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Entre Nous.

A Novelist on Noah: A Problem in Method.

This book on *Noah*, by Mr. R. H. Mottram (Rich & Cowan; 5s. net), is a notable addition to a series of biographies which aims at presenting the lives of well-known Biblical figures in a popular form such as will appeal both to laymen without special knowledge of critical matters and to historians and churchmen of all creeds. This account of Noah will certainly be a 'popular' biography: whether it is exactly a biography is another question. But Mr. Mottram is not overmuch concerned with this aspect of the matter. He says explicitly that the book is not meant for students, and will not add to exact knowledge. He is out, not to praise the critics, but to rescue Noah from them; for he holds that, with their dismembering tactics and their theories of eponymous heroes, etc., they have pretty nearly disposed of the patriarch altogether, leaving as 'the most certain thing about him that his name was not Noah.'

Yet with all his protestations, Mr. Mottram makes full use of all information available, and he is an adept at suggesting analogies from folklore and recent literature. His own literary style is fascinating—perhaps at times too self-consciously clever—and the first part of the book at least will hold the attention of that large reading public, actively intelligent, but without special critical equipment, for whom it is intended. His method of presentation differs from that of the critics in that it is synthetic rather than analytic. He unites, indeed, memory with imagination, but he claims precedence for what he would regard as a legitimate and even sanctified use of the imagination, and he is not inclined to sift memories with the exactitude of a historian.

In the course of his studies Mr. Mottram has developed a strong affection for Noah. Few characters, according to him, are so convincing. His notoriety is remarkable, especially with the English-speaking people, into whose imagination the Authorized Version has placed him with a success rivalled by no other translation. Mr. Mottram is convinced that the brilliant sarcasm of an Anatole France would have been impossible if he had read the Book of Genesis in English. Whatever the truth of this conjecture, the fact remains that the story of Noah, although it suffered a temporary eclipse in popularity during the machine-worshipping and comfort-loving nineteenth century, has captured, to a far greater extent than Adam or Abraham or even King David, the hearts of the simplest and least articulate peasants, has penetrated the folklore of all parts of the country, has led working-men to christen their sons by his name, and—last but not least—has provided a toy for the nursery of perennial charm, unrivalled even by the most elaborate models of the building of the Temple or of any other Old Testament occurrence.

Mr. Mottram locates the Flood in Mesopotamia, and regards it, not as a universal, but as a ubiquitous deluge—ubiquitous in the sense that it is one of many stories of a similar character, although distinguished from them by greater moral alertness. The consideration that the Deluge is not universal does not lessen its impressiveness in an age when communications between countries, and even between districts, were practically non-existent, and the locality constituted the world; and the ubiquitousness showed that in the Flood story there is a recollection which concerned all humanity. As regards date, although the author suggests that 'no one would have dared to call him Neolithic to his face,' Noah is placed in the age when only flint and stone instruments were known, the reason for this conclusion being that when so many instructions for the building of the Ark are given by 'a severely technical Almighty'—to quote the author's description—iron or bronze instruments would certainly have been mentioned, had they been in existence.

Noah is not only an actual human being, but a type. He is the first human being, in an age when society is in a state of transition from the nomad to the pastoral and agricultural condition, who seems to have been capable of using his imagination, and looking before and after. He alone, in contrast to the slothful and indifferent dwellers in the plain, with their 'easy-going confidence that the work in hand will get done even if no one does it,' being himself of a more virile stock, and noting signs obvious to those who had eyes to see, could envisage the approaching catastrophe and take measures for escape. He interpreted the coming doom as a judgment from a God of righteousness, who repented Him of having created man, a 'repentance' which Mr. Mottram artistically illustrates by a quotation from Galsworthy's 'Holiday'

and by a comparison with the feeling of an official who by organization and sanitation has made possible the teeming population of an Oriental city, and then wonders despondingly if all his labours have been worth while, when he sees what the inhabitants have made of their security.

So Noah, 'according to all that God commanded him' went about his boat-building. Of which Mr. Mottram uses all his novelist's art to give a most picturesque and delightful account. Far more ambitious than his great follower, Robinson Crusoe, he builds, not indeed a travelling menagerie, but a cattle-boat; for our author, even with all his respect for the use of the imagination, refuses to allow the Ark to contain all the inhabitants of a Whipsnade, being deterred chiefly by the obvious difficulty of watering them when adrift on saltish floods. Noah is a 'man of destiny,' standing out 'even more distinctly over against his fellow-creatures because he does not chatter,' laughing rarely but with gusto, concerned principally to get something practical done, managing his conglomerate company of the Ark (including his wife and daughters-in-law) with consummate ability; and when at last the waters dried from off the face of the earth, getting them all out again safely on dry land by breaking through the covering of the Ark, because the one and only door—which is compared to the kitchen-hatch of a modern passenger liner—had jammed; carrying through the whole enterprise so successfully that the multitude of his descendants which is stated so generously in the Genesis story, may be taken as a delicate compliment to Noah's organizing ability.

What of the moral and religious value of the story, according to Mr. Mottram? He passes slightly over the lapse at the end of the story, which, he holds, shows Noah to have been human and not a demi-god, and which he might have been thankful to the critics for reminding him, is omitted altogether in the more priestly source of the Genesis narrative. He gives us on the whole a convincing picture of a deeply religious man who, in the days when 'the old direct appeal of a deity to a universe completely under his control' was still possible, heard 'the voice of God,' and responded by his native sheer capacity, 'which it is more graceful to call righteousness.' At any rate, we are told in the Bible that 'Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord,' and Mr. Mottram finds evidence of the grace throughout the whole story, especially in Noah's act of sacrifice and worship at the ending of the Flood, and in his discovery—expressed in what our author calls 'one of the most inspired sentences in the language' and 'the basis of the conception of a reasonable and beneficent Creator who has been the father of the spirit of how many generations of English thought and feeling'—of the significance of the rainbow, with all that it meant as an assurance of God's care 'in seed-time and harvest, while the earth remaineth.' Noah's experience meant an advance in the religious confidence of the race.

Repudiating God.

In *The War against God* Mr. Sidney Dark and Mr. R. S. Essex (Hodder & Stoughton; 5s. net) tell the story of how countries to-day are repudiating God bitterly and systematically—Russia, Germany, Turkey, and Mexico, and it may also be Spain—and how others again are repudiating Him politely. The example they give of this is—England. In their foreword the authors explain the purpose of the book 'It is, therefore, of importance to have accurate knowledge of the reason why God is regarded as the enemy, and for what end He is to be expelled from the world which He created. It seems to us idle folly to shudder at what may be the blasphemies of the unbeliever and to pass by on the other side with cotton-wool in one's ears. We have listened to him as attentively as we can, and have made a careful note of what he has said. That note may have its uses because we find little that is admirable in the habit of men of strong convictions refusing to study the case of their opponents.'

Before coming to the present day a good historical sketch is given of the rise and development of critical thought about God—in the two chapters entitled 'From Job to Machiavelli' and 'From Luther to Comte.' We must not forget to mention also the interesting short summary of the teaching of H. G. Wells, Bernard Shaw, Hardy, and A. E. Housman, J. B. S. Haldane, Middleton Murry, Bertrand Russell, C. E. Joad, and Aldous Huxley. This summary refreshes our memory and gives even well-known facts a new touch which makes their significance clearer.

Even those well informed will be surprised at the cumulative effect on their minds of the facts presented by this book, and will be compelled to ask themselves again and again how far the defects of the Church have contributed to the widespread war against God.

One of the most interesting chapters deals with Mexico. The position in Mexico has developed in a similar way to the position in Russia, Germany, and Spain. It began by anti-clericalism and it

then developed into anti-theism. The Government claims that the former was due to the opposition of the Church to all social and economic progress. When the constitution was reformed the Secretary for Education asserted: 'The public power recovered fully the guidance of childhood and youth, permitting them to create a rational concept of the universe and of the social life, repelling the imposition of all religious doctrine by the instructors, in order to substitute, for fanaticism and social prejudices, scientific truth.'

And this is how 'scientific education' is established. It is a quotation from an official school Reader:

'Mama believes that the strike can be settled by prayers. If the boss knew this, how he would laugh! Then mother "confessed," and told the priest all about the strike. The curate is not in our situation and, as he does not know the indignity of being paid a miserable salary, and since he has never worked with his hands, he counselled my mother, RESIGNATION, and to bear everything in the LOVE OF GOD. A beautiful formula. Very convenient. But it did not convince my father.

'If the owner throws you out: "Resign thyself."

'If the boss fires you: "Resign thyself."

'If the boss kills you with hunger: "Resign thyself."

'And all for the love of God, who permits the bosses to exploit the working man. This is all that a man who is called a shepherd of souls and who gives his hand hypocritically to be kissed, could counsel. I am going to find a more practical formula.'

More about Canon Sheppard.

We are glad to give in this issue an account of Canon Sheppard's work written by one who knew both it and Canon Sheppard himself intimately. It will be remembered that in the solemn procession from St. Martin's to St. Paul's Cathedral it was Mr. Johnston who walked with Major Sheppard, the Canon's brother, behind the flower-laden hearse. The article appears in our 'Christianity in Action' series, and it is interesting to notice that Mr. Max Plowman, writing in the *St. Martin's Review* for December, strikes the same note. He says, 'The Peace Pledge Union stood to him for Christianity in action. He believed that, irrespective of creed, "by their works ye shall know them."'

'I have never known a Christian less concerned about the articles of his faith; and very certainly I have never known—nor ever hope to know—one as hourly concerned with the practice of his religion. Only a month or two before he died, I remember his saying to a small company of his closest friends: "When a man has had as much experience as I've had, he gets to know what he can do and what he can't. I know that I can't preach, and I know that I can't write; but I tell you what I'm good at: I'm a good mixer."'

Blessed are the good mixers, for they shall prove to be the only practical peacemakers.

The *St. Martin's Review* for December is largely devoted to Dr. Sheppard's life and work, and many will want to get a copy. Attention might also be drawn to *Dick Sheppard and St. Martin's*. This contains a good history of St. Martin's with a chapter on Dr. Sheppard and another on the Reverend Pat M'Cormick. The author is the Reverend R. J. Northcott of St. Martin's (Longmans; 3s. 6d. net). From the appreciations in the *Review* we give three short quotations:

The Archdeacon of Northumberland:

'Whether we were talking sad things or gay things—he was a peerless maker of laughter—or discussing difficult problems, when the moment of leaving came, one closed his door with a *pang* of regret—always.

'He was unique among all the people that I have met in this also—that in every human situation he was by instinct perfectly Christian—unexpected often, but wonderfully sure and right in his touch compared with well-meaning blunderers such as the rest of us are. This was not merely because he was a gentleman of perfect breeding, but because at bottom he had a Christ-like sensibility of the mood, the mind and the need of the other person.'

The Master of the Temple:

'He was strangely lonely. He seemed to be always giving his heart to every one, but in reality I am sure that he wrestled alone with God, never finding complete fellowship in this world.'

Sheppard, quoted by Middleton Murry:

'Faith? I don't believe I know anything about Faith, Middleton. But Jesus is my *God*. I don't believe I have any faith except that: but I have a love for men; somewhere in me I have love. I *hang* on to that.'

Printed by MORRISON & GIBB LIMITED, Tanfield Works, and Published by T. & T. CLARK, 38 George Street, Edinburgh. It is requested that all literary communications be addressed to THE EDITOR, Kings Gate, Aberdeen, Scotland.