

Sursum Corda

Writes On Standards

By Rev. James M. Gillis, C.S.P.

If I could find time between jobs I would write a book on Standards. Standards of value in literature, and if I were able, in the arts. Standards in drama, the motion picture, and what little I know of the subject in music. Not having time or the ability to write that book, I would gladly read it. Of course I have read a dozen or a score of volumes on that subject, but I hope the authors will not feel aggrieved if I say that they are not sufficiently explicit to satisfy me. Perhaps I should also say, not sufficiently simple and fundamental. Most of them presume too much on the knowledge of the ordinary every-day reader, the non-expert, the non-professional critic of whom I am one. They begin where we poor fellows have to leave off. They think we know more than we do. What we are looking for is a handy rule-of-thumb. We don't get it. Perhaps it cannot be had.

Let me explain with my favorite method asking a few pointed questions.

How am I to know whether a "best seller" for example, *The Keys of the Kingdom*, is a good book? To me it seemed very bad, for reasons which I give in the magazine of which I am Editor. But the literary critics of the daily press all seem to think it wonderful. Even some Catholic critics have praised it "to the skies." Who is right and who is wrong? How shall we know? What is the standard?

Take another example in another art. I heard some weeks ago at Symphony Hall in Boston a concert by the famous orchestra under Koussevitzky. That afternoon they played all modern music. Some of it seemed to me hideous. Other selections, including one I hadn't expected to like (a symphony by an out-and-out Bolshevik) I thought magnificent even stupendous. Was I right or wrong? Should I have liked what I didn't like and should I have loathed what I admired? Is it all subjective? Or is there an objective standard?

To take the most extreme example. What are these "moderns" trying to do with such paintings as you see habitually in "The Museum of Modern Art"? Are they kidding the public? Or is there merit in what they have to offer? To me and to most of the multitude some 90 per cent of "modern stuff" seems grotesque, absurd, insane, obscene. But the moderns tell us we don't know what we are talking about.

We could go on with more examples. But you catch my meaning. Remember, I don't want a hard and fast rule. Perhaps I shouldn't have spoken in the beginning of a "rule of thumb," though a rule of thumb is more elastic than shall we say a yardstick. I don't ask the Bureau of Weights and Measures to apply its standards to the arts and tell us whether we are getting our money's worth or are beginning "kyped." Nothing so rigid and mathematical as that. But what I want to know is this

are there no standards at all any more in the world of art and literature and music, as there seem to be none in the world of morals. When people say "I adore it," and others equally intelligent say "I abominate it," is there no comment to make except "Well, you know the old maxim, *de gustibus*?" In other words, where are we any way? Have we reached a condition of anarchy and nihilism in art and morality?

All these questions sprang up anew in my mind when I read a special article by one of our leading critics of the drama, John Mason Brown, commenting upon a book of one of his confreres in the same profession, George Jean Nathan. Some people rate Nathan as merely a smart Aleck, *enfant terrible*, or if they take him more seriously, an iconoclast. Mr. Brown, in common with a host of readers and playgoers, thinks Mr. Nathan's life-long contribution to dramatic criticism is of great permanent value. So there you are once again. Can we only say "Take it or leave it; like it or lump it"? Or is there an aesthetic standard which may be applied?

Even Mr. Brown seems to contradict himself. He is contrasting George Nathan with Dorothy Thompson. Mr. Brown calls them both "kibitzers," one in the affairs of the theatre, the other in the world of politics. She, he says, despises Nathan and dismisses him as a trifler. But, says John Mason Brown, "in the last analysis both of these critics write of what is the only critical truth." At that I cocked up my ears and opened my eyes wide. "The only critical truth"? What is it? It turns out to be "themselves as they respond to their different subjects." Let's you down again, doesn't it? Dorothy Thompson's truth is herself, and George Jean Nathan's truth is himself. Purely personal and subjective, to all appearances. Dorothy Thompson likes co-and-so's international policy which somebody else doesn't like. That's that and there's the end of it. George Jean Nathan likes a play and some other critic doesn't like it. More probably George Jean Nathan tears a page to pieces while some other critic thinks it the finest that has hit Broadway in a decade. And that's that and there's an end of it. The only critical truth is themselves.

Mr. Brown goes on to say or to seem to say that after all Mr. Nathan has another standard, that is his own likes and dislikes. Mr. Nathan, he says, gives an idea of some of those symptomatic values which are imperiled. So there are values outside the cranium of either Nathan or Thompson. But and here we get mixed up again. It does not matter whether one agrees with Nathan or not. The point of good criticism is that the writer's mind has been ventilated and that the reader's mind has been persuaded. Mr. Nathan may be right or wrong, but he is right for himself.

That seems to be just what the writers of unintelligible music or the painters of insane pictures say they do the queer things they do because they must "express themselves." Ventilate their minds.

Yes, some popular book on standards must come out soon or the world of fiction, poetry, art, music and let us add architecture and sculpture will remain as it is now chaotic.

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Library Signpost

"Lord, That I May See . . ."

By Rev. Benedict Ehmann

Did you ever toy with the idea of a fourth dimension? It is a fascinating bit of mental gymnastics. Confined as we are to length and breadth and height, we like to puzzle out whether there may not be some other geometric exit of escape from fixity.

Space is a sphinx and discloses its secrets grudgingly, and maybe the fourth dimension is only a mathematician's fantasia. Who can tell? But the supernatural estate of the Christian soul is no fantasia. Call it a fourth dimension, if you will; it is another plane, another level, another world, to which God has lifted the soul which is incorporated with Christ.

This is the world in which we live, so long as we are in the state of grace. This dimension of life was not normal to the soul and therefore, if God willed the soul to dwell in it, He had to endow it in a special way just as our breathing apparatus, and perhaps our whole physical mechanism, would have to be readjusted if we were transplanted to, let us say, the planet Mercury.

Unfortunately, this new wonder-world of the soul in grace remains, for most of us, an unexplored land. We dwell in it, in our own little spot, but hardly ever go out of doors to investigate the breathless beauties of it and to draw long draughts of its tonic air.

Lent is the Church's springtime time to go out of doors in God's Kingdom, drink in the fresh air, open our eyes to its loveliness, put our faces down into its running springs, and run free down its spacious avenues. Do we have faith? Is this world of grace more real to us than the earth on which we walk? To us, which is the shadow, and which the substance? Are we blind?

"Caro, we are all blind," said the grand Pius XI once to console a weeping blind boy.

That is why the Church prefaces our Lent with the Gospel of the blind man who cried out to Christ on the road to Jericho, "Lord, that I may see!"

May Lent open our eyes with the touch of Christ's healing in Communion, that we may see:

1. the beauty of God, "the Dayspring from on high, lovely in His tabernacles . . ."
2. the beauty of Christ, "Desire of the everlasting hills, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge . . ."
3. the beauty of the Church, Spouse of Christ, and Mother of all the faithful . . .
4. the beauty of the faith, milk for babes, and meat for giants . . .
5. the beauty of the Liturgy, Heaven on earth, the undying Sacrifice of the Bridegroom, and the sweet song of His Spouse, the Church.

These are beauties far grander than soaring symphonies and monuments. To know them, to taste them, is to be carried out of one's soul. This is to apprehend the Faith. Or, better, this is to find the Faith entering into full possession of us, moving from the surface to the depths of the soul.

To come to this experience we must tutor ourselves by prayer. Not a prayer of rote formulas

glibly tossed off, but a considered prayer, a prayer that is enlightened by the word of God, the prayer that we call meditation, and, in its higher reaches, contemplation.

This enlightened prayer cannot be sustained without spiritual reading. Such reading is all for the lamps of prayer. Lent ought, therefore, to be a season of intensive reading. If it is hard to read, that is good penance, and, like all things hard, it becomes easy the more you try it. Certainly the kind of spiritual writing which is being published these days will be called hard reading only by lazy and flabby minds.

Here is a suggested list, obtainable at the Catholic Evidence Library, Columbus Civic Centre, Rochester, N. Y.

The Public Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Archbishop Goodier

The Passion and Death of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Archbishop Goodier

Meditations for Layfolk, Bede Jarrett

God Within Us, Raoul Plus

In Christ Jesus, Raoul Plus

Christ in His Brethren, Raoul Plus

The Living Thoughts of St. Paul, Jacques Maritain

Christ the Life of the Soul, Abbot Marmion

Christ in His Mysteries, Abbot Marmion

The Ascend of Calvary, Louis Perroy

Why the Cross? Edward Leen

Progress Through Mental Prayer, Edward Leen

The Holy Ghost, Edward Leen

A Primer of Prayer, Joseph McSorley

The Spirit of Catholicism, Karl Adam

A Map of Life, Frank Sheed

The Unknown God, Alfred Noyes

The Layman's Christian Year, Ernest Oldmeadow

The Sacrifice, Paul Bussard

Providence, Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange

Christianus (The Christian), Abbot Vonier

Prayer for All Times, Pierre Charles

Five Years Ago--

—in the files of the CATHOLIC COURIER

From March 4, 1937, Edition

That the Kelly-McCreery School Bus Law is constitutional and applies to city as well as rural school children was ruled under a decision handed down by Supreme Court Justice Philip A. McCook in a New York City test case.

Launching a survey of Catholic boys, then in Scout troops throughout the diocese, the Rochester Diocesan Committee in meeting made plans to introduce the Scout movement in additional parishes following the next meeting of the committee set for May, 1937.

The Auburn Little Theater Players under the direction of the Rev. John S. Randall, presented their recent success, "The Cradle Song," at Cornell University.

An astrologer says that the stars positively predict Hitler's defeat. But what the world's groaning taxpayers really want to know is WHEN?—Atchison Globe.

Saint Patrick

O glorious St. Patrick, green Erin's bright star,
Who to our loved Ireland didst come from afar,
To illumine our souls with religion's pure ray,
And bring the glad tidings of new coming day.

First led as a captive to our fertile shore,
God humbled and tried thee, to exalt thee the more
But in Him was thy hope, thou didst pray night and day
Till at last by His own voice He hid thee away.

Then back thou didst go to thy lov'd parents' home,
And next came our glorious apostle from Rome
To prostrate the idols our fathers adored
And teach them to worship the God they ignored.

'Twas "the voice of the Irish" first called thee to toil,
To plant the cross through their dear native soil,
And their little ones thou in a vision didst see
With fervor imploring God's succor through thee.

Thy children now exiles on many a shore
Will love and revere thee till time be no more,
And the fire thou hadst kindled shall never be quenched
Though long with the tide of adversity drenched.

Ever bless and protect the sweet land of our birth,
Where the shamrock still blooms as when thou livedst on earth;
And our hearts shall yet burn where'er we roam
For God and St. Patrick and our own native home.

Feast Days

Sunday, Mar. 8.—ST. JOHN OF GOD.

Monday, Mar. 9.—ST. FRANCES OF ROME.

Tuesday, Mar. 10.—THE FORTY MARTYRS OF SEBASTE.

Wednesday, Mar. 11.—ST. EULOGIUS.

Thursday, Mar. 12.—ST. GREGORY THE GREAT.

Friday, Mar. 13.—ST. EUPHRASIA, VIRGIN.

Saturday, Mar. 14.—ST. MAUD, QUEEN.

Teacher: "If I were to say 'You was late at school today' would that be right?"
Pupil: "No."
Teacher: "Why?"
Pupil: "Because I want'."

Peace

There is peace to be found in the future
When the troublesome present is past.

There is freedom in all of its glory
With the best wanting virtues that last.

No more will the mad despot plunder
On the poor and the weak and oppressed;

And the dear souls who fell in the battle
Will be there to rejoice with the rest.

For the Stars and Stripes in their beauty
Will be waving through all of the years.

And the sun will become but a memory,
When Mother hearts have forgotten their tears.

EVERETT J. HANSEN.

EDITORIALS

(Continued from Page 18)

life. The Church has urged Pastors to have priests from outside visit their parishes to enable all to comply easily with the precept of annual confession and Easter Duty. In these days of frequent Communion, this may not seem as important as in the days when so many received once a year, and not more than once a year.

Yet a Lenten Mission means much to all even to our frequent communicants. It is an inspiration to the very pious to persevere in striving after perfection, it is an invitation to the lukewarm to become truly pious, it is the blessed opportunity for the careless to get back where they belong. It is for all Christ's true of grace. His love goes out to us. His yearning for our souls is made doubly effective by the cooperation the Mission prompts us to give.

The tests of the parish labor day in and day out for their flock. Study and prayer and meditation prepare them for their work in the confessional, the sick room, the school, at the altar, in the pulpit. But the missionary priest, the man of the religious order, who comes from his monastery, from his life of special dedication, brings with him into the parish a certain something that means a blessing on priests and people in the parish. A series of prayerful conferences, a daily visit to the church, meditations and instructions and sermons of the missionary type, the particular style of mission that is proper to each individual congregation of order: a mission confession, frequent Communion for all the week, daily assistance at Holy Mass; all culminating in the final service which is the climax of a well-planned program of a week cleverly arranged and zealously followed out with a view to the sanctification and salvation of every one who makes the Mission.

Lenten Devotions continue through the customary forty days; they take on an added attractiveness when supported by a Lenten Mission. It may introduce the Holy Season, it may be reserved for its closing week. In any case it is just what the soul needs to become better before God, just what the soul craves as a means of knowing God better and serving Him more perfectly. Let's make the mission!

CASTING OUT DEVILS

Devil worship, possession and obsession, witchcraft, are not new in the world. They go back as far as human records go. They are in the world today. Christ knew the suffering of those possessed by the devil. Christ used His divine power in casting out devils in so public a manner that His enemies could not question it—it was too evident a fact. So they had to be satisfied by saying He did it by diabolical power, through Beelzebub the Prince of Devils. Present-day wisecracks go further: they just deny the historical facts, or impute epilepsy or insanity to those whom Christ and Christ enemies on the ground recognized as victims of diabolical possession.

Is the devil in the world today? Is his influence felt among men? The murderous, treacherous, villainous, ways of Shakespeare's Macbeth, are so horror-inspiring that one would hesitate in ordinary times to consider them possible in any human being. How tame they seem when we compare them to modern realities, 20th Century Dictators!

Macbeth dealt with the devil, through the three witches. Surely our present-day Macbeth's, lords of mechanized slaughter, mindful of no obligation to God or man, forgetful of justice, untrue to friend and foe, alike, scourging the earth with their wicked ways, follow clearly the way the devil would suggest. The witches they seek out may be modern-type devils in human form; their direction borders on the diabolical. "He who is not with Me, is against Me."

The power of Christ is needed today to drive out the devils that scourge the world with their weapons of destruction. May our prayers hasten the day when Divine Love will conquer Devilish Hate! May they bring closer the day of the coming of the Kingdom of God!