

BOMERANG JOURNALISM.

By John A. Cooper, editor of The Canadian Magazine.

THERE is much in Canadian journalism to admire, but there are some features to deprecate. One of these may be termed "boomerang journalism," and I shall endeavor to explain what I mean by this phrase. Some important public matter comes up for discussion, let us say "The Fast Atlantic Service," and The Toronto Globe and The Montreal Gazette write leaders on the subject. These editorials are original and embody the matured thought of the well-informed editors of these journals. Some previous literature may be referred to, and some specialists on Atlantic shipping may be consulted, but the editor has in some way arrived at an independent decision on the subject. At any rate, we may assume that this is the case.

The editor of the country weekly or small city daily sits at his desk and awaits the morning mail. If he edits a Reform sheet, he is expecting The Globe; if he publishes a Conservative journal he is anxiously expecting The Gazette. It arrives. He turns up the editorial page and finds a two-column double-leaded editorial endorsing a plan for a fast Atlantic steamship service. He reads it over again, this time carefully. Having thus thoroughly imbibed the ideas of his favorite paper, he sits down and writes a digest of the article for his own Sawbill Progress. The readers of The Progress the next day are electrified with a strong editorial on a fast Atlantic service. A copy of The Progress passes via the post office route from Sawbill to Toronto or Montreal. If it is a Reform paper, it is eagerly read in The Globe office, the digest of The Globe's editorial is swiftly cut out from this independent journal,—this organ of the free and enlightened (Reform) electorate of West Blizzard, of which Sawbill is the chief town. If it is a Conservative journal, the same thing happens in The Gazette office.

Subsequently The Globe or The Gazette, as the case may be, appears with a double-headed editorial, "The Views of the People," "The Globe's (or Gazette's) Position on a Great Question Endorsed in all Parts of the Country," etc. This is "boomerang journalism."

I am not singling out The Globe or The Gazette for special criticism, but simply to illustrate how our chief political organs do their political work.

There is little independence in the political press of Canada. The great city dailies reflect the views of either the Government or the Opposition, and the smaller dailies and weeklies take their cue from the city dailies. For judicial and unbiassed political criticism, for well-weighed political opinions, for independent research and thought on subjects within the domain of party politics we cannot, speaking generally, look to the Canadian press. The editors of Canadian papers know that should they serve their party—not their country—until the appointed time, there is a "soft snap" awaiting them, and many of them live with this noble aim always in view.

There are a few conscientious journalists lying around loose through the country, but they are not numerous. This is due probably to the fact that in Canada it is considered clever to serve your party to your own profit.

The Montreal Star and Witness are fairly independent journals, but not strictly so. They are, however, also honest,

and that is much more than can be said of a few other Canadian journals.

This "boomerang journalism" is stultifying Canadian thought on political questions. The reader will notice that I have confined my criticism, if I may call it such, to political editorial writing. On other subjects, such as the "Queen's Jubilee," "Sunday Street Cars," "Our Relations with the United States," "Imperial Unity," "Postage on Newspapers" and "Good Roads" there is much independence of thought and a considerable expression of individual opinion based on a more or less accurate marshalling of facts. Why should there not be the same independence when considering such questions as the "Crow's Nest Pass," "Preferential Trade," "Voluntary Schools," "Intercolonial Extension," "Cold Storage Systems" and the numerous subjects that are now prominent in provincial and federal politics?

I believe in party allegiance, but I detest blind party allegiance. If a newspaper man wishes to write on the merits of a "Fast Atlantic Service," let him take two months to study the question; if he cannot devote the necessary time, he should say nothing. If he wish to reflect the opinion of The Globe, The Gazette, or any of the other large dailies, let him quote their sentiments with a credit. To rehash them, and dish them up as his own sentiments is to make a fool of himself, of politics and of the country.

The small daily should not have leading political editorials unless it has on its staff a man who has the time to study all these questions carefully and patiently, whose training is such that he approaches every new political question with a mind as clear of bias as a new sheet of paper is of ink. The editorials of these papers should be confined to local questions and to accredited summaries. If the editor of a small daily must write editorials on political questions, let him read both sides of the question and then give an honest opinion. It is not correct opinions that this country needs so much as honest opinions.

Then, as to editorials in weekly papers, there should be none whatever. In the time of a heated campaign, some strong political editorials in a weekly are excusable, but never at any other time. A weekly paper should contain news and advertisements—nothing else. All political opinions should be given as news, and the editor cannot then be held responsible for them. His paper will then circulate more freely among all classes of the community and he will not be accused of misrepresenting the views of the people among whom he lives.

A good story is told of a Western States daily newspaper whose publisher employed several expert editorial writers to fill up a daily page. One afternoon they were all celebrating and next morning the paper came out without editorials. That day hundreds of the readers of the paper congratulated the publisher on the excellent change he had made in doing away with that page. These were so numerous that the editorial page was finally abolished.

In any event I should like to see this "boomerang journalism" killed. If Canada is to attain to vigorous national stature it must be by a cultivation of independent thought, and the newspapers have not always encouraged and fostered what little independence already existed in the minds of the people. If events proceed in Canada along present lines we shall soon have two political Tammanies, and (to mix the metaphor) our national life will be crushed between the upper and the nether