

expected to evoke a spirit so elusive, although it affords a succession of vignettes of medieval life often as vivid and detailed as the miniatures of a contemporary illuminated manuscript.

In his prologue Canon Harrison disarms criticism by declaring that the book is not intended for the specialist; but he occasionally permits himself generalisations that challenge comment. The researcher familiar with the bewildering richness and variety of medieval institutional life will, for instance, read with some astonishment that the men of the Middle Ages were intellectually, socially, ecclesiastically, politically and economically 'bound in fetters'; and that they made 'little or no progress' during seven or eight centuries. Perhaps it may be suggested that Canon Harrison falls too readily into the current assumption that mental progress is to be measured solely in terms of scientific advance—or perhaps such branches of knowledge as theology and metaphysics are excluded by him from consideration as being neither 'familiar' nor 'easily understood'!

In the epilogue he pays tribute to the fundamentally Christian character of medieval society. 'At heart', he tells us, 'medieval man tells us that he possessed the pearl of great price': his mind was 'saturated with the Christian faith as the medieval Church taught it'. Here surely is the real clue to that identity of outlook between the men of the eighth and the man of the fifteenth century, which to Canon Harrison seems indicative of the stagnation of the Middle Ages. The habits of thought of the early Tudor Englishman were, he complains, the same as those of the Anglo-Saxon of the age of Alfred the Great. 'Their interpretation of the universe was the same; their superstitions were the same; their devotion to an ecclesiastical system were the same'. In other words, whatever else might differentiate them, they were bound together by the same Faith, and by incorporation in the same universal Church of Christ. And is not this the reason why it should be much easier for the modern Catholic to 'find his way into the heart of his medieval predecessor' than for the average 'man of the twentieth century' for whom Canon Harrison writes? To borrow once more from the source quoted above: 'If the four chief attributes of man at his highest be Love, Reason, Faith and the sense of Wonder, [the men of the Middle Ages] at least had them all: which does not mean that they always used them well'.¹

H. M. CHEW.

ROOF BOSSES IN MEDIEVAL CHURCHES. By C. J. P. Cave, M.A. F.S.A. (Cambridge University Press; 35s.)

It is difficult to select the more accurate superlatives which come tumbling with such profusion into the reader's mind when handling this book. In the history of English sculpture and English medieval life the author has made a brilliant discovery and the result is a

¹ Rev. Prof. Canon Claude Jenkins: *Some Aspects of Medieval Latin Literature*, in *The Legacy of the Middle Ages*, pp. 157, 158.

book of delight to all who like to look at reproductions of good medieval craftsmanship. In addition, those who are interested in emblems and symbols will find here a source of intriguing speculation and further investigation.

For some years past the French have been reviewing their great heritage of religious art in cathedrals and churches with books of photogravures and descriptions of their treasures. In England our treasury was so despoiled by the marauders of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that we did not seem to have anything to offer worthy of comparison with the French productions. But Mr Cave has discovered literally thousands of English medieval works, some by consummate artists, others by inexperienced masons, which have escaped the iconoclasts because they have been practically unnoticed since they were first chiselled. And he has presented them for our admiration and instruction in the only practical manner. Even those skilled in the practice of roof-gazing by frequent visits to the Sistine chapel would fail to appreciate the vast majority of these English bosses because they are set either so far overhead or in such gloom as to be unobservable. Mr Cave has reached them by means of telephotography and an electric beam. Through this medium he has come to close quarters with some 8,000 roof bosses, of which he reproduces in excellent half-tone blocks nearly 360 specimens. On these he provides a commentary in which he shows the specifically English character of this work; he adds a descriptive list (which does not claim completeness) of over 200 churches in Great Britain containing bosses; and finally he describes his methods and instruments for the benefit of future discoverers.

He leaves many problems of interpretation to subsequent students, in particular the meaning of the foliated head with the stem growing out of the mouth, a very common symbol and one which he suggests may be a pre-Christian fertility symbol. There is, too, a strange figure of God the Holy Ghost with three creatures appearing out of his beard; and the ancient symbols of three hares with three ears between them, of three fish eating each others' tails, appear quite frequently as well as innumerable 'grotesques' which may reveal much to the student of legend and folk lore. Most pleasing and delightful are the scenes from the life of our Lord and his Mother. A few of these, such as those at Norwich, are already known, but most are fascinating discoveries. The Lincoln imp now has an army of rivals for popularity and admiration.

CONRAD PEPLER, O.P.

THE TIMES OF MELVILLE AND WHITMAN. By Van Wyck Brooks. (Dent and Sons; 15s.)

During recent decades we have become accustomed in American writing to a vigour and precision much greater than we find in our own. We sometimes forget that the excellencies of the modern