ing pen has thus described it: "Her death was most beautiful. No agony, no sign to say all was over. She received Holy Communion and Extreme Unction. She was conscious almost to the last. She said to me two days before her death: 'God's will be done. He knows what is best, and if I am to be taken from you--' when she stopped, and I said as firmly as I could: 'Yes, darling, this will be best; you accept it, and I accept it."' It was in this resigned spirit that she passed out of the smoke and fumes of earthly fame into the white light of God's holiness. One can linger over such a death-bed, and feel one's faith grow all the stronger for it. Kathleen O'Meara has passed away, but the world is all the better for her having lived and labored. Kathleen O'Meara has gone to her reward!

MR. AUGUSTINE BIRRELL AND CRITICISM.

I.

Mr. Augustine Birrell is always lively, chatty, interesting, when he writes about books and authors. His two volumes of *Obiter Dicta* have had quite a run, and have delighted their readers. His latest work, *Res Judicatæ*, bids fair to be no less popular. His is a healthy mind with excellent digestive power, and a keen relish for wholesome literature. It is a scholarly and a trained mind. It is a broad mind. Mr. Birrell revels in the untrammelled, outspoken, bigoted and hard-hitting pages of eccentric George Borrow, and at the same time appreciates to the full the classic flow of Newman's graceful prose, the color and glow of it, the humor of it, the pathos of it, and the fascination that hovers over all the writings of the great Cardinal. Borrow, Mr. Birrell understands —he is a born Borrovian; he tells us 'men are born Borrovians, not made'—his falsehoods, inconsistencies, his brag, his naturalness; but while his sympathy with Newman is deep and reverent, he has missed the meaning of Newman's writings. They form part of Newman's life and are one and inseparable with it. It is asking much of the ordinary critic that he should grasp

and analyze the soul that lurks beneath the printed page of every great book. The most expressive author only reveals faint glimmerings of the light that glows within him. Human nature is too complex, human action too involved, human thought too open to various influences from within and from without, to find complete expression in words however full, or in art however finished. Therefore the best criticism is likely to be narrow, rigid, and inadequate.

Mr. Birrell does not attempt the higher constructive criticism. He does not go deeper than the purely literary qualities of an author. He does not seek the central thought that gives meaning to the book; he is content to impart to you the flavor and bouquet of its style. Herein Mr. Birrell follows the method of nearly all modern English criticism, from that of Matthew Arnold down to the estimates of Mr. Walter Pater and Mr. W. E. Henley. That criticism is of the surface. It deals chiefly with style; occasionally it examines method. It tears from the context a specimen of wit or humor, or of polished construction. What are the chief aim and purport of the book, its underlying idea, its definite place in the literature of the subject, its relative value? —these are questions unasked and unanswered by modern English criticism. In consequence the reader of such criticism is in no better position to understand the book or the author. Take up one of Sainte-Beuve's critical essays. Many of them are ideals of criticism.

You are given not only a conception of an author's style and method, but you are initiated into the very mainspring of his action; those traits of character, those mental peculiarities, those historical incidents that colored the author's views, are all made to bear on the book under review; an anecdote is told, a comment is made, a gloss is supplied; your interest is awakened, and you read the book with additional pleasure and profit. Henceforth the author has a definite place in your mental furniture.

No author can be taken out of his mental environment. Even a Shakespeare and a Goethe have their local coloring. An author's very form of expression is ruled by his times. His very thoughts are influenced by his contemporaries. These are principles of criticism that underlie much of Sainte-Beuve's work. Taine attempted to apply them, but sadly failed. Mr. Augustine Birrell has no such pretension, and it were unfair to judge him by a standard at which he did not aim. Matthew Arnold endeavored to be an English Sainte-Beuve. He wrote poetry that is superior to Sainte-Beuve's finest verses; in criticism he fell far below his French model. Mr. Birrell tells us: "a perfectly safe critic Mr. Arnold hardly was. Even in this volume he fusses too much about the De Guérins. To some later judgments of his it would be unkind to refer." Mr. Arnold after the fashion of George Sand and Sainte-Beuve did fuss too much over the reliques of Maurice

de Guérin, a young man with more ambition than brain. His verses are without inspiration and scarcely clever. His prose fragments are poor stuff. George Sand praised them because she regarded their author as one of her circle. Sainte-Beuve spoke kindly of Maurice to please his friend Mr. Trebutien. Mr. Arnold was then a very young man, and caught up the echoes of these writers, and raved over the specimens that they commended. The *Journal* of Maurice de Guérin reveals a morbid soul wrestling with a diseased body. Not so the *Journal* of his sister Eugénie. While Maurice was in the toils of Lammenais' genius, a wren suffocating beneath an eagle's wing, Eugénie was thinking of him, dreaming of him, praying for him, living for him, and pouring out to him all the love of one of the most beautiful souls that have ever been unveiled to the gaze of humanity. Open the pages of her journal at random. The reading of almost any paragraph is refreshing. You are inhaling the cool air of a bright summer morning, and the flowers are blooming, and the trees are a-blossom, and the birds are singing, and the breeze from the upland, laden with the fragrance of flower and blossom, bathes your brow. Whether she descants upon the varying scenes of the nature she loves so well, or upon the last volume of Walter Scott that she has been reading, or upon the feast-day that she has been celebrating, or upon the beautiful religious sentiments that fill her whole being, or upon the home

and family affairs, you always read behind the page the same calm, delicate, noble soul, so forgetful of self, so devoted to others, so happy in doing good, so content within the narrow sphere of her daily life. Her whole anxiety is for her dear Maurice. From time to time a sob goes out from the page; unconsciously it thrills her fingers as she writes the loving words; and there is that single cry from her heart of hearts giving meaning to the whole volume: ''Tis your soul, Maurice, your soul that I love!' How can we find words to express the loving tenderness of this sister for her wayward brother?—Too much may have been said about Maurice de Guérin; one cannot be too enthusiastic over his sister Eugénie. Contrast her *Journal* with that of Marie Bashkirtseff. The latter even in its fragmentary, shape, with its more unsightly revelations covered over, is a mirror reflecting a soul selfish, ambitious, nervous, restless, and unsettled, dissatisfied with life, hungering and thirsting after the love, the honors, and the fame that this world is supposed to give—a soul devouring itself in its hysterical moods—a soul dying with its yearnings unsatisfied, its aspirations unfulfilled, and passing away enshrouded in the gloom of despondency and agnosticism. Eugénie also had her hours of weariness and discouragement; she had her ambitions; hers was the soul of an artist fluttering against the bars of limitations; she had her disappointments and heart-burnings; but see how calmly and beautifully she bore

with all, and contemplate the lovely garden of virtues that blossomed in her soul beneath the dews of heavenly grace.

II.

So much concerning Matthew Arnold and the De Guérins. From what has been already said it may be inferred that criticism has its moods and its theories, and not infrequently is it led by fads. It were a delicate and a difficult task to discount all the prejudices that influence a critic in forming an estimate. Allowance is to be made for degrees of culture and the prejudices of race, religion, politics, literary taste, that are likely to color an opinion. These are among the Idols against which Bacon warns us. Mr. Birrell recognizes all this and tells us, "Most critics are such savages—or if they are not savages, they are full of fantasies, and capable at any moment of calling *Tom Jones* dull, or Sydney Smith a bore." Of course, neither Mr. Arnold nor Mr. Birrell is capable of such a blunder. Charles Lamb had a critical instinct that rarely if ever erred in matters purely literary. To a knowledge of history, or philosophy, or science, he had no pretension. This fact remembered we can accept Mr. Birrell's verdict: "The most striking note of Lamb's literary criticism is its veracity. He is perhaps never mistaken. His judgments are apt to be somewhat too colored with his own idiosyncrasy to be what the judicious persons of the

period call final and classical, but when did he ever go utterly wrong either in praise or in dispraise? When did he like a book which was not a good book? When did either the glamour of antiquity or the glare of novelty lead him astray? How free he was from that silly chatter about books now so abundant! When did he ever pronounce wiredrawn twaddle or sickly fancies, simply reeking of their impending dissolution, to be enduring and noble workmanship?" In this verdict are included many useful hints as to what constitutes true criticism.

Be it remembered that the book which may be comparatively harmless for a cultured class of readers, who are familiar enough with the substance and look rather to the form, may work great injury among half-educated people who possess little or no discrimination, and who accept all printed matter in sober earnestness. This latter class have no intellectual perspective. They are not prepared to allow for time, place, and circumstance. They take a distorted view of things. The important is cast into the background, and the trivial assumes gigantic proportions. Here are elements not to be ignored in true criticism. The Vicomte de Vogûé in a review of Zola's recent novel of the Franco-Prussian war —*La Débâcle*—alluding to the demoralizing effects of such a book among the French soldiers on account of the total absence of an ideal, and the wholly depressing character of the book, makes this distinction: "Everybody knows," says this admirer of Tolstoï, "that there are

two modes of reading, which have nothing in common. For us, dilettanti, reading is only a search after success in art; we say: 'This detail is exact and to the point; that other is cleverly imagined; the whole is capitally done.' For the simple everything printed has the force of the catechism and the almanac; it is a categorical imperative." All constitutions cannot thrive on the same kind of food. Food impregnated with deadly poison or the germs of disease can scarcely be wholesome for any constitution. What is true of the nutrition of the body is equally applicable to the nutrition of the soul. In a healthy personality mind-culture is not made a thing apart from soul culture.

Evident as these principles seem, it is strange how differently they are applied. Here is Aubrey de Vere finding in Spenser's *Faërie Queene* the most perfect ideal in poetry and philosophy; while about ten years ago Mr. Thomas Arnold in *The Dublin Review*, condemned the work as unfit to be placed in students' hands on account of its sensuous descriptions, and the anti-Catholic prejudices with which the poem is saturated. Which is right? Each is right from his point of view. In Spenser there were two distinct personalities: one was the servile courtier subscribing heartily to all of Queen Elizabeth's whims and fancies, hating what she hated and approving what she approved; the other was the inspired poet with a clear vision of eternal truth and noble ideals steeped in heavenly beauty.

It is in commenting upon contemporary books and authors that the critic is in greatest danger of being misled. Public demand is no criterion of merit. Books of a high literary character; books appealing chiefly to readers of thought, must needs be limited in their circulation. Any printed matter that touches the popular fancy or caters to depraved tastes, is sure to have a wide circle of readers. Now, the critic, as well as the ordinary reader, may be carried away by that element giving the book its temporary popularity, and may in consequence praise it far beyond its deserts. Living in the same intellectual atmosphere with the author, thinking more or less under the same dominant set of opinions, it is not an easy task for the critic to dissociate himself from time and season, and distinguish between the perishable and imperishable ingredients that enter into the composition of the book under review. We have heard Mr. Birrell tell us that it would be unkind to refer to some later judgments of Matthew Arnold's. We have the same authority assuring us that "Sainte-Beuve was certainly happier snuffing the 'parfums du passé' than when ranging among the celebrities of his own day." If this be true of the French luminary and his revolving planet, how much more applicable is it not to the critical stars of lesser magnitude? How misleading may not the puffings of a mutual admiration society of authors become? Or mayhap it is a coterie of critics who have combined to write down a certain au-

thor, damning his noblest efforts with faint praise. Temporary injury may be done the author, but the spite and the malice aforethought that dictated such criticism ultimately become unmasked; the genuine literary work survives the little jealousies, and shines all the brighter for having passed through the crucible. The severe attacks made upon Keats have not dimmed the lustre of his genius. Jeffreys prophesied that Wordsworth's *Excursion* would never do. Somehow *The Excursion* is doing nicely, and the genius of Wordsworth is looming up with the progress of time in more magnificent proportions, Jeffreys' prediction to the contrary notwithstanding. There was no gall in Jeffreys' pen as there was in that of Gifford or Lockhart. It was intellectual purblindness that prevented him from seeing the real greatness of Wordsworth. Sometimes a coterie indulges in the practise known as log-rolling; that is, it endeavors to create a favorable opinion for the writings of a friend. The recent quarrel between Mr. Churton Collins and Mr. Edmund Gosse revealed a great deal of log-rolling in England. You can seldom be sure of critical judgments of a book in the British monthlies and quarterlies. Their unanimity may be the result of concerted action on the part of a few friends who are manufacturing opinion in favor of the author. Tennyson at first sprung into notoriety by means of the log-rolling process; but in this case the friends who wrote him up showed their discernment of

true poetic work. His genius was too great and too well balanced to be spoiled by praise. He continued to delve and study and practice, always profiting by the censures of a Coleridge, and even of a crusty, fusty Christopher North, until he rose to his more recent giant-like dimensions.

III.

Speaking of log-rolling, is a reminder that there are shoals from which our Catholic critics have not always steered clear. A Catholic author writes a mediocre book, be it of fiction, or poetry, or history, or biography, or travel—or perhaps it is a spiritual or doctrinal treatise—and our Catholic papers as a rule feel obliged to encourage the book. Are they justified in doing so? Let us see. The secular press leaves the mediocre Catholic author out in the cold. It ignores his book. From the secular press he need expect no recognition. If his own pounce upon him for rushing into print, his is a sad plight. Of course, he may deserve to be beaten with rods, especially if, as sometimes happens, his inferior book blocks the way for something really worthy of the subject. Hitherto, since Shakespeare's time, the amount of Catholic literature produced in the English language has been limited in scope and quantity. Now, any book from a Catholic pen, containing wholesome thoughts, be it ever so mediocre, is beneficial. It is good to spread such a book. So have

thought our Catholic critics, and accordingly they have dealt lightly with the harmless book. But as Catholic literature increases in variety and extent, our critics can become more discriminating. It is not necessary to establish two weights and two measures of criticism for our Catholic authors. Recommendation is one thing, laudation is quite another thing. Catholic reviewers must plead guilty to the impeachment of having been in the past too laudatory of inferior literary work.

The varying fortunes of some Catholic books would make an interesting chapter in the history of English literature. Catholics have been not infrequently apathetic towards Catholic books of merit, even while their non-Catholic neighbors showed full appreciation of them. It was not a Catholic publisher who first issued an American edition of Cardinal Wiseman's great work on the *Connection Between Science and Religion;* that book was first printed in this country by the faculty of Andover College for the benefit of the students. The most searching study of *Hamlet* ever made on this continent was made by the Catholic poet, George H. Miles. The criticism first appeared in two consecutive numbers of the *Southern Review* when it was under the editorship of the late Albert Taylor Bledsoe. There is a noble piece of Shakespearian criticism buried out of sight simply because it is not better known. The other works of the same author are no less neglected. Nor is he alone. It took a Ruskin to discover the merits of *The*

Angel of the House, by Coventry Patmore; how many Catholic readers appreciate the poem? Catholics—reading Catholics with no slight pretensions to culture—have been known to question whether Aubrey de Vere was really a poet or only a pretentious verse-maker. The reply made to such was: Ask Longfellow, ask the critics of the London *Athenæum* the measure of Aubrey de Vere's greatness as a poet. The sanction of *The Dublin Review* had no weight with these people, but a non-Catholic approval quieted their doubts. So the story runs. We are the last to appreciate our own. Take up the old catalogues of books published by Richardson of Derby, Dolman of London, and Dunigan of New York, and note the number of Catholic books well worth preserving, which died out of sight with the break-up of these houses. Remembering the past, it must be admitted that in the cultivation of a taste for Catholic literature, and in the patronage of Catholic books, there is room for improvement. It is, if you will, an encouraging sign to see Kenelm Digby's monumental work, *Mores Catholici*, published and bought. But let us not forget that half a century before the chivalric and enterprising Mr. P. O'Shea issued his noble edition, an edition was printed and bought and read in Cincinnati. Still, it is something that in our eagerness to be informed concerning the latest literary fads and fashions, from Esoteric Buddhism to the studies of human morbidness of a Mallock or a Thomas

Hardy, we do not let slip from our grasp all that is best and noblest among our Catholic authors. It is well that they have not all passed into oblivion.

Our range and scope of Catholic literature are now sufficiently large for our critics to recommend nothing but the best. Our magazines and reviews should be up to the top notch of excellence. If, after a fair trial, any among them cannot reach that position—if there is no definite reason for their existence—then, why should mercy be shown them? They only block the way for something better. The namby-pamby and the goody-goody have no place in modern thought. Our journals are not under obligation to make their pages receptacles of school-boy essays and school-girl romancings. The waste-paper basket is the proper place for such articles. Young writers, be they young in years or be they young in the use of the pen, should put in a long and severe apprenticeship before appearing in print. What Pierre Loti has recently said of the higher forms of literary art applies here with equal force: "I do not claim," he says, "that in constructing any work in any manner whatever, a writer can always achieve a real success, even if he is possessed of the keenest sensibility."

A PEEP INTO TENNYSON'S WORK-SHOP.

Alfred Tennyson has passed from earth. His gropings to lift the veil concealing the life beyond the grave are over. He sees the whole meaning of life. In the words of a brother poet who dropped away a little earlier he can now say:

"Over the ball of it,
Peering and prying,
How I see all of it,
Life there outlying."

And now comes home to him the larger thought that he himself so exquisitely wrote, that with God rests a man's past and future. His life-work is measured in a scale of divine making not of human construction:

"We pass; the path that each man trod
Is dim, or will be dim, with weeds:
What fame is left for human deeds
In endless age? It rests with God."

Now that poets are chanting his name and critics are commenting upon his genius and influence, it were pleasant and profitable to enter his literary workshop and take note of the manner in which he struck out the beautiful thoughts that filled his poet-soul. It has been our