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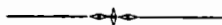
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spectator should exclaim with devout enthusiasm, *What hath God wrought?* No wonder if he should call upon the people, who have derived from their forefathers so glorious a heritage, to magnify the Giver, and to defend the gift."

The spirit of practical social philanthropy was revived by the Evangelical Movement, it has embraced the Tractarian Movement, and now the whole Church is working together for the good of the people. Without aiming at social revolution, it will endeavour gradually to permeate the whole social organism with the principles, the spirit, the self-denial, and the love to man, which Christ came to teach as the foundations of His Kingdom.

WILLIAM SINCLAIR.



ART. VI.—GIRLS, NOVELS AND PLAYS.

PLATO, in his immortal "Republic, or Ideal State," in discussing the education suited to the governing or upper class, was particularly anxious that the surroundings of the young people, and all the ideas put into their heads, should be such as should give them a strong impulse towards what is virtuous, praiseworthy, noble and true.

"Ought we," he says, "to confine ourselves to superintending merely our *poets* [of course, he would have included novelists if they had existed at the time], and compelling *them* to impress on their productions the likeness of a good moral character, on pain of not composing amongst us? or ought we to extend our superintendence to the professors of every other craft as well, and forbid them to impress those signs of an evil nature, of dissoluteness, or meanness, or ungracefulness, either on the likenesses of living creatures or on buildings, or on any other work of their hands, altogether interdicting such as cannot do otherwise from working in our city; that our governing class may not be reared amongst images of vice, as upon unwholesome pastures, culling much every day by little and little from many places, and feeding upon it, until they insensibly accumulate a large mass of evil in their inmost souls? Ought we not, on the contrary, to seek out artists of another stamp, who by the power of genius can trace out the nature of the fair and the graceful, that our young men [still more would he have said this of our young women, had he been writing of them], dwelling as it were in a healthful region, may drink in good from every quarter, whence any emanation from noble works may strike upon their eye or their ear, like a gale wafting health from salubrious lands, and win them im-

perceptibly from their earliest childhood into resemblance, love, and harmony with the true beauty of reason?

"Such a nurture, replied Glaucon, would be far the best."

So wrote the great pagan idealist Plato, the soul whom Origen described as naturally Christian. It is like the language of St. Paul: "The breach of the seventh commandment, and all uncleanness, let it not be once named among you . . . neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor gross jesting, which are not fitting." "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are venerable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report: if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

Very different is the state of things in which we find ourselves to-day. Our civilization is only partly Christian, and just now there is a considerable outburst of Animalism or Naturalism. Amongst the literary class there is a certain number, influenced largely by a section of French literature, who have revolted against the restraints and ideals of Christianity. These men and women declare openly that the object of all art is merely to show Nature in her various moods, without concealment or reserve. In this matter they have rejected alike the ideal of Plato and the principles of Christianity. So constantly is the dogma repeated that art has no concern with morality as such, that the docile multitude think it must be true, and submit to it with but faint protest.

Consequently we find a quantity of books in vogue which assume all kinds of evil, and steep the minds of the young with poisonous thoughts and subtle suggestions almost before they are aware of it. Marie Corelli touches this subject with much indignation in one of her books. I think she exaggerates, but there is probably some foundation for what she says. "London easily talks, particularly on unsavoury and questionable subjects. Therefore, as I have already hinted, if your book were a judicious mixture of Zola, Huysmans, and Beaudelaire, or if it had for its heroine a modest maid who considered honourable marriage a degradation, it would be quite sure of success in these days." And again: "'The new fiction is detestable,' I said, 'both in style and morality. . . . The woman whose dirty book I have just thrown away—and I feel no compunction for having done it—is destitute of grammar as well as decency. . . . Why do you read such stuff? How can you read it?' . . . 'Curiosity moved me in the first place,' she answered. . . . 'Then when I began to read, I found that the story was all about the manner in which men amuse themselves. . . . As I was not very well instructed in that sort of

thing, I thought I might as well learn! You know these unpleasant morsels of information are like the repeated suggestions of the devil—if you listen to one, you are bound to hear more. Besides, literature is supposed to reflect the time we live in, and that kind of literature being more prevalent than anything else, we are compelled to accept and study it as the mirror of the age.’” And again: “One day—a day that is stamped on my memory as a kind of turning-point in my life—I read a novel by a woman which I did not at first entirely understand; but on going over some of its passages a second time, all at once its horrible (character) flashed upon me, and filled me with such genuine disgust that I flung it on the ground in a fit of loathing and contempt. Yet I had seen it praised in all the leading journals of the day; its obscenities were hinted at as daring, its vulgarities were quoted as brilliant wit; in fact, so many laudatory columns were written about it in the press that I resolved to read it again. Encouraged by the literary censors of the time, I did so, and little by little the insidious abomination of it filtered into my mind and stayed there. I began to think about it, and by-and-by found pleasure in thinking about it. I sent for other books by the same tainted hand, and my appetite for that kind of evil romance grew keener.” And again, speaking of a certain poet: “At first I read the poems quickly, with a certain pleasure in the musical swing and jangle of rhythm, and without paying much attention to the subject-matter of the verse; but presently, as though a lurid blaze of lightning had stripped a fair tree of its adorning leaves, my senses suddenly perceived the cruelty and sensuality concealed under the ornate language and persuasive rhymes, and for a moment I paused in my reading and closed my eyes, shuddering and sick at heart. Was human nature as base and abandoned as this man declared it to be? Was there no God? . . . Were men and women lower and more depraved . . . than the very beasts? . . . By virtue of being a poet he passes into many a home, carrying impure suggestions into minds that were once cleanly and simple. As for me, after I had studied his verse to my heart’s content, nothing remained sacred; I judged men as beasts, and women as little better. I had no belief in honour, virtue or truth, and I was absolutely indifferent to all things save one, and that was my resolve to have my own way.”

I have quoted these painful extracts because they represent a very real danger to which our English family life is exposed. When I was young, the chief peril in young women’s reading was from the Foreign Circulating Libraries; but now a very considerable part of English light literature has the same non-Christian, or rather pagan, taint. Let us grant for the moment

that there is an excuse for such poisonous books being written for those who are not Christians; but we, who desire to follow in all things the example of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and whose citizenship is in heaven, are bound to protect ourselves against this blighting infection of destructive influence.

That animalism is not necessary to literature is proved at once by reference to the healthy, manly, moral tone of the greatest writers: Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, Miss Austen, George Eliot. Nothing, indeed, under the Bible itself, can be more healthy, invigorating and helpful than the strong, manly purity and idealism of the *Waverley Novels*; they are the example, to all time, of what an admirable educational force may be found in wholesome fiction.

We must not for a moment give way to this contagious atmosphere, or accept it as inevitable. If a man were to come and talk to our daughters about these abominations, the fathers or brothers would rightly kick him from the house. But if he talks to them through a book, a picture, or a poem, it is just as bad. Book, picture and poem should be equally impossible as the man himself. There is not the least need, from any point of view, that our daughters should know the refinements of wickedness in a corrupt civilization. The necessity is entirely the other way; their minds should be kept untainted from what is a deadly and poisonous presence. I should say the same both for young men and young women; a wise mother can instil principles and ideals into the mind of her sons which will last them through life, and which will make them turn with instinctive abhorrence from a literature that is based on the assumption that there is no virtue. But we are speaking more particularly of girls. When the mind of a girl is corrupted, it is worse than that of a young man, because the young man has numerous manly interests and occupations to keep his thoughts from basely brooding on what is vile; but a girl's imagination has fewer of such protective obstacles. That old idea of Plato's, that the mind should be kept as far as possible from all ignoble associations, is, as his young friend Glaucon assented, far the best nurture.

What I think we have to maintain is this:

1. The belief that most women are virtuous, and that it is only the exceptional few who go astray.
2. That love is something far better and higher than animalism, and has no necessary connection with it.
3. That while there are certain physical facts connected with our earthly nature, these are not to be dwelt upon or brought prominently forward, but resolutely kept in the background in thought, conversation, art and literature. For

the same reason that we wear clothes, we keep these lower incidents of our composite nature in their proper place; and that is, out of sight.

4. That a happy united married life is not only possible, but in the vast majority of cases the rule.

5. That evil books are as much to be avoided as scarlet fever or small-pox; and that thoughts or conversations for which boys at school would be soundly whipped are absolutely out of place in any household professing to be Christian.

6. That mothers have not only the right, but the duty to know all that their daughters read, and must firmly discipline them from anything approaching what is improper.

7. That art and literature are not fulfilling their proper function if they devote themselves to animalism or naturalism; that their duty is, as Plato taught, to purify and ennoble the thoughts of mankind as truly as any other teaching powers.

8. That it is no part of education to know all the ugliness, faults, errors, frailties, and wickednesses of human nature, but that it is, on the contrary, infinitely better to keep the soul pure, the hope strong, the trust and belief uncontaminated and unshattered.

9. And that, as this corrupting literature exists, and comes into our homes and libraries in specious form and plausible guise, and as it would be often impossible to detect it without reading it, the best advice should be obtained from reviews, critics, and persons versed in literature, as to what is unhealthy and dangerous.

I have left little room in my paper for the subject of plays, but all I have said about books applies with increased force to the drama. In the drama you see the very thing acted before your eyes, with all the seductiveness of beauty of person, beauty of scene, and power of realism. There are, of course, families who make no pretence at Christianity; but where the Lord Jesus Christ is at all acknowledged as the Divine teacher, example, and revelation of the will of God, it will be impossible for any conscientious and careful mother to take her girls to plays which familiarize them with those things which St. Paul said should not be once named amongst us. It is all very well to say that they are intended to show that virtue is in the end better, but the skill of the play in most cases consists in making the vicious character interesting and pathetic, and when once you have made a girl think that such things are possible, and not uncommon, you have done her an almost irreparable injury. To gloat without repugnance on sinful situations must in all cases tend to relax the moral fibre.

Of course, none of us can pass through life without being conscious of much that is evil, but it is our business to notice

it as little as possible, except when we are called on to convert it. Remember the lady in Comus :

“ A thousand fantasies
Begin to throng into my memory,
Of calling shapes, and beckoning shadows dire. . . .
These thoughts may startle well, but not astound
The virtuous mind, that ever walks attended
By a strong-siding champion, Conscience.

* * * * *

So dear to Heaven is saintly chastity,
That when a soul is found sincerely so,
A thousand liveried angels lackey her,
Driving far off each thing of sin and guilt ;
And, in clear dream and solemn vision,
Tell her of things that no gross ear can hear,
Till oft converse with heavenly habitants
Begins to cast a beam on the outward shape,
The unpolluted temple of the mind,
And turns it by degrees to the soul's essence,
Till all be made immortal.”

But this will not be if we wilfully go into temptation, where this ideal and aspiration is not recognised :

“ But when lust
By unchaste looks, loose gestures, and foul talk
* * * * *

Lets in defilement to the inward parts,
The soul grows clotted by contagion,
Imbodies, and imbrutes, till she quite lose
The Divine property of her first being.”

Short Notices.

The World Beautiful. By LILIAN WHITING. Pp. 190. Gay and Bird.

THE writer is an American lady, who was a very intimate friend of the late Phillips Brooks, and her writing shows clearly his influence on her mind and thought. She is bravely determined to pursue optimism, and to see the ideal in everything. She has collected a great number of quotations in prose and verse illustrating her thought and adding to the value of her book, the tendency of which is encouraging and elevating.

Things New and Old : Stories from English History. By H. ARNOLD-FORSTER. P. 240. Cassell and Co.

This is a reader for the Fifth Standard on the Tudor period. The book is useful, important, timely, and well illustrated.

Hours with the Bible. New Testament Hours : St. Peter to Revelation. By Dr. CUNNINGHAM GEIKIE. Pp. 475. Price 6s. Longmans.

These are valuable and interesting chapters, illustrating facts, thoughts, and teachings, in the last part of the New Testament. The style is readable, the thought clear, and the result adds much interest to Bible study.