

THE BANE OF THE AGE.

IN the *Xavier* for October appears a short but pithy article on novel reading, by Bernard Clark. Referring to the evil effects of indiscriminate novel reading he says: "So many and great are the attendant dangers in some novels that it requires all the reader's self-control to neutralize the evil impressions they would otherwise have on the mind."

The curse of the age is undoubtedly indiscriminate novel reading. Those who draw their ideas of the world, of men and of manners from the novels they read must enter upon the duties of real life at a very great disadvantage, not only on account of the false ideas thus obtained, but also on account of the dislike thus generated for honorable, if homely, every day labor. The effect of indiscriminate, excessive novel reading upon the mental faculties is not less observable. The memory, for instance, is a faculty easily cultivated. It can readily form the habit of remembering, or on the other hand, of forgetting, proportionate to the attempt made to fix the attention on what passes through the mind. In reading novels, unless read for study, the mind of the reader is passive. It is interested in what is read, but allows the ideas to pass without any very great exercise of the judgment, and without that deliberate attention which is necessary if one wishes to retain a new thought. It matters not whether the thoughts in themselves are worth retaining or not,—it is of the mental habits formed as the result of such reading that I speak here. These habits, once acquired, will ever after influence the reader, whether the book that is perused be a romance or not. What, then are the mental habits acquired by continued novel reading? First, then, I would say a habit of forgetting everything that is read; second a habit of reading without any attempt to follow or comprehend the author's observations and arguments; third, a vitiated literary taste, unless the reading be from the select few.

Not that I advocate the putting aside of all fiction. On the contrary I believe, and in this I agree with the writer in the *Xavier*, that a good novel is a boon, a gift, a godsend which may improve the reader in many ways, by opening up larger views of life, inspiring one with higher ideas of duty and by exciting noble aspirations after attainable good.

That novels exert a powerful influence on the ideas of men is self-evident. Men's ideas are modified, renewed, strengthened