

NOTES

Novel Reading

The people of this country, with few exceptions, confine their reading to novels and to the daily press. Dismissing the reading of the dailies as being good for neither soul nor body, a word in season as to the uses and abuses of novel reading may be permitted us. That novel reading has its advantages goes without saying. For instance, when we grant that a habit of reading is a most desirable thing for many people we must be ready to admit that the habit is justified even if the reading is confined largely to fiction, if for no other reason, because it is an antidote against the sort of fallowness of mind that is the seeding ground for all sorts of mischief. In the second place, a judicious selection of novels may be made the means of a fairly liberal education. For example, we can learn Irish history from James Murphy; Dumas will teach us much about the French Revolution; Shakespeare supplied the Duke of Marlborough with all the English history he knew. Similarly, there are novels that will give us a passing acquaintance with science, politics, social questions, and literature. And lastly there are novels that bring us in touch with sound religious and philosophical principles. Hence, it is certainly possible for a novel reader of taste and discrimination to improve his mind vastly even if he reads nothing but fiction.

The Other Side of the Picture

But for the one who will derive profit from such a course there will be a hundred to whom it will be positively harmful. To benefit by it presupposes many things: attention, real observation, submission to guidance, and hard study. The average reader will pay but slight heed to these, and will go on as fancy leads him, browsing here and there without any fixed principles to direct him. His mind will become a scrap-heap on which rubbish of all sorts is shot abundantly. The soft and sickly mental pabulum will relax and enervate his character and render him unfit for serious and prolonged application. His reading will beget in him a disorderly instead of an orderly mind. But even beyond this there is a positive danger. In what evil directions novels may influence readers is well indicated by Father Hull in the following passage:

"In bad directions the novel can exercise influence in several ways. In the order of fact it may convey false impressions as regards history, geography, national or racial characteristics or relations. In point of psychology it may represent life in a false and unreal way, and thus elicit longings, aspirations, and lines of endeavor which are artificial and delusive. It may draw the mind away into the realms of fancy so as to divert the reader from facing and embracing reality and making something out of it. A young man of humble extraction may be turned into a discontented and affected prig by feeding himself on 'society novels' which depict life at a higher plane of luxury, culture, and refinement than he can sanely aspire to. A young man or woman may have the head turned by the romanticism and sentimentality of love stories, and develop a morbidness of mind and temper which will spoil the course of true love; thus missing the substance while grasping at the shadow. Novels which depict the gentleman in the worldly sense may undermine entirely the sound and healthy conception of the gentleman, by covering lives of sin by the cloak of 'honor' and the like.

"These are the most ordinary forms of influence which novels may exercise in wrong directions. They may also contain a direct or covert attack on the fundamental ideas of religion, and familiarise the mind with doubts which burrow like a mole underneath the habit of faith and cause it to topple over into agnosticism or unbelief. A novel can also prepare the way for big mental changes by familiarising the reader with ideas which, so long as they remain unfamiliar, can

do him no harm; ideas subversive of the old traditional moral principles, which insinuate themselves in a romantic or interesting or plausible form. Finally, scenes and situations of sexual import even when not immediately defiling, have a way of furnishing the imagination with material which needs little at any time to kindle, and when kindled is so difficult to put out. We are leaving aside of course anything utterly gross and undisguised, which naturally any well-disposed reader will turn away from as soon as it is recognised. In novel reading the most delicate and subtle suggestions are often the most penetrating; it is like imbibing slow poison unawares, which affects the system by degrees, and only betrays its deadly character when its work is done."

La Marseillaise

The following account of the origin of the famous French war song will be of interest to most of our readers. We take the extract from the *Bombay Examiner*, which attributes it to the *Fortnightly Review*:

"Dr. L. Hacault, the Belgian journalist, sends us the following:

"Some thirty years ago I had in my hands a curious book, *L'Histoire de la Marseillaise, Documents Inédites*. The author, whose name has unfortunately escaped me, maintained that Rouget de l'Isle (who by the way, was a Freemason), at the suggestion of his Masonic brethren, undertook to furnish a popular military song against the German coalition. After composing the words as we know them (with the exception of the last stanza, which was written by a fallen-away priest), he set them to the music of a *Credo* by the Italian composer Lulli, which he had heard at a church at Lille, in 1789. The song became the favorite of all the republics that succeeded one another in France—that of 1792-99; that of 1830; that of 1848, and that of 1871, still in existence.

"At the time I read the *Histoire de la Marseillaise*, I had a competent musician friend, the Flemish composer, Edgar Tinel, founder of the Schola Cantorum of Malines. I went to his sanctum and, without a previous explanation, asked him to play for me on the pianoforte Lulli's *Credo*, as printed in the book which I had brought with me. He did so and declared it a great piece of religious music, somewhat analogous to the Marseillaise, but in quite a different key and measure. Then I had him play Rouget's Marseillaise. Tinel rendered it *con gusto* and *al trionfo*, and then exclaimed: "Well, did you ever!—The whole thing is plagiarised from Lulli, especially the chorus; *Aux armes, citoyens! Formez vos bataillons!*" etc.

"Mr. Carl Blind claims that Lulli's *Credo* owes its *leit-motiv* to a Mass composed in 1776 by Holtzmann, Kapellmeister to the Elector of the Palatinate, and that, consequently, the Marseillaise is of German origin. The truth of this claim can only be ascertained by comparing the *Credo* which Rouget de l'Isle heard at Lille with the *Credo* from Holtzmann's Mass and establishing their respective dates. Unfortunately, owing to the infernal war, this cannot be done at present."

DIocese of Dunedin

Favored with perfect weather and an ideal locality, the Catholic picnic held on the Forbury Park Racecourse on Monday (Boxing Day) was a complete success. His Lordship the Bishop, Very Rev. Father Coffey, Adm., and others of the clergy were present during the day. An energetic and hard-working committee controlled a lengthy sports programme for the large gathering of children, while the general arrangements for the convenience and enjoyment of the adults were such that all requirements were amply met and the success of the outing assured. It is hoped henceforward to make a similar combined picnic an annual event.

At the conclusion of his discourse at the 11 o'clock Mass and at other Masses on Sunday, Father Coffey expressed his wishes to the congregation for all the blessings of Christmas and for a happy and prosperous New Year. He also conveyed the similar good wishes of his Lordship the Bishop and Cathedral clergy. At the conclusion of the