

A Feminine Religious Revolt

ARE THE CHURCHES losing their hold on women? This question is put by *The Christian Commonwealth* (London) after a study of modern feminine types in Winston Churchill's latest novel, "The Inside of the Cup." On August 16 we gave an outline of this story mainly from the point of view of the hero, the *Rev. Mr. Hodder*. Few novels of recent date receive such extended notices in the religious press, the implication in this particular case being that Mr. Churchill's is epoch-marking. Hence the question put by the *Rev. R. J. Campbell's* paper at the head of a study of "The Woman in Revolt." It is still a "deeply rooted masculine belief," points out the writer, "that religion is more a woman's affair than a man's, an ornament and dignity to the sex, an occupation to diversify her domestic life, a vocation when the kitchen and the nursery are closed to her." But against this one-time prevalent, uncritical estimate of woman's position is Mr. Churchill's heroine, a woman who "challenges the current religious teaching from the pulpit of St. John's and who stimulates *Hodder*, the rector of the church, to reconsider his conclusions in the light of their modern view of the world."

Continuing the study:

"Quite early in his new charge *Hodder* is brought into contact with a woman member of his church, a sane, healthy, and vigorous personality, who confesses quite frankly that his presentation of Christianity does not convince her, tho she is puzzled by the authority and force with which he presents it. She can not believe in the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, the physical miracle involved therein seeming to her so useless. Then later another and much older woman disturbs and challenges him on the question of the Church's attitude toward divorce. *Hodder* held

that the marriage bond is indissoluble, and is obliged to refuse her request that he would allow her divorced daughter's re-marriage to take place in St. John's.

"Not until *Alison Parr*, daughter of the millionaire banker, comes into *Hodder's* orbit, however, does he realize the deliquescence of the old traditions and sanctions of religion among modern women. Before he meets her he hears of her—from her father, who speaks bitterly of the 'nonsensical ideas about her sex' which she has imbibed, and from a friend who tells *Hodder* that '*Alison* is a person. . . . The most extraordinary thing about her is her contempt for what her father has gained, and for conventionalities.' With a touch of contempt this friend described the attempt *Alison's* father had made to get her to marry a smug, Pharisaical member of the Church: 'She would have led him a dance for a year or two, and then calmly and inexorably left him. And there was her father, with all

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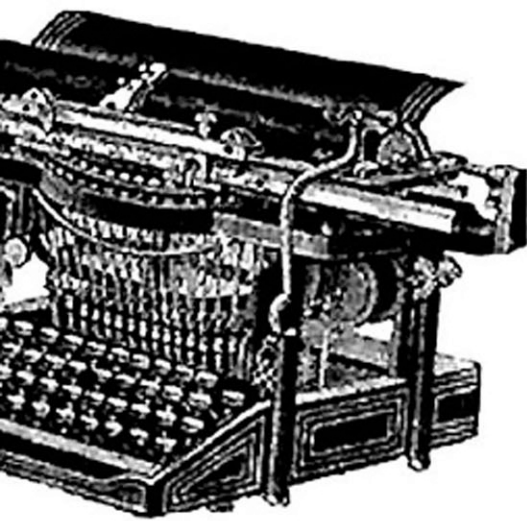


A Review of

THE INSIDE OF THE CUP

by

Winston Churchill



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his ability and genius, couldn't see it either, but fondly imagined that *Alison*, as *Gordon Atterbury's* wife, would magically become an *Atterbury* and a bourgeoisie, see that the corners were dusted in the big house, sew underwear for the poor, and fast in Lent.' To *Holder's* question whether *Alison* is happy as she is, he gets the reply: 'She is self-sufficient, and that is just what most women are not in these days.'

"One Sunday morning *Alison Parr*, who has come home for a holiday, goes with her father to church and hears *Holder* preach a sermon against materialism and individualism, into which he threw all the passion of which he is capable. *Holder* lunches with father and daughter that day, and at the table is an almost silent witness of an outspoken and incisively worded debate between the other two. *Parr* claims that philanthropy and organized charity were never on such a scale as in the present age. And *Alison* tells him that charity and philanthropy, as they exist to-day, have very little to do with the brotherhood of man. 'So long as you can make yourselves believe that this kind of charity is a logical carrying out of the Christian principles, so long are your consciences satisfied with the social system which your class, very naturally, finds so comfortable and edifying. The weak and idiotic ought to be absurdly grateful for what is flung to them, and heaven is gained in the throwing. In this way the rich inevitably become the elect both here and hereafter, and the needle's eye is widened into a gap.' In the pagan garden she has designed *Alison* and *Holder* discuss the same question which she and her father had handled at lunch. She tells the rector that his sermon interested her as she had not been interested since she was twenty, 'when I made a desperate attempt to become a Christian—and failed. . . . But why (she cried) do you insist on what you call authority? As a modern woman who has learned to use her own mind



Novelist Winston Churchill

I simply can't believe, if the God of the universe is the moral God you assert him to be, that he has established on earth an agency of the kind you infer and delegated to it the power of life and death over human souls. . . . Can't you see that an authoritative statement is just what an ethical person *doesn't* want. Belief—faith—doesn't consist in the mere acceptance of a statement, but in something much higher—if we can achieve it. Acceptance of authority is not faith, it is mere credulity, it is to shirk the real issue. We must believe, if we believe at all, without authority.' She tells him that 'he and his religion are as far apart as the poles; in order to preach his doctrine logically, he should be a white ascetic, with a well-oiled manner, a downcast look lest he stumble in his pride or do something original that sprang out of his own soul instead of being an imitation of the saints.' Her provocative frankness and clear-eyed honesty goad him into introspective study of himself."

The girl, *Alison Parr*, had "striven all her life to be free."

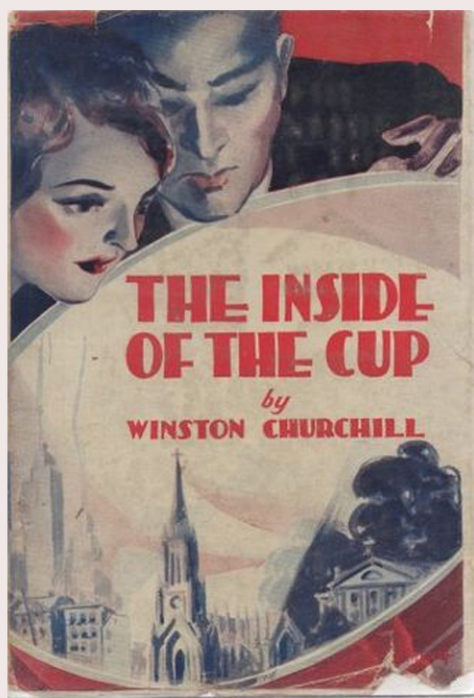
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She is very far from the acquiescent type, as we see in her further analysis:

"She hated humility, penance, asceticism, self-abnegation, repression, falling on her knees and seeking forgiveness out of all proportion to the trespass—these things threatened her possession of herself, 'the only valuable thing I've got.' In a senseless self-denial, she felt, she would have withered into a meaningless old maid, with no opinions of her own, and with no more definite purpose in life than to write checks for charities. 'Your

Christianity commands that women shall stay at home, and declares that they are not entitled to seek their own salvation, to have any place in affairs, or to meddle with the realm of the intellect. Those forbidden gardens are reserved for the lordly sex. St. Paul, you say, put us in our proper place some twenty centuries ago, and we are to remain there for all time.' Obviously, a girl with this instinct of self-preservation could not feel safe in her father's house; his dominating personality and inflexible will clashed with hers, and she went away to study landscape-gardening and to save herself from extinction as an individuality. Her struggles for self-assertion had bred in her a sense of disillusionment and futility; what she had gained hardly seemed worth while. Her work satisfied only the esthetic impulse. It left her emotionally and intellectually unsatisfied.

"With *Hodder's* awakening comes revelation for *Alison Parr*. Naturally and inevitably she becomes a partizan when the conflict between *Hodder* and her father is precipitated, but her interest deepens and assumes a personal quality, and soon they both knew that love had come to complicate and yet to illumine their relations. Together they make their choice and refuse the millions of *Eldon Parr*, in order to follow the light which has broken in upon their minds and hearts. *Hodder* in successive talks makes clear the religious conclusions at which he has arrived, and is fortified and confirmed in them by the response her personality makes to his. 'Oh, I am proud of you,' she cries. 'And if they put you out and persecute you I shall always be proud. I shall never know why it was given me to have this and to live. Do you remember saying to me once that faith comes to us in some human form we love? You are my faith. And faith in you is my faith in humanity, and faith in God.' And that passionate declaration proves that *Alison Parr* was still a woman, tho she was in revolt against an interpretation of religion and life too small for her capacity of soul and intellect."



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