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VOL. X. No. 4

TORONTO, THURSDAY, JANUARY 23, 1902

PRICE FIVE CENTS

Political Criticism

Written Specially for The Register

In a few weeks the Federal Parliament of Canada will be in session. The Capital will be astir with unusual activity and the politicians of all degrees will flock to that legislative centre. The usual ceremonies will take place, and the publicly-discussed business of the country will have begun. Ottawa, during the three or four months of session, becomes the focus towards which converge all rays of interest—public and private. The many-eyed press of the Dominion will keep keen watch upon every movement, anxious to record the same for the general benefit of all readers, and for the special enjoyment or instruction of some particular section of the political world. The season of sharp, destructive, as well as constructive, political criticism draws near, and already the first symptoms of the fever that fires the journalist's veins, are to be noticed. It might not be untimely for one who is aloof from the turmoil, the din, the discord of that heated arena, to give expression to his own views upon the question of political criticism in general. I have no intention of referring to either parties, or individuals; my purpose is rather national than political.

There is nothing more healthy for the constitution of a country than a fair, judicious and fearless analysis of all measures advocated or adopted by the legislators. There is, however, a plant that is dangerous under our atmosphere and to our soil, although it has been long rooted into the systems of the old world, and has flourished there in a special manner—it is partisanship. Here, where everything is new, fresh, vigorous, where conditions are like the climate and the country, at once bracing and expansive, the mind should soar above the narrower restrictions of partisanship and the eye should measure the future rather than confine its range of vision to the mere present. I do not mean that we must not have political parties, nor that men are not bound to do their duty towards whatever party they believe to hold the more solid principles and promulgate the more rational and patriotic policy. To ask that would be to demand that men should divest themselves of their free-born rights of citizenship. I merely wish to convey that, in regard to the subject I have chosen for this contribution our political criticism should rise above interclass partisanship, and shake itself free of all petty whims, prejudices, personal likes or dislikes, and, while aiming at the greater good of the Dominion, seek to discover the more remote consequences of deeds and works, before deciding upon their value under the glass of present circumstances.

The man who sees everything perfect in his own political party, and everything imperfect in the one to which he is opposed, is no more competent to attempt honest political criticism than is a bigot capable of writing exact history. The political critic must be above all meanness, either of sentiment or of expression; he must be chary of imputing motives when he does not fully understand all the difficulties of a situation, he must avoid hero worship on the one hand, and blind personal antagonism on the other; he must give the benefit of the doubt to the acting party un-

til such time as results either justify or condemn such action, he must take into constant consideration the variety of hues in the rainbow of provinces that spans our Dominion from sea to sea, he must keep before his mind the countless conflicting interests that come together in a whirl of confusion at the Capital, he must not forget that those who have been called upon, by the people to govern the country—from leader to last lieutenant—have to deal with various races, diverse creeds, numerous geographically divided sections, and untold corporate as well as individual interests, he must keep in mind that emulation is the order of the day, and that all are rushing and jostling each other along the highway of Canadian progress, each seeking to forge ahead of all other competitors, and that the men responsible for the well-being and the future of the whole nation cannot ignore any one of these. If he can retain but a few of these considerations in his mind, when he sits down to pen his political criticisms, he will probably produce that which will be calculated to advance the Dominion and to bring harmony out of chaos, good understanding out of blind antagonism, and future greatness out of the little events of the passing hour.

Sir William Draper, in one of his replies to Junius, characterized that famous critic's eulogiums as "Assertion without proof, declamations without argument, and violent censure without dignity or moderation." Whether he was justified in such a characterization it is not for me to here examine, but in this short phrase he has clearly indicated that which is needed in the statesman or political leader, in the legislator or ordinary politician; proof for every assertion; argument beneath the splendors of rhetoric, and both dignity and moderation in all censuring of others.

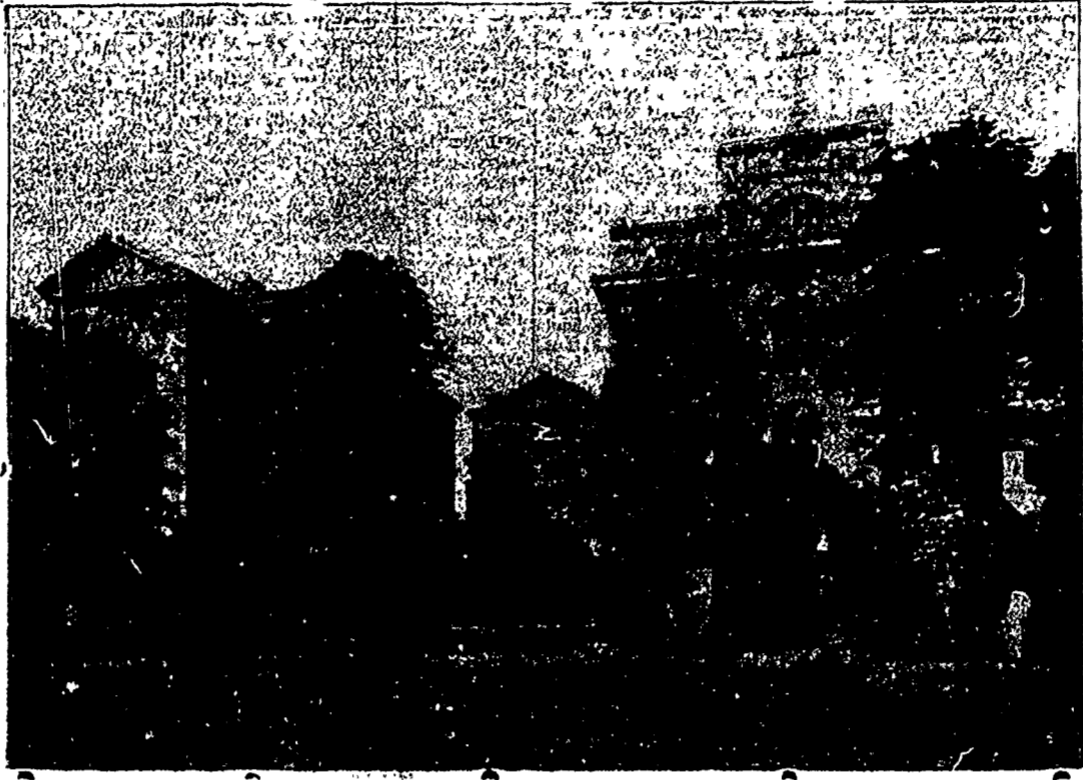
As a rule it is the party in power that becomes the object of political criticism. That which is in opposition by the mere fact of its passive participation in the affairs of legislation, rather than any direct or active part it can take, is sheltered from these shafts. Not that its principles, its ideals, or the expressions of its advocates are beyond reproach, but simply that its mission, for the time being, is to oppose, to find fault, to dictate what should be done, to assert what it would do—but not having the power which it does not do in a word, political criticism reduces itself to the examining into, the dissecting of and the passing judgment upon the actions of the existing government—no matter to which party it belongs.

In politics, as well as in literature, in religion, in philosophy, and in every other sphere, there are two kinds of criticism—destructive or aggressive, and constructive or favorable. To justly criticize men and measures the writer must understand that he is obliged to apply both standards, and that it is his duty, in as far as facts and the interests of the country will allow, to give the preference to the constructive rather than the destructive. The latter is the easier of the two, it demands the least amount of capacity, of foresight, of judgment, because almost any person can find fault, can pick bones, can note errors. On the other hand, constructive criticism requires exceptional attention, ability, deep thinking, and above all a faculty for detecting remote consequences from the mere presence of unexplained facts. The Government proposes some measure, the public does not exactly grasp its purport; destructive criticism is poured in like round shot and shell. Possibly the measure is allowed to drop; the public has succeeded in killing it. Does the matter end there? Ten years hence the public will ask "Why did not some government in the past adopt such a measure?" Because when a government whose statesmen had foreseen this result was prepared to do so, the destructive political criticism of the unforeseeing had rendered it inexpedient; and the lack of a single, well-balanced, impartial, constructive criticism of that measure, robbed the country of a boon that it would otherwise have enjoyed. We must remember that those who are responsible and obliged to take the initiative, with all its consequences, are in a position to study the requirements of the country in general, to detect future combinations of interests that men, with mere individual aims, cannot be expected to detect, and to prepare for conditions that a constantly nearing future must necessarily present.

Let us have political criticism—but let it be patriotic, Canadian, constructive, for our country is in process of construction, being a land of the future.

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The Pope and The Bible

(The Catholic Times.)

Most important is the information to hand that the Holy Father has determined to appoint a special Pontifical Commission for the purpose of studying, in the light of modern discoveries, questions affecting the Sacred Scriptures. The personnel of the Commission will have Cardinal Parocchi for its president, and with him will sit Cardinals Vives and Segna as assessors. Father David Fleming, the Franciscan, will be secretary, and the consultants are to be chosen from all parts of the Catholic world. The men among us of light and leading on Biblical topics are to have a long-weighed opportunity of laying their thoughts before the Holy See, and no effort will be spared to enable every scholar to register his opinions on the greatest problem, from the Catholic point of view, at this hour. There will be, we understand, every facility afforded to grapple with a class of questions which are as difficult as they are teasing. For many decades now those of us who are even slightly conversant with the trend of thought among intellectual Catholics have recognized the urgent necessity of some action to minimize dangers which, if allowed to increase, must ultimately threaten grievous evil to the Catholic cause. Not only guests, but laymen also, have sorely felt the perils of the situation, and it is with unbounded satisfaction that we chronicle the resolve to which the Holy Father, in his wisdom, has arrived. The Commission, it may be hoped, will help to secure peace of mind to many a weary soul; its very appointment is enough to save over some ugly wounds. Men, excellent, pious, of reputation unblemished, have spoken and written in favor of what were termed progressive views. At the time they and their opinions were not always well received. Like all reformers they had their urnance of affliction. To many of them the Pontifical Commission will come as a balmy wind amid the flames of trial, and beyond any doubt, when the Commission closes its labors, they will have been able to show that, though apparently out of harmony at the moment, they were never in discord with the actual sentiment of ecclesiastical doctrine.

But from yet another point of sight the constitution of this Commission is of enormous and almost incalculable importance. It starts, in some sense, a new era in the history of Catholicism. Theology teaches that the Holy Ghost dwells in the whole Church, which He guards and guides unto all truth in matters of Divine Faith. To the Bishops, with the Pope as their infallible head, ruling with supreme and inerrant power, He has committed the task of teaching. Yet this indwelling is in the whole body; the head is not cut off from the members, nor are the members separated from the head. Both conspire together for the fulness of faith and charity. And, by means of this Pontifical Commission, the feelings and opinions of the body, the

concurrent testimony, to the deposit of revelation, handed down from the times of old, will be easily and adequately gauged. The investigations preliminary to any Papal decision will be rapidly and surely made, nor is it possible that any matters will be overlooked. Rome has always shown herself alive to the demands and interests of the hour; and it is one more proof of the infallibility of the Sovereign Pontiff that he is calling in the ability of the learned to assist in the preliminary labors of the most notable function of his holy office. The sacred wisdom, the assembled councils of the Catholic world are to be placed at the disposal of him whose supreme duty is to lead the flock of Christ with unerring steps, into the pastures of truth.

Little foresight is needed to prophesy that the appointment of this Commission for the study of questions affecting Sacred Scripture will prove to be, not a solitary expedient, but a precedent in other branches of intellect something similar will, with the progress of time and the growth of the Church in English-speaking lands, assuredly be required. Indeed, it is by no means outside the limits of the probable that we may many of us live to see a Council of the learned established for the constant consideration of the changing problems of these rapidly-moving times. The world advances quickly now, so quickly that none of us can keep up with the ceaseless march of mind. It is an age of specialists, and only by the reunion of many men can you get at the full thought of the day. An always, the Holy See has recognized the signs of the time, and intellectual Catholics everywhere will gratefully acknowledge the splendid action to which the present Pope has given initiative. Not least will those whose long efforts are now at last tinged with the first dawn of success be grateful that the darkness is passing rapidly away, and that the day is near when those who were frightened at the sound of words which seemed to be novelties, shall be given to realize that the Gospel of God, if it is ever old, is ever new, and that His Word is not merely yesterday, but for to-day—for every day that shall be till the crack of doom; and that in deciding questions which affect it, while judgment comes from the centre, every information is to be gathered along the numerous radii that stretch therefrom to the circumference.

Westminster Cathedral.

The Architectural Review for January contains an article on Westminster Cathedral by Mr. W. R. Lethaby, which is profusely and handsomely illustrated, giving various views of the building. In the course of it Mr. Lethaby says:

The largest church in London, excepting St. Paul's and the Abbey, is now, after eight or ten years of labor, rapidly nearing structural completion. Nothing but praise and congratulation is due to all concerned in this fine work, and nothing but good fortune seems to have attended its progress. The site was a wonderful space to find in crowded Westminster. The Faithful have supported the scheme with loyal enthusiasm, and the work was confided into the hands of an architect of great gifts and matured powers, Mr. J. F. Bentley, who in turn has simply built his life into the church with unmeasured devotion.

The new Westminster Cathedral, whether fine architecture or not, is first of all a building homogeneous, simply seen, and directly constructed—monumental, as we say. Its large parts cohere into organic unity, and it is set out on lines liberal and suave without unnecessary art-books and transparent pretences of spontaneous simplicity.

The scale is very large—the span equal, indeed, to the largest known—and the height ample. Subsidiary parts, like the baptistery and the side chapels of the Virgin and the Sacrament, are themselves large, but the main church carries them as proudly as a liner carries little ships slung on davits.

Every building properly and necessarily has its forebears, and this one, so far as its main dispositions go, seems to be based on Romanesque examples in the southwest of France and in Lombardy, and on such a Byzantine church as St. Irene, Constantinople.

The building is a domed basilica, having four domical bays, and an apsidal termination which contains the monks' choir. Under the apsis is a fine crypt, with relic-chamber projecting westward under the high altar. The east bay—next to the apsidal end with its tiers of seats—forms the raised presbytery, where will stand the altar and its baldachin. Out of the next bay westward open transepts. This and the two other domed compartments by the nave are each subdivided into two minor bays in the aisles. Along the sides runs a colonnade of monolithic marble columns supporting a gallery, and a similar arcade returns at the west end, forming a narthex. Beyond the aisles are chapels which extend transverse measure to the same breadth as the transepts. The lighting of the central span of the nave is by large lunettes high up under the domes, and filled with a tracery of lattice-work. The dome over the

altar differs from the rest in having sixteen windows piercing its circumference. The domes themselves are remarkably interesting examples of constructive art, being entirely formed of concrete without and within. The pockets of the pendentives are brought up to a level terrace, on which the domes seem to stand like inverted bowls on a table.

Above the level of the roof-terrace the domes are double, and formed of two concentric shells of concrete, having an air-space of some three or four inches between them. The outer casing is of concrete slabs bedded on ribs which rest on the inner dome proper. This shielding of the dome, while allowing a free passage for air and for any water which may get through, seems to be an admirable expedient, and in the truest sense original—an originality which is no caprice, but reaches out from the firm ground of necessity. This series of large, graceful domes, rising out of the terrace-platform, is in every way a remarkable feat of building, done so simply and convincingly as to become a fine work of art. Throughout the church, indeed, the constructive ideas are finely conceived, and realized with great daring, assurance, and success.

After referring to other points which particularly appealed to him such as the masterly simplicity of the whole scheme by which a huge unit bay, of sixty feet square, four times repeated, and a noble apse, form the effective interior, Mr. Lethaby calls attention to other very fine dispositions for convenience and effective display, including the change in the dome over the crossing, whereby light as from a crown is radiated over the high altar; the management of the transepts, where, by means of a transverse colonnade, and large lunette above, the double space is opened up as one; and the way the crypt is made visible from the presbytery by a series of arches. As the outside is practically complete, continues Mr. Lethaby, and within the building is only an enormous brick and concrete shed, no better example is easy to find for the purpose of probing for ourselves the sources of satisfaction open to us in modern building. Without one made alert, curious, forced back on comparative criticism, inclined to carp, slightly wearied, it may be, by the astounding display of scholarship in what I may call decorative morphology.

If beauty were a merely abstract thing, there are thoughts, contrivances, delicacies of fancy here which might give fortune to a hundred buildings. No expedient of a critical refinement is here neglected. The great tower which climbs 230 feet into the air has the entasis of a classic column. The capitals are elegantly profiled like the earliest perfect Greek. The mouldings are purposeful, sharp, and refined. Everywhere is change, adjustment, variety.

Moreover, there is a certain universality—or, at least, synthesis—in the style, and every country and every age contributes its quota. Athens, Byzantium, Pisa, Bologna, Milan, Venice, the South of France, England's Gothic, the Renaissance of Donatello, the modern French of Dupin (not Viollet), and the modern

English of Philip Webb—all these, and many more antecedents color this complex result.

Inside all is different. You step over the threshold of the Cardinal's door, and the instant impression is that of reality, reason, power, serenity and peace. Almost a sense of nature—the natural law of structure.

The great size of this reservoir of air at once rears our imaginations. The height and distances allow of that blueing of the atmosphere which turns it from mere nothingness into a visible entity—a portion of Space, a slice of Infinity fit symbol of the Infinite. Indefinite aesthetic criticism is here out of court. The obvious sense and soundness of the structure beats down all the mutually destructive opinions of experts in taste. Does not taste approve it? Then so much, the worse for taste. In such a building the constructive and use problems are, of course, solved by the light of a certain generalized "artistic insight" in what, for a moment, we may call scenic display, but this display itself is not a question of mere nerve vibration, it is based on unconsciously reasoned ideas of order, clearness, mystery, mastery, generosity, sweetness, pride, as definitely as every act and word of the rites to be here celebrated express like controlling, even if unrealized, motives. Every work of art is a confession of faith.

The Health of the Pope.

Rome, Jan. 10.—Dr. Lapponi, the Pope's physician, said to-day of the health of Pope Leo, whom he visited last night after an absence of three days:

"For years the Pope has not enjoyed such perfect health. He never fails to fast on Friday, and sometimes on other days.

"The principal precaution I insist upon is keeping his rooms at an even temperature of 65 degrees, especially, as he is most careless about himself. He frequently retires without properly adjusting his flannels about his chest. When I remonstrate, he says he does not want to coddle himself."

When asked, if the Pope should remain as strong as at present, how long he would live Dr. Lapponi answered:

"I do not care to speculate on that question, but there is no reason why he should not reach the age of Gregory the Ninth, who was a centenarian."

This would mean eight years more of life, which would make Leo's pontificate longer than that of St. Peter, and even longer than that of Pius IX., who reigned thirty-one years.

The Vatican is informed that three American pilgrimages are expected this year on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Pope Leo's pontificate.

The Catholic Indian Association, which has been formed in Ottawa, has for its objects the finding employment for more red men outside the reserves, the promotion of habits of cleanliness among the inhabitants of the reserves and the development of education by the introduction of Indian teachers. The welfare of the Indian has been left practically in the hands of the missionaries and the government all along. A philanthropic movement to aid the church in the great work it is doing will find occupation for its energy.

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