

*Film* (Sylvan Press, 21s.) describes in detail the making of *Animal Farm*: it took three years to make, was shot in 750 scenes and consists of about 300,000 drawings in colour. His claim that the animated cartoon is 'a new art in its own right' may seem excessive, but to see *Animal Farm* is to be convinced that the drawn figures exist only to serve the purpose of the film. All the extraneous elements of the 'live' film are dispensed with, and such singleness of purpose in manipulating the possibilities of movement and colour in a wholly non-realistic way produces a direct and impressive effect. The savage irony of Orwell's tale, with its final totalitarian motto—'All animals are equal—but some are more equal than others'—has certainly found its visual expression in a film that is much more than an exciting advance in the technique of the cinema.

I.E.

## FICTION AND THE AGE OF FAITH

NAOMI ROYDE SMITH

AT INTERVALS during the past hundred years the historical novel has turned away from the court and the camp to occupy itself with religion, often with enormous popular success. Between *Hypatia* and *Il Santo* two of the best sellers of their day were *Quo Vadis?* and *John Inglesant*. They are still to be found on bookshelves from which those other historical novels, *Barabbas* and *The Sorrows of Satan*, have been cast out. Religion in itself; the religious adventure; the problems of conduct and belief; the opposition of the Church—all have long occupied, and continue to occupy modern writers; but it is only in the present decade, with Miss H. F. M. Prescott's *Man on a Donkey*, that historical fiction has returned to the Age of Faith.

The immediate gain is immense. We escape from investigations of tortured conscience and the conflicts of post-Reformation theology and practice and are once more involved in the crowded freedom of action based on an accepted creed, an obeyed authority. Haugenier de Linnieres, the newly knighted hero of Madame Oldenbourg's novel, *The Corner Stone*,<sup>1</sup> goes none too willingly with the pseudo-crusade against the Albigenes. He had heard it said 'that Raymond of Toulouse had never worshipped the devil; that war against him was not really a holy war. He thought these were quibbling considerations. You go to God's defence or you do not.' You also play at *l'amour courtois*—liberal shepherds give it a grosser name—with another man's wife who plays at virtue in exquisite raiment and in exquisite vernal settings.

1 *The Corner Stone*. By Zoë Oldenbourg, translated by Edward Hyams. (Gollancz; 15s.)

'He saw Marie standing before him, very upright, wearing a long purple cloak over a blue gown, with a crown of cornflowers on her hair. . . . She dropped her cloak to the ground and beneath she wore only a long, loose garment of a bright blue, and she pulled the cord which fastened the gathered neck so that the gown fell away revealing her shoulders . . . all white and as if carved in alabaster, luminous with golden lights, and the blue of her crown of flowers and her gown and the green of the forest made the blue of her eyes seem deep and radiant.'

The glowing softness of this verbal miniature is repeated in varying detail, alternating with equally vivid scenes from the other side of the picture:

'The mother was very ill, for they had cut out her tongue and cut off her breasts; the daughter had only been raped'.

The construction of this novel is violently episodic. It turns from Haugenier's grandfather, an old blinded man who sets out on an unconsummated pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulchre, to his son, Hubert the Fat, who commits incest in a chapel 'where it amused him to hang his gloves and his belt on a crucifix', to monks and clerics in learned controversy: it glitters with apocalyptic ecstasies of prayer.

Behind and before and around this tale of amours and warfare the Faith glows and menaces, condemns and serves as the symbolic tracery surrounding pictures so verbally polychrome that we are left with a sense of not having read, but looked through, a series of alternating pages, taken from *Les Très Riches Heures* and the lunatic symbols of Hieronymus Bosch. The final impression is of an hypertrophied comic-strip, a horror-erotic with horror predominating. Whether *The Corner Stone* is an authentic picture of life in the Middle Ages only learned historians can decide. It is certainly far more emotional than the *Morte d'Arthur* and the *Canterbury Tales*: but then, neither Chaucer nor Sir Thomas Malory had a long perspective to falsify his view of historical fiction. It is already a best-seller here and abroad.

*Colum of Derry*<sup>2</sup> takes us farther back into time. We are in the legendary region of early Irish Catholicism. St Columba, still Colum of Derry, coping with the tangled rivalries around the court of the High King and with the daily problems of an Abbot's rule, has one heart's desire: he longs to make enough fair copies of St Jerome's Psalter to provide every religious house in Eire with one free from errors. He is a perfect calligraphist and the book opens with the lovely episode of the learned Abbot teaching a schoolboy to write.

*L'amour courtois* and Crusades have not begun to stretch their bright, bloodstained shadows on this cluster of little striving kingdoms. Sin is

<sup>2</sup> *Colum of Derry*. By Eona K. Macnicol. (Sheed and Ward; 10s. 6d.)

there in the heart of Colum: the sins of pride and covetousness. He steals the perfect Psalter in order to copy it to the end, and the end is war. Colum is brought to trial and judged guilty of open rebellion. In the end he banishes himself to Iona, being allied with the potent druids. The novel stops at the point when the saint's greatest adventure began.

Miss Macnicol's pages are as crowded as Madame Oldenbourg's but are far less agitated and dazzling. They take us back into the island mists and temperate sunlight through which human frailty, bloodshed and holiness twist together and form into such Runic patterns as enrich the borders of the Book of Kells.

An Ulster Protestant who has read *Colum of Derry* says: 'I am enthralled by this book'. It enthral but it does not excite. It is neither erotic nor horror-raising. It is not likely to become a best-seller even in Eire.

## REVIEWS

**MARXISM: PAST AND PRESENT.** By R. N. Carew Hunt. (Bles; 12s. 6d.)  
**WHERE WE CAME OUT.** By Granville Hicks. (Gollancz; 13s. 6d.)

After recent reports coming out of Washington it is interesting to note that as lately as the summer of 1953 it was still possible to give a series of lectures, free from political bias and hysterical denunciation, on the theme of what Marx really meant. Mr Carew Hunt's book is based on lectures given at the School of Advanced International Studies of Johns Hopkins University and is a corrective, in a less indulgent sense, of his valuable *Theory and Practice of Communism*. In a cold and incisive way he analyses the leading themes of Marxist ideology (one is tempted to write 'faith') and is at great pains to fathom even the most confused concepts of the Marx-Engels 'deposit', as for example the distinction between 'productive forces' and the 'relations of production'. Where necessary Lenin and Stalin are brought in as commentators, particularly to show how they had to adapt the Marx-Engels line when faced with the realities of a Communist system, as in the highly embarrassing question of the withering away of the State.

Mr Carew Hunt scores no cheap points but shows the inherent philosophical difficulties, confusions and contradictions of Marx's thought, the wish fulfilment in his analysis of capitalism, the misreading and obsession with the French revolutionary tradition in his historical knowledge and political philosophy. The 'past' of the title is largely philosophical, while the 'present' is an all too short account of present Marxist thought in the U.S.S.R. One point he does not make clear,