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LITERARY PABULUM.

A SORT of mania has been raging all over England and the United States of America lately. Its chief symptom is a literary one, being unbounded curiosity to know what other people would read from an eclectic standpoint. Yet it counts most of its victims among the great unliterary. At first it was only distinguished people like Mr. Ruskin whose opinions were solicited in the interest of the public, but the desire seemed to thrive on its gratification until it included all sorts and conditions of authors, from Sir John Lubbock and Mr. Morley to the people who have told in the *Forum* about "books that have helped" them. The weeklies and the dailies have taken it up, and the very welkin rings with literary preferences. The discussion has spread to the non-professional, and the Philistine of the stock market and the lotos-eater of the drawing-room have joined issues upon it. It is thought to be edifying. It is said to be useful. It is known to be popular, and therefore editors nobly surrender their columns to it. This self-sacrificing desire to elevate the taste of the masses in the way they want to have it elevated is characteristic of modern journalism.

At first sight it looks reasonable enough, this demand to be told which are the "best" books for a person of limited leisure—and in this busy new country we are all people of limited leisure—to read. The mass of printed matter copyrighted every season upon all subjects is a little appalling to anybody who wants to keep abreast of "current literature." That phrase, by the way, was well invented. Most of it is truthfully described as "current." That is the consoling part of it. "The fashion wears out more apparel than the man," in printed stuff as well as clothes and carpets, and *bric-à-brac*. Conscious though one may be, however, that three quarters of the publications that are piled on the bookseller's counter will not survive the century, the multitude of them is none the less confusing. The critics should help us, but the critics we have not always with us. The critics, moreover, honest and conscientious though they generally are, are but men even as we, and yet unlike us, and must be governed to a certain extent by their prejudices. Doubtless our critical replica exists, and criticises somewhere if we could but find him, but where is he? The needle which nobody has found yet in the proverbial bundle of hay is discoverable in comparison. As for the rest, when they beguile us into buying a book we don't like, it is small consolation to give it away with the incontrovertible quotation in the Latin grammars about the autocracy of taste. And so, remembering the distinction between books and literature, we look helplessly about, and wish somebody who speaks with authority would make it for us.

But our wise friends do not come within a quarter of a century of today's literature. Carlyle did, when he enjoined his faithful Jeannie to "read me" among other people, but the average eminent person gathers his

robes about him and travels off to Plato. From this somewhat remote beginning he comes forward his fifty or one hundred steps, according to the number of works he is asked to designate, toward our time. The last one does not leave him within hailing distance of Mr. Howells or Mr. James, gentlemen both engaged in developing a school of fiction most closely and subtly related to the conditions and progress of our time, of which we all should know something. So the decision of authority as to the best books to read is no ark of safety for us in this latter day flood.

Apart from this, there is something very like fiction in the idea that any individual, however familiar with the walks of literature, can properly inform another individual whom he has never seen, whose occupation, habits of thought, religion, diet, and grandmother he does not know, as to what the unknown can most profitably read. Still more unreasonable does it appear when the information is addressed to several hundred thousand individuals, all differing in these important respects. Which of us would be content to abide by another person's—even an epicure's—decision as to the food regimen most enjoyable and most beneficial for all mankind! And are not essays more than *entremets*, and poems more than puddings? Above all, is it not foolish to expect to be greatly profited by the opinion of genius in this matter? The gods thrive on nectar and ambrosia, but common people must have their mutton.

These are the "honest doubts"—as the economic Thomases say about Commercial Union—of a person who has observed the literary application of the old saying that one man's meat is another man's poison. Every intelligent person's mind is supplied with infinite tiny feelers that stretch out in all directions, and instinctively grasp what is good and nutritious for the soul they belong to,—that is, if no evil will commands them to pamper the baser man instead; in which latter case the opinion of authority avails nothing.

I have heard the unregenerate say that in this matter the opinion of authority is—Humbug!

SARA J. DUNCAN.

THE PROVINCIAL PREMIERS AND THE VETO QUESTION.

If the Quebec Conference had been an assemblage of gentlemen brought together for the purpose of discussing, among other things, how they might best rid themselves of vexatious interference in a matter personal to themselves, their resolution respecting the disposition of the veto power would be intelligible. That Mr. Mowat should suggest, and that the rest should concur in the suggestion, that the power of supervising their actions should be placed in the hands of one whom experience has shown to be disposed to give them at least full justice is only natural and to be expected. But the Quebec Conference was nothing of the sort. Its members were the Premiers of all the more important provinces in the Dominion, convened for the purpose of deliberating upon the relations of the various Provincial Governments to the central Government, and their resolutions were a series of suggestions, which, if adopted, would in their opinion materially reduce the friction which the consideration of those relations disclosed. It is important to note that, with one exception, these gentlemen were all Liberals. In order to appreciate fully the import of the resolution in question, it will be necessary to get a clear view of those who complain of the unjust use of power on the part of the Federal Government. It is not the people of any one province who claim to be especially aggrieved, though the disallowance of the Manitoba Railway Bill was probably what led to the resolution. The adoption of the resolution by the Conference has put the case on a different footing. The real complainants now are the representatives of the people of Canada sitting in her Provincial Legislatures; and those of whom complaint is made are the representatives of the same people of Canada, sitting in her Federal Government. If there ever was a case which, by its existence, designated its judge, this surely is one. Who should decide it but the people of Canada themselves?

It is not necessary however to impugn the motives of the Provincial Premiers, in suggesting that the veto power should be placed beyond the reach of the people of Canada altogether. The recent threatened trouble in Manitoba and the conviction that it was the oppressive power of a great corporation that prevented the Government from granting the desired relief, would go far to make some extraordinary remedy seem necessary.