

This Congregation is well fitted for its difficult functions. It is composed of Cardinals chosen by the Sovereign Pontiff, some of whom are distinguished as theologians, others as canonists; still others for their ability in the management of ecclesiastical affairs, whilst all are conspicuous for piety and prudence. A secretary is named from the Order of Preachers, and in addition there is a number of eminent scholars and professors, called consultors and relators who undertake the office of censors. The duties of this board are sharply set down in an admirable collection of "Ten Rules" which have been supplemented and explained by various Popes. Benedict XIV, in his celebrated constitution "*Sollicita et provida*," while adding a new sanction, also dwells at length upon the duties and qualities which should distinguish the judges of books. He is first careful to recall the cautious prudence which has ever marked, and should attend this important work. He notices the complaints of authors who intimate that books are too hurriedly glanced over previous to sentence and briefly answers this and similar objections.

The following extract may give some idea of the careful examinations to which a book is subjected by the censors "The secretary" writes the Pontiff "will receive the books complained of and will require the complainant in each case, to state on what grounds he petitions the suppression of the book. He will then read it over carefully and have it read also by two consultors. If these think the book should be suppressed, some competent relator will be chosen to prepare a written opinion of the work, noting the paragraphs and pages to which special attention is to be paid. The consultors will then hold a meeting, and will discuss the written criticism of the relator, comparing it, paragraph by paragraph with the places referred to. Preparatory meetings of this kind, will be called by the secretary once a month or oftener and the Master of the Apostolic Palace, together with at least six consultors, shall be present. The secretary will record the views of the consultors, and will transmit to the Cardinals, a copy thereof, together with the relator's written opinion."

So much for the lower Congregation. In their turn, the Cardinals review the whole subject, having before them the book in question, the relator's document, the views and votes of the consultors. Sometimes the report comes from the lower chamber, proposing to permit the book without any condemnation, or again, to approve it after certain correction, or finally, when evident perversity checks hesitation, to proscribe it altogether. In any case, the superior Congregation holds two meetings, sifts the evidence, and takes up the votes. The Master of the Sacred Palace, who is present at all these assemblies as primary and official consultor, then carries the matter before the Sovereign Pontiff, on whose decision the final result depends, and without which no condemnation is ever pronounced.

Those judgments thus formed with extreme care suppose unchallenged qualities and dispositions in the judges. It is Benedict XIV who points out the most important. The censors are not charged to seek out reasons for condemning a book given them to examine, but they are to collect from its conscientious and careful perusal, remarks and observations which will be of service to the Cardinals in reaching a decision. No book is committed to any censor who is not especially qualified by his attainments, to express a just and intelligent opinion on the branch about which the book treats. Should a censor grow conscious of lack of ability, he is strictly obliged to acknowledge the fact, and this far from lowering him in the estimation of either the Pope or Cardinals, will rather strengthen their confidence in his candor and fairness. The judges must moreover be on their guard against prejudice, likes or dislikes for certain countries, families, universities, and institutions. Whilst they show no tinge of partisanship, they shall adopt for unflinching landmarks, the Church's dogmas, the beliefs rendered obligatory for all Catholics by decrees of general councils, constitutions of Sovereign Pontiffs, or the common consent of orthodox fathers and doctors. Decisions are not given on questions where these authorities permit liberty of discussion. Moreover a judgement calls for a study of the book from cover to cover, and no safe estimate can