

indicate the vanishing point of possible construction. In this country the cheapness of the novel in editions already named makes them accessible to everybody. In England a three-volume novel costs so much that the circulating library has to be invoked in order to gratify what else were a very expensive taste. But twenty cents here puts the same novel into the hands of any one. This has its good side, if the novel be wholesome and pure. But it has its bad side too, in the mentally debilitating stuff which is freely published, and a very bad side when the damnable trash is considered, some of which has appeared in both the Seaside and Lovell's libraries and in we know not how many others like them.

And yet the subject needs to be handled by religious teachers with a wise and careful discrimination. But it *should be handled by the pulpit*. The novel is a teacher—active when pulpits and Sunday-schools are silent, effective when these have lost their power. What ground then shall the pulpit take? Assuredly not *proscription of all fiction as injurious mentally or morally*. Such a ground could not possibly be held. The number of thoroughly good novelists and novels is too large, and they offset too strongly all of an opposite class to admit of this position. Walter Scott, Fenimore Cooper, Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, and among living novelists, Thomas Hardy, William Black and our own Howells would alone make any such position more than absurd. And yet some of us may have heard in comparatively recent times allusions to novel-reading as if it were, if not a sin *per se*, yet one of those very questionable indulgences which had better be given up and which are in hostility to an earnest Christian life. Novel-reading is classed with card-playing and dancing as forms of worldly amusement which are so inconsistent with moral seriousness that the only rule for a Christian is, "Touch not, taste not, handle not." It is always unwise for the pulpit to take a ground which cannot possibly be held, or held only by creating a sort of artificial conscience, which is quite as bad a thing as any evil results from novel reading. There is undoubted truth in the charge that the minds of the young are sometimes poisoned by what they read in novels. But the charge lies only against a class, and holds good far more of many a newspaper than it does of the novel. There are hundreds of novels which could be read only to moral advantage. They were written by authors of very lofty character and with a high purpose. I defy any person to read Miss Muloch's "A Noble Life" and not feel that while reading it he had been breathing the purest of moral atmospheres and had had his soul softened to finest moral impressions. So with scores that might be named. Not to dwell longer on this point, it may be said positively that a wise pulpit will *recognize the place of the novel in the reading of persons young or old*.

It has fairly won this place. Even if we urge that the modern novel,