THE CLAIMS OF THE CINEMA. Readers of this journal will recall the Disputation, 'That the Cinema is the Highest Form of Art', printed in our issue for June 1950. It might seem that, as with other 'medieval Disputations', this was simply an ingenious exercise in dialectic and that no one need take its conclusions too seriously. But if the cinema has any substantial claims to be regarded as an art-form in its own right, it is essential that the evidence should be available. And in the cinema, yesterday's masterpieces are soon forgotten; the very medium is impermanent, and the commercial interests of an industry are much more dominant than any concern for perpetuating the best examples of an art. That is why the work of the few independent repertory cinemas is so important, and in particular the British Film Institute (through the National Film Theatre on the South Bank) is making it possible for intelligent criticism to develop through its presentation of what are by this the classics of the cinema.

Such a film as *Battleship Potemkin*, made by Eisenstein in 1925, which was recently shown again, is a powerful reminder that in the cinema, as in other arts, the earlier can often be the better. An immense technical development, first of sound, and then of the cinemascopic-stereophonic-technicoloured devices of more recent years, has not been matched by an equal development in discrimination. Too often the very advance in methods of production has obscured the cinema's special genius—its capacity of communicating to the imagination simply in terms of light and movement. Thus *Potemkin* illustrates a profound revolutionary theme—the incorporation of an individual in a universal cause—in an idiom that is uniquely that of film. The celebrated 'Odessa Steps' sequence remains one of the great moments of the cinema, for with astounding insight it concentrates on the real meaning of a multitude. It compels us to be involved: that is the power of the film, and of course its danger too.

With the bewildering technical advances of the film, it may be that the future of its specific quality as a medium lies in a sphere where the imagination can have full play—in the animated cartoon; wholly unrealistic, transcending many of the limitations of live-action films, with their exploitation of the star performer and their increasing complexity. The recent showing of *Animal Farm*, the first full-length animated cartoon on a serious theme, is impressive proof that here is something that the film alone can attempt. George Orwell's fable of totalitarianism is a perfect instrument for the cartoon. Where a realistic treatment would be intolerable, for it would have to protest too much, the animated cartoon can suggest the whole horror of Orwell's theme through its brilliant economy of artistic means. Not indeed that such a film is easy or cheap to make. Dr Roger Manvell's *The Animated*

Film (Sylvan Press, 21s.) describes in detail the making of *Animal Farm*: it took three years to make, was shot in 750 scenes and consists of about 300,000 drawings in colour. His claim that the animated cartoon is 'a new art in its own right' may seem excessive, but to see *Animal Farm* is to be convinced that the drawn figures exist only to serve the purpose of the film. All the extraneous elements of the 'live' film are dispensed with, and such singleness of purpose in manipulating the possibilities of movement and colour in a wholly non-realistic way produces a direct and impressive effect. The savage irony of Orwell's tale, with its final totalitarian motto—'All animals are equal—but some are more equal than others'—has certainly found its visual expression in a film that is much more than an exciting advance in the technique of the cinema.

I.E.

FICTION AND THE AGE OF FAITH

NAOMI ROYDE SMITH

AT INTERVALS during the past hundred years the historical novel has turned away from the court and the camp to occupy itself with religion, often with enormous popular success. Between *Hypatia* and *Il Santo* two of the best sellers of their day were *Quo Vadis?* and *John Inglesant*. They are still to be found on bookshelves from which those other historical novels, *Barabbas* and *The Sorrows of Satan*, have been cast out. Religion in itself; the religious adventure; the problems of conduct and belief; the opposition of the Church—all have long occupied, and continue to occupy modern writers; but it is only in the present decade, with Miss H. F. M. Prescott's *Man on a Donkey*, that historical fiction has returned to the Age of Faith.

The immediate gain is immense. We escape from investigations of tortured conscience and the conflicts of post-Reformation theology and practice and are once more involved in the crowded freedom of action based on an accepted creed, an obeyed authority. Haugenier de Linnières, the newly knighted hero of Madame Oldenbourg's novel, *The Corner Stone*,[1] goes none too willingly with the pseudo-crusade against the Albigenses. He had heard it said 'that Raymond of Toulouse had never worshipped the devil; that war against him was not really a holy war. He thought these were quibbling considerations. You go to God's defence or you do not.' You also play at *l'amour courtois*—liberal shepherds give it a grosser name—with another man's wife who plays at virtue in exquisite raiment and in exquisite vernal settings.

1 *The Corner Stone*. By Zoë Oldenbourg, translated by Edward Hyams. (Gollancz; 15s.)