

suggest the benefit of the publication of literature expressly for adults; literature which will be more expressive of actual life, and will not reach the hands of the young. They contrast the great productions of the past with the works of fiction of the present, and cry out for the return of the day when the artificial restraints now thrown about English fiction shall be removed. These writers, in asserting such liberal yet guarded opinions are to be commended. There is little merit in expatiating in action upon lighter offenses to the exclusion of the grosser, while the newspaper is allowed almost unlimited permission in recounting the actualities of life. A novel, treating subjects preferably undiscussed, may if written by a judicious author be a power for good in pointing some great moral; and thus be of far greater worth than the novel that systematically shuns everything but airy nothings. To desire the introduction of more reality into fiction is thus not the exhibition of a certain grossness of taste, but rather of a healthy sentiment in pleasing contrast with the fastidiousness that has been for some time predominant.

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If the question were propounded, "What debt of gratitude does the present age owe to Voltaire?" the replies would be various. Some persons would deny that any gratitude is due him; that on the other hand the influence he exerted was wholly evil; that he merits, in consequence nothing but condemnation. Others hold that he did a great and beneficent work in combating the pretensions of the church of the last century in France. Those who hold the latter view are few; to the horrified view of the many Voltaire appears as a veritable demon incarnate, an enemy of mankind.

He who should wish to go down to posterity as an unpopular wretch would find no more effectual way to accomplish his strange desire than to oppose the religious prejudices of his time. If his opposition should be merely factious he would be deservedly condemned. If, instead, he should be the herald of a better day, he might rest assured that some future generation would appreciate his services. Voltaire violently opposed the ecclesiastical regime under which France struggled in the eighteenth century. Yet more, he mocked at religion itself. In return, he has received the condemnation of clergy and laity from his own time to the present. Hearing that he opposed the church and religion many honest men have seemingly not the patience to study his life—he attacked the church and religion—therefore there was no good in him.

However, it is well worth the while to study the life of a man whose influence has been so profound. He may have been shallow, he was undoubtedly a mocker, but shallowness and mockery are not bonds that draw men to a leader. Had there been no occasion for the career of a Voltaire, it would not now be necessary to denounce him; his influence would have been ephemeral. It is true he is to be blamed for his levity while treating the most sacred subjects, and for his apparently total lack of reverence. But where might the iconoclast ply his trade more justifiably than in the France of the eighteenth century? Surely men were then "wedded to their idols." It required the wit, the mocking raillery of Voltaire to show mankind the inefficacy of the dead forms and rituals which for them constituted the life of religion.

The condition of France in Voltaire's time was deplorable. The grinding poverty of the poor and the opulence and frivolity of the privileged classes were bringing the state to dissolution. Not this phase, however, of the social disease caused Voltaire sorrow; he was always an aristocrat, a courtier. And for this lack of sympathy with sorrow is he more to be blamed than the clergy of that age? They, too, were

sycophants living in the enjoyment of the riches they wrung from the peasant. It was intellectual despotism that he strove to overthrow. He had felt the injustice of the regime under which he lived; he had been banished from his land for resenting an insult put upon him. He had gone to England, had there seen a people free to criticize their rulers, tolerant toward all opinions; a people enjoying the benefits of a free government. What a contrast to his native land! There men were imprisoned for the mildest criticism of the ruling powers. There the unorthodox writer saw from behind his prison bars his book publicly burned. There, subsequently, Diderot, for no other offence than writing a book in which he said that people who are born blind have some ideas different from those who have their eyesight, was arrested and without even the form of a trial, was confined in the dungeon of Vincennes! What persecution could be more intolerable? If Voltaire hastened the day when such censors were hurled from power, is he not deserving of some praise?

He was at once brought into conflict with the church. It was the force that held the people in intellectual bondage; it nerved the king to the suppression of all literature that criticised the existing powers. Hence the first work of a man who wished to free thought from its trammels was to undermine the influence of triumphant ecclesiasticism. The extent of that influence was remarkable. At present many will submit to the guidance of ecclesiastics in matters pertaining to religion. But few, however, will submit to that guidance in other departments of life. In those days such was the extent of the peoples' degradation and ignorance, that the French clergy backed by the terrors of both civil and sacred law, guided the thoughts and actions of the people in almost every department of life. They in effect made themselves religion. To the priest one should confess. Individuality of sentiment was stamped out; all must bow to the dictates of those who had a monopoly of divine grace. In those who made such sweeping pretensions one would be justified in expecting the presence of the highest virtue and goodness. On the other hand the clergy, particularly the higher, were dissolute, unprincipled, unscrupulous; some of them were atheists at heart, persecuting others for asserting openly what they themselves believed in secret. The lower clergy exemplified somewhat the influence of divine precepts; between the higher and lower clergy there was little fraternal feeling; among the body of the higher clergy there was some fraternal feeling, that which holds together, while promise of boodle is held out, a band of public parasites.

Such was the intellectual state of France during the greater part of Voltaire's life. Voltairism, though a heroic remedy, was well suited to the disease it eradicated. By the introduction of the philosophy of Newton into France, and by holding up to ridicule the pretensions of ecclesiastics, he hastened the downfall of absolute authority in matters of opinion. Notwithstanding all the criticism that has been directed against him, much of the intellectual development of the present century received its first impetus from the movement with which Voltaire's name has been so prominently connected. Intelligent doubt is far better than ignorant, indolent belief. Voltaire taught men to question a proposition before they assented to it. If one chooses to attribute only to the teaching of him and his colleagues the violence of the revolution that came soon after his death, the good he did should also be remembered. He was not above his age in morals; but, considering the extraordinary condition of France in his time, it is safe to assert that the evil he wrought was in no mean measure offset by the good.

Those whom pious fear restrains from admitting the good