

Professor Knowles's work. There are many who will agree with Mr Pantin's comment that it is 'one of Fr David's most important pieces of writing'.

The book is admirably produced by the Cambridge University Press. It contains a Curriculum Vitae by Mr W. A. Pantin and a bibliography of the writings of Professor Knowles. The photograph used as a frontispiece has in the main caught very well the expression of the subject except that it gives him an unduly tight-lipped appearance.

This is not the place to attempt to pay tribute, however inadequate, to the achievements of Professor Knowles and to the high standards which he has set for Catholic historians in this country. Although he is retiring from the Regius Professorship which he has held with such distinction, it is to be hoped that he has ahead of him many years during which he can continue his great historical enterprises and by his work and his example remind his fellow Catholics that in our day scholarship is one of the most necessary forms of apostolic action.

PATRICK MCGRATH

MEDIEVAL LONDON: FROM COMMUNE TO CAPITAL, by Gwyn A. Williams; University of London, Athlone Press; 50s.

This book is a highly detailed study of the development of the city of London between 1191 and 1337. It seeks to unravel the causes and internal proceedings which changed the city from a commune existing in a feudal society on sufferance to a powerful corporation with an assured independent status as the capital of England. The ordinary reader will pretty certainly rise from his struggle with the book's complexities with two main impressions. The first impression will be a very powerful sense that his previous notions of medieval history were much too shallow; that the reality was far more complex and sophisticated than he imagined; that the Gregorian Reform, the coming of the friars and, indeed, the whole life of the medieval English Church was fitted into a far bigger and more variegated and difficult material and social frame than the older Church history books—or, indeed, the textbooks of medieval political history—suggested. The second impression—a very different one—is of the opportunities and dangers of modern methods of specialist historical research. The opportunities are clear. The astonishing wealth of MS material for so limited a field as the history of one city is revealed by the footnotes, appendices and statistical tables of this book. The detailed reconstruction of the careers and family histories of so many London trading families of the period also underlines the opportunities. But the dangers are equally clear. One danger in the use of so much specialised material is that no other specialist will ever have the time or energy to check the innumerable references and test the multitude of statements made by the author. Another danger is that advanced specialist research techniques do not necessarily qualify the researcher as an interpreter of his new material. Indeed, historical research of the modern scientific kind, with all its impressive apparatus and technical jargon not infrequently goes with a very naive and uncritical ideology. Dr

Williams explains in his Foreword that he has left out of account ecclesiastical affairs except in so far as they touch on political and social life. He does not explain why he has made this division. But as we read the book we get the impression that his real reason is because he is, *a priori*, convinced that religion had no relevance to the life of the city of London in the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Indeed, it seems that he presumes that the religion of medieval Londoners was very like that of their modern descendants. Thus the religious side of the life of the guilds is represented as a formality. Their 'obsession with funeral rites' is equated with the burial rites of nineteenth century friendly societies (p. 171). The author's only generalisation on the effect of religion on the lives of the citizens is that:

'Vitality was curbed and channelled . . . by the influence of the Church . . .

Among the moneyed classes, in particular, preoccupation with life after death, intensive application to formal ritual, and an overriding concern with atonement were almost obsessive, as was perhaps natural, given the current canonical ambiguities on wealth, trade and usury.' (p. 22).

This judgment, we gather, rests solely on the evidence of wills and of Dr Moorman's 'Church Life in England in the Thirteenth Century.' A scriptural quotation by a clerk chronicler receives the comment that this hardly represented the attitude of the citizens. We are told in passing that the preaching of Dominicans had strong influence during the violent political struggles in the city in the later thirteenth century—but the author does not see fit to enlarge on this point. Doubtless we have been too *simpliste* in the past in our notions of the middle ages as an age of Faith. But it would be equally *simpliste*—and historically unscientific—to see the average medieval Londoner as a modern post-Christian.

With these reservations, the book is very welcome as filling a notable gap in our knowledge of medieval history. Moreover it is, unlike the majority of modern historical theses written up into book form by specialists, written in readable and vigorous English.

HUGH AVELING, O.S.B.

THE PROBLEM OF SOVEREIGNTY IN THE LATER MIDDLE AGES, by M. Wilks. (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, new series, vol. ix.) Cambridge University Press; 65s.

Dr Wilks sets out to create, from the massive heterogeneity of later medieval political thought, an order faithful to the facts and comprehensive to modern man. His relation to the writers of the period, like their own relation to their predecessors, is one of respect for every opinion without loss of unified perspective. To achieve this, he examines primarily the solution they offered to the problem of sovereignty; and succeeds in making this the pivot for an exceedingly wide arc, which takes in the universal society, the origins of political authority, the relation of ecclesiastical to lay rulership, as well as the strictly ecclesiastical