



NOTES



An Ex-Cathedratic Medico

A doctor who knows how to write is likely to produce either a very delightful book or a very unpleasant one. He has special opportunities of studying human nature in all its phases, and to the making of his book, besides his expert science, there will go, for better or worse, the bent of his own heart. Thus, it is that while some doctors have given us some of our most beautiful and elevating volumes, others have done the opposite. Before us now are two volumes—"best sellers"—by a Sydney man of medicine: one is called *Post Mortem* and the other, with no visible reason for the different name, is named *Mere Mortals*. The words *post mortem* have an unpleasant connotation, and both these publications are decidedly unpleasant. The author is a typical narrow-minded, lop-sided thinker who is unable to see beyond the field of vision of his microscope. He abolishes the supernatural and scoffs at religion because they do not come to him to have their pulse felt or their blood pressure tested; and, with his limited knowledge, he pronounces with wonderful cocksureness on all known things and several others besides. Taking a number of famous or notorious persons who lived long ago he tries to make the events of their lives fit in with his notion of how certain—usual ugly—ailments which he thinks they had would have influenced them. Henry VIII, Anne Boleyn, Queen Mary, Philip II, Don John of Austria, Martin Luther, Schopenhauer, and some other men and women of good or ill report in the pages of history, are reviewed in this way. Out of it he makes a sensational series, peppered here and there with enough spice to attract the jaded taste of the uncritical and pagan readers of today. Dealing with Luther, he more than once refers to a *Life* of the "reformer" which he says was written by Hartmann and Grisar, or, again, by Messrs. Hartmann and Grisar. Such a reference makes us suspect that he never opened the work he quotes, and if he did open it his faculty of scientific observation must be poor indeed. Hartmann and Grisar never collaborated for the making of a book about Luther. The author was Father Hartmann Grisar, S.J., whose name ought to be well known to any mediocre student of history. We mention this bad mistake because it helps us to classify the Sydney doctor accurately.

Donn Byrne

A correspondent writes to ask us who is the Donn Byrne, to whose Irish novel we recently made some reference in these columns. Many people think Donn Byrne is an American, while others say he is Irish. Both are right or wrong, according to how you look at it. He was born in New York, in 1889, but he ought to have been born in Dublin. He came to Ireland when he was three years old, and lived during his youth there with his father, who was an Irish architect. He was educated in Trinity College,

and, as a student, was as much in evidence on the playing fields as he was in the classrooms. He can box with most men, and in a land where good riders are common he was a horseman. He has rambled round the world, and, with eyes that see and ears that hear, learned to know men and things. Hence there is the warm throb of life in his books, and your interest is fired by his vivid sentences. He has, like Stephens, the Celtic suddenness and magic which convert prose into poetry; but, unlike Stephens, his prose is the best of his work, so far as we can tell by what he has achieved up to the present. His fame came first in America, where his three successful novels: *The Wind Blowseth*, *Marco Polo*, and *The Foolish Matrons*, were published. The discerning critics of London soon became aware of him, and his books were sought after by the cognoscenti. His wife is not unknown to fame. She is the Dolly Byrne who, with Gilda Varesi, wrote the comedy, *Enter Madame*, which has had long runs both in New York and London. He left Ireland on his wanderings when he was a youth of twenty-two, and soon after married in Buenos Ayres. After much moving about he seems to have settled down to steady literary work, and, with his fresh laurels on his brow, has come back to his own people, where we hope he will continue to draw inspiration from the wealth of beautiful material found in Ireland.

Loose Thinking

The low level of modern education is evident in the lack of logic displayed by the average correspondent who writes to the daily paper a criticism of some of the profoundest problems of humanity, after five minutes of intense study. Slipshod English and fallacies of every kind are the common coin nowadays, and only the few are capable of feeling ashamed when they make a mistake either in grammar or logic. As a satire on the prevailing methods of reasoning, the following example of the up-to-date scientific method is not bad (the passage is from *John o'London's Weekly*):

I commented a week ago on this quaint syllogism. A Wiltshire correspondent appears to have met it in what he describes as its original form, thus:

"I was drunk on Monday on whisky and soda, on Tuesday on gin and soda, and on Wednesday on brandy and soda. The only constant factor in all these cases was the soda, therefore the soda was the cause of my intoxication."

My correspondent adds: "Many a scientific worker has based a conclusion on no better evidence. I refrain from pointing out the obvious source of the inaccuracy." The obvious source of inaccuracy seems to me to be the assumption that the constant factor is necessarily the guilty one. At that rate the same glass or tumbler might be held to be the cause of the intoxication.

Even great minds make slips almost as ridiculous as this. When Mill defined a cause as the invariable antecedent of an invariable consequent, Ward asked him slyly if Wednesday was the cause of Thursday.

Clearness and Compactness

The Greeks were models of clearness and compactness of style. They wasted no words; they made their meaning plain; they said what they had to say. In our time the best French writers have preserved the Greek tradition, and even mediocre men among them are far superior to our best. From the following pronouncement on dancing, by the Presbyterian Assembly, in Dunedin, one can see at a glance that the bonny city is earning its title of the Athens of the South:

"That the General Assembly anew affirms the principles of liberty of conscience, the right of the individual to determine his course of conduct according to a conscience instructed by the Holy Scriptures and enlightened by the Spirit of God, but a right to be used with reverence for the personality of others. (b) Dancing is one of the matters upon which every Christian has full liberty of conscience, and therefore the Assembly disclaims entirely any right or power to dictate to its people on the subject. It believes that honest differences of opinion on dancing exist, and that the question calls for the exercise of the very difficult virtue of true Christian tolerance which will enable one to say 'Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.' (c) In view of the popular character of dancing as an amusement the Assembly thinks it is its right and duty to call the serious attention of its people to certain aspects of this question. It deplors the excesses and abuses of the present dancing craze, regrets that many modern dances are unworthy of our Christian civilisation and culture, and grieves exceedingly that the open and secret use of liquor at public and private dances has produced disastrous results in not a few lives. (d) The General Assembly accordingly warns parents and guardians of the dangers that threaten young life, exhorts hosts and hostesses to discharge their responsibilities with scrupulous care and caution, and urges its members that before exercising their liberty of action, they should fully consider the facts and act as Christian love and wisdom direct. (e) While acknowledging the rights and privileges of church courts and the governing bodies of the church institutions, the Assembly deprecates dancing at functions connected with the church, and regards the letting of church halls for dances for the purpose of raising funds for Christian work as most unbecoming, if not reprehensible and appeals to congregations to cherish the ideal of direct giving as the method most consistent with the dignity and spirituality of the church. (f) The Assembly further affirms that the only solution of modern social problems lies in the positive preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom."

No man can ever attain nobility of character without sacrifice. Struggle wins all that is beautiful and worthy in life.

Alex. Aitken

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