

MODERN HISTORIANS AND THE STUDY OF HISTORY. Essays and Papers.
By F. M. Powicke. (Odhams Press; 16s.)

It is a tribute to the ease and charm of Sir F. M. Powicke's style that he is able to invest the short biographies of his 'modern historians' with considerable interest. These are mostly the leading men of the 'Manchester School' of which Tout was the great exemplar. Men of the utmost integrity and domestic virtue, valuable members of any community, they pursued their academic courses and raised monuments of learning. 'His memory', writes the author concerning one of them, 'was long cherished with gratitude and affection in Princes Risborough.' Only with Henri Pirenne, Belgium's national figure, do we escape from the atmosphere of the donnish study, the invaluable accumulation of facts from decade-long investigation of Pipe Rolls and Manorial Records, the gradual building up of a mass of unshakeable material for the study of the Middle Ages.

Quite correctly, Sir F. M. Powicke speaks of the *study* rather than the *teaching* of History. The present reviewer, when an undergraduate, attended the lectures of one of the greatest of these men, H. W. C. Davis, newly appointed Regius Professor at Oxford. He had chosen with a splendid humility to deliver an introductory course of lectures on European history to those preparing for their Preliminary Examination. The great bulk of the course dealt with the Dark and Middle Ages. The professor was universally careful and learned, balanced and fair and the reviewer can recall exactly one phrase of the entire course. 'Innocent IV', he remarked, 'then fled, no man pursuing.' The dry scriptural condemnation of a Pope the Professor disliked is not a world-shattering remark; but it is the only thing that remains. Decidedly H. W. C. Davis was a great student but not a great teacher.

The reason for this, which one feels was also characteristic of Davis' compeers, perhaps emerges in the book under review. The fascination of the Middle Ages was felt by them, but was not understood. In all Professor Davis' careful lectures there was never a hint of the spiritual principles by which medieval men lived. He can never have felt for a moment what Innocent IV stood for. The same lack is disastrously apparent in the two-volume Cambridge Medieval History by Previt -Orton, another historian tenderly mentioned in this book. Sir F. M. Powicke speaks critically of such historical symposia as the Cambridge Histories, but in the work of these admirable men there is the same failure to focus and illuminate. 'There is no single far-reaching source of light which makes every detail significant as luminous as the stonework in the High Street at Oxford on a clear evening in June.'

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