

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

American detective story, for example, so strongly contrasted against our own foggy, drifting tales, the robust sweep of the great novels, the cut-steel phrases of the American publicists, are the result of an evolutionary process. Just as we find lucidity and balance, a mature technique, in Arnold Bennett, Galsworthy, Shaw and Wells after the rambling and booming of the eminent Victorians, so the American writers of today have developed from a great body of nineteenth century literature comparable in bulk and quality to our own contemporary output.

A fascinating study of the whole of this nineteenth century American richness is in a fair way to completion. Mr Van Wyck Brooks has now written four volumes, *The World of Washington Irving*, *The Flowering of New England*, the book under review and *New England: Indian Summer*. The author's method in these studies of a vast literary field is remarkable. Many pages are closely packed with names of authors and books, too closely packed, for the delightful style so streamlines the mass of information that the mind glides over the smooth surface, unperceiving. Very often, however, the author breaks into what can only be called a literary cadenza. Rarely quoting from a writer's words, and then only in footnotes, he gives one in a series of pages a distillation of the writer's style, world and subject. A good digestion has indeed waited upon Mr Van Wyck Brooks's appetite for books. The well-being that is occasioned is dazzling. In whole chapters the reader can sink into a world of Dr Holmes's breakfast-table, Audubon's wilderness, or Emerson's Concord. These exercises are literary *tours de force* unparalleled in the reviewer's reading.

In *The Times of Melville and Whitman* Mr Van Wyck Brooks has overleaped the boundaries of New England to which he had restricted himself in the other three volumes. Here he is treating of the mid-century period when immigrants were pouring into the United States and its vast areas were being opened up to settlement. New England, as a result, no longer had a monopoly of literary production; the South, the Middle West and the San Francisco area were producing writers who would break clean away from the English literary tradition of the East. One finds in this volume curious echoes of Europe, Lola Montez in the Far West, a brother of Keats in Louisville, as earlier one found remnants of the Bonapartes; but meanwhile Bret Harte is writing his stories and the heroes or villains of fact are flourishing, Buffalo Bill, Deadwood Dick and Wild Bill Hickok. In between the European influences and the Wild West stands the cracknel-quality figure of Mark Twain, the great debunker of the romantic old-world tradition, and positively a central figure of the American way of life. His fellow countrymen loved him, and it is not unimportant that President Truman too is a 'man from Missouri'.

PAUL FOSTER, O.P.