

The introduction of music and singing between the pieces was sometimes resorted to, and most enjoyable evenings resulted from the combination of intellect and accomplishment; but, alas, the question of supper in quantity and quality arose and divided that club, and, moreover, it became unwieldy in number and critical in composition, so its downfall; we regret to say, came about two years ago; nor has it since arisen, Phoenix-like, from its ashes. It seems to us a pity, considering the greater lights that illuminate Toronto in the persons of Mr. Goldwin Smith and Professors Wilson and Clark, not to mention other lesser bodies who shall be nameless, that a Reading Club should not be re-organized for the next winter, composed of a small and select circle of literary people, not to exceed twenty or twenty-five, who will read *good* selections and *discuss* them, and improve the individual mind regardless of supper, and heedful of punctuality. We can imagine such a circle on a frosty winter's night in a cosy drawing-room with bright lights and a glowing fire, passing a most delectable evening, a veritable "feast of reason and flow of soul." Criticism and comment should be largely encouraged, and the meeting regarded as a friendly gathering, not a social entertainment to amuse an unappreciative audience.

The German Club follows the Reading Club by right of seniority, and has also existed for some years; indeed we hear it was most successfully carried on both afternoon and evening during last winter. Few people realise the strong Teutonic element which obtains in Toronto, or are aware that the city boasts a German church where service is conducted every Sunday in the mother tongue, and where a large congregation assemble. The daughters of several of our prominent citizens, too, have completed their education at German schools, and a few of their sons at German universities. Whatever the reason may be, the fact is incontrovertible that Germany is much more strongly represented in Ontario than France, and the formation of a German Club has proved most beneficial in stimulating and fostering the knowledge acquired abroad, and also in developing an acquaintance with German literature. It was customary, we believe, at these meetings of a dozen or more young people of both sexes (the fair however predominating) to take up some play of Schiller, Goethe, Lessing, or other modern author, and read it aloud by turns, each individual being assigned his part. After an hour or more devoted to elocution, German conversation followed, and occupied the remainder of the evening, which closed about half-past ten. As several members of the club spoke the language fluently and the majority were more than novices, this interchange of ideas was not so formidable as it sounds, especially as there was always a higher court to appeal to when any point or expression was called in question, or the correct rendering of a sentence was desired.

Last, and decidedly least, comes the French Club, which led a struggling existence through part of one winter and autumn, and was conducted on the same principle as the German. Its career, however, was shortened owing to the little connection and apparent sympathy between Ontario and France: few educated people in Toronto are at all conversant with that language of the Court and the State, of diplomacy and etiquette, that versatile, witty tongue which can be epigrammatic to a fault, and can express itself in terms for which our English vocabulary offers no substitutes.

No person of intelligence and culture, who has any knowledge of French, can fail to appreciate its bright sparkling qualities or to enjoy its play of words; at the same time it does not surprise us that our sober citizens should prefer that their children should absorb the healthy, sound, moral atmosphere of Germany. In the realm of literature alone what a contrast the two languages offer, especially in reference to modern authors! France may possess a wider reputation, and has achieved greater successes in the drama of the present day, than her enemy. Her language is admirably suited to brilliant repartee and stage effect, and, besides, there is inborn theatrical instinct in the French character: it is a nation of actors and actresses from the cradle to the grave. Several of the best plays produced upon the English stage, such as "Diplomacy," "A Scrap of Paper," "The Ironmaster," and others whose names escape us, have been adapted and found their way across the Channel with highly remunerative results to professional managers. Victor Sardou and Dumas fils are prolific and brilliant playwrights, and the divine Sara has also familiarised *even us* with her mother tongue. What shall we say, however, of the light literature of France, which our children, if they acquired the language, would naturally wish to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest, after a course of school classics, if they are not to sink into the slough of oblivion. Here we are brought face to face with the melancholy fact of the utter deterioration of the modern French novel. The realistic school inaugurated by Zola has given a death-blow to the old historical romances to which Dumas treated us. One writer now appears to vie with another in producing the most truthful and material photographs of poor, weak human nature. French novels have always had a bad reputation, and a naughty, wicked flavour

since the days of Paul de Kock and Eugene Sue; but George Sand, Balzac, Victor Hugo, and Alfred de Vigny, all, with the exception of some few works, wrote books which our daughters could read without a blush. As much cannot be said for the productions of our contemporaries; in fact, after a perusal of a number of novels that have lately been issued, we are forced to the conclusion that they are utterly unfitted for the eyes of our maidens to rest upon, and cannot be edifying to any age or sex. Zola is universally admitted to be without the pale of civilization; he writes for the masses, and his materialistic tendencies are really appalling: with him all things are lawful and all things are also expedient. Doubtless he is a great descriptive word-painter, after Hogarth, but like the latter his pictures, though effective, are coarse and repulsive in tone; he neither paints a moral nor adorns a tale. Alphonse Daudet has, we suppose, the next widest reputation. Some few years ago *Blackwood's Magazine* devoted a long article to a most favourable criticism of his early work, "Le Nabal," "Numa Roumestan," and "Jack" receiving special mention. The two first are extremely powerful studies of the two men who give their titles to the books, "Le Nabal" being drawn from life and a well-known figure in Parisian society. Since writing them he has given to the world "Froment Jeune et Risler Aine"; in this work, however, he strays away from the right path, and falls into crooked ways with vicious plots of adultery. Alas for the future of French literature! The realistic school has been made so popular by the force of bad example that every writer now dips in his thumb to pull out some plum more rotten than his neighbour has secured, and the result is a flood of unprofitable books. Jules Claretie, Henri Greville, and Dumas fils, all contribute their quota of corrupt material to oppose the tide of mental progress and elevation.

The *Revue des Deux Mondes* even, which a few years since was regarded as quite a high-class periodical, is now no better than the rest; its three and four part stories are mere tissues of vice and immorality. In fact, of all the French authors we have read during the past six months George Ohnet is the only one we can confidently recommend to the rising generation. His "Maitre de Forge," adapted and played upon the English stage as "The Ironmaster," is a most powerful and pathetic story of provincial life. He has just published another novel, "Les Dames de Croix Mort," which will, we trust, conduce to a literary renaissance. Where does the pride and glory of the French Academy, so much vaunted by Matthew Arnold, come in? Has this noble body of eminent men no voice in matters of taste and morality? If not, its sphere of usefulness is sadly limited.

In refreshing contrast to France is the light literature of Germany—we use the adjective "light" advisedly; it is scarcely applicable to those authors who err in their novels on the side of a heavy, pedantic style, often making their characters mere instruments to develop their philosophical theories and ideas, to carry on long metaphysical discussions,—this fault being particularly remarkable in the works of Freytag and Auerbach, "Soll und Haben," "Das Landhaus am Rhein," etc. Hackleander, on the contrary, is a very humorous, fascinating writer. His "Neue Don Quixotte" and "Europaen Schlavens-leben" are excellent social studies. Friedrich Spielhagen is a writer of romances also with social tendencies. To Paul Heyse and George Ebers, we are indebted for truly intellectual treats. The "Weltkindern" and "In Paradise" of the former, and the "Egyptian Princess" of the latter have caused their fame to be spread abroad in many lands. Among female authors we have Clara Mundt, whose *nom de plume* was Louise Mühbach, and who wrote a long series of historical romances, where fiction was superior to facts; also Eugenie Johns, known in literature as E. Marlitt; her best novels are "Countess Gisela" and "Gold Else." In every branch of literature—in the drama, with Goethe, Schiller, Lessing, Werner, Von Kotzebue, and Koerner; in poetry, with the two first named, Heine, Weiland, Ritur, Uhland, and a score of lesser lights; in prose, with the novelists above mentioned,—we have legitimate material to place in the hands of our young people, which will both elevate and improve their minds and develop their brain-power. For German is a language always open to study—indeed its intricate construction and involved sentences seem to court it; while, without being puritanical or illiberal, we must condemn modern French literature as of the earth, earthy, in the lowest sense, and own with a sigh that the mighty are indeed fallen since the days of Fenelon, Bossuet, La Fontaine, Boileau, Racine, Le Rochefoucauld, Madame de Sevigné, and Saint-Simon and a host of others, who shed their light upon the age of Louis Quatorze in the seventeenth century.

L. C.

DR. ADAM CLARK, who had a strong aversion to pork, was called upon to say grace at a dinner where the principal dish was a roast pig. He was reported to have said: "O Lord, if Thou canst bless under the gospel what Thou didst curse under the law, bless this pig."