

THE PUBLIC PRESS AND PUBLIC MORALS.

THE men of this world who modestly assume to themselves the title and character of children of light, are forever telling us that the Catholic Church is the mother of ignorance. She is slow, heavy, mediæval. It is even one of her own proverbs, that "Rome moves with leaden feet." She is hopelessly behind the age, and strives to keep her people back with her. She steadfastly refuses to advance and march hand in hand with the times. She will persist in clinging to the skirts of Thomas Aquinas, instead of falling at the feet of Herbert Spencer, and worshipping with him at the altar of the unknowable. She still regards St. Augustine as a greater theologian and teacher than Mr. Beecher or Mr. Talmage, or any of the pet preachers of the day. Everything that the children of this world bless we are assured she curses. She curses freedom of thought, as the liberty to believe or disbelieve at pleasure, and regardless of light and evidence, is called. She curses divorce, that most beautiful of modern institutions. She curses heresy. She curses science, that modern science that strives to reduce all that is to matter. She curses free governments, like that of France to day. She curses free education. She would set her *Index* upon every public library; for, above all things, she curses and hates, and would, if she could, abolish the free press that spends so much time, and thought, and money in exposing her machinations, bringing her dark deeds to light, and showing to the people of the world her true character and stamp. This, as seen at a glance, is a heavy indictment against the Catholic Church. Yet it is held as a dogma by every nine out of ten non-Catholics, who brush by us in the streets, or hold converse or business relations with us every day. It is, secretly or openly, the average opinion entertained of the Church by the great mass of people without her pale, by the lettered as by the unlettered, by the foolish as by the wise. Nothing, save the grace of God, can shake this belief, which, through three centuries of malice, persecution, and false teaching, has become an inheritance, and, as such, is accepted without question or hesitation. As towards the Roman Catholic Church, non-Catholics are absolutely color-blind. Everything in it flares with the lurid colors of the Scarlet Woman. Thus, whatever position Catholic opinion may take in law, in politics, in government, in religion, in social and public affairs, all other opinion instinctively ranges, or is inclined to range, itself on the opposite side. Voltaire's maxim was older than Voltaire. "Lie," said that great master of the art to his disciples, "lie boldly; lie

always." That has been the policy of all heretics, schismatics, and opponents of the Christian unity from Luther down to the first Christian century. Nay, it goes back a step farther, to him who, Christ has told us, was a liar from the beginning. So, to-day, we Catholics must be content to bear the burden, and face the consequences of three centuries of inherited calumny and falsehood regarding ourselves, our faith, and our Church.

This being, and no one will deny that it is, the attitude of non-Catholics towards us and our cherished and honest beliefs, suppose, for a moment, that the last of the load of charges brought against the Catholic Church were true, would there be anything so very extraordinary or unreasonable in it? Suppose the Catholic Church did actually and formally condemn the non-Catholic and anti-Catholic press, which, in its turn, constantly condemns and everlastingly anathematizes the Catholic Church, what, after all, would this be but a conflict of rival jurisdictions? Must our avowed enemies expect us to bless them when they curse us, and allow to them the monopoly of light, and reason, and truth? They anathematize to their hearts' content, but as soon as the Church raises her voice in solemn expostulation and warning, a howl of hate and execration fills the world.

Thus it was when the Syllabus was promulgated; thus it was when the scheme of the Vatican Council was propounded. The world resounded with the rage and clamor of those who hastened to place themselves in the ranks of the condemned, and then blamed the Church for condemning them. Thus it was, again, when the Prussian persecution of Catholics broke out. Where did Prince Bismarck find so powerful and universal an agent to applaud his policy and approve his course as in the free secular press of all lands? In Germany he was compelled to create out of the millions that he wrung from France a "reptile press" to propagate a gospel of lies against the Catholic Church, its head, and the Catholics of the German Empire, and, at the same time, to approve of every new act of the Chancellor and his satellites in the policy of persecution. In other lands the secular press and religious Protestant press, with their characteristic love of freedom and fair-play, of their own accord acted the part of reptile press for Prince Bismarck. All through the persecution the London *Times* had, and still has, as its chief Berlin correspondent, a prominent employé of the Prussian Foreign Office, whose letters Englishmen accepted as the free and unbiassed opinions of an Englishman. Some of those letters, with very slight variations, appeared in certain American journals as the unprejudiced opinions of "our Berlin correspondent." But, with or without such conspiracies as this, the public press, as a whole (with an honored

exception here and there), ranged itself freely and ardently on the side of the persecuting government.

It may plead now, with sorrow and shame at the havoc it has seen wrought by the material success of the Prussian policy of persecution, that it has changed in this regard; that it no longer upholds so wicked and unprovoked an attack on the German Catholics and the Catholic Church; that it has since condemned, and will continue to condemn, Prince Bismarck for having ever entered on so mistaken and suicidal a policy, which it always predicted would turn out a mistake, and so forth. It is safe to be a prophet after the event. Prince Bismarck has since found reason to condemn himself for his course of action towards the Catholic Church and the German Catholics, not so much because he feels any great compunction of conscience for what he has done, as because he found the Catholics too strong for him. His failure probably explains the cause of the free foreign reptile press having dropped from him; though, if the truth were known, their secret sympathies are with him still. The Catholics have not budged an inch from their position, and, if they were worthy of the condemnation and obloquy heaped on them from every quarter of the globe, they are more worthy of it to-day than ever.

Or, take the instance of the recent doings in France, since first Gambetta inaugurated his anti-Catholic, which he called anti-clerical, policy, which is simply an imitation, in a possibly more vicious and diabolical form, since it occurs in a land that, at least, calls itself Catholic. What stand has the public press taken on this matter? One would have thought it might have learned a lesson from the course of the Prussian persecution, and its failure; a lesson of charity, and humanity, and wisdom; some sense, at least, of the direction in which right and freedom really lay. In some instances, and not a few important ones, this was so. Some of the powerful secular press took the lesson to heart, and have steadily set their faces against the new anti-Catholic persecution in France. But it is beyond question that the great mass of feeling in the public press is in the other direction, on the side of sympathy with Gambetta, and in approval of the expulsion of the Jesuits, of the friars and nuns, and Christian Brothers; of the withdrawal of the schools from Catholic influence; of the tearing down of the crucifixes from the walls of the public schools. The movement is anti-Catholic; being anti-Catholic, it is in the direction of light and right, and the emancipation of human reason; therefore it is to be supported, seems to be the argument which these gentlemen use. Gambetta and his henchmen, Paul Bert, Ferry, Clemenceau, etc., all apostles of the new *culte*, are right, Monsignor Freppel and his comrades are wrong. So, up with the Communists, down and out with the

Jesuits and the rest of the "black band," is the popular cry in America as in France, in the air of a free republic as in the air impregnated with the poison of Rousseau and Voltaire, touched with the brimstone of revolution.

From instances like these—they might be multiplied indefinitely—it may be stated, beyond fear of contradiction, that the public press all the world over is, by its very constitution and nature, opposed to the Catholic Church, and that its columns are always open to attacks on the Catholic Church. Nor need one go outside our own free soil to prove this. There is ample evidence of it almost every day; every day, in fact, in some shape or form. And that is one of the points insisted on here. The public press is anti-Catholic, and, it is to be feared, we must count on its continuing to be so.

Let us not be misunderstood. We do not mean in saying this that the gentlemen who write on the public press would consciously state a falsehood concerning even the Catholic Church, however much they might be personally opposed to her and her teachings. As a rule, these leaders of modern thought who preach a gospel daily to the world through the columns of the morning and evening journals follow the growing fashion of the day, and are indifferentists in matters of religion. But indifferentists though they may have become in their mature years, they cannot wholly shake off the influence of their early training and surroundings. They were brought up and educated in a distinctly anti-Catholic atmosphere. Whenever they came across the name Catholic it was as coming across the name of an enemy,—a foe of the Republic,—a would-be overthrower of our institutions. In the books that they read the name Catholic was always identified with darkness, bigotry, ignorance, servility, and persecution. This is what we mean by the Protestants having inherited a legacy of calumny and hate against Catholics that is three centuries old. English literature, from the version of the Bible known as that of King James to the Book of Common Prayer, and all the way down the whole range to the school history or reading-book published yesterday, is steeped in anti-Catholicity,—is part and parcel of the gospel of conspiracy against Catholic truth and Catholic history. Generation has followed generation feeding on this poisoned food, until at length the poison seems to have inoculated the whole mass. The infant receives it from his mother; the father teaches it to his son. There is no escape from it; and when, in the relations of life, Protestants come in contact with Catholics, they come with this secret and invisible yet most powerful of barriers between them, bidding those stand off whom they would otherwise receive with open arms. And to think that non-Catholic editors any more than non-

Catholic ministers can escape this influence is to expect too much of poor humanity. They may have succeeded, as they generally do, in throwing off the shackles of such early teachings as they themselves received in the way of Christianity. They may look out with a smile of quiet scorn from their self-erected watch-tower of intellectual and philosophic calm over the wrangling and the jangling of "the sects," as they call them. But on that solid steadfast body, one in faith and in worship, one in the acceptance of the Pope as the supreme head of the Church on earth, as the duly appointed Vicar of Christ, and as the infallible guide of all men in matters relating to Christian doctrine and morals, the secular writer always looks with suspicious if not with hostile eye. He dreads that power that he was taught to dread and to hate from the beginning. He is always prepared to believe ill of the Catholic Church, and so to lend his influence to any plausible appeal against her.

This is seen in the sudden anti-Catholic eruptions that take place from time to time in the public mind. It is the easiest thing in the world to raise an anti-Catholic cry, especially at election times. The "Jew-baiting" of which we have heard so much of late in Germany and Russia, and at which a shocked world holds up its hands in holy horror, wondering how such things can be, bad as it is, is as nothing compared to the Catholic-baiting which any one who has lived through a generation must, within his own experience, have encountered in some shape or form.

Mr. Gladstone stands in the eyes of a very large portion of the world as one of the most liberal and enlightened of statesmen, and a devout Protestant Christian. For half a century he has been dealing more or less authoritatively and intimately with the affairs of millions of Roman Catholics. He must count many Catholics among his personal friends. One of his dearest friends was Cardinal Manning. Catholics have been his colleagues in Parliament, have served in his government, have borne great public trusts with dignity and honor, have helped materially to win England's battles by land and sea. Yet it is not so long since this experienced liberal statesman strove with all the vehemence of his nature to set the world aflame on the Catholic question; to address elaborate insults to the holy and venerable Pius the Ninth; and to impress upon his countrymen what he alleged to be a fatal fact,—that it was impossible for a man to be at once a sincere Catholic and a loyal subject of the British state, as though England had itself never been Catholic. Everyone remembers how the battle raged at the time and the rain of pamphlets that set in. But it will be remembered also how strong a following Mr. Gladstone found in the United States, as in England, to accept as gospel every word

he uttered. The same thing would occur to-morrow were there any plausible excuse for it. Witness how all England went wild, because the late Dr. Wiseman assumed and was confirmed by the Pope in the title of Archbishop of Westminster, since he could not take his true title, which had been stolen from the Church, of Archbishop of Canterbury.

On this, then, Catholics must always reckon, a latent universal hostility to the Catholic Church such as exists not against any other body, not even against the dark sects that menace all society, and whose agents are so active in their secret propaganda. This latent hostility naturally finds a happy home in the public press, which is, after all, but the expression of public opinion in its various moods. It is sometimes, often for long intervals, quiescent, but a very little friction will kindle it into heat. At all events the material is always there to convert into sins of malice what might often pass as sins of ignorance against us; and this for the reason already given, that Protestants have been carefully instructed either not to know us at all or to know us wrongly.

So much for the purely anti-Catholic side of the public press, which necessarily renders it not only obnoxious, but dangerous to Catholic readers. Let us now look at the public press in itself, apart from any immediate question of creed. To begin with, it has no creed. Let us put aside at the same time all questions of "organs," of newspapers pledged to support this or that policy, this or that party, this or that man. Let us look at them in bulk, as purveyors of news, as critics of public events, as guides and leaders of public opinion, for they are all this; and the guides and leaders of public opinion must *ex officio* take the grave matter of public morals into their hands. They must say daily, this is right, that is wrong; this is false, that is true; this should, that should not, be; it is right to suppress this, and to publish that.

Here we are at once in the midst of a very wide subject, a subject wide as the world and the universal family of man. Are newspapers, is the public press to be judged in its action and conduct by that highest code of human morals which is found in the laws and the precepts of Christ? Is the editor of what is called a great daily newspaper bound in conscience by the Ten Commandments, and by the commandments of the Church to which he belongs or professes to belong? Is he bound to conduct his paper on those principles? Those commandments bid him obey the Lord his God, keep holy the Sabbath, to swear not, to do no wrong to his neighbor or his neighbor's wife, to speak the truth, to love his neighbor as himself, to give no scandal, to steal not, to touch no ill-gotten goods, to slay not, either in person or in character, to bear no false witness, etc. Judged by these everlasting canons of

Christian morals, how does the public press stand in this and all lands?

It is manifestly idle to put the test, for not even the most moderate and well-behaved of public journals, leaving out of count the journals of infamy, could stand it. How the editors and managers of public journals can reconcile this deficiency with their professed following of and obedience to Christian dictates, must be left to their own conscience. They strive to evade the straight and severe test, and argue this wise:

A newspaper is not an exponent of the ten commandments, or the precepts of the Church. That is the office of the priests and of the Church itself, an office that we do not presume to usurp. We act simply as a sort of chorus to the great drama of human life and action. We chant the record of events from day to day. We are the letter-books of the public, the daily journal of human deeds and events. We are neither the keepers nor the guardians of the public conscience. We are simply blotters, wherein the hurried events of the day are hurriedly set down, sometimes with note and comment as a warning, a guide, or an encouragement to the public. We tell of evil as well as of good; of things known to all or that should be known to all. Our chief office is to gather and assort the news of the world and set it daily before our readers. They are not compelled to read us; they do it of their own will; if they find ill in us it is of their own seeking. We, in common with them, denounce the ill and maintain the good. On the whole we "make for righteousness," and the evil that we set forth in our columns is placed there as a lesson and a warning.

That is probably the manner in which a conscientious editor or manager of a newspaper would defend the office, functions, and conduct of what would be called the average public journal, and it is a very plausible reasoning, though it stands outside of the straight test of Christian morals. But, judged even by this standard, which is not at all a safe or a high one, how will the so-called respectable press come out? Leaving out the question of news, the chronicling of actual events, is there any daily secular newspaper in the land, one might ask, in the whole world, that is wholly and strictly respectable? The advertisements alone of any one successful secular daily newspaper would of themselves condemn it; and the more successful the paper the more numerous the obnoxious and immoral advertisements, which too often extend to professedly religious journals that go into the world with the pretence of preaching the gospel and the religion of Christ. For obvious reasons it is unadvisable here to cite evidence of the truth of this general charge; but it is a fact known of all men. In many

a journal that will give a page or more of the Sunday's sermons by ministers of all creeds, will be found columns set apart for professional infamy, on the proceeds of which the respectable paper counts for a large portion of its revenue. Would the *Index* of the Catholic Church be too severe a restraint on human liberty in instances such as these of daily and abundant occurrence?

That is one detestable and abominable feature, common, more or less, to all of the great public journals, and in this sense alone they are encouragers and propagators of vice. Some papers, it is true, try to prune their advertising columns to some degree, but none are wholly free from this taint. Then comes the great matter of news. What kind of news is most acceptable to a daily journal? Naturally, and as a matter of course, that which is conceived to be most interesting to the readers of the paper, that will create a sensation, and make the paper sell. Bishop Berkeley regretted that the devil should have all the good tunes. In a much wider and deeper sense is it to be regretted that the devil or his agents should furnish all the news considered good by the editors of newspapers. A great scandal in private or public life is always sure game, and most welcome. A great divorce case, for instance, will be detailed in all its minutiae, and flashed over the country, over the ocean even, from day to day; for the time being, all other news must yield space to that; not even the loathsomeness of detail is spared, and the viler the evidence introduced, the more carefully is it set forth. Nor is this all. People who read the matter in the newspapers crowd to hear the evidence, and fight for places; those supposed to represent "the best" in society, take their lunches along to sustain them during the ordeal, and opera-glass in hand to catch every phase of expression on the countenances of the parties to the suit, sit with more devotion and patience through the *cause célèbre* than they generally display in church. The case of a prominent public man in Brooklyn, some years ago, inundated the whole country with a flood of filth, and the flood ran at high tide for months. Had that no ill effects on public morals? One leading newspaper, after having given much of the case, at last declared, in disgust and shame, that it would print no more of it, but a day or so after it recalled its resolution, and went on publishing as vigorously as its respectable brethren. And this is only an instance of instances that are constantly occurring. So that it is safe to say that, the more notoriously bad the case may be, and the more notorious or prominent the persons connected with it, the greater prominence is it given in the public press, the more scrupulously are all its details hunted up and set forth, each newspaper fearful lest its neighbor should get a "beat" on so important a public matter. The argument in such a case is this: well, this thing has

occurred, and the public have heard of it; it is a pity, of course, that such things should be, but there they are; public curiosity is excited; the facts must come forth in the court; is it not better to furnish them in full, as a lesson and a warning to the public? As well ask, is it not better, by way of giving a diagnosis of a loathsome and foul disease, to call the people together, and in their presence subject sound persons to the disease as an *experimentum in corpore vili*, or show forth the nature of a mortal sin by making an innocent soul commit it. It is worse than the old Spartan lesson. To give their youths a horror of the vice of drunkenness, they would assemble them and bring in the miserable helots before them, stupefy them with liquor until they lost reason and control over themselves, and sank to a condition lower than that of the brute.

Take, again, the case, of which instances occur so often, of a notorious murderer, who is at last brought within the meshes of the law. The press is immediately at his service, and his sayings and doings, his habits, his early life and history, his appearance, his very diet and prison "drawing-rooms" are set forth with painfully accurate detail. His dying speech from the scaffold is given, the names of the "distinguished" persons present or who visited him in his cell, and even the wretch's last struggles as he dangles from the rope, are not forgotten. The respectable public press converts him into a hero, and gives more space to him than it would to many a noble person, the story of whose life would be a lesson of interest and of good to the people.

It would be waste of time to run through the list of general charges that might be fairly made and sustained against even that large and powerful public press that claims the name of respectable, and whose profession is to serve the public for its highest good. The fact stands patent to all eyes that, as a rule, what is evil and tends to evil finds a larger share of attention in the press than what is good or tends to good. Not that the latter is neglected, by any means; but it is allotted a second or third place. It is like a sprinkling of holy water over a very mixed congregation. The editors and managers may be very estimable and worthy gentlemen in private life; but when sufficient motives urge them, there is positively no law that, in the conduct of their newspapers, they feel bound to respect, save the written law against absolute obscenity and actual libel. Private character, the sacredness of a man's home, the recognized feelings of human respect, weigh not a feather in the scale when balanced against the interests of a newspaper. The newspaper motto seems to be, "all is fair in war and politics." If the editor has the Ten Commandments hanging in his sanctum,

he, if he is a conscientious man, carefully turns their face to the wall.

All this, be it remembered, is said of newspapers claiming to be respectable and worthy servants of the public. Let any decent man ask his own conscience if, in the average daily newspaper, no matter where edited, he does not find something or other, often a vast amount of matter, that he would, if he could, expunge, and that he shrinks from admitting into his family. There can only be one answer to such a question. Yet these people profess to write for the public, and give the public just what the public demand.

Doubtless, they are right, much as indecent showmen are right, but, if right, what a depraved state of public morals does their claim denote! For there is another class of public journals that appeals to a wider constituency still, that is wholly vicious and immoral, and that, by going beyond the journals that strive to cover indecency with some remnant of respectability, reap a golden harvest by feeding the multitude on the husks of swine. If the public prints that are issued in this country alone, daily, weekly, semi-weekly, monthly, the class of publications most widely circulated and generally read, were collected in one place, and tabulated according to their moral grade, the exhibition would shock and grieve all who are not wholly depraved. It would be found that the favorite reading of our public-school instructed masses is the wholly bad and immoral, and that the gradation is from the vile depths upwards to the few who rejoice in the light of heaven, in goodness, and in purity. And this is true of every kind and class of literature to-day. The records of the public libraries attest that the favorite reading consists of the trashiest novels, and that the vilest of vile novels carry off the palm in point of numbers. The very children, who go to Sunday-school once a week to learn religion and morals (save the mark!), may be found going to day-school, with their dime novels or blood and thunder weeklies packed in their pockets or their satchels. And yet we are a moral people, and rejoice in a respectable press!

An exhibition of our popular literature would, we say, shock and sadden the heart of any decent person, and, in our own case, of any well-wisher of the republic. Paganism, gross Paganism, might be written at the head, the foot, and at each side of it; not the Paganism of the great writers, poets, historians, and philosophers of Greece and Rome, but the sensual slough of the masses when the Greek states and the Roman republic and empire declined; when vice was erected into a worship, and temples were built, and priests and priestesses consecrated to its horrible rites; when the masses roared for their *panem et circenses*, and when emperors,

like Nero, buffooned and played the beast over and before them. There is not a large city in the world to-day that has not its paper or papers absolutely devoted to vice. Here, in our own moral and public and Sunday-school country, with its fifty or sixty millions of people, let any one pause a moment at any public news stand, and notice the people who surround it—people of all classes. On what do their eyes gloat? On the obscene and the vile; on prints whose very publication ought, in a well-guarded commonwealth, to be an indictable offence against public decency and public morals. We grow virtuous over the immorality of the French, and our enterprising publishers are ever eager to catch up the latest and vilest of their novels, translate it, and shed it broadcast over the land. Well, it pays. Vice always seems to pay—for a time.

Look at it as we may, it is impossible to regard the public press, the press that most circulates, as a whole in a sense favorable to public morals, and this quite apart from any special profession of faith. Much public good is undoubtedly wrought by the independent press, as against corruption or tyranny in government, gross malfesance in public office, gross and well-preserved shams, and dangers that might threaten the public liberties. Yet, on the other hand, how much that is corrupt in government, in officials, in public institutions, in public persons, is and has been for a long time sustained and supported even by the press calling itself independent, until the corruption finally falls to pieces of its own rottenness. The plain truth is that the press is published to pay at any price; honestly, if it can, dishonestly, if it must; and, as dishonesty generally gives quicker returns and larger profits, especially in a wealthy country, like our own, which offers innumerable opportunities to adventurers in every class of life, honesty must be content to go by the wall. The newspapers profess to be mainly "the abstract and brief chronicle of the time," to "hold the mirror up to nature." If that be so, all that can be said is, our nature wears a villainously vile visage. If this be the free press that the Catholic Church is accused of condemning, it may conscientiously plead guilty to the accusation.

Well, what would you have? will be the natural question. According to your judgment, the public press is either wholly, or three-quarters, or half demoralizing. At the very best it is by no means what it should be, or at least what you would expect of respectable journalism, no matter whether or not it professed to be regulated by the Ten Commandments and the true Christian code. You admit it is possible of good, and, in fact, effects some good. But the evil in it predominates. In a case of this kind two courses lie open: one, to reform the press, by creating a better public tone and purer public taste; the other, by gagging the press, setting a

ensorship over it, and prosecuting it for whatever the censorship judges to be damaging to faith or morals; setting up an *Index*, in fact, to which the press, like all other publications, should be subjected. This, in the moral sense, would be equivalent to reducing the press to the condition, in a political sense, that obtains in Russia or Prussia at the present day, or that obtained in France, under the First and Third Napoleons. In a word, it is to destroy the freedom of the press, as the word freedom is understood to-day. That word covers the largest license, short, as already indicated, of the statutes against absolute obscenity and libel. Short of these absolute lines, any newspaper or publication may sail as close to the wind as it pleases, and still lie within the harbor and protection of the law.

In countries professing freedom the idea of press censorship may as well be abandoned. Nor, on the whole, in the strangely mixed condition of public affairs, is it desirable that such censorship should exist. Were all men of one way of feeling and of faith, there would then exist a recognized common moral code, to which all would subscribe, and any grave violation of which would be immediately felt and resented by the public body. This public moral sense would, of itself, constitute a censorship more effective than any written law. But, unfortunately, we are not so constituted in the world to day, and we must take the world as we find it. The unity of the Christian faith, that alone could preserve a consensus of public moral opinion, has been broken to multitudes and nations, and a spirit of bitter antagonism has sprung up among millions of professing Christians. Multitudes of those who broke away from the unity of faith have drifted into the atheistic camp, whose motto is, *Ecrasez l'Infame*: crush out the infamy, called Christ, and rebel everywhere and always against this Christian Code that presumes to dictate to freemen the conduct of their every thought, word, and deed. Among non-Catholics it is unhappily true that the latter drift of thought is prevailing. All who are not Catholics are against the Rock, the centre of Christian unity, and the head of the Christian Church on earth. But a large section of Protestants still cling to many of the Christian teachings and principles that those who led the first Protestant revolt took out of the Church with them. These, however, have become more and more scattered and obscured and wasted, as generation followed generation, wandering farther away from the truth, until at last, Rome being practically out of sight, they found themselves in a doctrinal morass, with snares and pitfalls on every side of them, and only the dry cold light of what called itself pure reason shining ahead on barren ground and an endless waste of desert. That reason set itself over against Christianity, saying, "Your Christ is

an impostor. He was no God as He claimed to be. He was simply a man like Confucius, Mohammed, Brahma, Moses. Revelation is an invention. There is no God but man; no truth save what he discovers by his own reason; no code given to him to follow; no revelation from a heaven invented by priests." Protestantism staggers under and towards this reasoning to-day; and it is to be found, if not openly, at least between the lines of every secular newspaper and in not a few of those professedly religious.

Censorship of the press, then, in countries professing freedom, must be abandoned as hopeless, and for the reason that men's minds differ so diametrically about many things. But there is freedom and freedom. In France to day, for instance, the press is free to write all sorts of abominations against Christian morals and the Christian religion, but if a Catholic newspaper dare be emphatic and speak out its mind on the manner in which Catholics are treated by the government, it is immediately prosecuted, and the editor fined, sent to prison, or sent out of the country, as in the case of Baron Harden-Hickey, the editor of the sprightly *Triboulet*. So with the press in Germany, while the anti-Catholic persecution was raging. The Protestant, the Jewish, the Socialist press were all at liberty to heap every kind of insult on Catholics, to belie Catholic history, to defame the Church, to invent Papal Bulls even, as in the case of the *Cologne Gazette*; but, let a Catholic paper dare give vent to its honest opinion about Prince Bismarck and the proceedings of the government, it was straightway choked off for treason against the state. So we see from these examples how differently people of different ways of thinking interpret the phrase, "liberty of the press," and that *Indexes* are, by no means, restricted to the Catholic Church, where, when used, they are at least used only in defence of morals and Christian truth.

It may be taken as beyond question or argument that the public press will exist in this world, and will exist free. It has grown to be a public necessity. It has become the daily intellectual atmosphere that, whether we like it or not, we are all compelled in some way to breathe. Sometimes, in this changing atmosphere, "fair is foul, and foul is fair." A century ago, half a century ago one may say, the newspaper, in its present form and scope and universal comprehensiveness, neither existed nor was dreamed of. It was the bottle on the seashore that a careless fisherman found and uncorked to see what was in it. And a vapor came forth and mounted to the sky, and darkened the sun, and took shape, and strode the earth a giant, a geni, full of power for good or for evil, at once man's master and man's slave. Many a monarch, many a statesman, has since tried to force back the spirit into its bottle, but have succeeded only for a time. A leakage, sooner or later, was

sure to occur, and the geni came forth more powerful than ever, and only exasperated against those who would seal him up, and hinder his free movements.

"Let me only make the people's songs," was said of old, "and I will undertake to govern the people." "Few know," said Oxenstiern, "how easily men are governed." Doubtless, among a fairly intelligent and high-spirited people the less government, in the statutory sense of the word, exists, the more easily are they governed, inasmuch as they take themselves and their own affairs in hand, without having a policeman forever at their elbow. The songs that in old days were the expression of the popular voice have now yielded to the press. It is pre-eminently that: the echo, rather than the guide, of public opinion.

Being this, one would naturally expect it to be the truest representative of the commonwealth as it exists; of public tastes, public thoughts, public wants, desires, tone, and tendency. And here comes in the great difficulty of dealing with a question so wide in its bearings as this. If the press be all this, if newspapers supply the people with just what the people demand, and if there can be no such thing as a press censorship, if the public press be really and actually the true expression of public opinion, what need to argue more? The press is just what the people, and not what the editors and managers, make it. If they support this paper or that, it is because they like the politics, or the moral or immoral tone of this or that paper; because, as a whole, it satisfies them.

Now here lies a fallacy. Few or no respectable men, so far as the experience of the writer goes, approve wholly of any daily newspaper that they purchase and read. And the list of these is by no means restricted to Catholic readers. Many buy two or more newspapers every day, their business requiring them to do so. One or two they throw aside after having found what they wanted in them; the least objectionable they take home to their families, wishing, on the whole, that they could, by some happy chance, have a safe, sound, moral newspaper that would furnish the news of the day, comment on public events, occupy itself with the current matters of human interest, without giving prominence to moral filth, public scandal, and human viciousness. But it is just these objectionable points that make the newspapers "spicy." Without some columns of such matters daily, there is supposed to be "nothing in the papers." An editor will gleefully publish in his newspaper what he would be ashamed to read or hear read within his family circle. Consequently the newspapers appeal chiefly to the depraved tastes in man, and write down to the lowest level instead of writing up to purity and right. Let any man be at pains to count the columns of decency and indecency published in

the average daily newspaper within a year, and on which side will the balance lie ?

It is impossible, in face of such facts and reflections, to believe that the public press, as a whole, or even greatly in part, is conducive to public morals. If we thought so for a moment, we should be inclined to think that public morals, save of the wrong kind, no longer existed. And as censorship in countries calling themselves free cannot be, the public must only look to themselves to right matters as far as possible, by selecting the least objectionable papers. But here, again, comes in to the great mass of people the demand of business, and the advertising question. The more objectionable papers usually have the largest circulation, and are consequently more desirable as advertising channels. The good papers go among good people, and the good are in a sad minority.

It will be found, also, that the newspapers which appeal more directly and constantly to the lower appetites of men, are those deeply impenetrated by the anti-Christian spirit. Not that they will profess openly disbelief in Christ; not that they will not devote columns of their space to the Sunday sermons, to charitable and worthy purposes, often to the consecration of a Methodist temple or a Catholic Church; not that they are unwilling to expose an anti-Catholic lie or calumny, when it is fairly brought before them. They will do all this and much of it, and do much of it year in and year out; but, on the other hand, the associations into which such matters are brought in the same newspaper, are of themselves often a public scandal, and perhaps it were better that they did not appear at all in such evil company. And then the manner in which things that ought to be sacred are too often handled; the jeer, the jibe, the scoff, the jocose, free and easy, police-court style in which they are treated. The very head-lines, meant to be sensational, are in themselves often lines of blasphemy that strike a Christian soul with horror and shame. Did a Christian, a strong public moral sense prevail among our people, such things could not be, for the very next day thousands of protests would reach the office advising the manager that the people would not endure such infamy, and refusing to purchase the paper any longer. If this were only done we should speedily see a wonderful reform in the moral tone of our public press.

Reverting, again, to the more strictly Catholic side of the question, there is not, to the writer's knowledge, a Catholic daily newspaper, certainly none of any note, published in the English language. And yet we claim upwards of six millions of Catholics in this country, three millions in England, five in Ireland, leaving out Australia, British India, and the English-speaking Catholics scattered

over the globe. France has several distinctly Catholic daily newspapers, the best known of which are the *Univers* and the *Monde*, but none of them have anything approaching a circulation corresponding, not with the Catholic population of France, but of any one of the great French cities. What is true of France is true of Italy, and of other European countries called Catholic. In all, the Catholics lag wofully in their support of a Catholic press. In Germany alone, where the Catholic associations are better organized, and where distinguished Catholic laymen take a leading part in politics and public affairs, have the Catholics, under the fierce fire of persecution, rallied to the requirements of the hour, and answered the reptile and the anti-Catholic press by a press of their own, strong, able, and magnificently supported. Nor here, in the United States, are the German Catholics behind their countrymen at home in this respect. In many places they have their daily, bi-weekly, and weekly newspapers, all flourishing and doing a good business. They put to shame us English-speaking Catholics, who complain often that we have neither money, time, nor patience to support a Catholic press, yet find money, time, and patience enough to purchase and read at least one daily newspaper, often more than one. There is not a Catholic periodical or journal in the country that costs half the subscription of a daily three-cent newspaper.

It is not the purpose here to enter into an argument to advocate the starting of a daily newspaper that should be Catholic in principle, pay special attention to Catholic interests, Catholic news, Catholic progress all over the world; that, without necessarily having the word Popery heading every column, should be edited by intelligent and competent Catholic journalists—their number is not so few as people imagine—whose work, founded on Catholic principles, should, in political, commercial, financial, and social affairs, equal the best work of the leading non-Catholic journalists. If Catholics only half knew how to utilize their forces; if they possessed only a little more Catholic and public spirit; if our wealthier Catholics only get together and agree to start such an enterprise, and if the less wealthy would only join in, a strong and able daily journal, with Catholic knowledge and Catholic principles as its guide, would not be a dream of the far future, or a scheme that one only turns away from with a sinking of the heart. As matters stand to-day, it is with the public press as with the public schools. Both one and the other absorb some of the best and most ardent of Catholic workers, men and women, competent in every sense, as teachers and guides, but who, for lack of profitable employment in Catholic interests, are compelled to devote their

energies to other purposes, in a certain sense to the service of the enemy.

Some years back there was a proposal to start a Catholic daily newspaper in England, and the idea was taken up with some enthusiasm. A very distinguished English prelate was questioned as to his views of the matter. He shook his head dubiously, and rather frowned the scheme down. His views express those of many on the same subject. He was afraid, first of all, that the calibre of Catholic journalists would hardly stand the weight of the conflict they would be called upon to sustain. In the hurry and flurry of publishing a daily newspaper he feared that mistakes on grave Catholic matters would constantly be made, and the Catholic paper be thus made the instrument of committing the Church to a false position, which her enemies would be quick to seize and take advantage of. He doubted, too, if Catholics would support the enterprise. And, finally, he saw no necessity for it, since the Protestant press had altered its tone, to some degree, of late. It was inclined to be fairer with regard to Catholic matters, and its columns were open to any intelligent person who chose to expose misrepresentation or misconception of Catholic matters.

This opinion is worthy of much weight, as coming from one of our leading prelates in England, a man of great piety, knowledge, zeal, ability, and experience in public affairs. As for the alteration of tone in the secular press regarding Catholic matters, a general improvement has been noticed, both here and in England, for many years past; yet no man was more vehement in his exposure of the falsehoods and misrepresentations that filled the English press at the time of the Vatican Council than the prelate we have quoted. On the other hand, a Catholic naturally resents going a-begging to a non-Catholic paper, whether for information concerning Catholic matters, or for refutation of calumnies against Catholics, while he has, or ought to have, the means at hand to give information to others. It is hardly fitting that we should call upon strangers or enemies to tell all about us and our affairs, and then complain if they tell lies, or make blunders. And this view of the matter would seem to be that of our Holy Father Leo XIII., when urging the prelates and Catholics of Italy to do all they could to support the Catholic press, to sustain the journals that were in existence, and to start others where they did not exist. He desired that they should be made the equals, in ability and interest, of the non-Catholic and anti-Catholic newspapers, which depended largely, as do those in this country, on Catholic subscribers for their success. He deplored the fact that the journals which were opposed to the Church, and dangerous to public morals, should everywhere succeed, while Catholic journals seemed correspondingly to fail, and was very

earnest in his recommendations to the Italian prelates and clergy to do all in their power to remedy this defect.

The same urgency presses on us in this country. In our support of the Catholic press, even as it exists among us to-day, and of Catholic publications, we are far behind, not the secularists alone, but large Protestant communities, like the Methodists, for instance. Though no single Protestant body in the country equals ours in point of numbers, several of them surpass us in the number and circulation of their magazines and newspapers. It is only within the present year that the Catholic publishers of the country have united in deploing the remarkable falling off in the Catholic book trade here. When was such a complaint heard from Protestant publishers? And this in face of the facts of greater numbers of Catholics, more wealth in the general body, and a better, more popular, and *cheaper* class of books. The inference is obvious: the Catholics who buy books at all, buy largely, if not chiefly, of Protestant houses, and thus take into their homes the very literature whose essentially anti-Catholic, if not distinctly immoral character, it has been the aim of the present article to expose. An experienced Catholic publisher has assured the writer, and given him instance upon instance, of the melancholy truth, that the rising Catholic generation is not like the generation passing away. It has neither the same Catholic spirit, nor the same Catholic heart, of the brave race of men and women who founded and planted the Church in this country, and watched with pious eyes over its wonderful growth and development. The new generation finding, as they imagine, the work accomplished, seem to think there is nothing left for them to do, except to go over to the enemy, and be like unto him. "As father (or mother) is dead, you will please stop the paper or magazine sent to him, as there is no further need of it," is a request that frequently comes to a Catholic publisher, and presumably from a graduate of one of our Catholic colleges, or convents. Something is wrong. Where is the evil, and where the remedy?

It is surely a sad sign to find our people so backward in supporting what is really one of the great adjuncts, as well as one of the great necessities of Catholic life—a Catholic press. Never was there more need of it than in this day, when all society seems upheaving, when all faith is challenged, when men everywhere ask of Christ, "Art thou the Son of God?" and who, when the Church answers for Him, proclaim that the Church blasphemes. It is a time of great doubt, and of great public danger. Even the very laws recognize and foster great public immoralities, such, for instance, as the almost indiscriminate practice of divorce, and that great incentive to divorce, civil marriage. The spirit of modern legislation in all lands is against the Christian faith and Christian

ethics. To this spirit we owe the purely secular public school, to which is traceable much of the indifferentism and atheism that we see growing up and grown up around us. All these features of our society, from which a tender Christian conscience instinctively shrinks, and which many statesmen and publicists of no special form of faith watch with dismay and dread, are accepted by the public at large as the glories of the new civilization, the advance and progress of the age, the flower and the fruit of the freedom which the Catholic Church is assailed for warning men against and condemning. The public press is full of it from day to day. It is the upholder and exponent of it. How is a better tone to be created among the people, while all that is generally accepted as pretty much all that ought to be? And Catholics, instead of standing out against it, lend their aid to the very literature from which so much of it springs. A Catholic daily newspaper! There are already about forty Catholic journals in the country, and not a dozen of these enjoy a circulation equal to any of the more popular Protestant papers. It is time for Catholics, one and all, to put this question to their conscience: Am I to go on always supporting a class of literature that, if not openly licentious, is essentially demoralizing, and in spirit and in character anti-Catholic and anti-Christian? For such to-day, and for the reasons given, is the public press of all lands.
