

The Influence of Catholicism on English Literature.

I WILL state here, by way of introduction, that "literature," a word of very wide significance, will, in what I am about to say, be used in its widest sense, with the understanding, however, which can never be long, or even consciously absent from a Catholic mind, that, since we are dealing with the Church's place and influence in English literature, only such literature as comes clearly and distinctly under that influence, can have any real interest for us. All else, it seems to me, must, for us at all events, fall into the category of those "many things" which, as Thomas à Kempis is careful to remind us, "do little or nothing profit the soul."

In this connection, and at a time when the nature and efficiency of education have become veritable "shibboleths," as Carlyle calls them, certain words, written some thirty years ago, by the Anglican, Dr. Frederick Stokes, in his introduction to Dr. Maitland's famous work on the so-called "Dark Ages," will not, I think, seem out of place: "No man," he writes, "who is really grounded in the truths of Christianity can be truly said to be ignorant, and the practical teaching which the early writers of the Dark Ages obtained from the pulpit and the confessional was of far more real intellectual value than the farrago of scraps of grammar and elementary arithmetic to an unwilling generation in Board Schools and such like." May I commend the preface, and the book itself, to the reader's careful and appreciative study, and may I also call his attention to a saying of Pusey's, in his preface to St. Aug. Conf., to the effect that we are accumulating facts, in order to hide for ourselves our ignorance of principles?

I shall endeavour, indeed, in the presentment of this subject, to confine myself, as far as possible, and for sufficiently obvious reasons, to the witness of writers not of our Holy Faith. Where I find myself constrained to depart from this rule, or where I venture, as I have already indicated my purpose of doing, to refer to my own conclusions and inferences, I shall, of course, give due notification of the fact.