

[1935. Review of *The Platonic Legend*, by Warner Fite. *The New Scholasticism* Jan.]

*The Platonic Legend*. By WARNER FITE. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. Pp. Viii + 331.

Iconoclasm has its charms—for those who like it. On page two, our author states as the commonly accepted view of Plato that: “In brief he is one of the two persons of the Godhead—the other person being the person of Christ.” And page three: “The first canon of Platonic interpretation is the canon of omniscient intelligence.” And further, page five, as Strauss in his revolutionary *Life of Jesus* treated the New Testament writings as *historical* documents (!) [italics his, exclamation mine] so he, the author, has a similar aim in view.

We are glad to notice, however, that Professor Fite knows more about Platonism than about Christianity. And even in this respect, his vociferous distaste for both does not, toward the end of the book, obscure for him certain fundamental distinctions between them and their founders.

*The Platonic Legend* will undoubtedly receive a great deal of adverse criticism, mainly because its author glories in his ability to state unpleasant things as unpleasantly as possible. Nevertheless, we have here an antidote, perhaps too effective an antidote, for excessive veneration of Plato in certain particulars. But to assert, as the inside flap of the book cover does, that this work calls for a complete reappraisal of our ideas about Plato, is a trifle enthusiastic.

The metaphysics of Plato is omitted; political and social theory furnish the main theme. In this field we discover that Plato had aristocratic inclinations, that the opinion of an expert is of much greater value than the opinion of one who has not studied (a thesis particularly annoying to Professor Fite), and that the main body of people in the Platonic state were to be mere taxpayers supporting a Prussian military caste. The mistakes of Inge, Taylor, Woodbridge, More, Bosanquet, Jowett, are martialed with emphasis; only Grote is commended. Yet when Professor Fite, to explain the real charge against Socrates, adopts a diluted form of Taylor's explanation in *Varia Socratica*, no credit is given.

Yet the book is not all bad. If the chapter on Gorgias is impressionistic, if his remarks on Platonic love are as perverted as the customs discussed, yet Fite is right, so the reviewer holds, in interpreting the *Protagoras* as hedonistic, and Taylor is mistaken. He is also right in forcing

on us the concrete results of a Platonic state. His illustration is communist in Russia “who was dismayed to learn that in New York.

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