

bours. It is principles we object to, not men. Any Orangeman who fails to show in his daily life and conversation the superiority of his religion is a failure. When we complain of certain things, we are told that Orangeism is not responsible for them. This is true, and we know that there are lots of noble men amongst them, but to some others we might say that we feel we have a right to expect a good deal in the way of righteousness from men who profess such high principles, talk so strong of their order and its work, and protest so strongly against the convictions held by many of their fellow citizens.



REV. MR. TIMS AND MRS. TIMS.

DEGENERATION.*

BY REV. PROF. WM. CLARK, LL.D.

Are we growing better or worse? is a question frequently asked, and very differently answered. It can hardly be said that we are approximating to any great degree of unanimity on the subject. According to the ordinary optimist, all is going well, or even triumphantly, and rapidly approximating to the "best of all possible worlds," if we have not already arrived there. According to the pessimist of the Carlylese type, most things are going to the bad; and the watchwords of the day are—or would be, if we had sense enough to know what we are doing—shoddy, unreality, affectation, make-believe. No one can be sure that because progress is made in many departments, there is no danger of deterioration or degeneration in others; and our material, or even general social progress must not blind us to the possibility of decay, or even the fact. Some persons think that one of the serious evils of the day is anarchy, actually existing and threatening to assume portentous proportions in the future. There can be no doubt that lunacy has greatly increased on both sides of the Atlantic, and especially on the western side, unless we are prepared altogether to ignore the testimony of figures. There is, however, one department in which it is said that degeneration has become conspicuous, if not

*Degeneration. By Max Nordau. Price \$3.50. New York: Appleton & Co. 1895.

rampant—that of literature; and we fear that the theory is capable of being maintained. Of course, it may be said that an age which has raised a poet like Tennyson to the highest place, cannot be altogether lost in regard to literary taste and perception; but there is another side to the subject, and there are serious signs that our literary preferences are not quite so wholesome as we might wish. It is to this interesting subject that a book now before us—Max Nordau's "Degeneration"—is devoted; and it is a very considerable book, indeed. Naturally, it has aroused surprise, indignation and wrath in the ranks of the superior persons assailed; and this is exactly what we should expect. Moreover, in a work of such extent, covering so large an area, entering into minute details, and dealing with many topics in a very slashing manner, it is inevitable that there should be statements which many of us will hesitate to adopt in all their extent. Yet the fact remains that we have here a production of uncommon value, displaying large knowledge, keen and penetrating insight, decision of treatment, and great power of expression. Literary degenerates—authors and artists—he says manifest the same mental characteristics as other degenerates—criminals, anarchists and lunatics; and some among them, degenerates in literature, music and painting, have in recent years come into extraordinary prominence and are revered by numerous admirers as creators of a new art and heralds of the coming centuries. "This phenomenon," he says, "is not to be disregarded. Books and works of art exercise a powerful suggestion on the masses. It is from these productions that an age derives its ideals of morality and beauty. If they are absurd and anti-social, they exert a disturbing and corrupting influence on the views of a whole generation. . . . Now I have undertaken the work of investigating the tendencies of the fashions in art and literature; of proving that they have their source in the degeneracy of their authors, and that the enthusiasm of their admirers is for manifestations of more or less pronounced moral insanity, imbecility and dementia." These are brave words, but they are followed up by others quite as brave; and even those who deny that Herr Nordau has made out his case, will not refuse to admit that he has written much that demands and deserves consideration. As far as this writer is concerned, he thinks the case is only too strong. The subjects treated are *Fin de siècle*, Mysticism, Egomania, Realism, and the Twentieth Century. These are headings of the five books and in each book there are several chapters. The first book deals with the *blaise, fin de siècle*,

the dusk of nations, the general tendencies—more particularly dealt with in the sequel. Under the second come the Pre-Raphaelites, Tolstoism, etc. Under the third, Egomania, come Ibsenism and cognate subjects. Under Realism, Zola and his school. Under the Twentieth Century, Prognosis and Therapeutics. It must not be supposed that the author is a mere iconoclast, or that he does not see merits and power in the literature which he denounces. To Ibsen, for example, he does full justice, recognizing his genius more fully than many among ourselves would do. In fact, it does seem to be necessary, in some such way, to account for the admiration so widely accorded to writing so essentially morbid and unhealthy. We wish very much it were in our power to give an adequate notion of the vigorous manner in which the author handles the subjects of his criticism; but we must content ourselves with mere scraps. Here is a specimen. He is speaking of the wide prevalence of the sickly, sentimental, played-out feeling of a certain species of modern literature, and he proceeds to guard his readers against the notion that it is universal. "The great majority of the middle and lower classes," he says, "is naturally not *fin de siècle*. Of course, even these do not quite escape the prevalent moral sea-sickness. The Philistine or Proletarian still finds undiluted satisfaction in the old and oldest forms of art and poetry, if he knows himself unwatched by the scornful eye of the votary of fashion, and is free to yield to his own inclinations. He prefers Ohnet's novels to all the symbolists, and Mascagni's "Cavalleria Rusticana" to all Wagnerians and to Wagner himself; he enjoys himself royally over slap-dash farces and music hall melodies, and yawns or is angered at Ibsen. . . . It is only a very small minority who honestly find pleasure in the new tendencies and announce them with genuine conviction as that which alone is sound—a sure guide for the future, a pledge of pleasure and of moral benefit. But this minority has the gift of covering the whole visible surface of society. It consists chiefly of rich, educated people, or of fanatics. The former give the tone to all the snobs, the fools and the blockheads; the latter make an impression upon the weak and dependent, and intimidate the nervous. All snobs affect to have the same taste as the select and exclusive minority who pass by everything that once was considered beautiful with an air of the greatest contempt. And thus it appears as if the whole of civilized humanity were converted to the aesthetics of the dusk of the nations." This is first rate, but the volume has many passages as good.



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