

THE SATURDAY READER.

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THE FRENCH OF PAUL FEVAL.

A DEFENCE OF READING.

A CELEBRATED author has said, that of all the enjoyments of life that of reading is the one of which he would most regret the deprivation. It imparts knowledge, soothes pain, relieves grief, and affords a temporary forgetfulness, at least, of the untoward incidents that man is heir to. To him who has acquired it, especially in early life, it is a treasure beyond price, from which, if he is conscious of its true value, he would not part for perhaps any mere earthly gift that fortune could confer upon him. It is a new sense or faculty which enhances the uses of those he has received from nature, and brings him pleasures from sources beyond his personal sphere. We are convinced that few persons past middle age will deny that the hours they remember with most satisfaction are those passed with their books,—it being understood always that they belong to that class given to that mode of spending a portion of their time. We need scarcely explain that by reading we do not merely mean the capacity of comprehending written or printed language, but the higher power of extracting joint pleasure and benefit from the writings of others. Some will admit this, but they object to what they call light reading. What is it that they mean by light reading? Poems, novels, tales in rhyme or prose. Why, Homer's great works are tales or stories, so are the Greek tragedies; Virgil, Dante, Milton, Shakspeare, Cervantes, Fenelon, Dryden, Swift, Scott, wrote tales, and the world is much indebted to them for having done so. Are the works of these spiritual giants of the human race to find no readers because of the form in which they have clothed their thoughts? Be sure of this, that if these men had discoursed of a broomstick, they would have uttered something worth hearing, and which most of us would have been the wiser and better of having heard. So it is of others, although in a less degree. We are convinced that scarcely a book has ever been printed from which we cannot acquire a new fact or idea, should it be the reverse of what it attempts to inculcate. More men have been cured of unbelief by the perusal of the atheistical works of the French writers of the last century than they ever converted to their own doctrines; and the mobs of Paris were or believed themselves to be atheists, chiefly because they could not or would not read. Not that we would recommend such literature,—far from it,—but we have little dread of it. Books do not make an unbelieving age; they only represent the opinions of that age. Who now cares for all that Voltaire and the Encyclopedists taught and wrote? Who professes to be guided by them? Exactly that class who entertained similar views before them, and

who would entertain them had these writers never lived.

But at present our subject is "light literature." Parents and friends complain that young people might be better employed than in poring over tales and novels. Undoubtedly they might. But when? A young man is surely not less well employed in reading even a novel than in wasting his time in a saloon or in a billiard-room; and they all in this country have much spare time. Is a young girl better employed in passing her idle hours in silly or perhaps mischievous gossip, with companions not wiser than herself, than in holding converse, though it may be of a light kind, with Dickens or Thackeray, or the many clever men and women who are the authors of novels and tales? From the former they can gather nothing, for they have nothing to impart; the latter, as we have stated, can talk wisely about broomsticks, or anything else. Another objection urged against novels and tales is, that they put foolish and romantic notions into young folks' heads. We imagine that, as a matter of fact, this complaint is unfounded; for, so far as our experience goes, there are no persons less romantic than the readers of romances. There may be a few exceptions, in the case of those whose natural silliness may take that direction in place of some other equally foolish, but probably more harmful. We would be inclined to assert, indeed, that one of the real dangers of novel reading is that it destroys romance, without some tinge of which youth is anything but attractive.

To the young we would then give the advice, in all seriousness, to cultivate the habit of reading in their youthful days; it can seldom or never be acquired at a later period. One need not necessarily always read novels; but let them read anything, not objectionable on the score of taste and morality, rather than not read at all. There is food for babes and food for men; and the lad and girl who delight in stories will take to more serious matter as their advance in years. There is no object more melancholy than a man or woman in old age, unable longer to join in the business or pleasures of those around them, and without mental resources to while away the leisure which they find so weary and oppressive. We have known several worthy men, so circumstanced, who having retired from business, closed a temperate and active career by seeking relief in drink, and becoming sots, from sheer mental lassitude and depression. What a blessing the capacity of enjoying books would be to such persons! Learn, therefore, a love of reading, young men and women; and "like bread cast upon the waters, it will return to you after many days," having made life's journey, the while, more light and pleasant to you.

FENIANISM.

THERE is one marked contrast between the Irish outbreaks in '98 and '48 and the Fenian movement of to-day. The former were indigenous to the soil—the outcroppings of disaffection and active treason from within—but the latter, so far as Ireland is concerned, is an imported evil. The Fenian plot was conceived, as we all know, on foreign soil. Under the shelter of the American Eagle it, without let or hindrance, quietly extended its ramifications, perfected its organization, and became numerically formidable. Hundreds of pestilent foreign-Irish emissaries have been despatched from New York to foment treason and active rebellion among the home population. American-Irish "Head-Centres," and the free use of funds contributed by Americanized Irishmen, may possibly be successful in organizing a revolt, which may

prove more serious than Smith O'Brien's celebrated escapade; but there is after all some satisfaction in knowing that the Fenian movement was forced upon Ireland—that it originated and was nourished from without.

The English Government is proverbially tolerant of the license of free speech, and little disposed to deal harshly with the mutterings of wordy treason. The history of the past few months sufficiently evidences this fact; but the suspension of the writ of *Habeas Corpus* in Ireland proves that the limit of its patience has been reached. We gather from late papers that this decisive action of the Government has been hailed with universal satisfaction by the great body of loyal Irishmen throughout Ireland. In fact the people were in advance of the Governments, and for the protection of their persons and property would have gladly welcomed repressive measures at an earlier stage of the movement.

Whatever may be the issue of the Fenian plot in Ireland, whether the conspiracy may be sufficiently deep-rooted and formidable to hazard a mad conflict with the Queen's troops or not, it is pleasant to know that there must from henceforth be less of "swagger" in the movements of the ex-Federal officers who have for months past infested Dublin and other Irish cities. The, for the most part, characterless emissaries of the great Irish Republic, whose seat of government is New York, can no longer flout in open day, and if their nefarious work is continued it must be by stealth and under the cover of darkness blacker than the enterprise in which they are engaged.

But, unfortunately, we have a nearer interest in Fenianism than the consideration of its progress in Ireland. We, too, are threatened by some of the redoubtable leaders of the organization. Sweeney the Unconquerable is burning for the possession of Canada. The air is filled with rumours of Sweeney, and the timid hear already the tramp of the vanguard of his army of attack. All this looks very terrible; but still we sleep calmly in our beds, and valiantly despatch our usual beefsteaks and toast. Have not the Government, to be prepared for all eventualities, summoned our gallant volunteers to the front; and have we not all felt proud of their prompt muster and noble bearing? And are we not a brave people, too conscious of our own strength, to tremble before even Sweeney the Invincible?

Whatever may be the result of the bribes and blandishments of ex-Federal officers upon the virus of discontent which, perhaps, still pervades a small minority of the people of Ireland, there is nothing here on which to feed the hopes of Sweeney. The great Fenian bubble will burst, and leave its miserable dupes poorer, if not wiser, men, but Sweeney will obtain no footing in Canada. At the same time, we confess we cannot look upon a "St. Alban's raid," on a large scale, as at all improbable, and for the following reasons. Money in considerable sums is being paid into the Fenian treasury, and desperate attempts are being made to float the bonds of the Irish Republic. Now, granting that the O'Mahoney's and the Roberts' of the movement are knaves, who know full well the rottenness of the enterprise upon which they are engaged; still the pressure brought upon them by their dupes, who may be in earnest, is more than likely to force them into some mad movement.

An attack upon some Canadian frontier town, if only temporarily successful, would give a great impetus to the sale of the worthless bonds of the Republic on paper, and enable all Fenianism to glorify to its heart's content! Such an enterprise would be by many degrees the easiest in which they could engage, and, therefore, we should not