EDITORIAL

LAST month we had occasion to call attention to the needs of the reading public, and our remarks provoked some scathing comments on the general tone of Catholic weekly papers. For the enlightenment of those who are responsible for the production of these 'weeklies,' it may be worth while setting out this criticism in some detail.

'Why is it,' said the candid critic (himself a Catholic), 'that our Catholic papers are so unattractive in appearance, to begin with appearances? They either look dull and uninviting to one who wants to read, or repel one from reading by their cheap and vulgar aspect. The other day I picked up a paper that did duty in a certain midland town. The paper on which it was printed was of the cheapest and very unpleasant to handle, and the type wretched. I felt ashamed to think that this was one of the "organs" of the great Catholic body. There was nothing about it to suggest the dignity and beauty of the Church it was intended to represent; it might have been a propaganda "rag" issued by the irresponsible leaders of some popular movement. No thinking Catholic could be anything but offended with, and ashamed of, the general appearance of this weekly paper.

'What is responsible for this vulgarity? Besides bad paper and printing, the advertisements are often to blame. If advertisements are necessary, and they certainly are, cannot some effort be made to insert only those that will not at any rate look out of place in a paper that reflects Catholic thought and reports Catholic news? But no process of careful selection is apparent. Only recently the report of a sermon on

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1925.tb03513.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

the Blessed Sacrament appeared side by side with an advertisement that should never have been accepted for insertion. Advertisements nowadays can be, what they are supposed to be, attractive things; but our Catholic papers seem able to capture only those that in their crudeness and vulgarity are twenty years behind the times. The result of this lack of care in the advertising department is that the paper is disfigured and cheapened in appearance, and, instead of inviting attention, offends at the first glance. One may add, also, that any reproductions of photographs are usually bad. Very few of them would pass the picture editor of our ordinary dailies.

'A friend has remarked that the number of charitable appeals that appear week by week in Catholic papers might be made in a less dramatic way. The Catholic press is the natural medium for appeals by poor missions, but the way these appeals are made is often too theatrical. Perhaps the photograph of the appealing priest stirs the imagination of pious donors, or an S.O.S. in association with the name of a saint may find a more ready response; but the faithful appearance of these and similar illustrations week after week is apt to become tiresome. Worse even than this, perhaps, is the habit of some worthy appeal-makers to burst into humorous verse, or to adapt the words of a popular song to their own needs. There can be no doubt that all the appeals deserve support, but the method of asking for it too often degenerates into vulgarly playing to the gallery. Here, again, the blue pencil is badly needed when appeals are sent in, if our papers are to be kept free from the modern practices of "stunt" journalism.

'With one or two notable exceptions, Catholic papers now indulge in the scare headline, a trick of great commercial value which secular journals exploit to the full. But it is to be regretted that our papers

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find it necessary, as presumably they do, to follow the lead of their sensational contemporaries by adopting their methods of publicity. Titles and sub-titles of articles dealing with subjects and news of Catholic interest need not ape the startling headlines that introduce murder trials and divorce proceedings in the newspapers. Such methods of cheap journalism are altogether alien to the spirit which should inform our Catholic papers.

'There is certainly room for improvement in all these directions. One often hears the complaint that very few Catholics buy our weekly papers, and the explanation of this apparent indifference may be found in the shortcomings of the papers they are expected to buy. Again, English readers often complain that a disproportionate space is usually allotted to news and affairs of the sister isle (three pages of a recent paper dealt exclusively with these), and they feel that Catholic weeklies published in this country should not be so partial, at least in the matter of space, to the interests of another country. Why is it, they ask, that nearly all our papers have an Irish atmosphere? Surely the Church in this country is healthy enough to produce a paper that will appeal to English readers.

'Finally, one or two of our papers assume a patronizing tone in their remarks about priests, or take occasion to read them a little homily on their parochial duties. One paper, in particular, has got into the habit of being guide, philosopher, and friend to the clergy. But, probably, most of the clergy are content to find the advice and instructions of their Bishops sufficient. If only arrangements could be made for some well-equipped priest to undertake the editorship of a dignified, carefully-produced Catholic paper, the project would meet with the loyal support of all Catholic laymen.'

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We cannot here discuss in detail this criticism of the Catholic press, and give it publicity in the hope that the editors of our papers will find opportunity to deal with it as they think best. But it must be remembered that financial difficulties beset the path of every Catholic paper, and that very often ideals have to be sacrificed, and secular methods of publicity adopted, to ensure the payment of the printer's bill and the wages of the staff. It is true that only a small percentage of Catholics buy any Catholic paper at all, but this is due to an indifference much more general than a dislike of the papers provided for them. Those who have undertaken the distribution of Catholic papers inform us that probably not more than ten per cent. of the average congregation ever buy a Catholic paper. Nor is the difficulty of getting Catholics to support their own press confined to this country alone. In America, Catholic editors complain that they can only keep their papers going by offering various prizes to prompt subscribers, and by making awards of objects of piety to those who advertise the paper or magazine. Recourse must be had also to pious or devotional 'stunts' to keep the adherence of readers. There is a suggestion of similar methods in many of our papers, which shows the difficulty of making Catholic productions pay. Lack of capital is nearly always at the root of the trouble. But perhaps we are caught in a vicious circle, and Catholics do not read their papers because they are uninviting and shoddy, or the papers fail through lack of adequate support. Which is it?

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The synchronizing, at Oxford, of the C.S.G. Summer School and the annual conference of 'Ika'—surely the most unlovely name that ever heralded peace on earth!—was a happy coincidence, for the aims of both

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1925.tb03513.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

are so closely allied as to be inseparable. Only the equitable solution of social problems can give a solid basis to a settlement of the wider issues between the nations. It was a fact of no small import, therefore, that, while the members of the International Catholic League discussed Nationality, the Catholic Social Guild directed their attention to Natural Law and to Psychology and Modern Problems under the able guidance, respectively, of Rev. Dr. Cronin, of Dublin, and Rev. Dr. Aidan Elrington, O.P., the Superior of Blackfriars, Oxford. As the proceedings of both bodies have been reported by our contemporaries—Catholic and otherwise—we do not feel called upon to chronicle the details in BLACKFRIARS, notwithstanding the deep interest and enthusiasm which we feel both in the issues at stake and in these magnificent attempts to cope with the situation, which, too, the article, '*Peace in our Times*,' in the present issue, is intended to express.

EDITOR.

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1925.tb03513.x Published online by Cambridge University Press