

decidedly more entertaining and attractive. And the danger is, that in making their own selections they may not in all instances be influenced by a due appreciation of truth, morality, and virtue. In illustration of this, I shall state a circumstance which occurred under my own observation. One of the largest public schools in the Province was supplied with a School Library from the Educational Department, at the time the school was opened. The library consisted of 400 volumes, and had been selected by one of the trustees, a man of some education, and of considerable taste in the choice of books, but holding conscientious scruples against admitting any thing into a school library which could be classed under the name of 'fiction.' A very excellent library was the result of his selection, but consisting wholly of 'strong meat,' and therefore somewhat hard of digestion; no 'new milk' for babes, nothing which could be styled *light reading*—not even a *Robinson Crusoe*, a *Swiss Family Robinson*, or *The Boy Hunters*; all were scientific, instructive, improving, and often, I fear, repulsive.\* The library has been in operation ever since, some of the books have been carefully read, no doubt; but more than half of them, I am sure, have hardly ever been opened. I do not mean to say that good has not been done, for a few of the boys read, and read regularly; but a circumstance came to the knowledge of the head master some time ago which convinced him that though his boys, many of them, did not much relish the school library, they were fond of reading nevertheless. A book was found in the possession of one of the boys which not only did not belong to the school library, but would have been a disgrace to any library, public or private. On making enquiry it was discovered that two of the boys had entered into a partnership or contract for supplying palatable reading, at the low price of a penny a book—these pennies to be devoted to the purchase of an additional volume as soon as they amounted to a quarter of a dollar, the usual price of the books they considered most readable. The head master having thus found a clue to the whole matter, went to the father of that boy who acted as their librarian and asked permission to examine the young men's library. The father, at first, expressed some astonishment at the request, saying that his son, he believed, had some books locked up in a box, but that the boy always carried the key; and although he had frequently seen him give books to school boys, he had never suspected that they were of a pernicious tendency. The box, however, was opened in the presence of the boy's parents, and over seventy volumes were tumbled out, and without one exception they consisted of the cheap paper-covered literature to which I have referred. Sylvanus Cobb with his love and murder; stories of highwaymen, from *Dick Turpin* to *Paul Clifford*; lives of opera girls *et hoc genus omne*, and the very worst of Reynolds' filthy and exciting publications. There they lay, 'tattered and torn,' dirty and coverless, evidently extensively loaned and carefully studied—in striking contrast with the spotless state of *Hume's England* and *Gibbon's Rome* in the School Library. Mrs. A — and the head master set themselves to the work of dividing the clean from the unclean, or rather unclean from the filthy; and out of the seventy volumes over forty were put apart as fit only for the flames, and the rest were to be put beyond the reach of the young lad whose vested rights in a locked box had that day been so unceremoniously interfered with. When I remonstrated with the bookseller who supplied the boys with these books, he replied that to *sell books* was his business, and not to pick and choose for people. If they wished to buy, he was willing to keep all kinds to please them.

"I would not like to say in how far the in attractive nature of the school library was to blame for this boys' library, or how far the thing may be prevented in other instances, by a judicious selection of attractive reading for the young; but I think I may say confidently that, since an addition has been made to the library including books of this class, more books have been read, and, as far as I can learn, there has been a complete break up of the organization for the supply of cheap novels; and I believe that a healthier moral tone in the choice of reading is becoming more general among the pupils.

"Such are the facts of the case; and, without attempting to moralize, I leave them with those interested in the education of the young as food for reflection and warning."

HARTER THE MURDERER—PERNICIOUS EFFECTS OF FICTION AND THE LIGHT LITERATURE OF THE DAY.

COMMUNICATED BY THE REV. J. H. JOHNSON, M.A.

"On the 20th December last, between the hours of 12 and 1, a healthy, robust young man, of prepossessing appearance, and considerably more than average abilities, was publicly executed in the Town of Brockville, Upper Canada. I say *young*, for he was between nineteen and twenty years of age; and when he committed

\* This fatal mistake in selecting for a public school library none but so-called *standard works* has frequently been pointed out by the Educational Department, as failure in the success of a library of such books has invariably been the result. We hope that the effect of this practical illustration will not be lost sight of.

the awful crime for which he underwent the extreme penalty of the law, he was but eighteen past.

"And what, it may be asked, was the social position, and what had been the antecedents of one who thus early in life imbrued his hands in the blood of a fellow creature? Usually murderers belong to the very dregs of society, they have come up under the direst influences, been schooled in vice, and surrounded by the vilest companions. And it may be safely assumed that ninety per cent. of those who commit capital offences have had no educational advantages, and at least an equal proportion of them have been addicted to intemperance, and perpetrated their crimes while in a state of partial intoxication.

"The unfortunate youth whose name heads this paper, forms an exception to the rule. His parents were pious, and in the humble walks of life as agriculturists, were respected by the community. This son had a common English education, and attended Sabbath School and public preaching regularly, till he was more than sixteen years of age. He never acquired drinking habits, though on the morning of the fatal day of his bloody deed, he fortified himself to perpetrate it by partaking of the intoxicating draught. But he conceived the horrible design under far different circumstances, and traced his career of guilt to quite another source. Let us inquire a little into his history:—

"Edgar E. Harter was born in Herkimer County, N. Y., on June 11th, 1841. He was one of eight children. His parents were members of the Dutch Reformed Church. Edgar while in prison bore testimony to the deep-toned piety of his parents, particularly his mother, whom he never mentioned but in terms of tender affection. They sent him to school and attended strictly to his religious instruction. He proved himself to be a clever youth, and was a general favourite in the neighbourhood, as I learned from a memorial in his favour, signed by the principal men of Herkimer, and forwarded to Sir Fenwick Williams, the Administrator of our Government. He was possessed of a superior mechanical genius, and had a strong desire to learn a trade, but never enjoyed the opportunity to do so. He left home about two years ago, and worked in the employment of a maternal uncle named *Doxstater*, near the village of Watertown. The uncle appears to have been a man of correct habits, and to have treated him with marked kindness. But unfortunately while there he acquired those mental habits which dissipated his religious instruction, and undermined those virtuous principles which he had received in his earlier years.

"He formed the acquaintance of several young men of his own age who had cultivated a taste for the light literature of the day. In the present age works of fiction are furnished in a cheap as well as attractive form. Our American neighbours seem to be inundated with them. Large publishing houses in New York and other places are mainly supported by the demand for these pernicious works; booksellers throughout the Union, and I regret to say, throughout Canada too, are engaged in their sale; and the corrupt seed is scattered broadcast over the land. These young men formed a club to take the *New York Ledger*, and it was this publication he alleged to me and others, first gave him a disrelish for the Bible and other religious books. Knowing his uncle's aversion to such periodicals, he used to steal away into some secret place, and there greedily devour the contents of the *Ledger*. In fact, so fascinated did he become with the tales contained in the publication, that he was impatient for the period to arrive when the next number should come to hand. He esteemed the *Ledger* more than the Word of God, and longed for it more intensely than for his daily bread.

"The effect of this new development in his mental and moral nature may easily be surmised. It was impossible that his mind should be so absorbed with anything, and not experience some striking results. By a natural law the moral, as well as the physical man, partakes of the character of the aliments on which it subsists. Educators of youth well understand this principle, and carefully select the books they place in the hands of children. Benevolent men also, sometimes at a sacrifice, furnish the growing demand for cheap periodical literature, by publishing tracts, magazines, or newspapers of a moral or religious character, by truthful tales and easy sketches, gratifying the taste, and affording an agreeable relaxation from study, without vitiating the mind or endangering the morals of the young.

"With respect to the *New York Ledger*, it cannot be disputed that it contains many excellent articles. Some of these would do credit to our best religious magazines. But herein consists its greatest danger. Were all its papers and paragraphs of a vicious character, the periodical would be generally shunned; it would rank in the general category of immoral publications. It would be excluded from respectable society, and its circulation would be greatly circumscribed. Now, however, in the United States and in Canada, go where you will, the universal *Ledger* is to be met with. Like the frogs of Egypt, it may be seen all over the land, in all the houses, and even in the 'bed chambers.' The greater part of each