

truth." To characterize the class of novels most in favour at the present day as moral and religious stories of the type of "The Dairyman's Daughter" or "The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain," would certainly be misleading; yet far be it from me to disparage the charms of fiction. To the overtaxed brain-worker, no less than to the wearied handicraftsman or tiller of the soil, the relaxation to be found in the graphic realizations of Scott; the vivid, if somewhat too melodramatic, travesties of Dickens; the sombre passion of George Eliot; or the kindly cynicism of Thackeray's outlook on humanity, is beneficial alike to mind and body. But it is one thing to seek occasional healthful relaxation in the attractive pages of fiction; and quite another to make of it our staple reading. Sugar-plums are very nice occasionally, but if made our chief diet they will not only pall on the taste, but enervate the system; and the same is true of mental as of physical sustenance. Dr. Arnold, in commenting on the misuse of intellectual advantages by the idle or self-indulgent student, says:—"Childishness, in youth even of good abilities, seems to me to be a growing fault; and I do not know to what to ascribe it except to the great number of exciting books of amusement, like 'Pickwick,' 'Nickleby,' 'Bentley's Miscellany,' etc. These completely satisfy all the intellectual appetite of a boy, which is rarely voracious, and leave him totally palled, not only for his regular work—which I could well excuse in comparison—but for good literature of all sorts, even for history and poetry."

But the true antidote for this is to be found in the attractions of more substantial literature, in the fascinating interest of good biography, in the charm of our best essayists, in the fairy tales of science, and the genuine romance of veritable history.

There was not in the Edinburgh of

my own youthful experiences a free city library such as we now inaugurate; but there were nearly equivalent advantages to be found in the Mechanics' Library, the Edinburgh Subscription Library, the Select Library, etc. There, indeed, the citizens had long been familiar with such advantages, for it was in Edinburgh that Allan Ramsay, the genial author of "The Gentle Shepherd," started, in the year 1726, the first lending library in Great Britain. By means of well-stocked libraries, such as I have named, access could be obtained by a trifling annual payment to the best literature of the day; and I thus enjoyed from early boyhood the opportunity of ranging at will among the treasures of a carefully selected library of English literature. It is a privilege not altogether conducive to rigorous or systematic habits of study, and it might have proved more advantageous under judicious guidance. Yet even if it was but like the turning of a young colt into a field of clover and leaving him to browse at his will, it was a piece of education which I look back upon now as of inestimable value.

As to fiction and the more ephemeral popular literature, their claims for a share of the space on your shelves are greatly less than they once were. With the unblushing disregard of all an author's or a publisher's just rights, such books are reprinted now in so cheap a form that—unless you are troubled with scruples about becoming receivers of stolen wares—they are practically accessible to the poorest. There is little need for a library to supply the novels of Wilkie Collins, Trollope, Geo. MacDonald, Black, or Hawthorne; of Miss Muloch, Mrs. Oliphant, Mrs. Alexander, or even of such tempting literary morceaux as Carlyle's "Reminiscences," or Jane Welsh's correspondence, when the whole can be