



Stanley DeGraff

trast with the rest of the family. But to round out his character impressively she ought, I believe, to have put him as carefully into relationship with the poor he sought to lead. This would have demanded a fuller treatment of their attitudes, "lumpen" though they be, their apathy that gives way to rowdiness, their hatred of the Wikker family which colors with suspicion Handel's solicitude for their welfare. The dullness of a large part of the narrative of family affairs would have thus been replaced by a more effective picture of a well-intentioned man hopelessly caught among these mutually hostile forces in the little Yorkshire seacoast community.

EDWIN BERRY BURGUM.

A Biography of Jesus

THE LIFE OF JESUS, by Conrad Noel. Simon & Schuster. \$3.75.

EVERY so often we read some allegedly Marxian work so persistently subjective that we cannot help blushing for the author. This is particularly true in the treatment of historical figures. The technique, roughly, is to take some "favorite" and ransack history to claim for him all the qualities of the contemporary revolutionist. Under certain historical circumstances the analogy may seem convincing. For example, in studying a period of fundamental social change, we may be tempted to call a leading figure "the Lenin of his time" as a convenient metaphor. But if we proceed to use the phrase as anything more than a metaphor, we fall into an error which is, at its base, anti-Marxian, and assumes an imaginary reincarnation which is less than scientific. One of the fundamental concepts of Marxism is that no two historical situations are identical in their significance for the

rest of history. Hence, no two historical figures can fulfill the same historic role. An approach that formulates a false analogy, no matter how Marxian its claims may be, is outside the body of serious and useful scholarship.

This volume by Conrad Noel is the most recent example of a mechanical approach to Marxism. Noel apparently was not satisfied with the frequently stated thesis that Christ was a good deal more radical than most of his followers would care to admit. Jesus, he insists, was a Communist. He was a full-blown Marxist, complete with an understanding of the contradictions of Roman imperialism. He was baited by Hearsts, hounded by vigilantes, maligned by chambers of commerce. When he spoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, he meant socialism. The Aramaic word generally translated as "ministry" should read "propaganda," and "church" should read "divine international."

It is perfectly obvious that no Marxist could have arrived at such conclusions. Jesus was, of course, a radical in the terms of his own society. He was an anti-imperialist and sided, in general, with the oppressed and exploited classes. In his conflicts with the Pharisees and Sadducees he represented the majority interest against the entrenched minority. His system of ethics, although its basis was primarily eschatological, was largely an instrument for social justice. But to force a parallel between his time and ours, as Noel does, is to equate a period in which there was little material basis for social change with one in which social change is inevitable. Thus, the author is forced into the most dubious methods of scholarship. His approach to history is subjective, and he is completely indifferent to the results of modern research in the handling of his sources. He regards the Fourth Gospel as of equal authenticity with the synoptics and treats manifest legend with as much seriousness as relatively credible incidents. It never seems to occur to him that there might be an error in the reporting of words and deeds, and he quotes isolated sayings with all the credulity of a Fundamentalist.

And the point is simply that Marxism is not served by its malpractitioners. We will not, as Dorothy Canfield Fisher suggests in the *Saturday Review of Literature*, try to lure Christians into our movement by offering this book as substantial proof that Jesus was on our side on every point. Used carefully and objectively, with the precision with which a surgeon uses his most delicate instruments, Marxism is by far the most fruitful method of historical research. Used like a sledgehammer to make the events of two thousand years ago fit the present, it is no longer Marxian; it is no method at all, and only provides its enemies with good cause for derision.

It is unfortunate that this particular book so aptly demonstrates the malpractice of Marxism, because it is the *magnum opus* of one of the most honest and courageous men of our time—one who, during the late war,

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braved the official wrath of the British Tories by flying the flags of St. George, Sinn Fein, and the International from his church flagstaff. Since then, as Vicar of Thaxted, he has been a staunch defender of the Soviet Union, a valuable leader and ally in all the struggles of the day. Despite its inaccuracies, his book is in every way lovable. We come away from it with a feeling of warmth for this stout-hearted old radical, so devoted to two causes that he made the exponent of one into the world leader of both. He has torn history to shreds to create this anachronism, but he has done so out of no perverse motives.

R. H. ROVERE.

Brief Reviews

SOCIALISM VERSUS CAPITALISM, by A. C. Pigou. The Macmillan Co. \$1.50.

The successful building of socialism in the Soviet Union has put bourgeois economists in a dilemma. Not only have their theories been exploded, but now they are confronted with the unpleasant job of explaining away the ever-greater triumphs of the U.S.S.R. and the increasing breakdown of capitalist economy. For the past two decades have shown that socialism is superior to capitalism in every sphere of life. Hence the practitioners of the dismal science, no longer able to deny that socialism works, attempt to forecast difficulties for it in the future.

Meanwhile, the impact of the Soviet Union has been so great that the more honest economists try to approach the problem from what they call "a non-political" viewpoint. That is, they set up hypothetical economic systems and demonstrate that insofar as production and living standards go, there is little difference between "ideal" capitalist and socialist economics. What is needed, they argue, is a little more kindness on the part of the capitalists, and a little more patience on the part of the workers. In this way they dodge the unpleasant fact that capitalism is an outmoded social system which is no longer able to supply the needs of the overwhelming majority of the people; and they run away from the obvious necessity of a political program against reaction and fascism, which must ultimately lead to the establishment of a socialist society.

Professor Pigou, a leading English economist, is troubled by the decay of capitalism and the success of socialism. But instead of coming out boldly, as the Webbs did, on the side of socialism, he does a wire-balancing stunt which pitches him head first into the mire of futile verbiage. He begins by saying that "it is not the business of an academic economist, nor is it within his competence, to stand advocate for or against any political program." Thus he wanders around in the mazes of a cloud-cuckoo land of imaginary economic systems, weighing one hypothetical point against another. It is no wonder then he concludes that economists have nothing really to say about the future society. That is because, if they ever began discussing realities, they would have to blurt out that socialism is the one hope of humanity.

F. M.

THE LONG WAY HOME, by Sylvia Chatfield Bates. Harcourt, Brace & Co. \$2.50.

When you look at the best-seller list each week you almost always spot somewhere below Dale Carnegie a "novel of generations," one of those bulky pieces that reconstructs American history through the story of a family from Plymouth Rock to Radio City. Few of them have had any more truth or depth than George Arliss's historical portraits. As in his films, they depend upon authenticity of costume and furniture for historical flavor, and upon formulaized hokum for volume of sales. So with Miss Bates's latest job. It is superficial in its history, pointless in its tracing of generations, romantic in its emotions, and dull all the way.

M. M.