

University of Notre Dame
Religious Bulletin
January 30, 1932

Did Brownson Foresee Crooning.

Orestes A. Brownson, whose earthly remains are buried under our basement chapel, was one of the greatest thinkers America has produced, if not the greatest. He was a masculine thinker, vigorous, courageous, unyielding except in the face of conviction. The fact that he was an adherent of fifteen different religious sects or philosophies before he became a Catholic, and won supporters for each of these (except Presbyterianism, he tells us), is sufficient evidence that he had the courage of his convictions.

Now every real thinker is a prophet, because he can see where principles lead to. The student of Brownson is amazed at times to see how accurately he has forecast present conditions. Did he foresee crooning? Perhaps not, but at least he had an uncanny insight into the conditions that made it possible. Read the following extracts from his review of a novel written decades ago by a woman:

".... But seriously, while we hold womanhood, as every true man does, in profound reverence, we consider it a sad thing that women produce so large a share of modern popular literature. It is to this fact, combined with that of journalism, that we attribute the light and superficial, the sensational and sentimental character of the popular literature of the day, its lack of deep and vigorous thought, its weakness, its enervating tendency on the mind of the reader, and its unhealthy influence on society. The authoress shows, in the character of Lawrence Gerald, the injury it is to a man to be the pet of the other sex, and to be formed by feminine rather than masculine influences. He is a 'spoiled child,' weak in will, feeble in resolution, conceited, overbearing, unfeeling, cruel, incapable of robust thought, manly action, or sustained effort.

"Let any one, after reading a novel like the one before us, leave it and attempt to read a page of St. Thomas, or to make a meditation on any one of the great mysteries of faith, and he will at once understand the damaging effect on the mind and the heart of the novel-reading or the effeminate literature of the day. It unfits one for solid and serious study, enervates the mind, wastes the freshness of the heart, and creates a morbid craving for excitement.

"..... The faults of what we call Young America are in great measure due to maternal weakness on the one hand, and absence of paternal authority on the other. Mothers, for the most part, alternate between over-indulgence and over-severity. Most American mothers fail to govern their children because they fail to govern themselves. But aside from all this, while we hold the mother's influence very essential, as well as her tenderness during all the early life, we do not believe mothers are fitted to form strong and manly characters in their sons. The mother's influence softens, weakens and enervates, when not tempered and hardened by the influence of the father.... Lawrence Gerald... was really a lazy, worthless scamp, a self-confessed gambler, house-breaker, thief, and liar.

"..... We reverence the meek and chaste wife, the tender and loving mother, who lives in her children, and forgets herself in them and for them. But we do not reverence or honor woman when she forgets her womanhood, and usurps the prerogatives of the other sex, claims to be the superior of man, and subordinate all in society to her inclinations, tastes, and unchastened ambition, or love of power and display. We object to women as creators of popular literature, because the popular literature they create tends to emasculate thought, to enervate the mind, and to foster a weak and watery sentimentalism or a corrupting sensationalism. They who feed on it lose their virility, become incapable of serious and severe study, have no relish for what is grave and profound, and must have excitement, exciting reading, something that saves them the labor of thinking, inflames their imagination or moves their senses. This is the effect of modern literature."