

The second consideration with respect to choice of material is that the novelist must suit the every-varying taste of the times. When Scott began to write his famous series, he had almost to create a taste for his books. But the novelist of to-day finds a more or less refined and educated palate to which he must accommodate his wares. He cannot copy after his predecessor, for he must write for his own age. "The rude man," quotes Carlyle, "needs only to see something going on. The man of more refinement must be made to feel. The man of complete refinement must be made to reflect." To the rude man, who desires only to see something going on, the drama, and that of the roystering and hilarious comedy type, addresses itself with peculiar fitness. Dramatic production is almost a thing of the past, which would go to show that as readers we have reached the stage of more or of even complete refinement. The writings of one of the great poets of this age are addressed to the reflective quality, to the subordination of the purely emotional. Browning's poetry, with its keen and subtle analysis of character and motive, requires the exercise of the reflective faculty for its proper appreciation and understanding. If poetry, hitherto held to be the region of pure emotion, has so surrendered to the domination of the intellect, what may we expect of prose fiction? So we find some of the best novels a close and careful study of social and economic conditions, or an analysis of the secret motives that possess the human heart. I refer now not to the purpose novel, such as Bellamy's "Looking Backward," or Mrs. Humphrey Ward's "Robert Elsmere," but rather to such books as George Eliot's "Romola," or Hall Caine's "Christian."

The second part of our study will be devoted to the message which is conveyed through the novel of to-day. The word "message" appears perhaps too dignified and sacred a term to be applied to the novel, and should be applied, one would think, rather to the utterance of the prophet or the preacher. Yet I do not think we shall be far astray if we regard the novelists as minor prophets, some of them false possibly, or lacking in courage to utter what lies within them. The man who writes books for the public is, in his private capacity, not much wiser or more far-seeing than one who never writes. But when he writes he is, or should be, under inspiration. At the least, he is, as it were, under oath, and dare not utter things inadvisedly and without duly pondering upon the truth of his utterance. In his essay on Scott, Carlyle speaks of this message: "In the heart of the speaker there ought to be some kind of gospel-tidings. . . . Literature has other aims than harmlessly amusing indolent languid men." He further