

Fiction Defended.

J. D. Taylor, in "The Farmer's Advocate" of Feb. 8, takes exception to the reading of fiction, advocating nature-study, biography, poetry, science and theology as a better course of reading. Those are good, and should not be neglected, and for Mr. Taylor may be all-satisfying.

Science and theology, to many minds, are like closed dark-lanterns when lighted—the light is there, but no rays shine out for them, and they have no power to move the slide. Those same people have quick sympathies, and, by judiciously-chosen books, will oftentimes climb higher in Christian graces than many a one who is highly versed in fine-spun theology. Mr. Taylor thinks the reading of poetry is necessary to develop a fine style in an orator or in a writer, and indirectly refers to its beauties. Poetry is beautiful, it is refining and ennobling; but some of us like our literary—rather, mental—food served up in a different dish now and then, as well as we like to see our table set with dishes of different kinds.

Poetry and prose are both alike in this—they both are expressions of ideas more or less elevating; they both are the vehicles used to convey facts or fancies from the brain of the thinker to the eye of the reader. This being so, is not poetry fiction—a very fascinating form of fiction, too?

Rhythmic utterances and beautiful words are not poetry. The human body, to be a body, must have its skeleton; so poetry, to be poetry, must contain "a story." Sir Gilbert Parker's novels on French Canada differ from Longfellow's "Evangeline" only in mode of expression, both being founded on historical facts. Tennyson's "Maud" would make good material for a George Eliot. Shakespeare's "Hamlet" and "Othello" are dramatic enough for the most sensational, and his historical plays are no nearer facts than are Scott's historical novels.

Mr. Taylor evidently will think that if poetry is thought by me to be fiction, it ought to be sufficient fiction for one to read. Variety is the spice of reading, as well as of life.

The man who understands his fellows, being able to see their virtues as well as their frailties, and loving them in spite of all, is greater far than he who can grasp the most abstruse subject man ever battled with. He is better fitted to help his fellows up the "Hill of Difficulty." Good fiction introduces one to all men—the good, the brave, the noble, the generous, and their opposites, and those who stand on middle ground. Their creators picture them

so vividly that they become veritable flesh and blood.

To many life is rather gray, and if they can gather—as the earth does from the sun—light and warmth from a well-told story by a master, such reading surely cannot be called a waste of time.

Nature-study is charming, but not amusing, and, however sadly the English take their pleasures, we are simply Colonials, and not all of English extraction at that. Hence we want some wit and humor, some comedy and some romance, and we seek these in standard works of fiction. After a day of toil, an evening spent in reading is most restful.

Fiction is often educative. Where, outside of real history, can one get a better idea of French brutality and the horrors of the French Revolution than in Dickens' "Tale of Two Cities"? Who else gives us such a masterly description of the Battle of Waterloo as Victor Hugo?

Do not think that I approve of fiction as a daily diet; but it has its uses and its work, and is no more to be condemned than other forms of literature.

As for ranking the poets, I have nothing to say, but cannot forbear quoting Longfellow on Bobbie Burns:

"For now he haunts his native land
As an immortal youth; his hand
Guides every plow;
He sits beside each ingle nook,
His voice is in each rushing brook,
Each rustling bough."

The foregoing ought to be a great enough place for anyone to hold.
Elgin Co., Ont. M. J. T.

"Made in Canada."

It is a matter of common observation how little the average American seems to know about Canada, its extent and its resources, its people or their aspirations. Our cousins of the Republic have been the victims of a sort of self-satisfied, self-centered idea that they are "the people," from which they are slow—very slow—to awaken. We ran across a sample of this awhile ago in that usually alert and well-informed periodical on things Canadian—the New York Independent. One of its editorial book-reviewers, in referring

to Marian Keith's fresh, clean, wholesome story, "Duncan Polite," issued by the Revells, went on to say, "In accordance with a curious custom, which seems to control the topography of such literature during recent years, the scene is laid in Canada." Well now, why not? Where else would the New York scribe have it laid? What more natural and appropriate than that a bright Canadian young woman who takes to authorship should draw her inspiration from the land she loves, and interpret to us some phases of the environment amid which she has wrought and lived? It would have been the curious thing, indeed, had Esther Miller (Marian Keith), of Orillia, Ont., located her story anywhere else. Canada is coming to its own in literature. There is everything about this glorious land, its people and their history, to breed a race of authors who are already giving the world an imperishable heritage of prose and poetry. The next quarter century will witness marvellous industrial, commercial and agricultural strides in this young nation, but unless we are greatly mistaken, we shall see more noteworthy and enduring achievement in the domain of Canadian literature.

News of the Day.

British and Foreign.

Peru is having two powerful iron-clads built in Italy, and two fast cruisers in England. It is believed that these warlike preparations foretell future operations against Chili.

Prince Arthur of Connaught, who is at present in Japan, and will pass through Canada on his return, has invested the Mikado with the British Order of the Garter.

Manifestations of volcanic disturbance seem to be advancing northward on the American continent. Mount Sutton, Col., has now developed into an active volcano, and is belching forth flames and smoke.

A scene resembling somewhat the famous turning out of the "Rump" Parliament was recently enacted in the Hungarian House, where Parliament was dissolved, and the Opposition driven out by the militia and police. The ejection has since been declared illegal by the Opposition leader, Francis Kosruth.

Notwithstanding the assertion of recent despatches from China that anti-foreign manifestations of the past few weeks have been confined to a few extremists, and are indicative of no general spirit of unrest in the Chinese people, it looks somewhat

significant that Chinamen are being summoned home from all parts of America. San Francisco has already furnished her quota, and a movement toward a similar end is afoot in Montreal and Toronto.

The second Parliament of King Edward's reign was opened at Westminster on Feb. 20. In the speech from the throne, after the usual platitudes upon Great Britain's relations toward other nations, and desire for peace with them, especial reference was made to the coming controversy in regard to the Government of the Transvaal. It was also intimated that a vigorous policy, tending toward the improvement, governmental and otherwise, of Ireland, will be carried out. These, it is safe to say, will be two of the most interesting items in the Liberal Government's programme.

Affairs in the Russian Cabinet have reached a crisis at which a break seems inevitable. Premier Witte and Minister of the Interior Durnovo have long been at variance, Witte holding out for a liberal policy, Durnovo for a thoroughgoing system of repression. The present cause of division, however, is on the subject of the extreme power given to the Governors-General of the different Provinces, which Witte wishes to curtail, in order to facilitate a free electoral campaign. He has, it is stated, distinctly intimated to the Czar that choice must be made between Durnovo and himself, and the next move is awaited with interest.

The deadlock still holds fast at Algeciras. Even the delegates are becoming impatient, while some of the British papers come out-and-out with the opinion that Germany had little excuse for calling a conference upon a subject on which she had no intention of making any concessions. "We can discover in her conduct," says the London Times, "no regard for British sensibilities, friendships or interests. On the contrary, we see a stirring up of strife, for no intelligible reason; a menace to European tranquility, which is our first interest; a causeless menace to a nation with whom we are on terms of close friendship, and a flat refusal to allow our fellow-countrymen in Morocco the most ordinary guarantee for their lives and property." It now appears that, in return for a quit-claim deed for the remainder of Morocco, Germany wishes to secure possession of the Island of Mogador, to be used as a naval base and coaling station. The presence of three British fleets and three cruiser squadrons, however, manœuvring off the west coast of Spain, may be an intimation that, before this matter is disposed of, Great Britain must be consulted.

not very long since a fire occurred in a city theatre, and the civilized world was horrified to hear that strong men trampled women and little children to death in a mad panic of fear. Are those men to be pitied or blamed for such unmanly, cowardly conduct? "Whoever will save his life shall lose it," says our Lord; and surely to save one's life in such dastardly fashion is, in very truth, to lose all that makes life worth anything.

That is, as I said, an extreme case; but dare any of us say that we should behave better under similar circumstances? Though we cannot help condemning the cowardice, we have no right to say that we ourselves could face a terrible death more bravely. The thought of public opinion, the fear of being considered cowards, or of losing self-respect, goes down at such a moment like a child's dam before a flood. But men—yes, and women and children—have stood firm in such times of trial, times without number. To mention but one such instance: Minnie Baumer, a girl of twenty-two, refused to escape from a hospital in Cleveland a few years ago, because her patient was strapped to his bed, and she would not desert her post. After the hospital was burnt, her remains were found close to the bed. She died bravely.

Be of Good Courage.

Be of good courage, and let us play the men for our people, and for the cities of our God; and the LORD do that which seemeth Him good.—2 Sam. x. 12.

"I like the man who faces what he must, With step triumphant and a heart of cheer;

Who fights the daily battle without fear; Sees his hopes fail, yet keeps unfaltering trust That God is God; that, somehow, true and just, His plans work out for mortals; not a tear Is shed when fortune, which the world holds dear, Falls from his grasp. . . . He alone is great Who, by a life heroic, conquers fate."

It is rather a puzzling thing to make a choice among the many texts which rest on the servants of God to be of good courage. Over and over again, the command is given to be strong and very courageous, fearing nothing. Evidently courage is a quality very admirable in a man's eyes as well as in the sight of God. Cowardice is a thing we all despise in others. Too often we find it



excusable in ourselves. An easy, comfortable life is not a life to be desired, we should rather aim at a victorious life, feeling it a high honor to be sent forward by our Captain to the forefront of the battle, instead of trying to secure a safe retreat where there is no fighting to be done. Let us go forward to meet difficulty when it lies right in our path, remembering that the road to the Mount of the Ascension generally leads over—not around—Calvary. Let us face what we must, "with step triumphant and a heart of cheer," rejoicing that we have a chance to "endure hardness" as a good soldier should.

Ordinary physical courage is largely a matter of temperament or of bringing up. Anyone would expect a strong man to face a burglar, or a fierce dog, with less fear than a woman would naturally feel; and a woman who had always lived in a city might cross a crowded street with no fear of cars or bicycles, while she

would probably be alarmed if she had to cross a field with a dozen cows in it. Then, again, when the nervous system is "unstrung," it is far harder to be brave than when one is perfectly well. But, taking all these things into consideration, the fact remains that cowardice is a sin against God and direct disobedience to His command to fear nothing. It is a greater sin than it may appear to be at first sight, for it is a sure sign of want of faith in the ever-present, all-mighty protection of our Father, and, therefore, we should be careful to shelter ourselves always behind the invisible shield of Faith in His Living Presence. We have no right to excuse our fears for the present or anxiety about the future on the ground of "nerves," and think that we deserve pity rather than blame for our lack of courage. Let us take an extreme case, and we shall see at once that cowardice is not a sin to be lightly excused. It is