

chronicle of an unidentified friar of the Franciscan convent of Ghent who, at the request of his brethren, began in 1308 to put down in writing what he knew of the incidents and characters of a momentous stage of Flemish history through which he was passing. In 1297 Guy XIX, Count of Flanders, and ally of Edward, King of England, renounced his allegiance to Philip IV of France, and as a result Philip's forces invaded Flanders. Edward, from a mixture of political and strategic motives, decided to intervene on the side of the Flemish and landed in Flanders in August, 1297. His stay, however, was of very short duration and utterly disappointing to his hard-pressed allies: after nine months he backed out without having once engaged the French. The Flemings, after a turbulent truce (October, 1298-January, 1300), were left to fight their own battles; and finally, after the capture of Guy in 1204 in a naval battle in which twenty English ships assisted the French fleet, Robert III accepted almost crippling terms in a treaty at Athis-sur-Orge.

It is with these events that the chronicle is largely concerned and it provides a really vivid picture. The translation, too, has all the verve of the original, and so far as we can judge renders it faithfully. However, the translator's introduction has not the lucidity that marked the introductions to previous volumes of this series; and this is very noticeable in the first four pages of the section on the historical background to the *Annales*.

LEONARD BOYLE, O.P.

THE LITERATURE OF THE SPANISH PEOPLE. By G. Brenan. (Cambridge University Press; 40s.)

Mr Brenan has once more (and remarkably soon) put all lovers of Spain and her culture into his debt. *The Literature of the Spanish People* is precisely the book to put in the hands of students, both those who are in *status pupillari* and the vast body of others who will take trouble to learn about what they care for. As its name makes clear, Mr Brenan's new book is not a history of literature, although it begins at the beginning and works on, and it is a study of literature as a manifestation of a people, so that it deals with Prudentius and the Senecas, and with some of the Arabic and Jewish writers, as well as with writers in Castilian. The author deserves all praise for accomplishing a dual purpose: he uses literature as an illumination of character and ideals, yet he also considers literature as such from a strictly aesthetic point of view. It is not often that writers on literature can envisage their subject as an expression of national psychology and not sink into bathos, and it is very rare for a critic with an interest in history to be able to retain a grasp of aesthetic canons. It is to be hoped that British Hispanism has found in Mr Brenan a successor to the late Aubrey Bell.

As we are not dealing with a reference book, we expect to find

a partial treatment, or sometimes a very original treatment, of some subjects. For example, what Mr Brennan has to say on the great Spanish epic on the Cid is stimulating and valuable, while yet not exhaustive, and his observations on Don Quixote are highly original but not, of course, a complete account of the subject. This is in no sense a criticism, for the author warns us of this in his admirable preface. It is only by learning of a great number of different combinations of preferences that the student of an art can learn to be receptive of it in all its aspects.

Mr Brennan's attitude to the religious feeling of Spain will naturally interest Catholic readers. As he tells us in the preface to the second edition of his invaluable *Spanish Labyrinth* (one of the few accounts in English of the Civil War that has any depth), his attitude to the Spanish Church has mellowed considerably. There are still some failures of understanding which one must hope will be overcome in future works. For example, on p. 463, one wonders whether the quotation from Nontesinos is rightly interpreted. What the poet says is that 'in so wonderful a matter [the Eucharist] to keep silence and believe' is the way to merit, etc. There is no basis for extending this attitude to belief in general. On the same page there are two other matters on which one would like to comment. Mr Brennan says: 'The era of the mystics was brief—it is a complete mistake to regard Spain as having a natural leaning to mysticism . . .' Generalisations on national character are of course dangerous, and let it be admitted that one is not always quite clear as to the meaning of 'a natural leaning to mysticism', whether the phrase be used by Mr Brennan or by oneself! But surely his negative generalisation is rather sweeping. Is it based on a confusion between mystical experience and writing about mystical experience?

The rest of Mr Brennan's sentence quoted incompletely above leads us on to his remark on the alleged opposition in the seventeenth century between Catholicism and Christianity. 'I may well be a bad Christian but a good Catholic', says a character in a play. Surely the implication of this is that 'painful as it is to fail in moral and religious duty, there is some mitigation if one sticks to complete belief—at least there will be the basis on which to build up again'. To the moralist outside the Church, this is always and understandably rather shocking, because conduct is judged more important than motive (one of the main lines of conflict in the seventeenth century) and, of course, 'by their fruits you shall judge them'. But humble acknowledgement and pain that one is a sinner is itself a fruit. I think this line of thought will prove more inward and revealing than a sinister conclusion that 'Spain had . . . become . . . more ecclesiastical than spiritual', though one does not for a moment deny that such a danger can exist. Only, such a lot goes on in ordinary people's souls which clever people will never know—and

Mr Brennan, thank God, is not the man to be unaware of that.

EDWARD SARMIENTO

THOUGHT IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY ENGLISH POETRY. By Raymond Tschumi. (Routledge and Kegan Paul; 18s.)

The author's analysis of the works of five contemporary poets has a two-fold theme; the first strand is the difference between poetical and philosophical thought, the second is the kinship of the thought in their poetry with the positions of corresponding philosophies. The proper investigation of each would require a separate book, and the present one suffers from this fluctuation of interest. But there are other more serious criticisms. The terminology is often too loose; for example, in the following quotation, the use of the word 'thought' is awkward and ambiguous:—

'Poetical thought is neither an unnecessary ornament of philosophy nor an impure element of poetry, but a balance between thought and image . . .' (p. 18.)

A similar uncertainty appears also in the use of the word 'idea'. It seems to betray an uncertainty in the author's own mind as to the true ground of difference between poetical and philosophical thought and ideas. 'Although some ideas find no place in poetry, while other ideas are not philosophical, the difference between philosophical and poetical thought is a difference of quality rather than of medium'; for this difference of quality is due to the fact that 'certain ideas stir the imagination and the feelings, others are neutral'. (p. 15.)

There are several things to be said to this. First, the question of medium is not unimportant, for the first obvious difference between poetry and philosophy is that in the former the words, their sound and their ordering have an independent value; in the latter they are mere instruments. This is noted by the author on the first page of the Introduction, in a very significant quotation from Eliot; but it seems from then on to be disregarded, and it would, in addition, make unnecessary the consideration of Herbert Read. Secondly, the ideas of which the author speaks, abstract ideas, are differentiated as suitable for poetry or philosophy by their ability or inability to stir the imagination and the feelings. But this is the outlook of the orator; the poet is not dealing with ideas but with images; in poetry it is the stirring of the imagination which draws in the ideas. Thirdly therefore, though it is not the same thing to distinguish poetry from philosophy and to distinguish poetical thought from philosophical, even in distinguishing the latter the difference of medium is an indication of the true ground of difference which is that the thought of the poet is subordinated to the primary imaginative drive.

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