

LIBRARY OF SELECT NOVELS.

Fictional composition is now admitted to form an extensive and important portion of literature. Well-wrought novels take their rank by the side of real narratives, and are appealed to as evidence in all questions concerning man. In them the customs of countries, the transitions and shades of character, and even the very peculiarities of costume and dialect, are curiously preserved; and the imperishable spirit that surrounds and keeps them for the use of successive generations renders the rarities for ever fresh and green. In them human life is laid down as on a map. The strong and vivid exhibitions of passion and of character which they furnish, acquire and maintain the strongest hold upon the curiosity, and, it may be added, the affections of every class of readers; for not only is entertainment in all the various moods of tragedy and comedy provided in their pages, but he who reads them attentively may often obtain, without the bitterness and danger of experience, that knowledge of his fellow-creatures which but for such aid could, in the majority of cases, be only acquired at a period of life too late to turn it to account.

This "Library of Select Novels" will embrace none but such as have received the impress of general approbation, or have been written by authors of established character; and the publishers hope to receive such encouragement from the public patronage as will enable them in the course of time to produce a series of works of uniform appearance, and including most of the really valuable novels and romances that have been or shall be issued from the modern English and American press. The store from which they are at liberty to choose is already sufficiently great to ensure them against any want of good material; and it is their intention to make such arrangements as shall warrant the public confidence in the judgment with which the selection will be made. The price, too, will be so moderate as to make the work accessible to almost any income; and the style in which it is to be performed will render it a neat and convenient addition to every library.

There is scarcely any question connected with the interests of literature which has been more thoroughly discussed and investigated than that of the utility or evil of novel reading. In its favour much may be and has been said, and it must be admitted that the reasonings of those who believe novels to be injurious, or at least useless, are not without force and plausibility. Yet, if the arguments against novels are closely examined, it will be found that they are more applicable in general to excessive indulgence in the pleasures afforded by the perusal of fictitious adventures than to the works themselves; and that the evils which can be justly ascribed to them arise almost exclusively, not from any peculiar noxious qualities that can be fairly attributed to novels as a species, but from those individual works which in their class must be pronounced to be indifferent.

But even were it otherwise—were novels of every kind, the good as well as the bad, the striking and animated not less than the puerile, indeed liable to the charge of enfeebling or perverting the mind; and were there no qualities in any which might render them instructive as well as amusing—the universal acceptance which they have ever received, and still continue to receive, from all ages and classes of men, would prove still more irresistible incentive to their production. The remonstrances of moralists and the reasonings of philosophy have ever been, and will still be, ineffectual, unavailing against the desire to partake of an enjoyment so attractive. Men will read novels; and therefore the utmost that wisdom and philanthropy can do is to cater prudently for the public appetite, and, as it is hopeless to attempt the exclusion of fictitious writings from the shelves of the library, to see that they are encumbered with the least possible number of such as have no other merit than that of novelty.