

Novel Reading.

In this age when literature of almost every character is so abundant, the question as to what one should read is a perplexing one, and especially to those who have to economize time. But however urgent the demands upon one's time may be, there are few who can afford to forego the pleasure and profit of judicious novel reading. For just as a study of beautiful paintings and all works of pictorial art educates one to more thoroughly appreciate and enjoy the beauties of nature, so an acquaintance with novels prepares one to discern in homely life the humor, pathos and romance. And what is still more important the novel reader acquires a knowledge of people with whom he can never mix in real life, of modes of living quite new and widely different from his own, and of places he could never hope to visit. He thus gains insight into character, the faculty of forming a truer conception of inward facts of ethical value from outward manifestations, the power to adjust himself to new social conditions. In a word he is better equipped to meet the exigencies of life and acquit himself with prudence and dignity.

But when it has been settled that one should give a portion of his time to novel reading, a scarcely less important question arises; viz., what novels shall he read? In general, it may be said, one should read those authors whose works have been approved by the critics. But while it is well to consider, it is not well to continue all through life blindly accepting the opinions of others. One should note the effects produced on his own mind and character and by tracing these effects to their source become able to judge for himself.

Nearly all the readers of fiction are acquainted with those novels whose marked characteristic is a well-laid, thoroughly worked-out, intricate plot. In such stories each actor has an important function, every incident a real utility leading to new developments. Ingenious complications and developments are brought to a climax and afterward skilfully solved. They are interesting to the ordinary mind but not good art, not true to life and being false should be avoided. Some fairly good authors such as Wilkie Collins and Bulwer Lytton employ the involved plot, but not to such excess as many others. Novels of inferior rank almost always use this device and it often constitutes their chief and only interest. When such a defect in the art of authorship is coupled with low moral ideals it becomes intolerable.

Another class of novels which we think should be regarded with disfavour is that which lends itself to the portrayal of the Eastern civilization at the time of its greatest corruption. "Quo Vadis" by Henryk Sienkiewicz, is a good example of this class. It pictures the very worst phases of life in the most realistic manner. There cannot be much objection to realistic novels, unless they descend to sensualism, but this is just what is done in "Quo Vadis" and it is all the