

tion of the unclean spirit once you have imbibed a taste for pernicious reading. But give it up you must, before it has gained absolute sway over your soul. Later on it may be too late. You will be powerless for good, you will be ruined, and all hope of amendment be gone for ever.

Look at the hapless youth who has become a slave to the reading of novels. Time and health, and future prospects, virtue, true happiness, all are sacrificed to satisfy his morbid craving. He takes up the book, at first to while away an hour; but the plot thickens, and the interest therein increases; emotion succeeds emotion, and the alluring scenes captivate his whole being. Serious studies, prayer, the Sacraments, and all other duties become irksome and hateful. Whole hours are consumed in poring over and drinking in the poisoned pages. The day is too short to gratify this fascinating but fatal pleasure, and he who would not impose upon himself a like privation for aught that is ennobling wastes the best hours of night in unravelling the plot and finding out the end of a purely chimerical adventure. In these unguarded moments, in the silence of night, with no human eye to witness his folly, the wretched youth enters into all the passions so glowingly brought before his view. An imagined inconstancy fires his resentment; a forced separation overwhelms him with grief; an unlocked for meeting fills him with rapturous joy, pretended danger makes him shudder, and he or she who never wept over any real human suffering save perhaps their own sheds tears over the most absurd of sorrows. Should he light upon a passage which stirs and gratifies still more, he reads and pauses, and reads again till seduced beside himself, he seeks to clothe it with a palpable form, with the fulness of life and of strength, yet unconscious of the poison he is sucking in with such eagerness and delight. Fictitious passion arouses such emotion in his breast, that he identifies himself with the scenes he admires, and the faults and abominations of others he actually makes his own. The demon of impurity has seized him as his willing prey, wanton ideas fill his mind, unlawful desires are freely indulged; in a word, he is no longer the same, he is changed—corrupted.

Dearly beloved Brethren and children in Christ, it is no exaggeration to say that once a taste for such reading is cherished, it becomes a very passion, for many an unconquerable necessity, a second nature. One novel or pamphlet gives place to another. One volume is laid aside, only to take up another. All else is forgotten or forsaken. To read and read, such is the sole aim of the worthless but sinful existence. What countless hours are spent in this guilty pleasure? Yet does not the Almighty solemnly declare that on the last great day He will exact a strict account of every idle word, and of our inmost thoughts and deeds?

Ask those who give themselves up to such reading what they have reaped thereby? What knowledge they have acquired? What noble thoughts and impressions they retain? If they be frank they must confess that they have gained nothing, that absolutely nothing remains. But they mistake. Something, alas! they have gained, something has remained. A false judgment, an exalted imagination, extravagant, unreal, romantic thoughts and feelings. What is worse, they are wholly unconscious of this.

Poor deluded creatures, they are so familiar with the poison they continually imbibe that, blind to its effects, they know not themselves, but watch them, examine them closely, their manner of thinking and acting, and you will be convinced of the radical change. One day whilst a priest was giving a mission in a large city, a lady came and saluted him in such a silly, affected way that he at once said: 'I see, madam, that you are in the habit of reading novels!' 'Yes, Father, but they don't do me any harm, I merely read for amusement.' 'You know, my child,' the priest replied, 'that you must offer up all your actions to God, that even the most indifferent—your meals, sleep, recreations, are agreeable, when offered to Him, and taken with a view to His good pleasure.' 'I do, Father.' 'Well, then, offer Him the reading of your novels. Before taking up the seductive volume, throw yourself on your knees before your crucifix, and say, "My God, I am about to read this novel to please Thee; I am going to fill my mind, my imagination, and my soul with lying tales, seducing pictures, and feelings of sensual love. And all this I am going to do to fulfil the promises made at my Baptism, and renewed on the day of my First Communion, to procure Thy greater glory and the salvation of my immortal soul."'

'But, Father, I could never do that.' 'It would be merely mocking God.' 'But, my child, how could it be a mockery to offer a good action to God?' 'Well, but you know, Father!' 'Ah! I see, you feel that the book is not quite so harmless as you would fain have me believe. Yet I have put it before you in its least hurtful aspect. 'Tell me,' he added, 'were you formerly more pious than you are to-day?' 'Oh, yes, Father, especially at the time of my First Communion, and during my happy convent days.' 'Used you read such novels then?' 'Oh, no, Father, never.' 'Were you not heretofore more obedient to the inspirations of grace, more gentle towards others, more patient, and less addicted to luxury and foolish expense?'

'I was indeed.' 'Did you read novels?' 'No, Father, not at all.' 'Formerly you frequented the Sacraments with a holier relish and fidelity?' 'Alas! I did.' 'Were you not happier then?' 'God knows that I was.' 'And did you read such novels?' 'Oh, no, never,' she exclaimed, heaving a deep sigh. 'Well, then,' continued the priest, 'I have no more to say than that herein lay for you as for the great St. Theresa, the root of your misery and fault.'

Taught by a bitter experience, the lady gave up her pernicious reading, and very soon more serious, useful reading, more fervent prayers, restored to her soul her long lost peace and piety.

Be convinced that every bad book or paper is truly a 'curse,' with a prophetic view whereof the Prophet of old cried out, 'I see a volume flying . . . this is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the earth.'—Zach. v., 2-3. This curse, alas, is, nowadays, increased a thousand fold. The cursed torrent of bad books has burst all bounds. It has overthrown barriers hitherto deemed impassable. Hardly a town or a village where the vilest of vile literature reeking with moral filth has not borne the seeds of disorder and unbelief, of desolation, and spiritual death. Even those who dread the disorder are often forced to dwell in the midst of their mephitic atmosphere, breathing in the contagious breath with every breath of their life.

Dearly beloved, it is not enough to dread this pestilential atmosphere. It is not enough to shun the reading of impious and obscene books. It is not enough to keep from your homes, from your children and servants those romances which are a contagion for families and a very scourge for society. It is not enough to banish from your midst those journals which mingle in their columns with odious calumnies, insinuations, the most vile, and blasphemous the most horrible. It is not enough to spurn and despise those filthy productions in which the shameless writers, consulting only the ravings of their wicked imagination, transform into criminals persons the most worthy of esteem and veneration, and pour upon institutions the most sacred the hatred and contempt they would fain make their readers share with themselves. It were a shame and a disgrace and a crime crying to Heaven for vengeance, to admit any such into homes that call themselves Christians. Something more is required of you. The cursed evil has penetrated everywhere, the remedy must penetrate everywhere too. We must spread abroad the antidote of good doctrine to counteract the evil and enlighten souls, many of whom are more often seduced or abused than really guilty in themselves. We must be convinced of the fact that reading is one of the wants of our day. A universal craving, it must be satisfied. Vain were the thought to stem the torrent of bad books, unless we substituted good ones in their stead. Should we not place in the hands of those whom we would preserve, works which, whilst attractive and interesting, strengthen and ennoble the readers instead of corrupting and deceiving? Their ignorance does not protect from the contagion the poor and lowly removed far away from our cities. One must read within the humble cottage as well as within the stately mansion or sumptuous palace. There is no denying the fact. The question is what to give those who clamor for food for their intelligence. The question is to provide solid, sound, pure and palatable food, instead of the pernicious food they have had, perhaps, thrust upon them.

All honor to those, who, realising that the press itself must remedy the disorders of the press, encourage and help it by all means in their power! All honor to those who interest themselves in the Catholic Truth Societies where masterpieces, in their way, are written, and obtainable for the merest nominal sums. Here we have reason to rejoice to have within our reach so able an organ of truth as the *New Zealand Tablet*, which should be in the homes of every Catholic family. Happy the parishes where Catholic libraries are established and flourish! We know, by sad experience, how difficult it is to get our young people to use these libraries, which are chiefly established in their interests. Without discouraging love of legitimate sport and amusement, is it not a deplorable fact that our youth are inclined to make of it a very religion? Do they not too often sacrifice for sport and pastime the delights of home and friends, and entertaining and instructive literature? How many of our people are familiar with the splendid publications like the *Dublin Review*, *The Month*, *The Ave Maria*, *Ben-zigers' Magazine*, *The Austral Light*, *The Christian Family*, *The Australian Annals of the Sacred Heart of Jesus*, *The Annals of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart*?

These reviews and magazines contain articles often worthy of being not only read, but preserved, whilst some of them have good stories both interesting and instructive. Do your duty, dearly beloved, and whilst you conceive a horror of every kind of corrupting, immoral or dangerous literature, make strenuous efforts to encourage the spread of good, instructive, yet interesting, books, magazines, newspapers, and reviews.

Let us, in conclusion, exhort you to make the study of the inspired pages of Holy Writ your daily delight. Read and meditate the sublime books of the *Following of Christ*, the lives of the Saints, any pure literary work wherein you will find true wisdom, rest and consolation. Read

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