

NEW LITERATURE AND HOW SHE IS MADE.

Prologue.

Books are companions, and follow the moral rules laid down for companions. Books are food, and mental indigestion follows the devouring of unsuitable books. Books are teachers, good or bad. Since your teachers, your companions and your food should be chosen with care, you should study the pedigree, the anatomy and the soul of your books.

We have the misfortune -- or the good fortune -- to live in a very nasty age: misfortune, because ~~it makes~~ it more difficult for one to save his soul; good fortune, because the higher one rises above his environment the more pleasing he is in the eyes of God, and the stronger his character becomes.

The purpose of this series of Bulletins is to give, in sketchy outline, a history of the evolution of nasty literature, together with some Catholic principles of criticism.

Nota Bene: Until you have learned to judge for your self, your sound guide is the Catholic book review, America, Ave Maria, The Catholic World, Extension and a few other Catholic magazines give good reviews of secular as well as of Catholic literature.

Chapter One

The Living Influence of a Book.

A book can influence life, just as a statesman, a war or a plague. Ibsen started the literary revolution in its present form -- the open-sewer type. When his works were translated into English, twenty-five years ago, they became a living influence for evil. He had great power, poetry, wealth of imagination and dramatic ability, but was a literary heretic and a fakir, anti-Christian and anti-natural, as will be shown in the sequel. He was the author of the most anti-Christian book since Renan, "Emperor and Galilean."

Ibsen had his imitators in English, timid at first and few; but they have thrived because of a strange combination of circumstances until they now swarm like flies on carrion. The circumstances that combine to give them life are the following.

1. Immensely clever publicity work;
2. The power of advertisers to dictate reviews;
3. The decline of religious instruction with a consequent loss to the public moral sense;
4. The introduction of sex-instruction into the schools;
5. Modernism, with its Godless theology and pragmatic philosophy;
6. The war.

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George Bernard Shaw founded the Ibsen school. A red-headed Irishman, witty brilliant, snappy, but insincere, he got his fad started by reading into Ibsen what he thought the people wanted there -- and then got Arnold Daly to produce his plays. He was really brilliant, but he lacked the genius of Ibsen. He led his readers to sublime heights, and when they approached the altar at the supreme moment, they found not the priest, but the fool. There was a laugh, and all was over.

(To be continued)