

CONTRIBUTORS' DEPARTMENT.

THE NECESSARY LIMITS OF
CONTROVERSY.

WE have received a temperate and well conceived letter, signed "Canadian Catholic," on the subject of the "Reply of the Nineteenth Century," a paper which appeared in our last number. The writer takes objection to the course we pursued in inserting this article, while at the same time, by the footnote attached to it, we "all but precluded response." Besides this, he alleges that the matter contained in that article is calculated to affect the many Catholics who take an interest in educational matters; and this being so, we feel it a duty which we owe to our correspondent and to our readers generally, to explain the position we take in the matter.

In the first place, it is not within our province to meddle with questions of doctrine or theology. Questions of morals may be occasionally treated of, with due caution, even in a non-sectarian periodical; for the same system of moral teaching underlies almost all sects, and the differences that do exist are rather in the methods and degrees of enforcing moral discipline, than in the root-principles from which that discipline is evolved. The real difficulty does not come in until we approach the battle-field of history. It is in history that all parties seek for weapons with which to support their own cause, and to defeat their opponents. It is to the interest of both parties alike, that every possible light should be thrown upon past events, and that no discussion on the subject should be stopped without valid reasons. Moreover, when we approach the consideration of any historical event, we must remind a "Canadian Catholic," that religious party-lines cease to be drawn with the rigour and precision that obtains when polemics are on the *tapis*. There are several

well-known doctrines, to deny or to attack which, in a non-sectarian magazine, would be an outrage upon every member of the Church that held those doctrines.

But to pronounce an opinion upon a matter of history, such as the gradual decadence of the temporal power of the See of Rome, does not necessarily offend every Catholic, neither does it follow that, because a man is offended thereby, he must be a Catholic.

On such a question parties divide, as it were, in a different plane of cleavage; political and national sympathies enter largely into the elements that form an opinion, and many a staunch Protestant would prefer to see the Papal States intact, whilst as good Catholics have rejoiced to see His Holiness confined to the exercise of a vast spiritual power, and have foretold, from that very circumstance, an increase of his influence and authority over the world at large.

It is in this distinction that we consider the *nodus* of the difficulty must be sought and unravelled. Any topic, the mooted of which is offensive, *per se*, to a man who belongs to any religious body, simply on account of his belonging to that body, should not be tolerated in a magazine of this nature. Any topic as to which men of all shades of belief may rank themselves on either side, should be held permissible. And we cannot conceal from ourselves the fact, that such topics *do* exist, and that the liveliest interest is felt in them. To say that such "burning-topics" as the past history of education, which was for many years identical with the history of our correspondent's Church, are not to be handled at all in our pages, would be to debar our readers from information which they will naturally expect to receive from us. Details of bygone historical events, especially of an educational or social