heaven to which he looked forward was not a strange country to him.

Nowhere, either in the Old World or the New, can the Catholic faith live and flourish without the solid devotion to Mary which is the natural and inevitable fruit of a true belief in the incarnation of the Son of God. It would be foolish to speak as if this devotion were wanting in any country which belongs to Catholic Christendom. But there may be atmospheres in which faith cannot be as joyous, as free, as exulting, and as demonstrative as elsewhere, and it would be foolish also to undervalue the influence of a devotion which is able to mark itself on every detail of life instead of lying hid in the heart of the people in which it prevails. The joyousness of England went away from her shores at the Reformation, and it is the joyousness of faith which is one of the special fruits of a deep overpowering devotion to the Mother of God. The book before us gives many a hint as to the way in which this joyousness was fostered by our ancestors, and this is one main reason why we desire to see its teaching made familiar to English-speaking Catholics in the new hemisphere as well as in the old.

NEWSPAPERS AND NOVELS.

MENTAL activity is commonly believed to specially characterize our age. If reasons for this belief are demanded, the inquirer is pointed to the facts that in every department of human knowledge, investigation, and research are prosecuted with untiring energy; that these departments in modern times have greatly increased in number; and that the field and scope of each of them have been greatly enlarged. On these grounds it is commonly held that the educated classes of to-day are intellectually far superior to those of past times.

Without entering into any lengthy discussion of this conclusion, we affirm that it is faulty in that it represents only one side of the question. If the number of individuals who possess a respectable amount of knowledge be taken as a rule for measuring the intellectual progress of a period, and if the word knowledge is taken in the broad and liberal sense now commonly attached to it, then it must be admitted that the present age is greatly in advance of all previous times. But quantity is not the only element that should be taken into account in the calculation. Quality also enters into it,

Digitized by Google

and giving quality its due value we will be brought to a very different result from the conclusion just referred to.

We readily concede to the second half of the nineteenth century almost unparalleled intellectual activity, but at the same time we maintain, paradoxical though it may seem, that this activity is combined with a lassitude of thought which also is unparalleled.

This statement perhaps will be startling to some, and elicit only a smile of utter incredulity from others, yet it is not difficult of proof.

The literary world, that with which we are now concerned, is made up of two classes, those who write and those who read. In past times the student who represented the latter class was not less an intellectual worker than was the author who represented the former. But at present it may be laid down as a rule, having but few exceptions, that only the writers work mentally.

The great mass of the reading public has sunk into an almost hopeless intellectual "*dolce far niente.*" There is no room to doubt that reading nowadays seems productive of drowsiness of mind, a torpor of the mental faculties, manifesting itself in widespread mental indolence. Thus, our age presents the unique spectacle of a union of strongly contrasted extremes of the greatest intellectual activity and of the greatest intellectual inertia; action and energy on one side, and the stagnation of habitual laziness on the other.

An obvious reason for this state of things suggests itself, namely, the enormous increase in the number of literary productions and the comparative ease with which they can be procured. The amount and variety of reading matter devoured by individuals in our times precludes the possibility of thoroughly digesting it, and prevents the nutritive and stimulating effect upon the thinking faculties which a more moderate supply of less heterogeneous matter would produce. Then, too, the relation between reader and writer has undergone a change, or rather an additional relation has sprung up between them. Conscious of the incapacity of most readers to form intelligent judgments upon or draw logical conclusions from what they read, writers accommodate themselves to this inertness of thought. As for the reader, if he encounters a problem which requires close thought to enable him to understand it thoroughly, in nine cases out of ten the consideration of the problem will be deferred until some writer or other has obligingly relieved him of all necessity of mental labor by formulating a solution for him.

"Labor-saving" machines, as we all know, abound in our times. We believe that modern writers might be styled not unaptly "thought-saving" machines; for that is, in fact, the office which, to a very great extent, they perform for the reading pub-

Digitized by Google

lic. They condense facts, weigh evidence, arrange ideas, criticize, judge, and point out the sequences of cause and effect in the great strife of thought, and furnish convenient superficial summaries of the intellectual movements of the day for those who are themselves either unable or unwilling to study those movements.

The ancient maxim that "knowledge is power" was never before so universally accepted as true, nor so generally acted on, as now. The necessity of possessing a certain amount of knowledge for the practical discharge of the duties of life has helped to ingraft this maxim deeply on our age. Besides this, there is an almost universal pretension and desire to be ranked amongst the educated classes of society, together with an unceasing effort to bestow upon the greatest possible number the boon of education. The result of the combined working of these several factors is a general anxiety for knowledge. But notwithstanding this, we here repeat that before we can determine upon the claim of our age to supreme mental advancement we must make a qualitative as well as a quantitative analysis, that is to say, we must extend our inquiry and direct our attention upon two points, viz., the number of literary productions, and, going hand in hand with this, a higher standard of thought and style.

In regard to the first point, it would argue either gross ignorance or gross want of candor did we fail to note as distinguishing our age the increased number of instrumentalities by means of which information on every subject is gathered, and of channels through which it is diffused. A stream of printed matter, immense in volume, pours forth incessantly upon the world, the greater portion of which consists of the lighter kinds of literature. For the sake of greater clearness and definiteness in our remarks we may divide this literature into five classes.

First in order we place what is commonly called the newspaper press. The daily and weekly journals, whose readers number in the aggregate millions beyond computation, have—it is hardly necessary to remark—grown into a necessity of life, like tobacco and tea, and sugar and coffee. We dismiss them now, however, that we may refer to them later on. The next class is a motley crowd. It comprises all the serial and periodical publications, magazines, reviews, etc., with contents of a most heterogeneous character, promiscuously *mixed up*. Poetry, fiction, essays, reviews of books, novels in chapters, are interspersed here and there with a smattering of heavier matter, such as treatises on religion, sociology, mathematics, physics, and metaphysics. Many are eclectic in character, and are the *vade-mecum* of the "*habitués*" of literature. They are, in truth, indispensable to all who wish to keep *au fait* with the literary world, and they meet a want which the vastness

Digitized by Google

and variety of literary productions has necessarily created, and which a single individual could never supply without their aid. Third in order comes the incessant avalanche of novels. These, good, bad, and indifferent, are the pabulum on which the modern mind loves to feed, and hence the important part they play as agents of culture and civilization. A great falling off in numbers is noticeable in the next class, which consists of travels, explorations, biographies, and works on history, religion, politics, national economy, and that much contested battle-ground, philosophy. In this class too is comprehended polemic and controversial literature, which furnishes also a large amount of material for the second class. The rear of the procession is brought up by republications and translations of the standard classics of all times and of all nations. The publications belonging to this fifth class are, we regret to say, purchased by many rather because they are considered indispensable to a library than with any intention of reading and re-reading them until the golden treasures of their thought become fully known and appreciated. This is the picture we find ourselves compelled to paint of contemporary literature.

To the first and third class of our division belongs the distinction of having obtained the largest number of readers, and to these two classes, therefore, we shall confine our remarks in this paper.

The indifference and want of discrimination people generally exhibit in regard to what they read, strangely contrasts with the care shown in other occupations. If a person proposes to set out on a tour through distant countries, the moment the intention has ripened into resolution he commences to make preparations for it. Maps and guide-books are consulted, the route is carefully laid out, inquiry made as to the comfort and safety of railroads and steamship lines, their arrival and departure; the hotels at the stopping-places are decided upon—an investigation in which more experienced friends, who are acquainted with the localities to be visited, assist with their knowledge and advice; in short, every possible precaution is taken to insure the success of the trip. The details of the arrangements will vary, of course, according to the length of time the traveller has at his disposal, the distance to be traversed, the depth of his purse, and his station in life. But as a rule no one travels without previous preparation. Yet the same person, whose preliminary steps for a tour we have outlined, walks into a bookstore, selects at random some recent publication, or trusts entirely to the recommendation of a clerk or a eulogistic notice in a newspaper. It is certainly no exaggeration to say that the vast majority read without system, without purpose, without discrimination. We do not mean to imply that there are none

Digitized by Google

who read with aim and method and judgment; for such there are. But their number is only a trifling percentage of the reading public; they form, indeed, an almost infinitesimal fragment of the vast society of readers. The dictates of reason and common sense seem to have no influence or power when people engage in a pursuit so unimportant as "reading." The world seems to take for granted that the step from reading nothing to reading something denotes a great intellectual advance, and that it is therefore immaterial what is read, since it cannot fail to result ultimately in benefiting the reader. These remarks may seem ill-tempered and too sweeping to some, but unless the truth which they express is admitted it is impossible to explain intelligibly the conduct of a large portion of the reading public.

But let us return to the subject of newspapers. Between newspapers and newspapers there is as much difference as there is between an excellent saddle of mutton, well cooked, tender, juicy, delicious to the palate, and a tough sinewy steak cut from an animal of prehistoric times. So with newspapers. From the highest type of a good paper, for instance, the London *Times*, to the lowest, such as the Nihilistic organ, *Land and Liberty*, we pass through innumerable gradations of excellence until we reach those in which a microscopic inspection even, fails, to discover an intelligible reason for their existence. Let us analyze the process of newspaper-reading as it is prosecuted by civilized Christendom. In our description we follow in the main an astute observer of human nature, whose name, however, we are unable to rescue from oblivion. After the paper is obtained, the attention is first directed to the telegrams. But it would be erroneous to presume that anxiety about affairs of gravity occurring throughout the world is the motive. It is done for no better reason than because a habit has been acquired of wishing to be fed with the latest intelligence. A craving for news, like any other craving, once contracted must be satisfied. For this reason, then, all the telegraph news, home and foreign, great and small, is read with an equal amount of interest and an equal lack of reflection. After this the leading articles are turned to. The fate they meet is best described by saying "they are read;" for it must not be imagined that any concern is felt whether their contents are true or false, exaggerated or misrepresented. The eye runs over them to catch the general drift of what is written. Exceptions are made only in favor of anecdotes or really quite startling paragraphs, which are intrusted to memory for the sake of using them to create a sensation. Next comes, probably, the home and foreign correspondence, which is glanced over in the same way. There is probably a letter from Paris and one from London or from New York, each as likely to

Digitized by Google

have been written by some obscure scribe in the garret of a cheap boarding-house as received by mail. But the spiciness of the one is sure to be properly balanced by the dulness of the other, while both teem with a multitude of topics. Then follow divers articles, perhaps on Mr. Férry's education bill in France, or on the Zulu war, a brilliant account of the marriage or the funeral of some "great personage," or of a railroad disaster, described in such a graphic way that one either regrets not to have been present or feels his hair stand on end with horror. The local news column follows next in order, and then come sporting intelligence, law reports, shipping news, weather and money market. When the paper is put down an inconceivable variety of information has been jostled in a disorderly manner through the reader's mind, and the conclusion is generally drawn: "Nothing in the papers to-day."

We think this is as fair an account of average newspaper reading as can be rendered. The evening journals are skimmed over in similar style, only with this difference, that due allowance is made in the amount of attention bestowed upon them for the wear and tear on the brain of a whole day's work. Aware of this, the afternoon papers, as a rule, are the "*ne plus ultra*" of brevity and condensation. And here the fact must be recorded, that many fairly well-educated persons have fallen slaves to so slovenly a habit of reading. We have extant in our days large numbers of "confirmed newspaper-readers." All those who devote whatever spare time they can secure to skimming over a morning paper in the morning and an evening paper in the evening, with, perhaps, a weekly or two and a monthly on Sundays and at other leisure times, all these belong to one family, the family of "confirmed newspaper-readers." Excessive devotion to newspapers prevails mainly among men; but in our opinion, it is productive of the same evil effects that undue devotion to novels produces on females. News-reading does not promote a healthy mental condition; on the contrary, an individual that reads habitually in the above-described manner destroys by degrees his brain-power. The judgment will become weakened, the sense of mental discrimination blunted, intellectual initiative discouraged, and the mental powers finally become deadened, or at least seriously impaired by substituting a habit of mechanical skimming for that of intellectual reading. The influence of the press on the class of confirmed readers, as we have styled them, consequently denotes no real intellectual advancement. For, while a person who is not reading may be thinking, one who is engaged in mechanical reading is almost sure not to think. We have been speaking here of the better educated classes of society. If we descend a few steps on the social ladder, we encounter a state of

Digitized by Google

affairs still more discouraging in its character. The laboring classes, but a few generations ago, could not be counted as forming an integral part of the educated world. The laboring classes of to-day, with the exception, perhaps, of some rural districts where the much-vaunted benefits of a liberal education have not as yet gained a strong foothold, are now mostly habitual readers. Scanty means and a limited amount of time, which is all they can devote to mental culture, narrows down for them the field of reading matter. In the majority of cases a cheap newspaper is at once the Alpha and the Omega of intellectual food. They read not like those whose station in life is less humble, but they plod their way through from beginning to end, not omitting even the advertisements. Besides, the papers especially destined for the laborer have not that wide scope, nor that diversity of matter which first-class papers display. The articles are written so as to be within the understanding of the readers for whom they are intended, and a large space is generally devoted to a discussion of their own grievances and misfortunes, coupled with suggestions often very ill-judged, for the amelioration of their condition. They are, in fact, political levers, used alike by ambitious candidates for office, who court popularity in order to secure votes, and by unscrupulous schemers, to secure their goodwill under the pretence of having in view the improvement of their condition, but really to use them for their own selfish purposes.

The public dangers of our times, the social discontentment, the political corruption, the almost entire loss of correct judgment, the absence of the principles of morality, and the utter destruction of faith form an array of facts that must be ascribed to the pernicious effects produced by the circulation of cheap and bad newspaper organs among the masses. A few men without principles, or, what is worse still, and yet oftener the case, a few men with bad principles, acquire by means of cheap "laborers' journals" the direction of the intellect, of the will, nay, of the man himself. If in a state like Germany the suppression of over three hundred papers of Socialistic tendencies became a necessity, it was because the authority which is vested in every government could not allow the further corruption of its subjects. Could any stronger illustration be required to illustrate the detrimental influence of a large portion of the newspaper press upon society? If so, we refer to the reign of terror in Russia. Unless it be a progress from barbarism to civilization to advocate murder and assassination, unless it be an intellectual advance to have one's life threatened in print for being an officer of the crown, unless bloodshed and incendiarism, crime and rapine be the heralds of civilization, unless this be so, the Nihilistic press merits unqualified condemnation.

Digitized by Google

It may be argued against us that we have painted our picture darker than the reality and that we are blind to the benefits conferred upon mankind by the institution called "the press." This is not the case. We gladly acknowledge real merits when we find them. And so we hesitate not to say that a large number of our journals deserve high praise. But if the evils produced are not counterbalanced by the advantages accruing from the existence of an institution; if it is not to be denied, as it cannot be denied in these days, that the mischief wrought by the corrupt portion of venal newspapers is far beyond the control and influence not only of the uncorrupted press, but also almost beyond the control of national governments and of civilized society, how can it be asserted by people who think that the institution which is the cause of such a state of things, or, if not the first cause, is at least indisputably the agent without which the evils referred to could not have been spread to such an appalling extent, how can it be asserted that the universal prevalence of a habit of indiscriminate unreflective reading is evidence of the intellectual advancement claimed for our age?

The question is one of profit and loss, and is, simply, which has been the greater, the influence of the press for evil or its influence for good? To this question the answer is furnished by facts of such gravity that there can be no room for doubt as to what the answer should be.

On the branch of literature next in importance women chiefly waste their time. When the art of reading and writing and the rudimentary elements of arithmetic have been mastered, the novel becomes a staple article and an inseparable companion of the young female. It is true, novels figure in many domestic circles only as contraband and are read under prohibition. But this only shows, first, that parents sometimes possess common sense enough to conclude that such reading is not conducive to the healthful formation and development of character; and, in the second place, it exhibits the attractive power of these works of fiction. Not unfrequently trashy novels become almost the sole means of education. How very desirable, therefore, it would be to find in them material for real mental culture need not be dwelt upon here. Standard novels, such as might be put into the hands of the young without scruple or fear, can easily be counted. From that fact we may infer how very small their number is. Worthless trash, on the other hand, abounds. Fully three-fourths, if not more, of the publications under this head, have effects upon the intellect akin to those of newspapers. This class of novels, too, stimulates a morbid self-consciousness; the mind is filled with utterly absurd ideas about love and friendship, society and parental authority, and unrestrained

Digitized by Google

freedom and liberty of action. The religious element is rather avoided than brought forward, and what religious principles do fall under discussion, or are insinuated, are far more apt to undermine the faith instilled into the child's heart by the instruction of an anxious mother than to strengthen and fortify that faith. As to morality, the morality inculcated in these productions is generally of a most questionable character; for, the youthful mind imbibes from their pages certain notions that unlawful attachments are affiliated with depth of feeling and loftiness of character; and thoughts are generated which shrink from light until a ruined life and an irredeemable past, too late, betray their existence. Virtuous principles, checked in their harmonious development, wither away under the influence of this continuous novel-reading, until at last the distinction between right and wrong grows obscure. Thus not only is intellectual confusion created, but morality is destroyed by impressing false principles upon the young as the true principles of action. "To love and to err is but human." Such maxims are mild specimens of the sort of morality infiltrated by that curse of the age, "indiscriminate novel-reading." Poison, though sweetened by a liberal admixture of sugar, though attractive in form, though affording a momentary relief from the monotonous routine of an uneventful life, is poison nevertheless, and in the great majority of instances novels contain this poison in disguise. And yet how few trashy novels issue from the press without receiving words of praise and commendation from our newspaper press? And how few, too, are the instances in which merited censure is administered! Here, however, the materialistic tendency of our age asserts itself. The interest of the publisher and bookseller and the interest of the newspaper book reviewer here coincide. There are—and we take great pleasure in stating it—many men of character and of conscience among literary critics, men not only capable in the highest degree of forming an opinion and passing a sound judgment, but also morally incapable of giving any other than an honest one. To them we gladly render their due meed of honor. But, unfortunately, they are few. Author, publisher, bookseller are willing to pay for the favorable comments of the press; the press, in turn, is profited by conveying first to the public the tidings that So-and-so's long-expected sensational story has at last appeared and surpasses the most sanguine anticipations. Some papers are too high-toned; some affect, at least, to be too high-toned to sell their criticisms. The person whose doleful business it is to wade through all the new publications, and to whom the *reviewing* of the inevitable trash is intrusted, may refuse the direct bribe of money, to which the penny-a-liner is open. But the author, whose interest is united closely with the publishers', or very often the publishers

Digitized by Google

themselves, resort to other effective means at their disposal to secure a favorable notice from the well-known critic. Thus even the most trashy and pernicious novels rarely fail to receive laudatory notices. Moreover, it is much more agreeable to praise than to condemn; much more advantageous to make friends than to raise up enemies. Then, too, public opinion is shirked. A book which deserves, it may be, nothing but censure, but which, owing to a vitiated taste has been favorably received by the novel-reading public, few critics will have the courage to condemn as it deserves and as they would if they dared. In such cases the majority of our newspaper critics will prefer "unlimited discretion" (*sic*) to truthfulness, and from *prudential* motives will abstain from obtruding their own candid estimate of the value of the book, or rather of its worthlessness, upon the unwilling ear of the public.

Thus far in our remarks we have had reference mainly to that portion of the literature of fiction which supplies the demands of the middle and lower classes and obtains its support from them.

Novels are works of fiction. As works of art they may, from an artistic standpoint, possess a meritorious character. They may be excellent in that one particular, though faulty in every other point of view. But novels, after all, fall, like sculpture and painting, and poetry, also, under the requirements of ethics. Apart from the æsthetic, they ought to have a didactic side. In a novel, the purposes of the drama should be enlarged. Therefore, unless a novel aims at the purification of the human mind from the bondage of passion; unless it tries, as its ultimate end, to bring the true, the good, and the beautiful into prominence; unless it engenders in the reader love for virtue, and hatred and abhorrence of vice, it fails as a novel.

The field in which the novel moves is so large that there should exist no lack of means to keep this main constituent of excellence constantly in view. Dramatic and pathetic elements can blend in it with enchanting descriptions of nature. Yet, brief, unimpressive melodramatic scenes are too frequently introduced, which mar the even tenor of the story. Wearisome digressions, superfluous explanations, reflections which have neither depth nor meaning, often incumber an otherwise charming tale. An infusion of spirit is certainly desirable; but the sensational element ought never to overshadow the plot. The principal use of the dialogue ought to be restricted to certain definite ends, to bringing out the phases of character, to preparing the way for the incidents, and to foreshadowing the final catastrophe. In the dialogue there is wide room for the exhibition of art and skill and true discretion; for the tamer form of narrative needs interruption, and it increases the interest if persons tell their own tale, while the purpose of the con-

Digitized by Google

versation is gradually revealed to the reader as event follows event. But the talking must not degenerate into verbiage, while, at the same time, it should be sufficiently copious and discursive to be natural. The plot is not seldom a structure resting upon supports so fragile that the failure of one entails a collapse of the whole fabric. As a public road is often embellished and enlivened by flowers and foliage along the wayside, so the course of a tale ought to be embellished and enlivened by graceful descriptions and amusing or entertaining dissertations. The characters ought to be conceptions faithfully and consistently carried out on all sides.

These are some of the requirements of a good novel. Hence to produce a real work of art in this line of fiction requires more than a ready pen and felicitous expressions, than charm of style and mastery of language, than a lively imagination and a happy faculty of combination. The historical novel, moreover, undertakes to sketch the inner life of a period of the events of which history presents us with a formal account. Manners and customs, tastes and pleasures, estimable traits of character and glaring defects alike require careful treatment. They call therefore for elaborate studies.

Now let us ask candidly, who and what is the average novelist? Excepting those who stand at the head of the profession and whose works are a living protest against the tendency of modern literature to deterioration, the average novelist, he or she, is generally one who has failed in other fields, or who resorts to novel-writing for a livelihood. The demand for novels is so great that even a very inferior article commands some price. Money to this class of writers is the first object, and it is more easily obtained by turning out trashy novels by the ream, after a general pattern, than by earnest study. Thus men and women become novelists regardless whether or not they bring the necessary gifts and qualifications to their selected vocation. Aided and abetted by a venal press in the undertaking, they inundate the book market with novels, the quality of which is in inverse proportion to the quantity. Without genius, without talent, without ability, without either inspiration or real vocation, stern necessity, or a mere mercenary motive, incites to attempt success by the pen. So far as the effect concerns merely the purse, the result may often surpass expectation; but so far as "letters" are concerned, the attempt, as a general rule, neither secures literary laurels nor does it elevate the standard of excellence. When we consider the almost fabulous amount of work performed by some writers, simply as regards the manual labor on the manuscript, and when we further consider what frightful racking of the brain it must cost to avoid repetition in construction and to give each story a distinctive character of its own, we are not much surprised that a large portion of the novels

Digitized by Google

of our day is characterized by monotonous triviality, a slow dragging along, an utter absence of fresh spirit, and an evidently exhausted imagination. One must feel commiseration for those poor novelists; for there is nothing more dreary and difficult, more wearing than compulsory literary work. When persons decide upon engaging in such work they cast their lot in an evil hour; for having once entered the arena, retreat is all but impossible, while the toil and labor and wear and tear both of mind and body are immensely out of all proportion to the scanty returns made by shrewd publishers to second and third rate authors.

Much of what we have said in regard to novelists applies also to newspaper-men. The qualifications of an able editor are possessed by few. To a versatility of mind seldom met with, he must unite that rare quality of turning out a well-written leader at a moment's notice on almost every subject that may present itself. Then, besides the editor's other positions on the staff of good newspapers involve heavy responsibilities and require mental and physical exertions which tax strength and endurance severely. Many who occupy these positions are quite prominent writers, some of them distinguished; and unquestionably they sometimes render very important services to the public. But we are not referring to these, and when we leave the "*Dei majores*" we mix among a crowd of quite disreputable characters. It is a corps at once subservient and impudent, ignorant and yet full of conceit, seldom thoroughly acquainted with any branch of learning, yet flourishing a multitudinous knowledge as shallow as it is pretentious. Their ignorance is concealed or attempted to be concealed under a bombastic and exaggerated style. The average newspaper man has one wonderful talent, that is, the ability to write palpable nonsense without exertion of the brain; writing with him has become by dint of practice a mechanical rather than an intellectual occupation. Can he be ranked amongst the "men of letters"?

The conclusions we deduce from the foregoing considerations obviously cannot go towards making up a favorable verdict for either of the two lines of modern literature we have discussed.

It is well here to bear in mind that literature reflects indirectly, but truly, the character of an age. Moreover, literature is more than the mere expression of contemporaneous thought. As we have already observed, the literature of a given period acts as a silent but powerful agent in the formation of the character of the period that follows. Fancy and imagination issue from the human brain, and in their flight arrest the will and determine the conduct of countless individuals. They give to an age their own characteristics. The visible imprint left by an age in its literature, which is handed down to posterity, establishes therefore a more than for-

Digitized by Google

tuitous connection between two generations. Literature is a guide, so to speak, into a land beyond our own immediate horizon. And so the two branches of *modern literature* which we have examined will throw a light upon our own times, and also upon the near future that is already dawning upon us.

Burke asserts, that "the cause of a wrong taste is defective judgment." We fully agree with him, because, in the face of all contradiction we maintain, that the circulation of bad newspapers and bad novels would not have assumed the immense proportions of our day without gross defect of judgment on the part of the public. But while we find the primary cause of this in the want of a proper discrimination on the part of the reading public, it is not to be doubted that the vast quantity of very mediocre reading matter exerts a reflex influence, and produces defective judgment in those who devour it. A striking similarity, it seems to us, exists between the usefulness of alcoholic drinks and the usefulness of newspapers and novels; and in the discussion of the temperance question the arguments *pro* and *contra* have elicited a like confusion to that which exists in regard to the question before us. It is certainly going too far to regret the existence of wines, beers, and liquors, because they have filled inebriate asylums, or because intoxication, a sure effect of their immoderate use, often leads to crime. Stimulants in certain cases are highly beneficial when moderately used, and in certain climates and in certain conditions of life they are indispensable necessities. The highest authorities of the medical faculty sustain this opinion. In like manner, we hold on solid grounds that the extent to which the readers of our times indulge in newspapers and novels tends to promote an unhealthy condition of mental culture. We here simply state a deplorable fact, but we by no means pass a sweeping condemnation on the progress which we have maintained is apparent in the present age. The temperance question is analogous to the one we are treating. It is an extreme view to see in total abstinence the only remedy for excess. What is required is to abstain from *immoderate* use in one case, and from *indiscriminate* reading in the other. Here we must meet an objection which will be raised. Pope says:

> "'Tis with our judgments as our watches, none
> Go just alike, *yet each believes his own.*"

He strikes here at the very root of the difficulty; for the reliance placed upon our own private opinions, a belief in a certain private infallibility, whatever matters are dealt with, where our inclinations lean powerfully all one way,—this, we contend, is the great error. On the other hand, were we to grant the absence of all authority in

Digitized by Google

the walks of private life, and to assume private infallibility, we would find ourselves before a mountain, the steep sides of which it is impossible to climb, while its solid rock defies digging away. There is, indeed, a way to avoid the dilemma and to solve the problem. As Jenyns says,

> "But have we then no laws besides our will,
> No just criterion fix'd to good or ill?
> As well at noon we may obstruct our sight,
> Then doubt if such a thing exists as light."

We come now upon exceedingly delicate ground; for we touch the important questions of religion and of education. Faith and morality cannot be separated. Where the former is missing, the latter will die out; and where the former is established, the latter will at once appear. Immorality indicates, without fail, absence of religion. Nor have moral obligations, indeed, any value, if the future life is called in question; their value, where that is done, at best can have only an ephemeral character. We all know that the foundation of morality can alone be laid and must be laid in youth, in the tender age of childhood. It is, therefore, in the schools that correct moral principles ought to be ingrafted upon the children, for the school in a certain sense is their church, as the Church in turn is the school of the parents. These two great truths are frightfully ignored in our days. The elimination of religion from the education of the masses has been and is still prosecuted by the erection of undenominational schools, though these schools are the only ones the children of the poor can attend. No wonder that under these circumstances we notice an entire absence of correct principles as to right and wrong; no wonder young people who grow up in these modern schools display bad taste in their reading; no wonder they think right wrong, and wrong right. Temperance is not brought about by the conversion of the confirmed drunkard, but by instilling habits of self-restraint and moderation into the young, and by carefully training them during the period of adolescence. We do not mean to imply that it is not a noble undertaking to rescue those who become fatally addicted to intemperance from ruin; far from it. We assert merely that the one method is radically and thoroughly effective in that it prevents the disease, while the other simply prevents a fatal termination in individual instances. And so it is with children. Obedience to the injunctions of parents and of those who are in authority over them can be enforced for a time, but this obedience without religion will ever be slavish submission. No wonder, we repeat again, prohibited books are read on the sly; no wonder mischievous literature is

Digitized by Google

exerting so widespread and so pernicious an influence; no wonder the public taste descends lower and lower.

It is not within the scope of this paper to dwell upon the mission of the Catholic press, with which we are brought face to face. Nor do we intend to extol the "index librorum prohibitorum," issued by the one institution which alone has ever claimed the right of superintending the mental culture of her children, the Church of Rome. We leave to abler pens to take up these subjects. We have merely touched them, and we are conscious that in doing so we have been going to a length that many, perhaps, even of Catholics, will not follow us. We lay down only a principle, and we claim that if true Catholic ideas—and we do not mean by them the narrowmindedness freely attributed to Catholics—were breathed throughout the world, it would soon find to its surprise, as well as joy, great relief from two fatal evils,—demoralizing newspapers and novels, and drunkenness. For, we believe that if people are firmly grounded while young in right principles of faith and morality, and that if they hold fast to them, as they will if they attend to the duties imposed by the Church upon them, that in that case the harm wrought by bad literature will be greatly lessened, if not entirely prevented. An undue appetite kept in bounds may now and then break loose, but as the body tries to cast off external objects that accidentally enter and injure it, so the poisonous doctrines of false morality propagated by trashy papers and trashy novels will find no room or scope in a healthy moral atmosphere. If neither bad papers nor bad novels were any longer in demand, their supply would stop; and both these branches of literature could and would rise to a higher plane, and leave the decision not doubtful as to whether we surpass our ancestors in intellectual culture or not. In conclusion we add that it would be well for hyper-rigid moralists to bear in mind the classic truism.

"Medium tenuere beati."

Digitized by Google