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CRITICISM of critics has been common ever since the first critic assumed an intellectual frown and donned his eyeglasses. We hear a very great deal of it in those days. Members of the fault-finding profession in all its branches share alike the interesting invectives of those who forget that in criticising critics they constitute themselves critics. The book reviewer who reviews without reading, or reviews the author instead of the book; the art critic who lauds at the rate of a dollar a line a painting by a wealthy but worthless artist, or attempts to display his wisdom by a description—composed largely of adjectives and nonsense—of a master's masterpiece too great to be grasped by his pocket-bound imagination; the dramatic connoisseur whose praise of the play comes from his adoration of the leading lady, or whose scathing denunciations are due to the poor location of the seats assigned him; and the musical critic who is pleased with nothing but himself, or denounces a musical society because he wasn't appointed its conductor; these and many more like them are held up to the public gaze so frequently, that many people are tempted to believe that none others exist, that honest criticism has ceased to be.

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THE right to criticise is as unquestionable as the right to think; in fact, true criticism cannot be better defined than the expression of honest thought. Journalistic criticism is therefore just as natural and necessary as journalism itself. Its duty, theoretically, is to reflect that so-called public opinion of which journalism is the organ. But the constituent members of the great and glorious public cannot—heaven be thanked—each of them record his opinion in the journals of the day. Space, spelling and other obstacles forbid. The impossible task therefore devolves upon the critic—least fortunate of mortals—of expressing the widely divergent ideas of this conglomerate

mass of humanity in one opinion—his own. Need it be wondered that when he attempts the task he fails, and when he doesn't attempt it he makes hosts of bitter enemies.

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J for this reason representative criticism, or criticism which attempts to reflect public opinion, long since fell into disuse, and the era of personal criticism dawned. The critic no longer tells what the public think,—even if he says he does, he doesn't—he tells what he thinks, and that alone. But the great trouble is that he very rarely tells why he thinks or what business he has to think at all. Hence the array of charges which the critics of critics bring against him. Money, muddled brains, marriage prospects, and fifty other things—but never a logical process—are alleged to be responsible for his thoughts.

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THE "essentials" of valid criticism are those two occasionally met with commodities—knowledge and honesty. Anyone who possesses these has the right to criticise. Without them anything a critic may say is as impotent as it is impudent. It is probably truthfully charged that many of our modern critics possess but a small amount of either. But in condemning them it must not be forgotten that there are a very large number who are abundantly endowed with both, and whose service to literature, art, music and the drama is of the very greatest. And the ignorant or dishonest critic really does very little harm. He is one of the nuisances of the age; that is the worst that can be said of him. His criticisms are too transparent to be effective.

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A GOOD deal has been heard in Montreal lately about the injurious influence of a certain musical critic, whose blood-curdling denunciations are said to make people unwilling to undertake any musical effort. We think music in Montreal will survive long after the gratuitous advertisement of the critic aforesaid has ceased. If every line he writes displays his ignorance of music, manners and English, and his fealty to personal and national prejudice, sensible people will only laugh at his sneers, and wonder that a reputable newspaper should print his verbal meanderings. And of course if it be otherwise—it will be otherwise.

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FINALLY, brethren, there is a critic who does not write in papers, but who is none the less worthy of your contempt. He sits behind you at the theatre or next you in the street car; you meet him at the dance, or are forced into his society at the summer resort. Be the subject discussed sonnet or sermon, singer or scenery, he can tell you of something better, he can pick a flaw. He is the great unpleased, the everlastingly cynical. Do you know him? In the name of our common humanity snub him.

One Hundred Dollars in prizes.—See page 9.