

AMERICAN FICTION.

American writers of fiction have come in for a snub and a little honest criticism from The New York Nation. It appears that great efforts have recently been made by American writers to found an indigenous school of fiction. These efforts, we are informed, have failed, and in the nature of the case could not but fail. According to The Nation, the hope to make novels go by nationality is doomed to disappointment. Fiction to-day gets a favorable verdict in the United States not because it is American, English, or Polish, but because it is good; and it is damned not because it is foreign or native, but because it is weary, flat, stale and unprofitable. The Nation censures the American novelist for trying to "extemporise" himself into fame, and hints pretty plainly that life is not represented by two or three characters, "wiredrawn to the vanishing point." Pretty phrases, impromptu scenes, odd conceits, paradoxes, epigrams, and the rest of the stock in-trade of literary triflers will not suffice. These are enjoyable when discreetly employed, but it is ruinous to let them usurp the place of better things. It is especially dangerous to produce too much. The writer who desires to do himself and his readers justice will not be in too great a hurry to be famous. He will mature his conceptions, he will realize his scenes, he will pay some attention to style; nay, he will even turn a deaf ear to the blandishments of editors, and, above all, he will not mistake a flash-in-the-pan for solid reputation. The New York Nation records that the four novels most sold in the United States during the last few months have been Mrs. Ward's "Marcella," Mr. Meredith's "Lord Ormont and His Aminta," Mr. Geo. Du Maurier's "Trilby," and Mr. Hall Caine's "Manxman," and adds that the fact ought to be significant of much "to a large class of literary Americans." A little attention to the causes which have made the success of these novels will, The Nation thinks, yield more light on a difficult subject "than all the theorising that could be spun out of men's vitals."

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(Signed) S. S. STAFFORD

New York, Dec. 10th, 1894.