

A READERS' GUIDE TO IRISH FICTION

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A Readers' Guide to Irish Fiction by Stephen J. Brown

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BY

STEPHEN J. BROWN, S.J.

*"Books may be likened to a glass in which the face of society
is minutely reflected." —COWPER*



LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON
NEW YORK, BOMBAY AND CALCUTTA

1910

MCC

Do cum Glóire Dé agus onóra
na h-Éireann

PREFACE

THE present GUIDE TO IRISH FICTION is intended by the author as the first part of a work in which it is hoped to furnish notes on books of all kinds dealing with Irish subjects.

Before explaining the scope of this section of the work it may be well, in order to forestall wrong impressions, to say at once what it is *not*. In the first place, then, it does not lay claim to be a bibliography. By this I do not mean that I am content to be inaccurate or haphazard, but simply that I do not aim at exhaustive completeness. In the second place, it is not a catalogue of books *by Irish writers*. Lastly, it does not deal exclusively with books printed or published in Ireland.

The author's aim has been to get together and to print in a convenient form a classified list of novels, tales, etc. (whether by Irish or by foreign writers), bearing on Ireland—that is, depicting some phase of Irish life or some episode of Irish history—and to append to each title a short descriptive note.

Two things here call for some explanation, viz., the list of titles and the descriptive notes.

As to the former, I have, with some trifling exceptions, included everything that I have been able to discover, provided it came within the scope of the work, as indicated

above. It has been thought well to do this, because a vast amount of fiction that, from an artistic or from any other point of view, is defective in itself may yet be valuable as a storehouse of suggestion, fact, and fancy for later and better writers. For was it not worthless old tales and scraps of half-mythical history that held the germs of "Hamlet" and "Macbeth," "King Lear" and "Othello"? There remains, indeed, a large class of novels and tales that, so far as one may judge, can serve no useful purpose. It may be thought that with such books the best course to pursue is to allow them to pass into merited oblivion. But it must be remembered that booksellers and publishers will naturally continue to push such books because it is their business to do so, and the public will continue to buy them because it has ordinarily no other means of knowing their contents than the publisher's announcement, the title, or—the cover. A "Guide" would, therefore, surely shirk an important portion of its task if it excluded worthless books, and thereby failed to put readers on their guard.

Next, as regards the descriptive notes: there are three points which I should wish to make clear—the source of the information contained in these notes; their scope, that is, the nature and extent of the information with which they purpose to furnish the reader; and, thirdly, the tone aimed at throughout the work.

Information about the books has been obtained in various ways. A considerable number have been read by the author. Indeed, there are few writers of note

included in the Guide about whose works he cannot speak from first-hand knowledge. Of the books that remain the great majority have been specially read for this work by friends, and a full account of the same written by them according to a formula drawn up for the purpose. In all cases, except in a very few—and these have been indicated—the wording of the final note is mine. In the few cases referred to, printed reviews or notices of the books have been drawn upon, the source of the note being mentioned in each instance.

A word about the *scope* of the notes. My chief object in undertaking this work was to help the student of things Irish. This object determined the character of the notes. A few years ago there appeared in Belgium an excellent work, entitled *Romans à lire et Romans à proscrire* (Cambrai : Masson), by the Abbé Bethléem, which has since passed through many editions. In this work novels are classed *au point de vue moral*. In the rare cases in which the books included in my list contain matter objectionable from a moral or a religious standpoint, I have not hesitated to remark the fact in the note. This was, however, but a small part of the task. It will be clear, likewise, from what has been said that my object is not to attempt *literary* criticisms of Irish fiction. Such literary appreciations are to be found in other works already published, accounts of several of which will be found in the Appendix. True, a certain amount of criticism is often needed lest the account given of a book should be misleading, but it has been avoided wherever it did not seem to further the main

purpose. This purpose, let me repeat, is, above all, to give *information* to intending readers. I have therefore endeavoured, as well as might be, in the small space available, simply to give a clear idea of the contents of the books. In a good many cases I have further attempted an appreciation, or rather a characterization, of the book in question, but this was not always possible nor, indeed, necessary.

¹ Of the tone adopted in these notes little need be said. I did not consider that it would further my purpose to aim at that literary flavour and epigrammatic turn of phrase affected, and with reason, by reviewers in many periodicals. Moreover, to do so would have been inconsistent with brevity. Then, I must disclaim all intention of saying "clever" things at the expense of any book, however low it may deserve to be rated. I have avoided, too, the technicalities of criticism, even words so tempting as "psychological." Lastly, I trust the little work has not been rendered suspect to any class of Irishmen by the undue intrusion of religious or political bias.

Apology might well be made here for the defects of the work. They will, I fear, be but too evident. But it should be borne in mind that, with the exception of Mr. Baker's works, to which I cannot sufficiently acknowledge my indebtedness, I have had no guide upon the way, since no writer, so far as I am aware, has hitherto dealt in this way with Irish fiction as a whole.

It may be asked, for whom especially this book is meant? In the first place, I hope it may be useful to the general