

About New Books

SUMMER truck is not proper English and according to grammarians it would be considered a slang term, but truck is a word used a great deal on this continent. There is scarcely another word quite so suitable to the occasion, when a modern writer of book notes sits down before the monthly collection of summer books. The table is piled high with a motley collection which much resembles the vegetables on a hawker's waggon. If the reviewer be honest he will possibly be unpopular with the authors who are trying to make a penny, with the publishers who are endeavoring to earn a dollar, and with the editor whose salary depends on the amount of advertising which his publication contains. For is he very likely to be very popular with the average reader of books—since that person is interested in stories, not literature or information.

Recently I was fortunate to see an annual report from a leading Japanese library showing the class of books read in Japan. What struck me particularly was the fact that there was no fiction in that library. It was only some time afterwards I learned that the Japanese do not believe in wasting time on fiction. Is it, or is it not, a waste of time and money to read fiction—especially the fiction that is found on the counters of Canadian book-stores and the shelves of Canadian public libraries? Is it true that the public which has learned to read but has not yet learned to think, is better reading interesting truck than not reading anything but the newspaper? Is the fact that there are some "big-sellers" born every month a sign of educational progress or educational retrogression?

These questions must be answered by the individual reader, and he would be an unwise man or an all-wise being who would answer them in the negative or the affirmative. Nearly every Canadian is anxious to read the latest novel from the pen of Sir Gilbert Parker, W. A. Fraser, Ralph Connor, Norman Duncan or any other of the leading Canadian writers—because it will probably depict some scene from Canadian life or history which will be pleasing and perhaps educative. That seems reasonable. But why read the truck from the writers of New York and London, who have not proved their knowledge of any particular phase of human life? For instance, why read the "Red Cravat," by Alfred Tresid-