

eddies of events. The literature of the hour we cannot ignore ; it has its uses ; but we may and ought to guard against wasting more time and energy upon it than is absolutely necessary.

The daily press is flooding us with sensation and distraction. It were the height of unwisdom in us to devote any but the most limited time to our morning paper. The monthly magazine and the quarterly review also claim our attention. The story is told of Madame de Staël, how she asked Fichte to give her within a short quarter of an hour an idea of his philosophy. The philosopher was horrified at the thought that anybody could in so few minutes take in the meaning of a system that had been for him a life-labor. Well, that which caused Fichte to shudder is now of every-day occurrence. The magazines and reviews come to us laden with articles on every conceivable topic, in which the learned of the world condense their life-studies ; and within little more than a quarter of an hour we are enabled to become familiar with issues that it would take us years to master to the degree of our newly-acquired knowledge. Is this a boon ? The knowledge so acquired cannot be rightly apprehended unless we have brought to it previous special training. It is simply a cramming of undigested facts. It is not culture. Culture implies severe mental discipline, continuous training, and methodical study of the best thought and most polished expression. Magazine articles can be of use when

judiciously selected and read with care. Do not attempt to read all. Choose those only that are in your line of reading. In these remarks I have in view the secular press. But we Catholics must not forget that there is also a religious press, and that it is an imperative duty upon us to support that press. Much good is done by every well-edited Catholic journal. Now, many of our Catholic weeklies are instructive, edifying, and improving. Their editorials serve as an antidote to correct the poisonous effects of the venom frequently instilled into the daily press. They determine our bearings as Catholics upon the issues of the day. They signal to us the dangers that beset us. This is in a higher degree true of our Catholic magazines. Those published amongst us are few, and are easily enumerated. There is the *Ave Maria*. Weekly does it place at the feet of Mary a bouquet of flowers, rare and choice, contributed by the most graceful Catholic writers. There is *The Catholic World*. Every month it comes upon our tables laden down with strong food for reflection and sweetmeats for amusement. You cannot pick up a number without finding amid its great variety something to suit every taste. There is the *American Catholic Quarterly Review*, edited by one of the most erudite among scholars, and treating every topic in the light of Catholic theology and Catholic philosophy from an elevated plane of view. It may interest you to know that cultured non-Catholics are among its most constant readers, regarding it as the

fullest and most authoritative expression of Catholic opinion in America.*

Memoirs and biographies and books of travel and manuals of popular science form the staple of our reading, and instructive and entertaining reading they make; but we must bear in mind that the ninety-nine hundredths of them are books of the hour, satisfying the wants of the hour and nothing more. They excite a momentary interest, and are then forgotten. Let them not monopolize all your spare time. The only biography in our language which has passed into the literature of all time is Boswell's *Life of Johnson*.† Autobiography

* Two other monthlies, worthy of mention, are *The Messenger of the Sacred Heart* and *Donohue's Magazine*.

† There is one biography which I would like to see in the hands of every Catholic young man. It is *Frederic Ozanam: His Life and his Works*, by the late Kathleen O'Meara. I can introduce it to you in no more fitting words than those I have used elsewhere:

"The second London edition, now before us, has been found worthy of a long and valuable introduction from the pen of Cardinal Manning to what his Eminence calls 'this deeply interesting narrative.' With great firmness of grasp the author handles the salient events of the day, and groups around Ozanam all the leading characters of that most interesting period of French history—interesting above all to the Catholic student—and follows her hero through the whirl and turmoil of Paris, and notes amid the seething of thought that was then going on in all active brains the self-possessed student through 'eighteen years of great intellectual and spiritual intensity' (Cardinal Manning's preface, p. 9), strong, energetic, earnest, carving his way to eminence, and inspiring youthful souls with his own chivalric impulses. Faithfully she traces his footsteps as, weak in body, he wanders through many lands in search of the health that was ebbing fast away from him; but, well or ill, always returning weighted down with erudition gathered from musty tomes hidden away in the recesses of dust-laden libraries; now picking up legends in Catholic Brittany; now culling flowers of sweetest poesy and song in the garden

has been recently most disastrous to the writers thereof. Mark Pattison, who seems to have written in order to vent a personal spite; John Stuart Mill, Carlyle—all wrote themselves down over-estimated idols with feet of clay. The one exception is that admirable piece of soul-dissection, so outspoken with honesty written on every page; that revealing of a soul to which tens of thousands are bound up by ties of gratitude, love, and admiration—the *Apologia* of Cardinal Newman, a book which will henceforth rank with the *Confessions* of St. Augustine.

And here I would ask you to distinguish between the suggestive book, that sets you thinking, and after reading which you wish for more, and the book that leaves

of St. Francis of Assisi; now imbibing inspiration in the land of the Cid; now following the slow and solemn tread of the great Dante, delving into that inexhaustible mine of high thought, the *Divina Commedia*—glad always and above all things when he could establish a branch of his dear Confraternity of St. Vincent de Paul. It is all told with an indescribable charm.

"Had Kathleen O'Meara left no other work from her pen than this biography, she would well deserve the gratitude of Catholics. If we were asked what book we would recommend to be placed in the hands of young men in order to quicken their sympathies in behalf of misery and suffering, and aid the good that is in them to bloom out and bear fruit, we should name without fear of demur or contradiction Kathleen O'Meara's *Frederic Ozanam*. It is a story of great talent utilized and bearing compound interest; an illustration of great opportunities created and seized upon and used to advantage; a revelation of sweet and charming domestic virtues. In Ozanam we behold the man of the world whose pulse beats in sympathy with all the literary, political, and social movements of the day; the ripe scholar, the unwearied student, and the beautiful, saintly soul. The book is strong enough to mark an epoch in the life of any thoughtful Catholic young man." *The Ave Maria*, March 6, 1889.

nothing unsaid, and in a measure does all your thinking. I need scarcely tell you that the suggestive book makes the more profitable reading. It is invigorating; it is of the highest order of writing. All the world-authors—Plato, Aristotle, Dante, à Kempis, Shakspeare, Goethe—are eminently suggestive. They exhaust no train of thought; they are content to designate the lines on which the reader should travel in order to attain the goal. Between lines you read a sense of power held in reserve. Their utterances, given out in distinct though subdued tones, are the utterances of men holding in control both thought and expression. Hence the libraries of books that have been written, and that will continue to be written, upon each of these great writers without ever exhausting their infinite suggestiveness. The suggestive book may be large or small: A modern suggestive book should be confined within a small compass. Would that I could bring home to writers the ease with which this may be done! How much weariness of spirit the reading world would then be spared! The process is simple. Let the writer reject from his book whatever there is of padding, of negations, of repetitions of things that have been better said by others; let him eschew all grandiloquent description and what is called fine writing; let him confine himself to his subject, meeting difficulties and objections in the clear light of the predominant idea, condensing whole chapters into paragraphs, whole paragraphs into sentences,

whole sentences into single words and phrases. In this manner may books be written in keeping with the busy life men lead and the many claims that press upon them. In this manner would there be less waste of paper, less waste of ink, less waste of labor, less brain-waste; the millennium of the reading world would be at hand. The reading of strong and terse writing fires the soul and strengthens the intellect; the reading of emasculated books will make emasculated intellects.

VI.

I NEED scarcely tell you that the great bulk of novels of the day are of the lightest froth. It were intellectual suicide to spend one's time and waste one's energies unravelling improbable plots or watching puppets of the brain—mere wax-works—dance before one through page after page and volume after volume, leaving it difficult to determine which is deserving of most censure, the presumption of the writer in rushing into print, his bad taste, or the mongrel language in which he expresses himself. The British Museum recently made a rule to let out no novels to readers till after the expiration of five years. How many of the novels published in this year of grace will be read five years hence? Ask the Mudie or any other circulating library what is the duration of the popularity of books for which the presses, worked day and night, were unable to supply the demand. The popularity of the hour is no criterion of worth. *Ben Hur*

lay long months untouched upon the publishers' shelves before men awakened to its beauty and power; *Lorna Doone* was for years struggling into public recognition; and who that has read *Dion and the Sybils* will say that it has yet received a tithe of its full measure of justice? The popularity of the hour is most misleading. Among living authors the one that bids fairest to become a classic—I regret that I cannot unreservedly recommend him—is one who worked for years in poverty and obscurity before obtaining recognition; even at the present moment his readers are limited. His prose is as repellent to the casual reader as is the poetry of Robert Browning. But, like Browning, he is a keen analyzer of human motives; like Browning also he deals largely with the morbid in human life. Every novel of his is a soul-study, and almost every sentence is an epigram. I allude to George Meredith. A careful study of his *Diana of the Crossways*—the original of which, by the way, was the Hon. Mrs. Norton—will give you some insight into his great power and unrivaled merit.

But there is no dearth of novels that have passed the ordeal of time and are pronounced classic. Scott is still read, and will continue to be read as long as men will appreciate the spontaneous outpourings of a genius who writes with all the ease and joyousness with which the blackbird sings. There is about his novels the freshness of the morning dew. We Catholics will pardon him the misrepresentations of our monks and the caricatures of

our religious practices that disfigure some of his pages, for we know that he bore us no malice, and had he known better he would have done us more justice. The large majority of his books are wholesome reading.

But there is now coming into vogue a pernicious species of novel, all the more dangerous because of its insidiousness. It is not openly immoral. It is, as a rule, artistically written, and loudly praised by the critics in sympathy with its principles. It is the novel of Pessimism. Its spirit is anti-Christian. It represents men and women under the cold and barren influence of Agnosticism or Positivism—either system has the same ultimate result—with Agnostic or Positivist theories filtered through their lives and moulding their opinions and characters. Within its pages you look in vain for a Providence, immortality, spiritual existence. Its summary of all life is a natural development of the physical man or woman, happy in the airy fancies youth weaves; then a crisis which precipitates all illusions; afterwards hardened feelings, bitterness in speech, and either railings at all life or the resignation of despair, recklessly, hopelessly submitting to the Must-be. You cannot detect its subtle influence till it has left the iron in your soul, and the sweet prayers of your childhood have grown insipid, and the ritual and ceremonies of the Church have lost their attraction, and you no longer think of God and your future with the same concern. It is in steering clear of such novels that direction is especially necessary.

Though we have no single great national novel, either for America or for England, as Cervantes' *Don Quixote* is for the Spanish; as Manzoni's *I Promessi Sposi* is for the Italians; as Tolstoi's *Anna Karénina*, that great prose epic of Russian life in its good and its bad aspects, is for the Russians; still, in Dickens, in Hawthorne, in several of Bulwer Lytton's—*My Novel*, for instance, and nearly all his later ones—in the great modern master of novelists, him of the big heart and the generous sympathy, that great lay preacher and critic of manners, who has written such classic prose and given us such grand character-studies in *Vanity Fair* and *Pendennis* and *Henry Esmond* and *The Newcomes*—in all these and many others we can find amusement, instruction, and improvement. You may be interested to know that Thackeray was in strong sympathy with the Catholic Church. His bosom friend, William B. Reed, of Philadelphia, in a valuable little book, published anonymously and now very scarce, bears witness to the fact; and I quote his words all the more willingly, for the reason that when this essay of Mr. Reed's was republished in a series printed in New York, the interesting passage was omitted.* "Thackeray," says his friend, "was in one sense—not a technical one—a religious, or, rather, a devout, man, and I have sometimes fancied (start not, Protestant reader!) that he had a sentimental leaning to

* Bric-à-Brac Series: Anecdote Biographies of Thackeray and Dickens, edited by Richard Henry Stoddard.

the church of Christian antiquity. Certain it is, he never sneered at it or disparaged it. 'After all,' said he one night to him who writes these notes, driving through the streets of an American city, and passing a Roman Catholic cathedral, 'that is the only thing that can be called a church.'"* We will think none the less kindly of Thackeray for this good word. We will censure him all the more lightly for his want of appreciation of his Irish neighbors, and especially for his caricature in the Fotheringay of the beautiful and accomplished Miss O'Neill.† I know no better antidote against a craving for the trashy stuff that is now flooding the world than to make a thorough study of one or other of the great novelists. After one has become accustomed to fare on wholesome food one is not apt to feed on husks and swallow swill.

Not but that among novels, as among poems, which have not yet received the sanction of time, we perceive many a gem bringing home to us many a beautiful lesson, and we may humbly and thankfully accept the gift. I find in several of our living writers purpose, style, and art of a high order. One of the most successful of them—Mr. W. D. Howells—once remarked to me that he could no more conceive a novel without a purpose than an arch without a key-stone. Various are the ways

* World Essays, p. 209.

† Thackeray himself received no better justice at the hands of Lord Beaconsfield. The spiteful character of St. Barbe in *Endymion* is far from being the genial and large-hearted Thackeray as known to his friends.

in which the goodness of that purpose may be shown: now it is to place before us an ideal of life in its diverse phases, now to caution us against some of the evils gnawing at the vitals of society, now to bring the past nearer, now to photograph glimpses of an order of things passing away forever, now to put us in presence of higher truths; and we have well-written and powerful novels illustrative of all these ways. To mention names were tedious.

I am not unmindful of the distinctively Catholic novel. It is of recent growth on English soil. That eminent churchman and scholar, Cardinal Wiseman, saw in the *Last Days of Pompeii* the model of an idea which, carried out, might prove most fruitful in bringing before the minds of the people a vivid picture of the Christian Church passing through the various stages of her struggles and her triumphs. His fertile brain accordingly projected a series of novels intended to rehabilitate the life of the primitive Christians, and, with his usual versatility, he turned aside from his oriental and scientific studies, and led the way in that delightful story of *Fabiola*, which continues to be read with unabated interest. Then followed *Callista*, a classic of finer fibre and more delicate structure, abounding in subtle traits of character, and penetrated with that keen sense of the beautiful in which the Grecian mind lived and moved. It is a book that grows upon one with every successive perusal. Other works of merit were modeled on these, and though the list is short, it is select.

Nor am I unmindful of a number of writers of the day professing the Catholic faith, whose pens, though not devoted to exclusively Catholic subjects, have produced, and still produce, good reading. Two of the most prominent—Lady Georgiana Fullerton and Kathleen O'Meara—have recently dropped out of the list, and have gone to their well-earned reward. So has the chivalric and generous John Boyle O'Reilly. Rosa Mulholland, Christian Reid, Mrs. Elisabeth Gilbert Martin, Mrs. Cashel-Hoey, Richard Malcolm Johnston, Marion Crawford—with some exceptions,—the Rev. John Talbot Smith, the outspoken editor of the *Catholic Review*, and those two honored pioneers of the Catholic novel in America, Mrs. Sadlier and Mrs. Hanson Dorsey, are among those that recur to memory.

Were we to enumerate the various Catholic authors who in our own day shine in different departments of literature—James Jeffrey Roche, poet and journalist, on whose shoulders the mantle of John Boyle O'Reilly has so worthily fallen; Charles Warren Stoddard, Maurice Francis Egan, who, whether polishing a sonnet, penning an editorial, or etching a scene from life, always pleases; Louise Imogen Guiney, Agnes Repplier, Eleanor C. Donnelly, Katherine Conway, Mrs. Mary E. Blake, Mrs. Margaret F. Sullivan, who wields so versatile a pen, whether as journalist, or critic, or eloquent pleader in behalf of Ireland—were we to name all, we could not find space within the covers of this essay.