

The student of the eighteenth century can go, for a truthful, if one-sided, delineation to Defoe, Fielding, Smollet, Richardson, and Madame d'Arblay, just as he who wishes a picture of Russian life at the present day goes to Torgueneff and Tolstoi, but, for any period before the eighteenth century, for want of real novel literature, we must have recourse to historical fiction if we wish to get behind the scenes, come in direct contact with the men and women of the time, and understand them somewhat as we understand those of our own time. Historical fiction has, therefore, a large and important field to itself, a field which it is not possible should be occupied by any other branch of literature. Its work is hardly inferior in value, if well done, to that of genuine history; for it affords that insight into the human mind, that acquaintance with the spirit of the age, without which the most minute knowledge is only a bundle of dry and meaningless facts.

The death occurred recently of William Bernard McCabe, at Donnybrook, near Dublin. He was one of the oldest Journalists in the kingdom. He was born in the Irish capital in November, 1801, and wrote for the press as early as 1824. He was probably the last survivor of those who took part in reporting the speeches which Daniel O'Connell delivered before his entering parliament on his election for Clare, a year before Catholic Emancipation was carried. Since 1851, he has contributed a number of valuable historical papers to the *Dublin Review* and the English periodicals. But his name will be longest remembered in connection with his historical novel, *Bertha, a Romance of the Dark Ages*, and *The Catholic History of England*, which he brought down to the end of the Anglo-Saxon period.

A recent issue of the *Boston Herald* contained an article on the acquisition of a language, from which I quote the following sensible remarks: "Some students begin a language for the mere love of knowing foreign tongues; others acquire languages either for professional purposes or with the aim of gaining access to foreign literatures.

But whatever be the motive, it is well to set out with some knowledge of the

science of language—some insight into the relations of languages to one another—some grasp of the theories of modern scholars about the origin and development of speech.

To learn language without knowing anything of the science of language is like acquiring the art of putting up electric fixtures without any knowledge of the principles of electrical science.

To approach a language, on the other hand, from the standpoint of universal principles is to make the study of it easier and progress in any particular tongue much more rapid.

By knowing, for example, the laws of consonantal interchange we may often discover the meanings of words without being obliged to refer for them to the dictionary. In this way every new language learned makes more easy the acquirement of other tongues of the same or of allied stocks."

In a description of *The Bowery* written by Mr. Julian Ralph for the Christmas number of the *Century* there appears an absurd little anecdote of Thackeray. The great novelist, who was visiting New York, desired to go to Houston street. He was not certain if he was right in pursuing the direction he had taken, so he stepped up to a "Bowery boy" and said "Sir, can I go to Houston street this way?" "Yes, I guess yer kin, sonny," said the boy, "if yer behave yerself." Thackeray, we may be sure, smiled his own peculiar smile and pursued his journey.

Mr. J. C. Bailey contributed a delightful paper on *Cowper's Letters* to a recent number of Macmillan's Magazine. Of our epistolary literature and especially of the contribution made thereto by the bard of The Task, the author says: English literature is fairly rich in good letters, and in the very front rank of the best come the letters of the recluse, who might naturally be supposed to have nothing to write about, the quiet, retiring, half-Methodist poet, William Cowper. They are written in the most beautifully easy English, and he steers his way with unerring instinct between the opposite dangers of pompousness and vulgarity, which are the Scylla and Charybdis of the letter-writer. They are not set compositions, but he never forgets that he is writing, not talking; they contain long discussions, yet he does not