

The Catholic Weekly Review.

A JOURNAL DEVOTED TO THE INTERESTS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CANADA,

Reddite quæ sunt Cæsaris, Cæsari; et quæ sunt Dei, Deo.—Matt. 22: 21.

Vol. I.

Toronto, Saturday, Aug. 20, 1887.

No. 27.

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ENEMIES OF OUR PRESS.

CATHOLIC authors, pressmen and publishers might well exclaim in the famous words of Marshall Villars, "Defend us from our friends," even though their innate modesty would hinder them from adding, "we can defend ourselves from our foes." Among the numerous enemies of the Catholic press, those which infect our own community are, strange to say, perhaps the most subtle, malignant and dangerous. We find it difficult to preserve patience with the gentry to whom we are about to allude, so that it seems right to declare at the outset that the opinions expressed in this paper are purely personal judgments for which we alone are responsible.

There are none so blind as those who deliberately refuse to see. Many Catholics are perversely purblind to their eternal interests; being apathetic, supine, thoughtless and lethargic in everything but what concerns the acquisition of money. In passing through life, too many of us scan the horizon and see only those things that bound the vision of our temporal interests and inordinate selfishness. If all the reasoning of Locke were employed to demonstrate the abject meanness of such conduct it would probably only rouse our anger. This paper is not intended to be very didactic; it is not our purpose to preach a homily, but certain defects are so universal with us, and so far-reaching in lamentable consequences, that we could not afford to pass over them in silence.

Apathy and hypercriticism, as distinguished from criticism, are the bane of the Catholic press. Hypercriticism springs from an ungenerous spirit, which is in turn produced by mimical exaggeration and unnecessary disapproval. It overlooks or undervalues great merits, and magnifies minor defects, with the result that it not only misrepresents, but does irremediable outrage to a deserving author. The hypercriticism to which so many of our really meritorious writers are subjected by nominal Catholics who are false to themselves, coupled with the jackal sneers of Catholics who are obsequious and cringing, enrages and discourages our pressmen and publishers. Those influences affect our periodical press with most

detriment, and the periodical press is consequently the weakest division of our general literature, whereas it should be the most vigorous.

It is almost unnecessary in this age to affirm that an extensive newspaper press is necessary for all purposes of propaganda. We are supplied with thoughts from many sources; we evolve it from our own inner consciousness; from the pictorial volume of nature, where every page is lovingly touched with that pencil which never repeats itself; from the Creator as manifested in the universe, in the earth and the air, the undulating ocean and the starry sky. Our surroundings preach for us their lessons, our environments deliver their messages; for we are the pupils of all that exists. But nowhere do we, even the most learned among us, often unconsciously indeed, imbibe more freely or more deeply than from the overflowing columns of the newspaper.

The daily and weekly newspapers are the guides, counsellors and friends of the common people, whose schoolmasters they are. Said that wonderful man who was intended by nature for a great editor, the late Henry Ward Beecher: "The most efficacious secular book that ever was published in America is the newspaper." They who control the press command the people. This being the case, it devolves upon us as a vital duty, to deepen and widen such a salubrious spring, lest by neglect its channels become arid, or their contents grow stagnant and we sip poison.

The reprehensible apathy which so many of us display towards our press has attracted the close attention of one of our leading journalists in the United States. After quietly and silently observing the gloomy prospect for a prolonged period, this clever editor and scholar actually gives it as his opinion that Catholics are too often mutually jealous, which detestable passion, he affirms, finds disgusting expression in unjust, absurd and ridiculous hypercriticism. He believes that Catholics are at present quite unwilling, if not absolutely unable, to accord each other the just credit of possessed abilities. This language is undoubtedly strong, but we believe it is disinterested, and we know it is true.

It was not, and it certainly is not, our intention to condemn criticism as it is properly understood and occasionally practiced. If the critic be unbiased and competent, we certainly have no quarrel with him. Such admirable writers as the late lamented Dr. Brownson, and the present Maurice F. Egan, we look upon as veritable watchers on the tower. Yet, Dr. Brownson was an austere critic, and Maurice F. Egan is a rigid critic; but both writers produced no work that was not conscientious.

We believe the functions of real criticism are legitimate, laudible and utile. A careful and discriminating estimate of a particular article, novel or poem, or of the entire works of an author, may very materially help to educate the public taste. "Our antagonist is our helper," says Burke. But we shall never cease to censure critics who are not competent and just, nor to condemn criticism which is not discriminating.

An incompetent and pretentious critic reviling the works of a great writer, always reminds us of the puny mortal who lifts his rheumy eyes to heaven, and chuckles with idiotic conceit at discovering spots on the sun. It is often a task of the greatest difficulty to assign him whom