English Classical Scholarship

Historical Reflections on Bentley, Porson, and Housman

C.O. Brink

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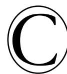
HISTORICAL REFLECTIONS ON BENTLEY, PORSON, AND HOUSMAN

C.O. Brink



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Foreword by D.S. McKie

Habent sua fata libelli. That a reprint of Charles Brink's *English Classical Scholarship: Historical Reflections on Bentley, Housman and Porson* is now called for, twenty-three years after its first publication, is eloquent testimony to the lasting value and influence of the work. Translated into German,[1] and having opened up a rich field for *epigoni*,[2] the book, as references to it and discussion of its ideas continue abundantly to attest, remains central to current writing on the development of classical scholarly thought. In truth *English Classical Scholarship* has itself in the intervening time become a part of English classical scholarship, and that is why its reissue is made all the more necessary. In nothing more, as grateful offering to the milieu from which he drew so much and in which he thrived, could its author have delighted.

D.S. McKie
Robinson College, Cambridge

1. By another: Marcus Deufert, *Klassische Studien in England: Historische Reflexionen über Bentley, Porson und Housman*, Stuttgart and Leiden (1997). To such an extent had Brink's internal thought-language long since ceased to be that of his native upbringing that he mistrusted his ability to write – at least to his own satisfaction – in the language in whose style and precision he had once rejoiced. Willingly he passed the task on.
2. Principally H.D. Jocelyn, *Philology and Education: A Review Discussion of C.O. Brink's 'English Classical Scholarship'*, Liverpool Classical Papers 1 (Liverpool, 1988); C.A. Stray, 'The Rise and Fall of Porsoniasm', *Cambridge Classical Journal*, 53 (2007), 40-71; D.J. Butterfield and C.A. Stray, *A.E. Housman: Classical Scholar*, London (2009). '[Brink] challenges thought in every paragraph' (Jocelyn): lively dissent also, let it be added, as evidenced in all three works.

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PER TE SAPERE AUDE

Richard Bentley

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Preface

This book started life as a series of lectures, and I have had no wish to remove the *soupçon* of informality that attends lecturing. The audience consisted, in the main, of Italian graduate students at that remarkable institution, the *Scuola normale superiore* at Pisa; the lectures were helpfully chaired by Professor A. la Penna, of the University of Florence. The Italian translation was made by Professor Francesco Calvo, at that time Italian lector at Cambridge. I expressed my thanks to him for his spirited translation in the preface to the first (Italian) edition in the *Annali* of the *Scuola* (1978) which by a mischance got lost in the printing. It gives me pleasure now to retrieve my acknowledgment.

This is a second edition, somewhat improved, I hope, by a new introduction, a new chapter on Victorian scholarship, a second chapter on Housman, new material in the notes that appear in the second part of the book, and a fairly full index. But above all the book has been rewritten almost completely, so as to bring out what I think are the contours of the history of these studies. The incitement to do so came from a number of friends who gratified me by agreeing (though also partly disagreeing) with the outlines of an early draft. My thanks therefore are due in the first place to Professors D.R. Shackleton Bailey, F.R.D. Goodyear, and H.D. Jocelyn. I am very grateful too for the advice received on certain matters of detail. Professor F.H. Sandbach gave me some useful hints on the history of Trinity College, Cambridge (in connexion with chapter 2); my Caius colleague, Sir Sam Edwards, Cavendish Professor of Physics, referred me to André Gide's published conversation with Housman, which had passed me by (chapter 8); Dr F. Stubbings and Professor R.G.G. Coleman provided guidance in the library of Emmanuel College (chapter 5); Dr R.D. Dawe and Dr J. Diggle pointed out some features in the editing, respectively,

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of Aeschylus (chapter 7) and Euripides (chapter 5) which I had overlooked; Dr B.A. Windeatt drew my attention to T. Tyrwhitt's primacy in the editing of Chaucer (chapter 5); Dr D.S. McKie's as yet unpublished book helped me to see more clearly the complicated transmission of Catullus (chapter 9).

C.O.B.
June 1985

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Introduction

Publications on the history of classical learning proliferate. But an important feature of the subject, perhaps *the* important feature, has not yet received the attention it seems to deserve – I mean the emergence of true scholarship, that is critical scholarship, in English classical learning out of its surrounding environment: at home, society at large, universities, schools; and abroad, European scholarship. This is a first attempt at taking bearings in an historical context, with the likely faults but also, I hope, virtues of such an attempt. The book describes some major aspects of the history of English classical scholarship viewed almost exclusively as critical learning. There are many other aspects – classical scholarship in education at universities and schools, or as civilizing influence on society, or as a basic element in the give and take of ideas and intellectual attitudes. The reason why these are either excluded or brought in merely by way of illustration and contrast is not only my ignorance of many of the historical factors or my unwillingness to beat the big drum for the things that I value most highly. As my chief reason I offer the not very recondite conviction that what matters, by definition, in critical scholarship of any kind is that it be critical. No one needs to exhort the natural sciences to be scientific because that is what they are. But, in the sciences concerned with what are called 'arts subjects' or 'humane subjects' or 'literary and historical studies', the very names tell a different story. The causes of that difference are deeply embedded in their history but not, I believe, in their essence. This feature is not sufficiently brought out in much that is written on the history of the subject. I concentrate on the aspects of classics of which I have first-hand knowledge, for I write as a professional Latin scholar with some secondary interests in Greek, ancient philosophy and history. But that is accidental. Similar points to the ones I am making could be made in dealing with ancient philosophy, history and other aspects. Even so it has been involvement with my own subject that has helped me to put in perspective certain facts about its history which I have come to regard as major facts.

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The matter at issue may be clarified further if we ask what A.E. Housman, one of the great innovators in classical learning, had in mind when he pronounced on the early centuries of Greek learning in England as follows: 'But these were the years when we were learning Greek and were not yet in case to teach it: our contribution to the European fund begins with the seventeenth century'.[1] With some appropriate changes he might have pronounced similarly on the learning and teaching of Latin.

If we want to get a hint at the kind of scholarship he had in mind, we can do no better than look at the intellectual operations performed by the great classical scholars during the comparatively short periods when that 'contribution to the European fund' was made, and include his own contribution to the fund. Obviously he was thinking not only of textual criticism so called but of the study of the text and language of ancient Greek and Latin literary remains.

Housman was thinking also of the mode of such study, the procedures that might promote scholarship. Sometimes he calls these procedures criticism, sometimes knowledge or understanding, sometimes, with regard to a similar kind of criticism, discovery of what is new and true. These are descriptions of kinds of science, to use this term for an organized body of knowledge. I talk of kinds of science since all sciences differ in the degree of generality aimed at, the formality of their methods of demonstration or proof, the 'Aristotelian' degree of exactness that is appropriate to the object under scrutiny, the various kinds of art or artistry that may be requisite to the science concerned, such as a sense for the elegance of a mathematical proof, the ingenuity in setting up an experiment in the experimental sciences so called, the help afforded by historical imagination in historical study, and verbal or literary imagination in literary study. But they all agree with each other, and differ from the arts, in aiming at something that can be said to be 'known'. 'Valid' or 'true' is the name for what is correctly so established, and 'new' the name for what is thought not to have been established in this or that context before. By contradistinction, when abstract, 'scientific', notions are drawn, say, into poetry or rhetoric and made subservient to poetic or rhetorical purposes, the resulting amalgam cannot be said to be 'known' in the sense canvassed above; philosophical poetry or scientific rhetoric can evoke many things, but they stand or fall by being poetry or rhetoric. If however one ingredient of the amalgam is not made subservient to the other, whichever it may be, then either the cognitive or the poetic or the

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rhetorical status of the discourse is frustrated – which may happen accidentally or deliberately, and has often happened deliberately of late. Such frustrations of coherence are here discounted. To chronicle them critically would be an huge task, but fascinating and, I believe, beneficial. The task, however, is not among the many unfulfilled plans of the present writer.

In classical studies the intellectual aims and methods indicated by Housman have not always been in view. They may easily be mistaken for any commerce with the seemingly 'ancient' components of their own civilizations by men, say, of the Italian Renaissance, of seventeenth-century France, or of eighteenth-century England. But the long after-effects of the two ancient civilizations may mislead. Eighteenth-century Horatianism in England, for example, however strong in substance and fine in texture, was of its time and country. Of course, it would not have existed without Roman Horace, but Roman Horace, nevertheless, was a long way off. And as for eighteenth-century Homeric studies, it is hard not to apply to them what Richard Bentley is thought to have said to Alexander Pope about his renowned Homer in heroic couplets – 'that it was a very pretty poem, but that he must not call it Homer'.[2]

The new critical study of ancient texts and ancient historical traditions assumed quite a different complexion. There was little of it during the century of the Renaissance when the Italians made their prodigious effort of drawing Latin letters, thought, and art into their own cultural orbit and thus became the founders and arbiters of the 'Renaissance civilization of Europe'. Their discoveries of ancient manuscripts and their *editiones principes* were indeed indispensable, but their procedures in dealing with the texts turned out to be haphazard and risky. Very few of the sixteenth-century humanists in Italy had premonitions of what was required. A larger number of French scholars of the same century, however, had. The greatest of them, Joseph Justus Scaliger (1540-1609), must be said, but is not always said, to have inaugurated a new era of critical scholarship.[3] Moreover he carried north, to Holland, fundamental notions of the new criticism. It was in Holland, in England, in Germany, that these notions first came to maturity, paradoxically far from the Mediterranean home of the ancient exemplars, to which they radiated back in due course.

But the boundaries and contours of the new intellectual territory cannot be said to have been mapped out until Richard Bentley (1662-

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1742). What he set down was magnificent, and indeed quite different in character from some over-daring emendations of texts, which alone his name now suggests to all but a few classical specialists. But it is true that his work suffered not rarely from the faults of the born discoverer – undue hurry and overconfidence. His influence extended also to scholarship abroad, for a considerable time even more strongly than at home, though not so much in France or Italy as in Holland and Germany. The direction of later English developments, therefore, is determined partly by Bentley's thoughts returning from abroad, and partly by influences emanating from Bentley at home. It was left above all to two of his successors, Richard Porson (1759-1808) and A.E. Housman (1859-1936), to specify and consolidate but also to deepen and generalize, with conspicuous virtues indeed but occasional faults of contraction that arise whenever consolidation is the order of the day. The reformed Bentleianism of Housman's work resulted chiefly in a new scientific basis for all verbal and stylistic study in classics; textual criticism was the primary but not the only concern. This takes us to the second World War; the achievement can be seen in a clear perspective without the contemporaries of his later years, some of them sizeable scholars, who would otherwise have merited some notice, even in a book designed merely to find a way along the critical heights. Housman's mature achievement thus marks the apposite end for this book. What comes thereafter is too close for a dispassionate view.

If my observations are just, the layout of this book follows almost of its own accord. Bentley, the Newton of European philological and literary studies, will find his appropriate place in the centre together with a few contemporaries. The centre piece will be preceded by a brief chapter on antecedents, and in particular two outstanding and often under-rated Cambridge scholars, Thomas Gataker and John Pearson. After Bentley there follow Porson and the Porsonians, and some brief observations on Bentleianism abroad; but also, almost instantaneously, the disconcerting spectacle of the new critical scholarship faltering, in spite of the unexampled extension, over the subsequent half-century or more, of classical education in the public schools and the universities. Without this background of Victorian classics, the final topic of the book can scarcely be understood – I mean Housman's opposition to the modes of classical study then prevailing and his laying of new scholarly foundations.

In its concentration on actual scholarship the present book

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differs from most writings on English classical studies. It may be useful therefore if I briefly indicate the areas where other books complement what little I can offer and where other writers and I agree, or disagree, in our views of the subject. I begin with works on English classical scholarship and go on to those that discuss classics in a wider setting.

The general reader has been provided by M.L. Clarke with a succinct and pleasant narrative of *Greek Studies in England 1700-1830* (1945). Chronologically this period coincides with what Housman called the English 'contribution to the European fund', but the definition of what constitutes Greek studies does not. Clarke is concerned with classical education at schools and universities, discussed more widely in a later work, *Classical Education in Britain 1500-1900* (1959), and with the whole width of study – from amateur to professional – of ancient Greek literature, thought, and history.

The general reader too will find an instructive and often entertaining examination, from differing points of view, of what the Victorians found in ancient Greek civilization (or what they thought was that civilization) in R. Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (1980) and Frank M. Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (1981). Neither impinges much on the scholarly issues, technical or general, raised in the Victorian chapter of this book.

Like Jenkyns and Turner, and unlike the present writer, R.R. Bolgar is concerned with features of modern civilization that were believed to be an heritage of ancient Greece and Rome. For that reason his large and learned book, *The Classical Heritage and its Beneficiaries* (1954), is only tangentially connected with the subject of my present work. For critical scholarship or science, as I understand it, is essentially self-fulfilling – it establishes what it can establish, and has done. Hence it must repose on the civilization of which, in certain favourable conditions, it may form a vital part, although it cannot be identified with it in either aim or character. It can cause no surprise, therefore, that Bolgar's survey shows signs of hurrying to a close, once it reaches the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the time when the most effective and clarifying developments in critical scholarship and science had started.

Bolgar, though by no means uninformed on classical matters, writes in the main as a student of modern literature, especially French. H. Lloyd-Jones, on the other hand, is a professional and well-known Greek scholar. His two books of reviews and essays (1980),[4] however, many of them published before, go beyond the

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limited professional field into the cultural penumbra of classical studies. They seem to be written largely for the general reader, though there is much from which any reader, however learned, can profit. But I have to declare a basic disagreement of a kind that has close relevance to the topics of the present book. Lloyd-Jones professes himself vitally concerned with the question: What can the ancient Greeks (or Romans) do for us? 'We study antiquity', he says, 'in order to use it for our own purposes.'[5] This seems to me misconceived. Of course we are tied to our own time, and indirectly our own lives will be affected in various ways by the work of scholars and scientists. But direct application to our own purposes will introduce into scholarship or science an ulterior and extraneous aim and, by the same token, ambiguity and ambivalence. There is then a danger that such an 'application' will colour our assessment of scholarship, scholarly topics, and scholars. The facts gathered in these pages, not least in the chapter on Victorian classics, seem to me to signal that danger.

I now turn to some books that are specifically concerned with classical scholarship. Anyone seeking information on its history up to, say, 1900 will usually find some answer by turning to Sandys. J.E. Sandys's three volumes are entitled – admittedly by a misnomer – *A History of Classical Scholarship*. They appeared in the early nineteen-hundreds: Volume I, 1903 (3rd ed. 1921), Volumes II and III, 1908. 'An indispensable work of solid learning which I use with gratitude' – this is what the greatest of German Hellenists, U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, said of Sandys.[6] Generous praise, indeed, for Wilamowitz was aware of the shortcomings of the book. The 'History' in fact offers a conglomerate, normally pedestrian but occasionally jaunty, of quite disparate topics: factual details on works of scholarship, though not always correct; judgements on their qualities, more often than not at second or third hand, and not rarely off the mark; finally, condensed biographies of scholars, great, not so great, and not great at all, which take the place of 'the history of the subject'. It is disconcerting that Sandys offers the only repository of many of the relevant facts, and hence remains indispensable. But the field is so large that it will be a long time until something more adequate can replace this book – and so, finally, gratitude prevails.

On the other hand there are two books that may be read with great advantage by anyone wishing to inform himself on the whole width of this subject – one of them superlative though hard to read

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because of its allusiveness, the other a considerable achievement though perhaps not what its writer could have achieved in his prime. Wilamowitz, the author of the first, has already been mentioned. His celebrated *Geschichte der Philologie* (1921) is easily the most fascinating and instructive survey of the history of classics as a whole. (There is now a serviceable translation by A. Harris, entitled *History of Classical Scholarship*, and edited by H. Lloyd-Jones, 1982, with a wide-ranging introduction which canvasses the editor's very personal views, moreover with numerous notes and a useful index).[7] It also happens to be one of the shortest (80 pages in the original) – a marvel of epigrammatic compression. Its subject is rather wider than the strictly philological one here chosen; it is classics as the comprehensive study of Greek and Roman antiquity, its language, literature, history, thought, and material remains: in the shorthand of the German term, *Altertumswissenschaft*, 'science of antiquity', as seen, sometimes idiosyncratically, by one of the greatest practitioners in the history of the subject. Rudolf Pfeiffer's *History of Classical Scholarship 1300-1850* (1976), is, as one would expect, an highly intelligent guide by a master of his craft, welcome also for occasional corrections of Wilamowitz's idiosyncrasies, though not quite 'comparable to the achievements of his preceding volume on the history of scholarship in antiquity (1968). Again, however, I have to warn the reader that my subject is narrower than Pfeiffer's history of comprehensive classical scholarship and its links with Christian humanism, especially that of Erasmus.[8]

Two shorter monographs on more specific topics have particularly assisted my present attempt: Sebastiano Tirnpanaro, *La genesi del metodo del Lachmann* (1963, 2nd ed. 1981) and E.J. Kenney, *The Classical Text. Aspects of Editing in the Age of the Printed Book* (1974). Readers will find them instructive and interesting complements to the picture I have offered.

This is not one of the large weighty books that could and perhaps should be written on these matters. What I do is to draw some guidelines of the kind at which I have already hinted, and my scholarly apparatus is as limited as my intent. But the intent has come out of my own work, which continually sent me back to Bentley and Housman (to a smaller degree, Porson) and, in the end, has made me read them much more intensively than was required by my immediate purposes.

As I have explained in my preface, the first, Italian, edition was a record of a series of lectures to an audience of, in the main, Italian

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graduate students. The present edition consists of the English text from which the Italian translation was made. But I have revised it extensively. In particular I have enlarged the introduction and have added a chapter on Victorian classics which would not have been of much concern to an Italian audience, and a second chapter on Housman. The purpose however is unchanged. This remains a little book and its purpose is to instruct beginners in classical research, but also stimulate the interest of others who are not professionals. Any claim it may have to the attention of classical scholars will be twofold. First, I think, many of them fail to *read* (I do not mean, occasionally consult) Bentley and Housman; I hope to incite them to do so. Secondly, the guide-lines I draw may prove not entirely useless to those who contemplate large-scale work on this important chapter in the history of scholarship – and perhaps also to some who do not.

The person who has learned most from these exercises is the present writer. Pondering on my reading of Bentley and Housman, I have been led to many areas of history since 1500 where I possess no expertise and must fall back on impressions, guesswork, and second-hand information. I have persisted nevertheless, in the hope that historians who are qualified to write about these matters might take up the story from the point where my limitations force me to leave it. I point to problems that arise when critical scholarship impinges on the body politic and social. These are tangents to my main concern and I have no more than hinted at them. For example the position of scholars and (later) scientists in society has changed a great deal in the four centuries or so I have been concerned with. Moreover the character and position of what may be regarded as classical scholarship differ widely in the earlier centuries from that in the later, and in the present century. It must be reckoned a virtue that 'the educated and civilized man' in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, a man like, say, the Hon. Charles Boyle, interested himself in scholarly matters, though he could not entirely fathom them. Yet once there were true judges of these matters, it was bound to become apparent that he was, and continued to be, falsely credited with the ability to judge. Had it been otherwise, the Phalaris controversy, which must loom large in any account of Bentley's work, could not have taken the course that it did take.[9] Similar difficulties are experienced in our own time in different guises.

Such strains and stresses are bound in turn to affect the lives of the scholars and scientists, and thus their work at a remove. It

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is for that reason that I have not entirely omitted, as I might have been tempted to do, some account of the biographies of the half-dozen or so classical scholars to whom, ultimately, we are debtors for most of what we know about the texts and the literatures of that part of antiquity which is still described as classical.

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1

The way to Bentley: the New Learning in England; the seventeenth century, Thomas Gataker and John Pearson

The English word 'humanism' now carries a number of different meanings. Of these only one is of interest here – the meaning related to the Italian *umanesimo* and *rinascimento delle lettere*. To give sense to these expressions the *lettere* in question, Greek or Latin, must have been thought, and in fact were thought, to exercise an influence on men's 'humanity', make them more 'humane', enhance their *cultura*. This presupposes a strong feeling for the intrinsic value of ancient literature and this feeling – not mere familiarity with some works of Latin literature – marks the *rinascimento* off from the Middle Ages, at least in Italy. That there were many other corresponding strands in contemporary Italian life I do not wish to deny. But the inspiration comes from Latin literature, later also Greek. The opinion so long held that this was first felt by Petrarch has something to be said for it, and not less because for him the setting in which his inspiration occurs is still largely medieval. The inspiration is not identical with scholarship, let alone strenuous and critical scholarship. But learning was part of it.

The reason for the inseparability of an element of learning is clearly that the ancient literatures, first Latin, then Greek, and the manuscripts in which they were transmitted, had to be recovered, copied, emended to be read, translated and assessed, before they could be made part of a new *cultura*. Most of the Italian humanists were scholars, but very few of the Quattrocento men – Valla and Politian are well-known exceptions – had more than an inkling of the complex and critical problems they were facing.[1] If this applies to the restoration of the ancient texts, it does not so apply to the effect exercised by the texts. The men of the Italian Renaissance pulled into their own culture whatever they could find of ancient

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literature. Evidence of the energy with which they amalgamated it is abundant. There is a cultural break in spite of the many links with the Middle Ages, and nothing illustrates that break better than the contrast with such countries as England and Germany where the Renaissance spirit did not work a similarly rapid transformation.

Roberto Weiss's brief but important book, *Humanism in England during the fifteenth century*, has carefully analysed the dominant features of this movement. (A much earlier, thirteenth-century, interest in Greek studies, associated with the names of Bishop Robert Grosseteste and probably also Roger Bacon, was noted by Weiss in a posthumous book;[2] it seems to have been furthered by connexions with Sicily and South Italy, but survived that century as little as similar interests before the fifteenth century did in Italy.) It is impossible to overlook characteristics appearing at the initial stage that were to last for a long time to come. Interest in certain cultural innovations of the Italian Renaissance was indeed new but one may doubt whether early English humanism can be called new in the sense of the Italian propagators, and not rather a means of improving some aspects of traditional scholasticism. In that century, and longer, English classical learning was the business of churchmen. Ecclesiastics too staffed diplomacy and civil service, in both of which humanistic Latin style found a convenient application. In these two ways therefore humanistic learning was accepted as a means rather than an end. The end that such innovating patrons as Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester (1391-1447), and a generation later John Tiptoft, Earl of Worcester (died 1470), envisaged was to draw from Italy what could be useful in theology and philosophy on the one hand and in diplomacy, law and administration on the other. Naturally there had been similar origins in Italy as well. But the contrast with the Italian humanists who came more and more to regard *studia humanitatis* as self-justifying ends is nevertheless striking. Weiss is right, therefore, to insist on the double outcome: in contrast with Italy, English classical learning co-operated with medieval scholasticism without an overt break; but this *via media* also prevented hostility between the old and the new learning. Few, if any, schoolmen in fifteenth-century England attacked classical literature and few, if any, 'humanists' mocked scholasticism.

Humanistic studies were attached to the pursuits that mattered at the time and for centuries thereafter, that is, most of all, religion and theology in that close connexion with scholastic learning which I have already mentioned. It was the link with theology that made

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those studies part of contemporary culture. But there is another side to it. For the very attachment to theology kept humanistic scholarship in a subordinate position,: it was understood that the Church Fathers and the Bible would claim first allegiance.

Hence the long line of divines, not primarily men of letters, who concerned themselves with classical learning. It is not surprising, therefore, that the number of those who were primarily devoted to classical pursuits remained small. The two Universities made little provision for those whose chief interest lay in the classics. Provision was made for theology and philosophy, law and medicine, both within the Universities and outside, in diplomacy and administration, at court and in government. This state of affairs, in contrast with Italy, France and, to a certain extent, Germany, is brought out by Bolgar in what is perhaps the best chapter of his book.[3] It was inevitable that, when administration of Church and State called for scholars' Latinity, their service to scholarship had to take second place after more pressing practical needs had been met.

Such were the conditions in which the new learning had to establish itself, and it is not surprising that in the fifteenth century, and much of the sixteenth, even the ability to learn blossomed slowly. As yet England was unable to attract those who could have helped. Two early visits – Manuel Chrysoloras' in 1409 and Poggio's in 1418-23 – proved failures. Even Piero del Monte, who came as Papal Collector and whose influence on Duke Humphrey seems well established, was not pleased with his success. Latin translations of Greek originals were commissioned and obtained from Italian sources; two outstanding humanists, Leonardo Bruni and Pier Candido Decembrio, were the first to send commissioned translations, the former Aristotle's *Politics*, the latter Plato's *Republic*; both declined invitations to visit the country, politely but firmly.

Those who wanted to learn as well as travel went to Italy and profited from their visits as best they could. Ferrara, where Guarino taught, had the highest reputation and a number of his English disciples are on record. Of these only two seem to have taken up humane studies as a career – John Free of Oxford and, a little later, William Sellyng.[4] But Free, a highly talented and accomplished man, died without making a lasting impact and, apparently, after being appointed Bishop of Bath and Wells by Pope Paul II. Sellyng was drawn into Church administration as Prior of Christ Church, Canterbury. Others acquired some learning but, having reached a tolerable standard, returned to high positions in Church and State.

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Such men were perhaps most effective because they exercised patronage and collected personal libraries which reflected their humanistic interests. The first two Englishmen known to have studied under Guarino are also the outstanding examples of this class – William Grey of Oxford, later Bishop of Ely, whose books went to Balliol College after his death, and Robert Flemyng, later Dean of Lincoln, whose books went to Lincoln College, Oxford. The known items of these libraries tell us a great deal about the tastes of their owners; they have been instructively analysed by Weiss.[5]

To a certain extent this state of affairs still conditioned the humanistic learning of the highly distinguished group of the 'Oxford reformers' under Henry VII and Henry VIII: Grocyn, Latimer, Linacre, Colet and More. It is true these men were considerable scholars, considerable enough to satisfy the expectations of Erasmus. Indeed they were on friendly and personal terms with him. But it stands to reason that Erasmus was looking for *bonae litterae* rather than critical scholarship, and *bonae litterae* were found by him in abundance. Their chief contribution was educational. Few of them published much apart from elementary Latin grammars, Latin translations of Greek originals, especially philosophical, medical, astronomical. Thomas More's *Utopia* is famous not as a work of scholarship but as a creative work of political thought.[6] The difference in aim and method is seen when one turns not so much to Erasmus himself as to the great Italian and French savants of the same period: For this was the age of Victorius in Italy, and the age of Budaeus, the elder Scaliger, and their junior, Robertus Stephanus, in France. The same holds good for the next English generation, which cannot bear comparison with Doratus, Turnebus, Henricus Stephanus and Lambinus.

In fact the outstanding men about the middle of the sixteenth century were educators rather than critics: Richard Croke (who had been taught by Grocyn), Sir Thomas Smith, his successor as Greek Reader at Cambridge, Sir John Cheke, the first Regius Professor of Greek in the same university, and Roger Ascham, Greek Reader at Cambridge. What distinguishes them and their friends from their forebears of the fifteenth century is that they were professional scholars teaching at their University, and teaching Greek. What they did was to establish the bases of language and literature, just as their colleagues had done at Oxford when in 1516 Bishop Fox had founded Corpus Christi College with this special purpose in mind.

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How much firmer the grasp of the languages had become can be gathered from the many dozens of distinguished English translations made at the time, and even more from the Latin verse then written. By consent of the greatest European humanists, the Scotsman George Buchanan of St Andrews (1506-82) was regarded as the outstanding neo-Latin poet of the period.[7] If one takes Britain as a whole one must surely judge that before it could claim to teach critical scholarship in classics, it had already attained European standing through Thomas More and Buchanan.

From the point of view of critical scholarship, the position of sixteenth-century English humanism seems archaic. For by the first half of the seventeenth century classical studies were no longer what they had been in the early Italian Renaissance. The work of Victorius and some of his Italian contemporaries in the sixteenth century had already put a different and more critical complexion on humanistic pursuits, and by the seventeenth century primacy in classical studies had moved from Italy to France and then to Holland. The contrast of English classical studies with French and Dutch was marked. The widening of the historical horizon in the best French scholarship of the period, the critical energy displayed both in France and Holland, were not found in England. On the other hand England had the advantage of these disadvantages in that the country was not open to the abuses that turned the study of historical and chronological evidence into ever larger collections of 'antiquities', and that turned textual criticism into a provider of ever larger and ever less critical editions 'with notes by various editors', *cum notis Variorum*. Such were the tendencies developing despite the work of the greatest scholar of them all, Joseph Scaliger (died 1609),[8] and despite Casaubon (died 1614) and Lipsius (died 1606). But these tendencies were already strong in the work of Salmasius and Meursius, considerable scholars though they were.

These facts need to be borne in mind when we are confronted by Wilamowitz's saying[9] that seventeenth-century English scholarship before Bentley, as much as contemporary German, would best be considered in the setting of 'Dutch classics' ('könnten . . . in die holländische Philologie eingeordnet werden'). There is little doubt that during this period Dutch influence on English classical scholarship was strong. But a less wholesale approach to Bentley's procedures shows several virtues that may justly be claimed for Bentley already present.[10] Soon one discovers an intellectual freshness and critical independence which puts the unprejudiced

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