

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers I*, 1885 – 1886 Oct 3, '85 to May 29, '86) The original is very badly faded.

Budget, Ferris Editor
May 29th 1886

Our Newspapers

The newspaper press of Cincinnati is something wonderful to contemplate and furnishes material for severe criticism, and at the same time invite serious reflection.

Taking a cursory glance at our English newspapers we have two afternoon papers that can lay claim to having a good character and some ability. Their voice is usually on the right side, and in favor of decency, law, and order. Of the morning journals, one is so bad that it is properly regarded as unfit for the inspection of those who esteem purity and law. The fact that it has ability and may be termed a great newspaper, makes the case more to be deplored. Another morning paper which appears as a new light in the system, shines forth with a fair character, but is lacking in the strong, penetrating and purifying heat that should radiate from an orb that professes to give light to the world.

It is proposed here to notice more particularly the morning daily which claims to be respectable, and which unquestionably ranks as a great newspaper, and possesses marked ability in its way. Its news department may be passed over, for one in search of news, as such will quite surely find it there in greater quantities and more voiced apartments (sic) than can be digested well.

The editorial department, that which gives character and tone to the paper, is the one most open to criticism. Humor and wit contribute much to happiness, but it is an error always and continuously to treat matters of public and private welfare in terms of levity and recklessness. It is well to be partisan, but not to be blindly and coarsely so, or at all times, and on all occasions. It is a good thing to make fraud odious, and to hold up to scorn and contempt those who defend fraud. But there are other questions and frauds upon the ballot box that call for attention during the life of man. What extreme and inexcusable folly it is in a partisan newspaper, and how shortsighted for a newspaper, even from a partisan stand-point today, to denounce a candidate

for office as an unfit and corrupt person, and totally unworthy of public trust, and tomorrow to command his nomination by the party convention, and declared that, on the whole, the convention could not have done better, and thereafter to give such nominee that newspaper's unqualified support, and to denounce as traitors to their party those who dared to work and vote against such disreputable aspirant for office. Contrast for a moment the course of such a partisan newspaper with that of a newspaper that is partisan, yet fearless in attacking and exposing unfitness and corruption in public officials wherever found, whether of that newspaper's faith or not.

The fearless and impartial journal beyond all question would have a measurable advantage over the one that is blind and narrow. For the one would command the respect of all classes, and inspire the dread of those who are unfit and dishonest. The other is respected by none and marked by all, except it may be by a small few who never think for themselves, and its party influence ceases to be of much weight. Then too, look for a moment at the style of literature which is almost daily laid before the reader of this morning journal as evidences by the following sample paragraphs from a single issue, commencing with the leading editorial of the day:

The only red flag now flying is the bloody nose of E. J. Morris. It is not what one would expect as an emblem of temperance, but is the best that can be done under the circumstances.

We do not in the least mind saying, as often as the fact may be disputed, that the Commercial Gazette is conducted upon the principle that it is as good a thing as a man can do, as a general rule, to oppose the Democratic Party.

The gentleman of the bleeding proboscis, Mr. Morris, protests that Jim Sullivan was not allowed to escape on bail from the Hammond Street Station House, where he had been incarcerated for tapping the sniffer of a crank for claret. Well, we will not stand on ceremonies. It is possible that Tim was discharged on his own recognizance, and if so, it was a sort of complementary attention by one soldier to another. Bring forth the skeleton with the bloody nose. Never mind the metaphor.

The cranks of the city had upon their minds this spring to help the Democratic Party out of the hole in which it had placed itself, by

running a third party ticket. We were as emphatic as possible in warning the people that the cranks were in practical cooperation with the criminals. There was a good deal of talk that the committee of One Hundred would bring out a non-partisan ticket, but the idea was abandoned. The pinch of the difficulty was on the night of the Republican primaries. The Republicans saved themselves with great difficulty. The contest was between the Republican and Democratic parties, and the contest next fall will be the same. The soft-shelled crank of Cincinnati journalism quotes pathetic paragraphs about the sorrow that came upon the nose of E. J. Morris in October 1871. One of those paragraphs mentions that Morris was not knocked down, as had been reported, but simply struck in the face by Tim Sullivan; and this further observation was made: 'Tim Sullivan was working for Fitzgerald, and was not willing to recognize that other persons there had equal rights with himself.'

There are several additional paragraphs, all breathing the deepest concern for Mr. Morris. We think we detect in them the hand and pen of Mr. Morris himself, for there is the shadow of a doubt upon us whether any other citizen felt so keenly on the subject. We may remark, in extenuating of the course of the able editors of this city at that time that they did not know Mr. Morris as well then as since. If they had known as much fifteen years ago as now, they might have sympathized with Mr. Sullivan. But this is a horrid course of thought that we do not intend to pursue. —

This is not an exceptional style in English, but it is the ordinary strain flowing from these editorial columns daily. True it sounds at times of the humorous, but it is more the jest of the buffoon. It is in no sense elevating or instructive. One looks in vain in the columns of this journal for an editorial discussing, on high, moral grounds the questions of the day. If it takes either side of a question involving morals, or law and order, it is more frequently on the wrong side than on the right, and is found defending lawlessness and immorality, rather than condemning them. During the recent disturbances growing out of the labor troubles throughout the country, this journal, which is supposed to be an educator and instructor, contained no calm, well-considered article or articles bearing upon the all-pervading questions of the hour.

Perhaps the most reprehensible display of partisan journalism that has

appeared in this morning daily occurred recently, when, after the Legislature had enacted a law abolishing the Board of Public Works, and creating the Board of Public Affairs, the editor of the paper uncovered himself so far as to say, in one of his leading editorials that since the Legislature had come under Republican control, he was not so much in favor of non--partisan Boards as he was!! From a partisan stand-point, such a disclosure was preeminently weak, because such a public instructor should have known that the politic course was to join in the public approval of a non-partisan Board, and deplore, for the sake of the party, that the legislature had failed to rise above party and give the people what they clamored for, a non-partisan Board.

But aside from the political phase of the question, what excuse can be found for the abusive and intolerable attack made in those columns upon an organized body of men, an organization of leading and worthy citizens, whose only purpose has been to lift Cincinnati out of the mire and filth of politics, and from which the city for years has been struggling to escape. What this fair city now requires, above all other needs, perhaps, as the light begins to dawn above the clouds of municipal mismanagement is a daily newspaper, the corner-stone of which shall be character, and with a superstructure of pronounced ability. Then we should have a journal that would be fearless in speaking the truth, bold in espousing the right; a power to lift up and educate, rather than drag down and debase.

[A.A. Ferris]