

USE AND ABUSE OF THE NOVEL.

II.

Prose fiction is of comparatively recent origin in English literature ; it may be said to date from 1814 when *Waverly* made its appearance above the literary horizon of England. Its growth has been marvellous, and at present each day witnesses the appearance of several novels, besides divers translations from the other languages, notably French and German. Our grandfathers could easily have named all the authors whose works had till their time been given to the world ; but now it requires volumes to record even the list of those whose writings almost exhaust the English language. If the future student of literature were to be obliged to learn the names of this army of writers, and make a study of even one principal work of each of them, we might thank heaven that we were not born a hundred years hence. Luckily however for him, the most of these millions of books will live but for a day, and none but the antiquarians of future ages will know that the "enlightened people" of the nineteenth century ever amused themselves with this vapid and frivolous literature. The Shakespeares will have been separated from the Beaumonts and the Fletchers : the masters only shall live.

The writing of novels has become a profession, and the reading of good novels has been recognized as a means of culture and enjoyment. To many the world of fiction is greater than the world of reality. Their "intellectual attitude is . . .

highly complex ; they "delight. . . . to read what they do not believe, and know they are not intended to believe, and yet they are not contented if it is incredible." The details of a narrative are more eagerly followed by these readers than is the study of the social and political problems that daily present themselves for solution, and that, soon or late, must become subjects for the serious consideration of the citizen and patriot.

Whatever may be the praise lavished upon a novel, it can in no wise raise its standard, any more than would the mixing of sugar with strychnine make the latter less a poison. Thus, to whatever height we may laud a trashy novel, it nevertheless still remains trash. It is a fact to be deplored that many newspapers sell favorable criticisms of novels. Men are paid to mislead the public as to the merits of these books. What can we say, for instance, of the London critic who received books to criticize, but always with the injunction of the publishers that he was not to *cut the leaves* ? In this particular instance Gerald Griffin was partly justified by the extreme necessity in which he found himself, but how many are there who regularly criticize favorably for a monetary consideration. They are paid, and the author and the publishers reap a harvest.

Censure is very rarely administered to a novel. It is not as in the time of the great Jeffry when a work had to possess real value in order to