

EDITORIAL NOTES

Wanted : A Virile Monthly.

I have recently been re-reading *The Reminiscences of a Maynooth Professor*, a very unusual book, in which the late Dr. McDonald sets forth with simple candour his views on things and men as he saw them throughout his sad and not too tranquil life. I have no intention either of recording the emotions that such a book must arouse or of forming a judgement on the autobiography itself or its author. Many reviewers have already had their say. One sees him as a 'tamed eagle,' cabined, cribbed and confined within a narrow system which was too petty and cramping for so great a mind. Those who knew the man will reject this summing-up as absolutely as the Maynooth Professor would have scorned it himself. Another expression of opinion lays stress on his embittered, discontented and grumbling outlook which, but for his inherent goodness, would have led him to disaster. But, whatever his flaws of temper and temperament and however great his mistakes and indiscretions, Dr. McDonald will be honoured by all, even by those with whom he came into conflict, as a man of very rare courage with a passionate love of truth. His essential folly in the eyes of his associates was this: he continually and consistently said in public, as respectfully as unpleasant truth-telling allows, what less courageous men have no scruple about saying, with much less restraint, temper and respect, in private. He sought neither favour nor popularity; yet he won the affection of the priests of his own diocese and of almost all with whom he came into contact in a normal, human and unofficial way. All loved him as 'dear Wattie'—a fool of a sort who would not leave things alone, a Quixote who would tilt at others be-

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sides windmills—still ‘dear Wattie’ who had a strongly-developed sense of justice, a fierce thirst for truth and a disconcerting way of voicing his views on truth and justice.

I have been specially interested by what the book has to say about Catholic editors and their ideals, doings and editings generally. Editors were recently admonished in these pages by Mr. Gerard Moon to examine their consciences. Perhaps this pious duty may be performed with the help of Dr. McDonald.

Dr. McDonald records how, when visiting San Francisco in 1908, he met a priest who assured him that the clergy of the United States looked for light and leading to Ireland, and especially to the great school of Theology at Maynooth. There is a distinct flavour of disappointment in his words and the admission that, although they did not altogether look in vain, still they received less than they expected. ‘When you write no scientific books,’ says this American priest, ‘we find excuse for you, when you give us twaddle in your periodicals, we excuse you still—with greater difficulty. Not a word that you publish but, if it has go in it, will echo round the world, across the Atlantic, to the Pacific Slope, to Australia, South Africa—wherever the English tongue is spoken. You have a position, but, mind you, you have not been acting up to it, and you are in danger of losing it. You will not hold it unless you maintain a more virile press.’ It must be remembered that these words refer to Ireland and to Irish periodicals. It is not our concern at the moment to defend the statements or to say that the Irish reviews and journals suffer from the effects of stagnation and sterility. We would only ask: Are Catholic periodicals any better in England?

Money, people say, it is all a question of money; and Catholics in this country are an impoverished crowd. It is true that the bulk of Catholics are poor,

but not all. Money or the lack of it is not the explanation. The point is that the periodicals are already in existence. Not to seem discourteous to our contemporaries (we are examining our own conscience, not theirs) we will say *BLACKFRIARS* is here: you have it before you as you read. Does it require more money to make *BLACKFRIARS* a live paper—‘a virile monthly’—than to let it stagnate and become moribund? No. It is not merely a matter of money. It is only a matter of brains and courage. And is there any lack of either among us in England? One could muster a good list of names of living Catholics in all spheres of learning, art and literature as sufficient proof that brains are not lacking. And courage? Catholics in England have on the whole a fair record for that. The history and traditions of our little flock struggling against overwhelming odds through many dark days are refutation enough of any accusation of want of courage.

Wherein is to be found the reason why a reputed English Catholic population of over two million gives such feeble support to its press and its periodicals in general? It is no answer to say that there are too many journals. France and Ireland, if we take into consideration the proportion of our Catholic population to theirs, have many more papers, reviews, magazines and journals than we have. Is it the means of distribution that are lacking? Do people fail to read the reviews because they never see them or have never even heard of them?

A paper must exist on its merits, not on charity. To tell people that it is their duty to support a paper which they honestly think is not worth supporting is to insult them. Is *BLACKFRIARS* worth supporting? That is a question frankly offered to tax the brains and courage of our readers. Replies are quite seriously invited and will be warmly welcomed.

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Recently we have received from New Zealand several copies of a paper, *The Month*, which certainly is in every sense of the word a virile monthly.

It is lively in its matter and it has the assurance of continued life in this sense that it is supported by its readers. The readers are sufficiently numerous to enable the editor not only to pay his printers' bills, but also to pay his contributors liberally; and over and above this, there are profits that go to maintain and educate orphaned children in the diocese of Auckland. If in New Zealand, why not in England? Will our readers help us to solve this riddle?

THE EDITOR.

THE NIGHT NURSE GOES HER ROUND

Droop under doves' wings silent, breathing shapes
White coverlids dissimulate; in hope
Of opiate aid to round the ledge where gapes
The sootblack gulf in which obtuse minds grope

For very nothing, vast and undefined,
In starless depths no astrolabe can probe.
The moving form, as doomed to pass and wind,
Unwind and pass anew, in sleep-dyed robe,

Of firmamental silence more than hue,
Watches the doorway of the tired's escape
Only. Fatigue gone on; I left behind

With moths' feet, wordless whispering; or find
Reality, white coiffe and scarlet cape;
And dreams are what a dream should be, or true.

JOHN GRAY.