

NOTES

A Jack of all Trades

The scholars of the Middle Ages were men of study, and what books they wrote were produced slowly and as the result of deep and vast learning in at least the subject with which they dealt. Often one book was the fruit of a lifetime of labor and thought, and such a book was sent forth as nearly perfect as genius and industry could make it. *Nous avons changé tout cela.* Nowadays the majority of authors throw off books as lightly as they change their hats, and it has become a rare thing to find a truly scholarly and profound work on any subject. *Timeo hominem unius libri*—I fear the man of one book—may be variously interpreted; but if it means that the man who devotes himself to the mastery of a single subject is to be respected it is a sound principle. Equally true would it be to say: *Timeo hominem plurimum librorum*—I fear the man of many books—in the sense that persons who turn out books without study and without sincerity are dangerous people. Of these the most notorious is Mr. Wells. Yesterday he gave us a novel about burglars, to-day a romance about Mars, to-morrow he publishes a study of Socialism, and for the day after he has ready a history of the universe. It goes without saying that no thinking man can pay the slightest attention to what so volatile a writer has to say on any subject; but that does not prevent the venal race of reviewers from lauding as the greatest work of the year each new business venture of Mr. Wells. With reference to his latest production, *America* says: "Many Americans are like him. But that this romancer gains acceptance as an historian is a sad commentary on American scholarship."

What Einstein Saw

The famous scientist, Einstein has visited America. When asked for his impressions this was among the things he said: "Your girls dress like aristocrats. I saw one attired in the most up-to-date style. I thought she must be the daughter of a millionaire, but she turned out to be the typist. Even your working girls dress like countesses." His observation holds good for New Zealand also. Thousands of our girls put all their earnings into clothes, often into shoddy, with disastrous moral and economical results. Their training is all in the direction of extravagance. Thrift, self-denial, foresight are forgotten; and no money is saved for a rainy day. Girls who imagine such display is likely to catch for them good husbands make a serious mistake. A sensible man thinks twice before undertaking the support of a woman whose clothes' bill is evidently of large proportions. Common sense will tell him that the fine feathers do not guarantee a fine bird, and he will look round when it comes to the selection of a partner for life for a girl to whom character means more than complexion, and who is more solicitous for the things that matter than for those that she wears. The philosophy of clothes is a subject that modern girls do not study. They are foolish if they think that the modern man neglects it as they do. Here and there one will leap in the dark, but for the one there are ten who will hesitate and weigh ways and means well before proposing to a girl who carries all her worldly goods on her back. Hence, some unhappy marriages and many late marriages. In the old days of long ago when children were trained to honor their parents an appeal to fathers and mothers might be effective; now the girl with the latch-key who reads books which she does not consider fit for mother is beyond parental control and, like thrift, reverence, manners, and morals are considered old-fashioned.

Novel-Reading

We remember the time when it was considered "fast" to read a novel with a yellow back. We remember when Miss Braddon was near the edge and

Ouida beyond it. There was no self-respecting woman then who would read books such as girls read nowadays without scruple if not without sin. Times have changed and not for the better. Yet, it is unwise to condemn novels too sweepingly. Like most things, there are good and bad novels and a reader of sound judgment and good taste will know where to draw the line between them. First of all it ought not be forgotten that Catholics are forbidden by the law of the Church as well as by the law of nature to read obscene works. In the next place, they are forbidden to read books that are likely to prove a source of temptation for them. And what is dangerous for one may not be at all dangerous for another. Persons who can read objectively and with a detached mind may well read books which would be fraught with danger for persons of a neurotic disposition. No general rule can be laid down regarding books that treat of sex, but it is safe to say that as a rule they are not worth reading by those who might safely read them, and for others they are not to be recommended. It used to be the custom to denounce "penny dreadfuls." We could never see very much wrong in them. It is not the stories of Deadwood Dick and of Colorado Pete that do the harm. They merely fascinate the minds of the young much as a good detective story fascinates their elders, and as far as our memory serves us they are at least clean. Certainly, compared with the daily papers they are admirable. Contrasted with the works of certain female writers of to-day they are positively edifying. And, with all due respect be it said, apart from style, they are in the same class as many romances by writers of good repute, such as R. L. Stevenson and Rider Haggard. One class of novels may be recommended safely. The following extract from the *Bombay Examiner* deals clearly with them:

"There are novels whose chief aim is to portray the character and conduct of human beings as such. These are perhaps the highest form of novel-writing. The theme must be something serious and worth while, the characters true to life, the ethical issue elevating and instructive. Without assuming the character of a sermon or moral treatise, they skilfully serve the purpose of one; presenting the virtues and vices in concrete lives, and making one feel the attractiveness of the one and the repulsiveness of the other, thus doing us good in an unobtrusive and welcome way, under cover of entertainment which refreshes and amuses us at the same time."

As a general rule for guidance the same writer says:

"In the selection of novels, therefore, I would recommend the reader to select such books as give ethical or informational or moral value combined with healthy entertainment. Still I would never wish to exclude any story or novel which is merely entertaining in the way of clean sensationalism or healthy amusement; books which contain the weird and uncanny, such as ghosts and magic; the fascination of a tangled plot; the gruesome sensationalism of crimes, such as murder, robbery or fraud; hair's breadth escapes and the like."

Lastly, he adds:

"I do not condemn these things, but define their functions. They are like pegs and cock-tails, concentrated stimulants at the time, but of no permanent value."

Hence, while reading of such books as *San Celestino*, *When We Were Boys*, or *Loss and Gain* is to be recommended, it would be wrong to condemn temperate indulgence in Sherlock Holmes and the novels of William Le Queux. One thing that we can recommend with certainty is the cultivation of the reading habit, even if only novels be read. It is a remedy against idleness and as such invaluable.

For the first time since before the war, Mass was celebrated at the High Altar of the Cathedral at Verdun on June 23. Former President Poincaré attended the services which were held in commemoration of the battle of Verdun.

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