and Sarmiento have in effect stated a single theme—that learning is more than the sum of its intellectual parts and that no human study can in the end ignore or contemn the destiny of man.