Scott Relates Religion, Comedy As Escape From Despair Into Faith

BY RICHARD BEST
Thresher Religion Editor

The attunement of Christian theology to the tragic literature of extreme situations should be balanced by an appreciation of the comic imagination.

This thesis was presented last Thursday by the first Negro to speak in the Rice Chapel, Nathan A. Scott, Jr., of the University of Chicago.

Scott stated that the comic hero, especially Shakespeare's Sir John Falstaff, might be considered a Christian type. "Comedy says we are men; that our health and happiness is dependent on our acknowledgement of human conditions." Falstaff may have been a distasteful individual in many ways, but in him there was no fatigue or world-weariness; he had a conscious commitment to the present moment.

Comic Escape

Living for the joy of the adventure and to the glory of God, Falstaff restores our confidence in humanity. Because of the Incarnation, the Christian must respect history, he must appreciate the gross concreteness of life in time.

This contrasts with the tragic hero who yearns to be an angel. Comedy is an escape from despair into faith. "We move in the figure of a dance and trace the outline of the human mystery."

In the discussion period afterwards, it became apparent that the address was received with much interest but also with some hostility.

Falstaff A Christian?

The Negro Episcopalian had larded his talk with a plethora of literary illusions, and Rice English Professor Gerald O'Grady felt that Scott had rather completely misunderstood the role of tragedy which, he contended, also contains "elements of earthliness."

But above all there was a curious inability on the part of many present to understand how Sir John Falstaff could be in any conceivable manner a Christian type. There was resistance to the idea common in Anglican theology that Christianity is "a materialistic religion," concerned with life in time.

Chapel Speaker

Tonight at 7:15 pm the Rice Chapel Committee is presenting John Lee Smith of Cornell University for a lecture on "Private Morality and Public Righteousness."

Dr. Smith, a graduate of the University of Texas and Yale University Divinity School, has done extensive work in collaboration with H. Richard Niebuhr. At present he is Associate Director of Religious Activities at Cornell.