



# THE REPORTER'S NOTES

## Holiday Season

This is the season when most Americans celebrate a religious event whose date is known to everyone, for it is from the birth of Christ that the years of our times are counted. In perhaps no other country is what we call the holiday season marked by so nearly universal observance. Practically all Americans, churchgoers and non-churchgoers, baptized and unbaptized, know in their hearts what the spirit of Christmas is.

Perhaps this is the proper occasion to take notice of a fact which, in our opinion, it is high time we all acknowledged: There is a deep religious stirring in our country, a groping for some compelling principle and belief that may help us to guide our lives.

Perhaps the last campaign is evidence of this; perhaps that ordeal of inner conflicts and fears we all went through was something much more than the traditional rise in political temperature that accompanies a Presidential election. Perhaps the passions for one candidate or another were not just turned on by propaganda magicians. Perhaps they were there inside ourselves, just waiting to burst out. Many strange things happened during the campaign, and now, last but not least, there is the fact that so many Americans find it difficult to abandon their new-found concern with politics, and would like to do something but do not know what.

There was in this campaign the sudden rise to fame of Adlai Stevenson and the grip he established on the minds of millions. His careful avoidance of demagoguery aroused the loyalty of men and women to a pitch no master rabble-rouser could ever dream of. What he said was in the purest tradition of Emerson's idealism, tempered

by a humorous awareness of the pragmatic realities of our time. Over and over again he said that the nation as a whole is far superior to any one of its segments, and that no leadership is to be trusted unless it is guided by an exacting conscience. Yet all these plain principles, when transferred in an extraordinarily polished form from the pulpit to the arena, sounded to a large number of eager men and women like a true call to a crusade.

On the other side, the side that won, there was a stubborn will to believe, irrespective of what was seen or heard. There was a yearning for faith and for the visible incarnation of that faith. Of course, on both sides political opportunism and the professionals' gimmicks added fuel to the fires. But there was a genuine quality about these fires. In fact, they are still burning.

Let's add immediately that these fires, far from threatening a national conflagration, are evidence of something that must be considered a blessing—for no harm can come to a free community from a revival of faith among its citizens.

Of course, a religious revival offers many opportunities to false prophets. They have felt for quite some time that there was something stirring, and so far the going has been good. But the largest number of Americans know in their bones what the role of religion in our country is. For religion in America is based on tolerance, a faith to which all our sects minister and in which all decent citizens believe, regardless of sect.

WE CAN well afford a rebirth of religion in our country. If the recent campaign, as we are convinced, was an evidence of this, then everything we went through during those torrid weeks has been worthwhile. For a religious rebirth means that Americans who have a faith will find a way to understand each other and, when the inter-

ests of the nation demand it, to work together.

In the spirit of Christmas, as men who are equally concerned with religion and with America, we offer all our best wishes to the outgoing President, to the incoming President, to Adlai Stevenson—and to all our readers.

*Those among our readers who live on the Pacific coast will have to consider our Christmas wishes retroactive, for they will receive this issue of The Reporter well after December 25. This is the reason, incidentally, why our date of publication looks slightly absurd to Reporter addicts who live in New York City. But they must remember that this is a national magazine. In fact, only nineteen per cent of our circulation is in New York State.*

## New Light on 'Limelight'

Since we published the article by Robert Hatch on the last Chaplin movie, quite a few angry protests from friends and staff members have come to our ear. Hatch was unfair to Chaplin, we have been told, and "Limelight" is probably the last and certainly the greatest of all the Chaplin movies. Obviously, there was nothing for the Editor to do but take a look at the facts, which could hardly be called a punishment. But unfortunately it just so happened that he entered the movie house thinking he was a nonpartisan umpire and he emerged chock full of pro-Chaplin bias. Anyway, since the majority of critics and spectators seem to be quite antagonistic to "Limelight," here is his minority report:

To see "Limelight" is like sharing with Chaplin what for years, perhaps all his life, has laid heavily on his heart and mind. Some people are disturbed at being taken into anybody's intimacy. This may partly account for the ill-concealed irritation that marked the reviews of many a

critic. The underlying theme was: We know Chaplin; we consider him great, very great, indeed the greatest of all movie comedians. We are familiar with his message and consider it immortal. What more does he want now? What more has he got to say?

What Chaplin has to say in "Limelight" concerns the destiny of the comedian, the tragedy of the man who reaches glory by playing a role, but who depends entirely on the whim of the public if the glory he has won is to remain with him to the end of his life. The protagonist of "Limelight" is a clown who, for some reason, has lost the public's acclaim. With this movie Chaplin tries to prove that no matter what the public thinks, he is something more than a clown.

He does it, in our opinion, with extraordinary restraint, with a dignity that is always accompanied by tenderness and respect for his audience. He is in full command of his means—at almost any moment he could have the audience shaking with laughter or with sobs. Of course we may be completely mistaken, and certainly we are in a minority, but seldom have we seen a work of art where charity and compassion ring so true, and with so little support from sentimentality.

At the same time "Limelight" is a simple, unsophisticated work of art; its themes are so elemental as to appear, to many, trivial: One of them, for instance, is the unrelenting, contagious will to live and to achieve of a man who has been buffeted by chance but never gives up. The end, of course, is as old as tragedy itself. The protagonist reconquers glory and dies. This is also the point where Chaplin lets himself go, and makes the audience first laugh and then cry as only he can.

For years, the critics and most of the people in the know have been telling Chaplin: "You are through, Charlie, you are through." Now he has produced a movie about a man who is through. The answer from most of the critics seems to be really angry: for, after all, now that he is so safely pigeonholed into history, what business has this man got outliving himself?

OF COURSE, Chaplin's incomparable gifts as an artist have nothing to do with his private life or his opinions. His private life may not be exemplary, and his opinions not very different from

those of Henry Thoreau, an anarchist who, perhaps because he is safely dead, is considered a great American. But for all his oddities and peculiarities, this non-American, Chaplin, has raised to the level of eternal art the human stuff of which America is made.

For all we know, Mr. Herbert Brownell, our Attorney General-designate, is an intelligent, sensible man. We cannot believe that he will banish Charlie Chaplin from our country. Our major picture magazines have shown us Chaplin honored by the Queen of England, decorated by the President of the French Republic. Is Mr. Brownell going to put him on Ellis Island?

Chaplin might well land on the island wearing that derby and carrying that bamboo cane which, according to some of his critics, he should never have abandoned. There would be plenty of cameras to take pictures of Chaplin's final act. And certainly there is at least one man, Joseph Stalin, who would gladly give away a couple of assorted satellites to have that picture soon.

### Forgotten Waterfront

The extraordinary legal immunity of lawbreakers on the New York waterfront is by now a familiar story. As far back as 1948, the public was treated to a catalogue of crimes on New York's seven-hundred-mile, billion-dollar waterfront—traffic in narcotics, smuggling, systematic pilferage, gambling, extortionary strikes, loan sharking, and kickbacks. Before 1948 there had been investigations, and the city is currently

undergoing another by the New York State Crime Commission. The chief contribution of this new group has been to provide documentation for the easily-inferred fact that prominent shipping firms have been obliged to give generous Christmas presents if they wanted to be sure their cargoes would be unloaded.

BUT THEN, there has always been a lot of talk about this state of affairs, and nothing much has been done about it. On November 20, 1951, Governor Dewey described the "racketeering, organized crime and restrictive practices which have increasingly over the past fifty years hamstrung the port of New York." Dewey's righteous indignation seems a trifle pale when we recall that this racketeering is taking place in the same city where the nation's leading racket-buster got his reputation and in a state where that racket-buster is now governor.

Because of the tenacity of organized crime, New York City needs all the official co-operation it can get. Mayor Impellitteri, for example, seems to take very little interest in the work of the State Crime Commission. In April, 1951, just before the State Crime Commission opened an investigation, Mayor Impellitteri arrived in Cuba for a two-week rest. Currently, while that same Crime Commission is looking into the waterfront, the Mayor is in Florida for a rest. Both the Mayor and the Governor have had a tendency to regard the situation on the waterfront as deplorable but remote.

### CHRISTMAS, 1952

Tell us, what are we to lay  
At His feet this holy day?  
A burning hill, a bloody limb—  
Are these all we offer Him?

Shall we give the King of Men  
A flaming ball of hydrogen?  
A globe of pain, a web of rope  
Imprisoning our mortal hope?

These are heavy gifts to lay  
At His feet this holy day;  
Better that we give the Child  
That in us still undefiled.—SEC