

## BOOK REVIEWS

CALIBAN IN GRUB STREET. By Ronald A. Knox. (Sheed & Ward; 7/6.)

You need not be a Catholic to note that the 'intelligent' world seldom exerts the full extent of its intelligence where religion is concerned. When the egregious Lewis Dodd, of *The Constant Nymph*, quotes 'Moses' as having said 'it is better to marry than to burn,' none of the party at the Karin-dehütte, except the Italian man-servant, can correct his ascription. 'For Florence (the product, you remember, of academic Cambridge) had not, unfortunately, read her Bible with quite the same intelligence and attention which she had accorded to other and inferior books.' This comparative slackening of effort over the things of God is, I think, the symptom Father Ronald Knox finds most notable in newspaper symposia on religion. He does not, of course, expect the literary free-lances asked to take part in these exercises to be theological experts. On the contrary, it is just because they represent the average man that they are there at all. The teams are not even picked, primarily, as teams of journalists—otherwise Father Knox would (he says) have substituted 'Gigadibs' for 'Caliban' upon his title page. No, the symposiasts are—as far as religion is concerned—the average man made attractively vocal for other average men. This Father Knox conclusively proves in an inquisition on the initiative (or subserviency) of the democratic Press and its myrmidons—one of the most useful passages of a useful and brilliant book. Having thus roughly defined the stature of the typical symposiast—there will always be stray figures, such as that of Bertrand Russell, which exceed it—Father Knox gets merrily to work with his scalpel on Arnold Bennett, Hugh Walpole, James Douglas, Conan Doyle and the rest, not always, I am afraid, using the animal as though he loved him.

So far as it goes the book is undoubtedly a triumph for Father Knox, and I am delighted to find it acclaimed as such in the secular Press. 'For a logically trained mind (as *The Nation* puts it) the prey is too easy . . . Father Knox aiming a little logic at these symposiasts is like a champion shooting pigeons at Monte Carlo. The only interest is in the speed and neatness with which they are dispatched.' There is

nothing, I feel, to be detracted from this praise. Perhaps I am wrong in regretting that there is very little to add to it. Father Knox did not set out to convert the symposiasts. He undertook (and very laudably) to show the general public befuddled by 'big names' how little worthy of reverence were their wearers' religious conjectures. He apologises charmingly if he seems to be 'endeavouring to bludgeon the symposiasts out of their last remaining contact with Christianity,' and I am perfectly certain that he is not. But I am pretty sure, too, on his reading of their misunderstandings, that he has hardly an adequate conception of their interior and exterior difficulties. 'Curiosity by itself (he suggests) ought to bring men to church to find out what is being said there.' Perhaps it does. A Catholic editor was once asked if there were any Catholic periodical he would like to leave on the seat of a railway carriage to give an idea of the length, breadth, height and depth of the Faith to the next traveller. One might put a parallel question with respect to the average Catholic sermon, which—unless, like Miss Rebecca West, he has a taste for ritual—is all the stray sheep intruding a nervous nose into the fold is likely to take away with him. Perhaps an honest Catholic symposium as to 'Why They Stay Outside' might have its uses? The main difference between the symposiasts and ourselves is (as Father Knox admirably puts it) that they think religion is something they might get hold of; and we know it is something that has got hold of us. No one will assume the yoke of a Christ misunderstood and unloved; and how is the symposiast to be brought to love and understanding? *Sed quis te invocat nesciens te? Aliud enim pro alio potest invocare nesciens.*

H.P.E.

LIFE IN THE MIDDLE AGES. Vol IV: Monks, Friars, Nuns.  
By G. C. Coulton. (Cambridge University Press; 10/6.)

This is the fourth volume of the reprint and extension of Dr. Coulton's *Medieval Garner*. The complete work consists of translations of documents from multifarious sources illustrating the whole of medieval social life. It is unique in value; no similar acquaintance with the period could be obtained without years of study in several languages. The present volume is confined to monasticism.

Let us be quite clear as to its material. The essential idea of all monasticism is the following of the evangelical counsels in order more expeditiously to observe the two-fold precept of