

especially was watched with careful attention, and any book that seemed to overstep the bounds was promptly stopped—by the prosecution of its publisher. Many will remember how the first attempts to issue the stories of Zola were at once checked in this way. Nowadays, Zola has received a kind of apotheosis, and is regarded as a kind of moral prophet with a perhaps regrettable freedom of speech. And it is quite certain that British authors turn out works by the score which would have made the French novelist blush. It is one of the most curious symptoms of the literary output of the present day, that it seems to have divested itself of the last shreds of modesty. There is nothing which may not be said, and the shackles which writers of fiction once alleged that they felt as a restraint have long since been thrown to the winds.

There is nothing that sells a book better than a reputation for freedom from the ordinary restraints of decency. If by any chance a combination of piety and indecency can be achieved, as in the case of certain popular successes, the blend is even more irresistible. But there can be no doubt that there is a public which enjoys what would have shocked the readers of the last generation, and there has been until recently no protest against this kind of novel. And the least pleasant feature of the case is that it is apparently women who are the greatest offenders in this way, and who at the same time constitute the greatest part of the special public to which this rubbish is addressed. One hears often enough people say that it is not safe to place a French novel in the hands of the young. There was a time when an English novel was supposed to be quite safe. It was, indeed, a complaint against British fiction that it was addressed too exclusively to the bread and butter miss. That can no longer be said. We doubt if French fiction can show anything which for impure suggestion and sheer unpleasantness is to compare with certain English works of recent years.

The great mass of the novel-reading public are finical about their beer or beef or tobacco; but they seem to have no standard by which to judge of the quality of the fiction on which they feast their minds. Even parents seem, as a rule, to have little or no sense of their duty in regard to the sort of books that are perused by their growing boys and girls. We know of cases in which maidens in their teens were permitted to have free access to malodorous works of certain French and English writers of the fleshly school—productions which to the healthy mind are what a whiff of assafoetida is to the sense of smell. The 'Hawke's Bay Herald' says in this connection:—

'The freedom with which the young are allowed the run of the library nowadays certainly raises a serious question. Are the minds of a great body of the reading public, and especially of boys and girls, at an impressionable age, to be contaminated by a train of filthy acts, and a dialogue of filthy suggestion? The case of the modern novel is so serious that we wonder it has not attracted the attention of societies which make the suppression of vice their end. A prominent journalist recently offered to supply half a dozen marked novels, any one of which he said would secure the conviction of the author and publisher. The offer, as far as we know, has not been taken.'

For many, even among the young, sensational novel-reading is not so much a recreation as a passion—something akin to the taste of toppers for strong waters, or of Anglo-Indians for fiery condiments. For the young, the urgency of the danger of unrestricted access to fiction is sufficiently indicated in the extracts given above from our Hawke's Bay contemporary. Some time ago, Herr Wengraf gave, in the Vienna 'Literatur-Zeitung', some homely advice which may be usefully taken to heart by the general reader. He counsels all and sundry never to read (1) books with catchpenny titles; (2) novels in more than one volume; (3) works on popular science, the authors of which are not known as reliable; (4) books of which puffs or unanimous notices have appeared in the press. Attention even to these counsels would banish from the hands of the general reader many of those 'risky' books whose only mission is (in the words of Perreyve) to corrupt the mind and to blot out the boundary lines of honor.

## Notes

### 'Catholic Marriages'

We are pleased to state that the demand for the 'Tablet' publication, 'Catholic Marriages', shows no sign of abatement. Large orders keep pouring in from Australia. Many members of the clergy in Tasmania, Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, and other States of the Commonwealth, are procuring bulky parcels of many dozens of copies each for circulation among their people. In some of the dioceses, the distribution of the publication is being taken up with much cordiality by conferences of the clergy. Our Management sent in one day as many as one hundred and seventy-two copies of the publication to a single order across the Tasman Sea. Our first issue was unusually large for a colonial publication; but we hope that a second, and even a third, edition will be called for.

### A 'Bull'

A 'bull' has been described as a mental no-thoroughfare. But most genuine 'bulls' contain a truth—but a truth that might advantageously have been otherwise expressed. Of such is the example given by the Sunday-school superintendent (as reported in a Presbyterian contemporary): 'In choosing his men, Gideon did not select those who laid aside their arms and threw themselves down to drink; he took those who watched with one eye and drank with the other.'

### 'Superstition'

A Northern contemporary rails in a superior way at what it is pleased to term the 'superstition' of believers in the old verities of the Christian faith. When we find a secular contemporary flailing 'superstition', we forthwith turn to its advertising columns. And there we usually find enough dynamite to knock its 'superior' sort of homily into smithereens. The case under consideration here proves to be no exception to the general rule. In two columns we find the paper making itself thrice the sounding-board of 'superstition', the platform of the fortune-teller, the 'astro-mathematician', and the 'clairvoyant' medical impostor. It rather discounts the verdict of a paper when, side by side with its loftily-expressed scorn of 'superstition' in religion, we find it making itself the medium of propagating some of the worst and most fraudulent forms of superstition. Butler tells us how

'Augustus having, b' oversight,  
Put on his left shoe 'fore his right,  
Had like to have been slain that day  
By soldiers mutiny'ng for pay.'

People who have not entirely lost the sense of humor can afford a merry laugh at the opera-bouffe 'philosophy' that denounce the Augustan superstition in one column, and sells it at six shillings an inch in the next. Our secular contemporaries that flail 'superstition' should, for sweet consistency's sake, eliminate it from their advertising columns.

### A Menace to Health

Judging by the remarks of a number of medical men interviewed by the Auckland 'Herald', there is as great a menace to public health in dirt as in adulteration. 'There is', said one medical man to the 'Herald', 'a great deal of dirt about our streets in summer, and all sorts of food should be carefully protected, more particularly meat, fruit, and vegetables that are eaten uncooked. It seems to me to be a relic of barbarism that meat should be hung up in an open shop and exposed to all the desiccated disease germs that are blown off the street by the wind in

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