

heart of the fundamental truth of religion, and at the same time feeling that it lies not in his power to solve the tremendous problems presented to the world, may quietly await their solution at other hands, using uncritically the offices of the Church, and trusting that time and conscientious inquiry will sift what is vital from what is not vital, and reconcile to each other the different parts of truth. But a clergyman has to preach, to teach, to answer questions, to give others assurance of their faith, to pledge his word continually to his parishioners for all those facts and doctrines which Science and Criticism are calling in question. It is true, as the writer reminds us, that in 1865 an Act was passed modifying the iron-clad subscription to the Articles which bigotry had framed with its usual recklessness of conscience, and imposed not only upon candidates for Orders but upon boys at their entrance to the University. For the particular has been substituted a general assent which, however, as was observed at the time, must comprehend all the particulars of which the dogmatic system is made up. But, apart from subscription, the performance of service, the reading of the lessons, the ministration of the Sacraments are tests in themselves. Truth or falsehood, as we had occasion to say before, may be taught through a Ritual as well as through a Confession. The Bishops, according to the writer of the paper, do their best to reconcile consciences by liberal interpretation; but the limits within which this can be honestly done are narrow. For the Church at large and the nation, the thing to be feared is, that there will be a secession of intellect from the Clerical Order and a reign of mere Ritualism and Obscurantism, which, as the light cannot be shut out for ever, will lead, in the end, to more utter scepticism and worse ruin.

THE good and evil of College examinations are a stock question for the opening of the Academical year. Professor Max Müller is now brought forward as a witness on the adverse side. He says, we are told, that an examination is a mere lottery. A mere lottery it cannot be if it is conducted with tolerable care and judgment. The results usually correspond very closely with the opinions previously formed of the candidates by their teachers and their classmates. Reasonable anticipations are at least as seldom disappointed in the result of an examination as they are in practical life. In fact, examinations have some claim to respect as exceptional specimens of fair-play. But admitting the imperfection of the test, we must ask what mode other than examination there is of ascertaining a student's progress in his work? Professor Max Müller, though a very eminent man of letters, is perhaps not the best judge of this question. He has a favourite study to which he has always been devoted, and which he would have pursued without any examination to excite his industry or guide his aim. But ordinary students require both a stimulus and a mark. In Lord Althorp's life there is a remarkable passage showing that a college examination, by arousing him to exertion and making him conscious of his powers, turned him from a mere sportsman into one of the most useful of statesmen. That nerve and quickness, as well as knowledge, tell in examinations is true; but so they do in life. Men too often overstrain themselves in competitive examinations, and against this the voice of warning cannot be too loudly raised. But the sufferers are usually not steady students; they are men who put off all their work to the last. A student who reads regularly a certain number of hours every day, does not work too late at night, does not smoke too much, lives a temperate life and takes sufficient exercise and relaxation, is never hurt by an examination; and the preservation of health is essential to success in the examination itself, since without health both nerve and memory will fail.

THE IMMORAL IN FICTION.

In the sphere of literature not many subjects have been so bewritten as that of the proper function of the immoral in works of fiction. The far greater part of all the writing, however, has been of no avail. What tending down of "broad" expression or elimination of narrative nastiness has been effected is much less owing to what is known as moral criticism, than to a general modification of society's customs and manners. Productions of the immoral standard of "Tom Jones" or "Peregrine Pickle" would now be considered outrageous and hyperbolic, more because they would be anachronistic in treatment than in subject. Such nastiness is no doubt rife to-day; but people have the decency not to speak of it for delectation. But, though no conspicuous agents in this change, discussion and criticism are not to be disdained. For, apart entirely from the frequent opening of the flood-gates of cant and hypocrisy upon the question, and the consequent depreciation of the supposed value of the better kind of criticism; apart from all this, of the subject is one insusceptible of definite treatment, and to prescribe rules is quite impracticable. As the dramatists would say, the difficulty lies not

so much with the subject itself as with the action, and to circumscribe the latter were to circumscribe genius and taste. In the hands of one writer a subject may be piloted through innumerable immoral shoals and rocks with safety, while under the guidance of another shipwreck would be inevitable. Perhaps the embarrassment of the critic of the immoral may here be expressed by saying that he is obliged to assume chiefly a negative position: to ostensibly circumscribe and confine, while yet conscious that to many cases his strictures are impertinent. Such being generally the position of moral criticism, it is interesting to read the two pseudonymous articles in the September issues of the *North American* and *Contemporary Reviews* in temerarious advocacy of well-nigh unlimited freedom being allowed the novelist; the article in the former *Review* being by "Ouida," that in the latter by "Vernon Lee." Mdlle. de la Ramé's essay, while agreeing with the fundamental assumption of latitude in fiction, is so bizarre in detail as to detain us but a moment. It need only be said that the writer contends—and her sincerity is evinced by her own books—that, because English fiction does not care to openly discuss illegitimate love, the senses and passions, it is "grotesque," and that not to be erethistic and erotic, or to look to matrimony as the event of love, is to be "bourgeois." This is probably enough.

"Vernon Lee's" article is a much more elaborate, and in every way more able, discussion. It is argumentative, in the form of a "dialogue"; but there is no difficulty in identifying her own opinions with the utterances of "Baldwin." This character states his position thus: "I want absolute liberty of selection and treatment of subjects, to the exclusion of all abnormal suggestion, of all prurient description, and of all pessimistic misrepresentation. I want the English novelist to have the right of treating the social and moral sides of all relations in life, as distinguished from treating their physical sides." Both the English and French schools, therefore, are to be condemned: the English, because they fear Mrs. Grundy too much, the French, because they give a false impression of life, because it offers "as something we instinctively accept as a generalization" that which is merely "an accidental, exceptional heaping up of revolting facts." In her own novel "Vernon Lee" may be supposed to have illustrated these her views, and with the aid of that illustration there need be little hesitancy in repudiating them. The entire plot of "Miss Brown" certainly comes under the head of a "pessimistic misrepresentation," and approximates so closely to morbidity as to be distinct without any considerable difference. "Prurient" suggestion—true it does not go into minute "description" here—it is full of; and of "abnormal suggestion"—the expression is a trifle hazy—there is no exiguity.

Throughout this article is urged the argument which is most frequently, employed in justification of introducing the immoral into the novel, namely: that of imparting knowledge of the world. There is indubitably an enormous amount of immorality in this world, and therefore it is contended that fiction should display its workings, its effects and its influences—always, however, as euphemistically as possible. The school of fiction, "Vernon Lee" contends, which does not do this is "pernicious, because it permits people, or rather, let us say women (for the ethics of novels are, after all, framed entirely for the benefit or detriment of women) (*sic*) to live on in the midst of a partial, and therefore falsified, notion of life." A girl, according to this, should be made conversant about the "realities of life" (more euphemism for adulteries, intrigues and lusts), else is her knowledge of only partial "practical utility." Bah! If it is not sophistry, how foolish is all this pretended necessity for "knowledge of the world"! Is that "a ridiculously partial idea of life" which believes it not permeated with sensuality and lawless self-gratification? Must the girl be, like "Vernon Lee's" heroine, familiar with "nudities and Elizabethan dramatists"? Must she know of the damned brute who seduces innocence, and must she follow the probable course of his victim to the brothel? This is life, the life of thousands of girls once as pure as she. Balzac somewhere says that if the young wife but knew the past life of her husband she would be completely horrified. Must we tell her of it? Yes, much of all this a girl must know; but she should learn it at her mother's knee, in the secrecy of private and inviolable converse. Fiction is primarily designed for amusement, and while it may inculcate a moral lesson, it must not play upon the mind a *can-can*, or imprint upon it a loathsome picture. "Baldwin" expresses this when he says: "Commit to the intellect, which is that which registers, re-arranges and develops, only such things as we may profit by having registered, re-arranged and developed." True, as we have seen, "Vernon Lee" disclaims in words the French school; but it is rather to the "physical detail" that she objects, and once or twice her realism is in the vein of Zola. Let those who write about immorality in their novels defend it on some less diaphanous pretext than imparting a "necessary knowledge of life." If a girl is to be trained to consort with *hetairæ* then, of course, the