

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 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 overestimated 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 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, a Kempis, Shakespeare, 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. Hence the libraries of books that have been written, and that will continue to be written, upon each of those without ever exhausting their infinite suggestiveness. The suggestive book may be great 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 of the age that press upon them. In this manner would there be less waste of paper, less waste of ink, less waste of labour, 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 unmasculated books will make emasculated intellects.

I need scarcely tell you that the great bulk of the 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 of 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 publisher's 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 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: every novel 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 unrivalled 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 as 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.

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 Karenina," that great prose epic of Russian life in its good and its bad aspects, is for the Russians, still, in Dickens, 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 we can find amusement, instruction, and improvement. It will interest my readers to know that Thackeray was in strong sympathy with the Catholic Church. His bosom friend, William B. Read, 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. Read's was republished in a series printed in New York the interesting passage was omitted. Bigotry dies hard. "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 the church of Christian antiquity. Certain it is he never sneered at it or disparaged it. 'After all,' said he one night to he 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. 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.—*Brother Azarias in Catholic World,*

(To be continued.)

DURING THE PRESENT AGITATION AND WITHOUT MEANING TO BE AT ALL PROFANE.

From Dr. Wild's homilies, drawn thro' the nose,
From Charlton and Bunting, and all such as these,
From Goldwin Smith's poems and sententious prose,
Libera nos, Domine.

From the old times revived, when Religion was gain,
And church-plate was seized for relics profane,
From Protestants damning all Papists again,
Libera nos, Domine.

From such reformation when zealots begun
To preach Heaven must by firm bulwark be won
From *Te Deum* sung by each son of a gun,
Libera nos, Domine.

From saucy petitions which seem to inflame us,
From all who belong to a League that's not famous,
From the Devil, Doctor Dawson, and each d—d ignoramus,
Libera nos, Domine.

Toronto.

J. A. M.