

only in so far as it mirrors correctly the drift of thought in the communities of the world.

Shall novels be read at all and to what extent? are questions that are sometimes asked. They must be decided for each one by himself. The judicious reading of selected novels surely could not injure the most fastidious. They help the abstract thinker to gain a concrete conception of things. They help those who are continually theorising to understand man as no other branch of literature has an opportunity of doing. Dr. Stalker recommended to the students of Yale the reading of finely written novels as a means of securing a better literary style: and perhaps some would suggest that for adding to the "aggregate mass of manhood" in each student in the absence of any professor on humanity, a wise reading of the best fiction might assist very materially.

While knowledge is to be gained from the novel, however, there is a danger to the one who devours everything. At the best they are only suggestive of truths, but when too closely followed there will be the unwelcome sight of the young novel-fed coxcomb displaying his smattering of knowledge before the aged men whose experiences have been gained from many sources.

Fiction serves also as a great leveller. Its reading exalts the lower classes in much the same way that anything better than their present state helps them to new regions of thought. It brings down the more intellectual, when too closely followed, to the level of the other. In the one case the finer feelings are enervated, and high ambitions removed; in the other the coarser tendencies are turned so as to serve a noble purpose.

On the whole we may regard the schools of fiction, begun in Richardson and Fielding, and continued in Scott and James, in Lytton and Nathaniel Hawthorne, in Blackmore and Reade, and ending at present in George Macdonald, as having been an ever increasing influence for good in moulding the secular and religious thought, in directing the social and national life among the many powerful forces at work as benefactors of mankind.

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