

J. H. Parry (1914-82)

C. R. BOXER*

Professor John Parry, C.M.G., Professor of Oceanic History at Harvard University, 1965-81, and of the Visiting Harrison Chair of History at the College of William and Mary, 1981-82, died suddenly at his home at Cambridge, Massachusetts, on August 25, 1982, at the age of sixty-eight.

Parry had achieved great distinction as a historian, both of maritime and of Latin American affairs, and he died at the height of his powers. He was also an outstanding university administrator, exemplifying a rare combination of academic and administrative abilities. He was Vice-Chancellor of the University of Wales in 1963-65; and he played a leading role in the development of Latin American studies in Britain. He combined great erudition with a compulsively readable style. He never wrote a dull page or a clumsy paragraph.

Parry was born on April 26, 1914, and educated at King Edward School, Birmingham, at Clare College, Cambridge, and at Harvard University. He became a Fellow of Clare in 1938, after a period of travel and research in Spain and Latin America, including the Archive of the Indies at Seville. His first book, *The Spanish Theory of Empire in the Sixteenth Century*, was published in 1940. It was a brilliant essay, which displayed that economical eloquence which is a hallmark of his style; and it remains required reading for students of Imperial Spain.

Parry saw war service in the Royal Navy, 1940-45, mainly in the Indian Ocean. This experience helped to enlarge his scope as a maritime historian. At the end of the war, he returned to Cambridge, where he became a university lecturer in history and a stimulating College tutor and teacher. From 1949 to 1956, he held the Chair of History at the University College of the West Indies in Jamaica. Then he moved to Nigeria, serving as Principal of University College, Ibadan, 1956-60. On his return to Britain, he became Principal of University College, Swansea, remaining there until 1965.

During that time he headed a government committee to report on Latin American Studies, which enabled him to revisit the United States,

* The British Academy.

where he had spent a year as Visiting Professor at Harvard in 1955. The report of this committee led to the establishment of five Centers for postgraduate work on Latin America: in London, Oxford, Cambridge, Liverpool, and Glasgow. Parry moved to Harvard in 1965, to take the Gardiner Chair of Oceanic History and Affairs, which he filled with great distinction, and Cambridge became his home. On his retirement, he took the Visiting Harrison Chair of History at the College of William and Mary for a year. Among other honors that he received, he became a Commander in the Spanish Order of Alfonso X in 1976.

Parry's work on Latin American history has been universally recognized as exceptionally distinguished for soundness of research, originality of thought, and clarity of exposition. *The Spanish Theory of Empire* was followed by *The Audiencia of New Galicia in the Sixteenth Century: A Study in Spanish Colonial Government* (1948), and by *The Sale of Public Office in the Spanish Indies under the Hapsburgs* (1953). Both of these works were models of their kind, and can be read with pleasure and profit today. Parry also turned his attention to a larger canvas, with his *Europe and a Wider World, 1415–1715* (1949). This became and remained deservedly popular; and it has not been entirely superseded by his more detailed work covering a shorter time span, *The Age of Reconnaissance, Exploration, Discovery and Settlement, 1450–1650* (1963). This was supplemented by a documentary volume, *The European Reconnaissance. Selected Documents* (1968), dealing mainly with the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. All of these works were written with his habitual lucidity and elegance; although the recent re-issue of *The Age of Reconnaissance* (1982), with a few trifling changes, is rather disappointing, for the reasons given elsewhere by this reviewer (reviewed in this issue). *Trade and Dominion. The European Overseas Empires in the Eighteenth Century* (1971) shows Parry at his best. It traces in masterly outline the development and vicissitudes of the European maritime empires in the Age of Enlightenment. It defines the factors that stimulated the expansion of European commercial and political influence outside Europe; and it narrates briefly and pungently the consequences, both for Europeans themselves, and for the peoples of the regions where they intruded.

In 1956, Parry collaborated with P.M. Sherlock in *A Short History of the West Indies*. Ten years later, he published *The Spanish Seaborne Empire*, which may, perhaps, be termed in some respects his masterpiece. In 1974, he published *The Discovery of the Sea*, taking as his text: "All the Seas Are One." Inevitably, this book drew heavily on his previous work, containing great gobbets from *The Age of Reconnaissance*. But it provides an admirable survey of European maritime discovery down to the completion of Magellan's great voyage. His last book, *The*

Discovery of South America (1979), is another lively survey that covers more than the title indicates. It is not necessary to enumerate here Parry's contributions to historical journals and congresses. Suffice it to say, that he did not discuss a topic which he did not illuminate. He was an admirably clear expositor of maritime and navigational technique, and of shipbuilding and shipboard life. His works are unlikely to be superseded in the foreseeable future. At the time of his death, he had just finished editing a five-volume documentary history of South America, which will be published shortly. His next book was to have been called *Cook and his Contemporaries*, of which his premature death has deprived us.

Parry led a very active life, traveling widely, and finding time for sailing, fishing, mountain-walking, and bird-watching. He had a genial and unaffected manner, which gained him a wide circle of friends around the world. He will be sorely missed on both a professional and a personal level; but his example and inspiration will long remain. He was happily married in 1939 to Joyce Carter, who, with their son and three daughters, survives him.