

## 19. HOW YOUNG CRIMINALS ARE MADE.

A Cleveland paper says that a number of young boys in that city have been in the habit of reading the "dime novels" to a great extent, gorging themselves with the exploits of burglars, highwaymen, smugglers, pirates, and murderers, which are the staple of these pernicious books, were filled with a morbid desire for similar adventures. Five or six of them, the oldest fourteen and the youngest ten years of age, organized themselves into a "band of robbers," with a capital of forty dollars to begin business with. They selected a wild cavern for their base of operations, in imitation of Dick Turpin and Jack Shepherd. They lived there for several days, practising all sorts of mischief, before their parents found out their hiding-place and took them home.

## 20. CHARACTERISTICS OF FICTION.

From a lecture lately delivered in Toronto, by the Rev. Geo. H. Bridgman, M.A., we make the following extract:—"None could deny the influence of reading upon character, and in view of the multiplication of works of fiction during recent years the question had assumed vast importance. The reading of works of fiction he considered advantageous under certain restrictions. There was, in his view, no objection to these works simply because fictitious. The works of Homer, Virgil, and Shakespeare carried us into the sublime and enchanting regions of imagination, and familiarized us with the grand and ennobling conceptions of those master minds. The 'Pilgrim's Progress' was a fiction, but its perusal had been productive of as much real benefit as any uninspired book. Cowper's poetry, while of a high order of fiction, could be read with no less profit than pleasure. Such fiction as inculcated right feelings and principles, as tending to cultivate the imagination and purify the heart could not rightly be condemned. The parables of Scripture were in a sense fictitious, so were the allegories often employed by religious writers to impress truth with greater force. Where, however, incident and plot form the staple of the narrative, the effect is evil, only evil, and that continually. The whole tone and spirit of the works of the most popular novel writers and romances was bad and unhealthy. Lord Byron, who 'touched his harp and nations heard entranced,' combined the most brilliant intellect with the deepest moral depravity; never was genius more closely allied to vice than with him. The world renowned novels of Sir Walter Scott were alike fascinating and instructive, and in many points excellent. In order, however, to gratify his partisan feelings, Scott had perverted the truth of history. He had whitewashed the House of Stuart, and ridiculed the heroic Covenanters, to whose stern refusal to bow the knee to tyranny we owed our liberties. Bulwer employed his great talent to exalt and glorify wickedness. His heroes were criminals and given to the practice of every vice. Dickens, it has been said, had accomplished by his writings more good than any five preachers and any five legislators together. He did not concur with this estimate. That popular author had prostituted his extraordinary abilities, and degraded his genius to the most unworthy purposes. He had clothed his vicious characters with the most amiable qualities and cast odium and contempt upon religion. In 'Little Dorrit,' while professing to contend for a relaxation of the stringency of Sabbath observance, he had aimed a blow at the citadel of the Sabbath itself. If such were the writings of the best fictionists, what must be the tendency of the host of lesser lights? Let not the young yield to the fascinations of these polluting books whose effect was to sap the foundations of morality and poison and corrupt the mind. What class of writers, taken as a whole, were so immoral as novelists? The perusal of light literature destroyed all relish for more solid reading matter. Those who were given to the baneful pursuit, as a general result, knew nothing of history, science, or other useful studies. False views of life were imbibed from novels. The young who indulged in the pernicious practice of reading highly wrought and sensational romances revelled in scenes that had no counterpart in anything that had ever transpired on earth. Life was a stern reality, as all such would find out to their cost when they awakened from this delusive dream. The glorification of criminals urged young men on to the commission of the most fearful deeds of crime. It was another reason why we as Britons should honor and venerate the name of Queen Victoria that she had encouraged a sound, healthy literature. (Applause.) If anything more than another threatens to dwarf the vigorous Anglo-Saxon intellect and prevent the attainment of its high and glorious destiny, it is the flood of trashy and impure literature which now circulates so freely. He did not object to fiction under the following restrictions: Let it be pure; let it be true to life if not to fact; let it be kept in its own place; and, finally, let it not be read by the young until their character and judgments are matured and their principles fixed.

## 21. EDUCATIONAL RESULTS OF CHEAP FICTION.

In a paper read at a meeting of the Educational Department of the Social Science Association, in London, England, Mr. W. C. Taylor said, that it is more difficult to estimate the results of fiction than those of other departments of literature is primarily evident from the nature of the subject. Its influence is not to be measured entirely by statistics, nor can its effects be put to any immediate tests such as could be applied to science, to art, to writings upon politics, economy, or morals. The results of a study of these are pretty sure to make themselves visibly known in the government and conduct of the nation; but the results of the study of fiction, though as certain, and perhaps as important, do not show themselves with the same openness, or, generally, with a like rapidity.

The fictions of Rousseau and his contemporaries hastened, if they did not altogether bring about, the first French revolution, but how difficult would it be to estimate the exact amount of influence which they had upon the general result! The writings of Adam Smith, upon the other hand, produced the great commercial revolution of modern times, and we have no difficulty in tracing the progress of events succeeding their appearance, for they were adopted as soon as understood, enforced as soon as they were adopted. The common antithesis of "fact and fiction" furnishes the grounds of the argument most commonly urged against it. "What is the use of cramming our heads with a lot of mere inventions," say its opponents; "one fact is worth all the fictions that ever were." "Telling a story," or "romancing," is commonly a mild way of putting it that one is not adhering strictly to the truth; and he who is entitled to a far more intelligible, though less polite title, may often be agreeably surprised by finding himself in possession of the honorable one of "story-teller."

But it is not fiction, but the abuse of fiction, which enlists condemnation, and this has been promoted by the cheapening of literature. Let us see if this is so. Fiction is abused when it is used to promote illegal, immoral, or irreligious ends. In a secondary sense, it is abused when its influence is given to lower the standard of taste and intelligence, and to spread a love of what is frivolous and meretricious, rather than that what is solid and valuable. There can be no doubt that most of the novels of the present day are to the last degree worthless.

The "sensational novels," with all their puerilities and absurdities, do but endeavor to enlist our feelings in startling and unusual events, the morality being generally unexceptionable, and are merely good or bad according as they do this artistically or inartistically, the latter being almost invariably the case. But the novels, without any strong situations, the novels of society, so called, introducing us to the worst side of human nature, deliberately seek to enlist our sympathies in favor of it, and consciously represent their mean conceptions as the inevitable order of things. But the real way to test the results of cheap fiction is by its influence on the poorer portions of society.

Previous to 1830-31 but few attempts had been made to place an acquaintance with literature of any kind within the reach of the masses. Books were still among the dearest of luxuries; and periodical literature, that greatest boon to the working classes, was yet in the infancy of its development. *Constable's Magazine* in 1827, "The Family Library," a little later, and the works of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge about the same time, had made ineffectual efforts to supply the gap, their object being, however, rather educational and entertaining than entertaining and educational. The *Edinburgh Review* in 1802, the *Quarterly* in 1809, the *Westminster* in 1814, *Blackwood* in 1817, and *Tait Fraser*, and a few others had all started on a career of success; but the subjects of these magazines were altogether political and critical, and the price was high. Taken altogether, their circulation did not amount to more than 125,000, according to the most correct estimate. Such cheap literature as was in existence was uncensored, and wholly of a treasonable, immoral, or irreligious cast. Sedition and indecency, indeed, were then considered the only literary nourishment palatable to the humble, and a lower taste was supposed to be a necessary accompaniment of a lower class.

About 1830-31, attempts were made to cater for the instruction and amusement of the people, and to raise the character of their reading, but owing to the heavy taxes then imposed on publication, few of these existed for long, and only two survive to the present day—namely, *Chambers' Journal* and the *Mechanics' Magazine*. About the same time the passing of the reform bill, and the prolonged discussions on it during its progress through Parliament, introduced a taste for politics amongst the people, producing a demand for cheap newspapers. This was sought to be supplied by the uncensored press, which issued their new sheets without the Government stamp in open defiance of the law, and which for three years maintained a contest with the executive, in the course of which 500 persons suffered imprisonment, and which culminated