

My only concern now is to show how true is the statement that we should not rely too much upon what critics say, and I wish to show this in a sort of negative way by bringing forward the opinions which writers have held of one another. You will easily discern how entirely untrustworthy and conflicting are the statements of even the best writers when judging others, and, as these men are the agencies that fashion public opinion, how little you can depend upon it.

I wish, however, to mention that these remarks apply in no manner to the obedience we owe to our spiritual directors or ecclesiastical authorities. Their criticisms and judgments refer to the moral order and to what is for or against faith, and therefore their directions must always be accepted and reverentially followed.

If the world at large and if the critics themselves would accept Mr. Andrew Lang's definition of criticism as a more or less agreeable way of airing one's personal preferences, there might be less heart-burning in the literary guild.

Criticism has never been an exact art and never will become so. The critics have their say and then we turn around and criticise the critics. One age reversed the verdict of its predecessor. Nay, even these temporary verdicts are but the clash of opposing opinions. The strongest hand carries the day for a moment, and then night comes and the new day brings in new conditions. The critic by profession has always been an object of authorial hatred. The envy of the unsuccessful against the successful has been described as the motive power of criticism from the days of the Greek Callimachus to the English Disraeli. Yet when an author himself tries his hand at criticism he makes no better fist of it than the professional. If Quintilian fell foul of Seneca, if Athenæus treated Socrates as illiterate, if Dionysius picked flaws in the style of Xenophen, let us not forget that poets and historians have also misprized and reviled each other, that Homer had no relish for the coarse humor of Plautus, that if the critics of Callimachus were unjust, he too was a critic accused of injustice.