

the woman who cannot exist without morphia of the mind whispers, "Is it not passion, drunkenness, ecstasy?" The publisher, a new Sir Pandarus of Troy, smilingly adds, "Take my experience. When the trade meets in counsel, and we display our wares, one question falls from shrewd business men the moment novels are laid out. 'Is the tale a bit risky?' says Bibliopola. 'No? then put me down for a dozen copies.' Or 'yes? I will subscribe for twelve score.' Deepen the Parisian taint, the demand increases accordingly." That this had long been the rule in French story-telling, a simple sum in arithmetic applied to Zola's editions will prove. First, being of the brutal type, quite unashamed, he beat all others out of the market. Second, if we leave aside "Le Débâcle," which made appeal to the nation's memory of Sedan, there is perfect equivalence between the degree of outrage on decency and the number of copies sold. Neither great art nor humanitarian motive counts for anything in the welcome given to such literature of the kennel. Not "Humanity" but "la Bête Humaine" decides what reward its purveyor shall carry off. Now the same arithmetic is heard in London and provincial book-buying. Realists of both sexes, publishers and libraries, conspire to one end. The mart of pleasure exchanges its vice, acted or portrayed, for hard cash. Infamous stories have been made a speculation in commerce. The suicide of the novel pays.

For it is nothing else, and so we refute our sham realists, mad about one kind of reality which to them is the only world—carrion that smells to heaven. Dress it daintily, ye Frenchified cooks; serve it in your sauce of smooth phrases; give it the finest names ye can invent; but is there any disguising the foul thing? So far from it that your own taste, subdued to what it works in, before long scorns all less piquant mixtures; and the naked satyr is chef to your cuisine. Without figure of speech, here in my twelve specimens I note the *sforzando-crescendo* which invades what was literature and rudely sweeps out landscape, ideas, humour, wit, playfulness, to make room for cynicism more and more openly shown. Of course there is cruelty also, "lust hard by hate." And blasphemy, which finds in the Bible matter for verbal sacrilege. And mockery of marriage, because instinct has no law. And women that hunt their prey down, themselves furiously driven. And men—if men they can be termed—all nerves and temper, incapable of doing any profitable task, neurotic, curiously effeminate, possessed like the Gadarene swine, hurrying towards the steep. In the whole range not a single hero. The tremendous devilry of a Don Juan is too strong for these flaccid, decadent, or merely animal types. They are not diabolic, not supermen but infra-men; it is the woman that triumphs here—and what a woman!

Do we deny the facts, then? Why should we? Facts are of all kinds, but literature chooses, interprets, humanises; and according to its choice so will be its greatness, or the reverse. You, madam, may seize on the ignominious details of a royal massacre in Belgrade, transpose them to the courtesan key, fill your stage with brie-à-brac from the demi-monde, and protest that you

mean no sensual record of passion; but who will believe you? It is the sensual record that explains the multiplied editions. Or you, sir, may exhibit in English costume a Madame de Warens attempting the rôle of Mentor to a gentleman-Rousseau. Your style is elegant; your heroine, let me be frank, is unspeakable. You have argued in a less revolting story that the man of letters who yields himself to base instincts is lost, if he cannot pull up in time. It was Balzac's opinion, and he knew. But the scenes of domestic and deliberate vice which you would have us admire—well, is there in the eighteenth century a figure more odious than Madame de Warens? Let me offer you a piece of Scripture commented on by Ruskin, "If the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him. You would fain be respectful to Baal, keep smooth with Belial, dine with Moloch, sup, with golden spoon of sufficient length, with Beelzebub; and kiss the Master to bid Him good-night." Virtuous vice—the Rousseau gospel—is like the French Republican sentiment which tenderly spares its criminals the sight of the guillotine, and quite forgets how they came to deserve it. Poor monsters, could they conquer impulse?

There is another opening for the naturalist, who makes of an Eastern Counties village his puppet show, resolved to outdo Zola's rustics and fling away reticence. Swift in his depraved moods, when his genius had left him, would probably have written or snarled and sniggered, and played the reforming ape, in this fashion. What does Yahoo literature mean by drowning us in filth? "But is the picture false?" cries its painter. Yes, for it is out of proportion. The village sins; the village is coarse; the village can be shockingly inhuman. Magistrates, clergy, police know that well. But they do not intensify evil by posting up crude illustrations of it on the village dead walls. Wise men tacitly agree that some things ought not to be spoken of in public; if Yahoos there must be, let darkness cover them. Or shall we abolish decency lest the French call us hypocrites? This book is perhaps the ugliest in recent fiction. Yet it pleads for the joy of life!

No one will suppose that these unflattering pictures of themselves are studied by villagers. The price forbids it. They have been painted for the upper classes which, when the fit takes them, like to roll in the mud; *s'encanailler* the copious slang of the Boulevards terms that deplorable craze. It is a word to sum up my twelve authors, even the most delicate-seeming, the epicures of tone and tint, who would sacrifice the Decalogue to round a period. Yet, harrowing as the Village seen by Asmodeus may be, a certain fashionable woman (unmarried on her title-page) contrives to render almost equal to it in unpleasantness the London society she "knows so well." Her men are bad enough; but her great ladies go beyond anything hitherto described in English prose or rhyme. They delight to plunge where no sounding-line of manners or morals can follow them. The female smoking-room, with its licence of talk, its rivalries, intrigues, reckless unbeliefs and anarchisms, what man would have dared to put it before the world, calmly, unblushingly, as this cultivated, polyglot, widely travelled woman has done? Is it a sermon or a