

ing of all the subjects suggested by Jacob Abbott, that return upon himself which I have always regarded as one of the finest things in literature. The virtue of the Rollo Books is to tell us how to do things, how to split a heavy log, how to build a causey. Their vice is to offer us moral instruction without enough disguise. And Mr. Abbott, although when engaged upon the Rollo Books he did apologize, or almost, because "there are many pages in which there is no direct effort made to convey moral instruction," came some ten years later to understand that these many pages had been too few. Thereupon he wrote the *Francia Stories*, more populous and more varied than the Rollo Books. In these later stories the moral tone is the same as ever, but the lessons are poured more gently into the funnels of the ear. We enjoy the seasons at *Francia*, the topography, the landscape. We feel, strange to say, the presence of what is nowadays known as sex interest or sex appeal. We make the acquaintance of Beechnut, who is to Jonas as verse is to prose. How came Jacob Abbott to make so new and so happy a departure from his earlier method? That is the great subject, which I hand over, not without envy and reluctance, to students who have access to the manuscript sources.

But Jacob Abbott has secrets that nobody can tell us. By what happy tact does he keep his children, exposed though they be to so many moral influences, so lifelike? They talk a language childhood doesn't use, to be sure, but the questions they ask in it are such as almost any child wants answers to. Their behavior is natural. They learn none of their lessons, school lessons or moral, with unnatural ease or unnatural pleasure. Now and then, when alone—when Rollo is alone in the dark, on the solitary road, after the wagon has broken down and his father has ridden on for help—they are touching. And Mr. Abbott understood perfectly the art of making his reader wish to find out what will happen next.

P. L.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### The Function of the Church

**S**IR: You have rebuked Bishop Manning for saying that it is not the function of the Church to pass upon questions of the management of business. You say that if that is so, then the Church abdicates her claim to moral leadership.

Many might say what you say. What I cannot see is how you can say it. For it seems to me that week in and week out you are preaching doctrine that distinctly supports Bishop Manning and requires him to take just the stand he does.

The Church has a standing as a teacher of morality. It has this standing on the basis of the idea that moral principles have an intrinsic validity independent of circumstances. As a teacher of what course is best adapted to meet the exigencies of a given set of circumstances the Church has no standing. To acquire standing in this department she would have to turn from her present specialty to a different specialty, sacrificing her present standing in the uncertain hope of acquiring a different standing—a course rather less dignified, I think, than to abdicate her claims outright.

Now the Church might raise Cain with radicalism without going beyond her traditional sphere. She might, for instance, insist that it is a crime to shoot a man in order that we may avenge an insult, or may express our abhorrence of his wickedness, or may make some trade more lucrative. Then she might go on to say that this means not only that there must be no war with Mexico over oil, but also that no coast-guard shall shoot at smugglers who are merely trying to avoid the payment of duty. She might

then announce the inference that when either an employer or a trade union is guilty of demanding tariff protection, this employer or trade union does not come with clean hands into any industrial dispute until it has publicly confessed itself a sinner in the matter of the tariff and has done works meet for repentance.

Or she might say that it is a grievous sin to allege the authority of the moral law in an issue that is not of a moral nature; and that therefore, for instance, when Joe Doe and others have furnished the capital and Richard Roe and others the labor for a certain industry, and there arises a dispute as to whether Doe etc. or Roe etc. shall have the management of the industry, it is a work of the devil for either side to claim that it has a sacred right against which the other side is committing an outrageous crime.

Obviously, if the Church began saying such things as these, it would keep clear of the curse which Scripture pronounces upon those of whom all men speak well.

But you, if I am not mistaken, are constantly decrying the idea of trying to base our actions on principles which are supposed to have eternal validity for all occasions. You teach that what we ought to do is to find what will best suit the needs of our time, and do this; and that any other policy is a pernicious error. According to you, if the Church wishes to make her moral leadership amount to something she ought to be in the business of deciding what is now a proper standard of living and how much money a person of ordinary discretion must have in order to make it probable that he will attain that standard.

If the Church is to make such decisions her business, why should she expect her utterances to be received with more deference than those of an average editor? What commission for the job of arbitrator can she show?

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### Have the Soviets Robbed Rumania?

**S**IR: In the issue of the New Republic of May 25th you refer approvingly to the British government's attitude toward the present rulers of Russia, which caused the British courts to sanction the exchange of British goods for Russian gold confiscated in Russia from previous owners.

"A very considerable part of the gold in possession of the Soviet government, approximately \$120,000,000, belongs to Rumania. It is a part of the Rumanian gold reserve which was sent to Moscow for safe keeping before the revolution of 1917 when there was danger that it would fall into the hands of Germany." (Memorandum on Trade with Soviet Russia submitted to the Committee on Foreign Relations of the U. S. Senate, January, 1921, by John Spargo.)

According to such a conception of right as the world has aspired to heretofore that gold would be wrongfully held and used by the Soviet government and wrongfully received by those with whom that government exchanges it for gold.

In other words, the appropriation of that gold by the present rulers of Russia would be defined as theft and England accepting it would be a receiver of stolen goods.

Is one to understand that in the present reforming tendency sweeping the world such a conception of right has become obsolete?—If so, what is the new standard that supersedes it?

I am so interested in the broad and progressive views of the New Republic that I would be very glad for enlightenment on this question.

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PIERRE TROUBETZKOY.

[What disposition the Soviet government has made of the Rumanian gold reserve we do not know. We should consider its confiscation highly reprehensible if Rumania had observed a correct attitude of neutrality toward the Russian internal struggle. As a fact, Rumania took advantage of the weakness of Russia to seize Bessarabia, which she still holds by force of arms. By the principle of nationality some part of Bessarabia should no doubt go to Rumania; but the seizure of the province was none the less an act of war. That question and the question of the Rumanian gold reserve should obviously be adjusted together in the negotiations for peace between the two countries.—THE EDITORS.]

## After the Play

ONLY with the end of the season does Deburau end. It trails behind it a shining cloud of admiration and from the critics a flood of praise. And yet it may be said, I think, that Deburau is a very bad production, and, unfortunately for us, one of the worst kinds of bad.

To begin with it is one of those plays that are all style. Without style through every detail of it, such a play falls apart, becomes false, evasive. And since it is not an American play, not like *The First Year* or *Beyond the Horizon*, but is Parisian all over, we must have it carried out, stated, with the Parisian sense of style in the production. If we are to give the room to a foreign importation we must get the benefit of seeing a quality stylized, the benefit of another culture. But Mr. Belasco's production shows scarcely any conception of what this style is or what would be taken for granted in any Paris theatre.

You can see the whole case in a nutshell among the pages of the program. Two pictures are there, one of Deburau himself, the other of Mr. Atwill in the same pose. Deburau's body is all alive, the foot out, the hand in the air, the face piquant and pathetic and whimsical, the whole moment arrested but vivid with inimitable vitality and life. It is the mime, the arch and shyly tragic fool, the dance of the ironical human comedy itself.

Guitry's play is Parisian, the poetry of the boulevards, full of ingenuity, theatricality, profound feeling, sorrow, and declamation. It has its own truth so long as it is kept together. It goes lightly on tiptoe, whatever may be the happiness or broken heart within it. It is the kind of thing in which the soul must be a little chic.

The acting qualities for all this are rare on our stage, however common in Paris. But nobody in the company seems concerned with that. And so the play at the Belasco turns out to be a romantic drama, now gay, now heavy, somewhat confused, not without delightful moments, but with two very weak acts and many speeches that sound false and tricky. You have to think hard to recognize what the play may really be.

Mr. Atwill enters very well and at the end recites well the pointed rhetoric of his advice to a young player. But otherwise he acts precisely as his picture in the pose of Deburau looks. The picture looks willing but sober. It is heavy, stale; it is hard-working, well-meaning but dull. There is morality and honest purpose and the best of intentions in this pious mass, but no vitality, no verve, nothing that is crisp or wistful or pathetic or fleeting, sensitive, droll. And no suggestion of style, though there is a good deal of mannerism. The other actors are as bad and worse; though Miss Coghlan's old school training makes her somewhat more in key with the play if out of key with the occasion.

Where they all give themselves away worst is in the scene where Deburau is ill and Camille comes to visit him, and the young son says he will "troi, father", and goes away to take his father's old place. Here in this scene is the test of acting in such a play: the muted harlequinade, the height of pantomime, tense and charged with the ebb and fire of that life that is struck down but goes on under the still surface of living. But Mr. Atwill does not exist at all when he sits there in his invalid's chair. He knows nothing to do and therefore he does not know how to be anything. Meanwhile Miss Mackaye's Camille wanders in off some magazine cover, wearing a very pretty hat, and goes out wearing it.

Before this scene comes that other in Camille's boudoir. The two lovers have been together and the moment is charged with spent passion, with Deburau's worship of beauty and Camille's acceptance of this familiar due, all set in the frailty of the luxurious place. The audience decides that the scene lacks dramatic structure. But what has really happened is that Mr. Atwill and Miss Mackaye sit there beside the piano like a brother and sister who have just been making out a Christmas list. They part. The new lover comes in, the last word in aristocracy we are to suppose, but now much tyrannized by his costume and good looks and very East Side English. He kneels at once and rather badly, and is accepted. But what would Monsieur Guitry decide about this suburban little party with crackers and milk? For Monsieur Guitry knows the grotesque and fantastic artificiality required to give truth to the speeches and unity to the atmosphere. He knows the mingled oddity and elegance to be achieved; the perpetual rhythm of vitality to be kept up throughout, the shrewd attentiveness and smart detail, the technical invention, the precision of voice and gesture.

Two things put the play over: the indestructible charm of the original, and the mechanics of the production. Obviously the stage end of it is very good indeed, though in no sense new or inventive. Except for that ridiculous and Edwardian spotlight on Deburau's face at the last, there is much to admire: the management of the theatre within the theatre, the footlights across the back of the stage, the thin curtain with the boy dancing behind it, the costumes. But to let this high Belascosity in management blind us to the flatness and lack of all style in the more important side of the production would be too bad. To do that is to substitute plumbing for art.

This is the most dangerous kind of thing in our theatre. It is smooth and enterprising platitude which holds us up, keeps us from even seeing what the idea really is. And in our American theatre most of all, this empty adequacy is bad. We are a new and progressive country that accumulates more skilfully than it spends. We produce better than we use. We run to a sort of bathtub civilization. If the hot water flows the apartment is successful, if the dumbwaiter does not creak we have a home. We may have fifteen miles of concrete walks in the village before we begin asking ourselves where they lead to. The worst faults in the theatre compared to this specious smoothness of Deburau at the Belasco become almost virtues, faults like ranting, lack of finish, prompting, amateurishness. These at least may have life in them. But this Deburau is only cold pudding in a tame and ingenious automat.

You can say this, too, without undervaluing the mechanical skill of the enterprise. Nor is anybody insisting on some new and original style of production. This Belasco perfection of chairs, tables, lights, cloths, programs and crowds is all admirable enough. You may like it, as Whistler said he liked the vase, because you can pick it up and set it down. Or you may wholly believe in this honest and faithful detail and recognize and admire the patience and theatrical knowledge that provide it. But all that, nevertheless, is not strong enough to give Deburau the style that it must have to make it art. And after all this sort of thing, this elaborate industry under Belasco and the late Beerbohm Tree, may be perfect and yet fairly unimportant. At best you can only call it the housekeeping school of production.

STARK YOUNG.