

The Decency-in Print Campaign

Frederick Howatt, '39

In this modern age of license, there is a mass of books, newspapers, and magazines, which evidently has no other end than to corrupt the mind, to make sin attractive, and to kill the spirit of faith and of love for God. The most shameful affairs run riot on the printed page; illicit love is treated in the most suggestive manner possible; indecent illustrations and color designs are flaunted on newstands and in the windows of bookstores.

Some of this trash is openly obscene. The danger, especially to the minds of the young, in reading this type of "literature" are too well known to need discussion here. Not so widely recognized, however, are the harmful effects, of the less obvious portion — those publications which contain stories of the "romantic" or "risque" variety, which glorify crime and the criminal, or which are illustrated with pictures or drawings bordering on the indecent. In these, no particular passage or part can be pointed out as obviously objectionable, yet in their entirety they convey to the reader impressions and ideas which, if not definitely immoral, are at least unwholesome.

The danger lies in the fact that this unwholesomeness is usually entirely unperceived by both the younger and older generations. Parents who would bristle with wrath and indignation if their offspring were found perusing openly obscene literature usually tolerate the reading of gangster and "love" stories. Evidently they regard such reading as a manifestation of a common phase of adolescence which will soon pass, leaving the youngster none the worse for the experience. But it is more than this. The minds of the young are impressionable and receptive to external influences. The false attitudes towards life contained in such reading material may leave a lasting impression upon the youthful reader. The poison is taken in small doses and with a heavy coating of sugar, but it does its destructive work as well as the more potent doses contained in outright obscene literature, for it is tolerated rather than discouraged and frowned upon.

These evils have always been recognized by the Catholic Church, which, throughout the ages, has waged a vigorous campaign against them. This campaign was intensified and augmented a few years ago when the Legion

of Decency was formed, consisting of persons of all denominations. But the Legion's drive against immorality in motion pictures occupied the spotlight to such an extent that the phase of its work dealing with immoral literature was overshadowed, and did not receive due attention and support from the public.

At the present time, however, the drive against indecency in print is being given greater impetus. The Bishops of the United States and Canada have issued pastoral letters warning the people of the danger of bad reading and reminding them of their duty to work for its suppression. From such centers as Notre Dame University and the Paulist Press, anti-smut literature is being circulated. Diocesan newspapers carry articles deploring the present flood of filth, and exhorting the public to lend its support and encouragement to the groups of zealous workers who are leading the way in the campaign.

The necessity of this campaign is evident. There are laws in existence forbidding the sale and circulation of smut, but they are so full of loop-holes and so poorly enforced that their effectiveness is negligible. In any case, they apply only to what is openly obscene. The inadequacy of these laws is attested to by the enormous quantities of indecent literature now in circulation. And what is the reason for this condition? For the most part the cause may be found in the indifference and complacency of the general public.

The activities of a conscientious minority can reduce to a considerable extent the circulation and reading of immoral literature, but this is not enough. To safeguard the morals of the nation, and particularly of youth, the temptation must be done away with,—printed indecency must be suppressed entirely. This can be effected only by an aroused and united public.

The warning has been sounded by religious leaders, the example has been set by the campaigns now in progress. It is the duty of every decent, right minded citizen, not only to encourage these campaigns, but even to take an active part in them. This is God's work. There can be no indifference in a matter of this sort. What Christ said still goes: "He that is not with me, is against me."

An aroused and united public can accomplish much for the cause of decency-in-print. The appeals of religious leaders depend for their effectiveness upon the good will of individuals, and at best the immediate effects of their efforts

are comparable to a lopping off of branches. The public, however, aroused by these appeals, can go to the roots of the matter. In one way or another, the sale and circulation of indecent literature can and must be suppressed. The power of numbers, in the form of the boycott, can be exerted against the purveyors of smut. The laws regarding obscene printed matter must be more strictly enforced, and where inadequate, must be supplemented by new regulations (with teeth). Such legislation can be pushed through, but it requires a concerted movement on the part of a large proportion of the public. Only then will it be apparent to the government that the will of the people is strongly opposed to printed indecency.

Furthermore, in individual cases, parents should supervise the reading of their children. They have a duty to rear their offspring in the fear and love of God, and to protect them, to the best of their abilities, against the onslaughts of Satan. Certainly this includes protection against the dangers of printed obscenity. And to best protect the young they should also set their own houses in order, lest by their example they cause their children to think the reading of impure literature a harmless and amusing pastime.

Clearly, then we cannot sit idly by, and watch others campaign against smut. Every decent citizen owes it to himself, to his children, to his neighbour, to take an active part in this drive. The dangers have been indicated, the means of suppression suggested by our religious leaders. It is our duty to take up the cudgel, to fight the good fight for decency in print.



The Sailor's Song

Gerald Mallett, '44

A sea, a sky, a ship —
A wind sharp as a knife,
That is my life.

A night, a moon, a star —
A dream of yesterday
To light my way.

A home, a mate, a child —
In the future — somewhere?
That is my prayer.