

joined with that which evinces no talent at all, is devoured by the child, with a rapidity unknown to the tardier movements of riper intellects. Whatever the subject which the progress of knowledge has brought forward, sooner or later it gets into the shape of a book for children, with all the accessory attractions which the ingenuity of the printer, the binder and the engraver can furnish. Is it desired to acquaint the young pupil with the history of a certain period, or the life of a great man; it would indicate a long distance behind the times, to refer him to those immortal writings in which the events and the actors are described. There is always at hand some little book containing the desired information in miniature, divested of all hard words and troublesome reflections, and, peradventure, invested in the garb of an attractive tale. Is it desired to inculcate some important truth in religion, suitable to guide the life and keep the heart from evil; it is thought that the purpose cannot better be accomplished than by means of a story abounding in incident and adventure, and ending, probably, with love and a marriage. Is a lesson in morals to be stamped on the tender mind; still the never-failing little book will render unnecessary any recurrence to such obsolete authors as Johnson or Paley. Is botany or chemistry, or physics, to be taught; still the means are the same. Even the beautiful simplicity of the sacred oracles has not saved them from being converted into namby-pamby, to accommodate them to the taste of the rising generation. In short, nothing seems to be too profound, nothing too simple, nothing too high, nothing too ignoble, to be brought within the compass of this class of books; and, as if they were the most approved means of leading the steps of the young into the paths of virtue, and enlightening their minds with a knowledge of the truth, they form the great staple of every Sunday-school library in the country.

It is a sufficient objection to this juvenile literature, that it vitiates the taste, weakens the understanding, and indisposes and unfits it for a more elevated kind of reading. By having the results of science and art, the lessons of morality and religion, ever presented in the garb of a story, with lively incidents and an agreeable ending,—vice punished and virtue rewarded, according to the most approved methods of romance,—the youth imbibes false ideas of the stern realities of life, and finds the common and unadulterated truth too insipid to awaken any interest in his mind. Indeed, these books are read, or, more correctly speaking, devoured, not so much for the sake of instruction as amusement; not so much for the principles they may profess to inculcate, as the incidents and adventures in which they abound. This result is just what might have been expected; and I submit to those who have better means of judging, whether, as a consequence of this result, the youth of our time do not manifest a marked unwillingness to give their attention to anything calculated to excite any activity of the higher mental faculties.

We greatly underrate the youthful intellect in supposing that a special class of books is needful for furnishing it with intelligible and attractive reading. The mistake is the more curious, inasmuch as it occurs by the side of another of the opposite character. The very boys and girls who are practically supposed to be unable to read a history except in a diluted state, are kept, for years together, upon the study of grammar—a science which, even in its elementary state, is of a most abstruse and metaphysical character. And many other school studies, such as geometry, algebra, rhetoric, mental philosophy, require a far greater reach of intellect than many of those works which are the glory of English literature. I believe that those works will furnish an abundance of suitable reading for a youth ten years old and upwards; and no one can suppose that they are not better adapted to improve the taste and cultivate the higher powers of the mind than the juvenile books of the day. He may not perceive, at every step, the keen sagacity of Gibbon, nor fully appreciate the quiet graces of Prescott and Irving, but he will learn on good authority the facts of history, and feel somewhat of its grandeur and dignity. He may not perceive the full significance of Shakespeare's greatest thoughts, nor be charmed with the harmony of Spenser's verse, "in lines of linked sweetness long drawn out," but he will catch an occasional