

# BOOKS and NOTIONS

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### THOUGHTS ON CURRENT LITERATURE.

From a sermon delivered by the Bishop of Algoma at the Church of the Redeemer, Toronto, December 28, 1884.

"Influences are quietly, insidiously at work, which are undermining the edifice of life for a large proportion of the rising generation, and which for them, yea, for generations yet unborn, are destined to convert it into a melancholy, crumbling ruin. Witness, for example, the character of much of the reading furnished to the children of the present day, and devoured eagerly, while parents are ignorant or indifferent. Beginning even as early as the nursery period, the supply continues with increasing liberality through every succeeding stage, till the mind is absolutely drugged with poison, and wholly unfitted for any exercise, either healthful or useful. First, for the credulous baby period, stories of fairies and giants, whose impossible achievements stimulate to the highest pitch of unwholesome excitement; then later on, the child's paper or magazine with its tales of wonderful exploits, and unlikely experiences. Sometimes, when the book is furnished from a Sunday School library, interspersed with a few moral and religious reflections, so purely parenthetical that the reader can and does skip over them, without once losing the thread of the narrative. Then comes the "dime" novels with their highly seasoned stories of daring crime, and exciting, improbable adventure, till, at last, the mind having been thus thoroughly trained for it, the novel of the period is taken up, and mind, heart, imagination are all surrendered to its irresistible fascination. And what is the result of it all? Evil, and evil only. By every human law of the human conscience and the human intellect, the after effects of this deluge of unhealthful literature, is unmix'd mischief. The innocent are slaughtered. Everything in them that would serve to keep them pure and innocent is affected injuriously, if not fatally. Reading like this stimulates a child's brain to a state of unnatural precocity—surrounds it with an atmosphere of unreality, in which facts seem fancies, and fancies assume the appearance of facts—teaches it to distrust and feel discontented with the common prosaic scenes and duties of every day life—encourages listless day dreaming and idle revery—keeps the

nerves of the imagination perpetually on the stretch, till they have lost all their proper elasticity, and fall into a condition of actual mental disease, unfitting for any strong, concentrated effort, and leaving its victim at last an intellectual inanity—and lastly, while worst of all, it creates a violent and intense distaste for all sober, serious, religious thought, and for any reading, whether of the Bible or otherwise, which would rudely break in on its pleasant dreams, or suggest the memory of God or death, or the judgment or eternity.

Am I overstating the case? It would be impossible to exaggerate here. Statistics in such a case do not help us much, because the produced results are being wrought out very largely below the surface, but this I venture to assert, that were it in our power to trace out the secret causes of the tide of irreligion, dishonesty and crime that seems to be setting in amongst us, and of which our newspapers, it is to be feared, do not tell us the half, it would be found that among the most potent is the universal and increasing demand for an unhealthy, because sensational, current literature.

**BOOKS AND BOOKSELLERS.**—Booksellers have a perfect right to make the best capital they can out of new works. It has often mystified the public how a three-volume novel can pass through an extensive edition at 31s 6d., and be supposed to be a success, then, in six months afterwards, the whole three volumes will be condensed into one volume, and retailed at from 7s. 6d. to 10s. 6d. The fact is established that the libraries of England, which number 670, must all have a copy of a good work—that Mudie must have, perhaps, 300, but he subscribes at a limited price. It is perhaps, not generally known that any work of prominence, whether it be a novel, history, biography, or political, is first "subscribed," that is to say, the publisher sends round his book canvasser to the various purchasers to ask the booksellers how many copies they will take. He generally commences in Paternoster-row, and calls upon Longman's number one. Successful in the first instance, he makes sure of being fortunate afterwards, for there are no better judges of the value of a book than the head of the Longman firm. This forms a first edition, but seldom, if ever, does the three volume novel extend to a second edition.—*Exchange.*