

His secret they had lately learned,
And knowing that for which he yearned,
Had hither come to woo.
The dark robed sisters talked of sin,
The light robed spoke of peace to win.
What should the mortal do?

With keener glance he now beholds
Upon the elfin mantle folds
Of each, a glowing name.
Ambition, Avarice, and Ruth,
He sees beside Love, Honor, Truth,
Each promising fair Fame.

Ambition, scorned, soon fades from sight,
Black Avarice joins the hasty flight;
Ruth may the best abide.
Fair Love and stainless Honor stay,
But they alone as servants may,
For Truth he makes his bride.

When from the dell this youth did part,
Truth reigned supreme within his heart,
'Twas there he read his fate.
The lines he read as there he stood
Were these: The true alone are good,
The good alone are great.

IOTA.

A FEW THOUGHTS ON READING AND BOOKS.

"Of making many books there is no end," said the wise Solomon. Obviously the sage speaks of mere *human* compositions as contra-distinguished from the Inspired writings, and had reference to the wearing, distracting effect of the former upon the mind as opposed to the healthy, solid, results which will surely flow from the faithful, conscientious, reading of the latter—the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever.

This age may well be styled the age of books. The shelves of the great libraries of the world are already bending under their burdens, and every year there are added to the mighty list some 25,000 new volumes. Brains, and pens, and printing presses are in ceaseless activity. The thoughts that only a few weeks ago were shaped in the author's brain are to-day the property of the world. It looks as if authors were determined, despite everything, to usher their offspring into the world to take their chances for life or death. Books good, bad, or indifferent, on every conceivable subject are ever coming from prolific

brains, and demand a perusal. Around these works are ever swarming the gleaners of literature, sucking therefrom that which either strengthens or palsies the brain—which either purifies or corrupts the heart. The public eagerly ask: What does this sayer say? One work is quickly flung aside to make room for another, and this soon yields to its successor. Reviewers grow weary with their work. They have, perhaps, neither the time nor the patience to pass righteous judgments. Even good books, are damned with faint praise; indifferent ones receive commendatory words, and bad ones, after a slight protest, are permitted to damage society. Indeed, words of praise or commendation are scarcely heard amid the bustle and din of preparation, and men are becoming restless and nervous as they watch this ever-rolling and increasing stream of literature. As one has said: "I stand beside the ceaseless flow of this miscellaneous torrent as one stands watching the turbid rush of Thames, at London Bridge, wondering whence it all comes, whither it all goes, what can be done with it, and what may be its ultimate function in the order of Providence."

We are living in this age of books. We take notes. We are great admirers of good books. Like Milton we deem them the precious life-blood of master-spirits we cheerfully concede that the mastery of one good book is of incalculable value, we know that to be rich in spirit is to be much with the grand old masters, reading with a purpose, assimilating, growing. We cannot help noting, too, that there are all over the world men and women, boys and girls, among whom there is a growing taste for a literature that not only profits not, but is exceedingly harmful,—nay, in many cases, there is even a relish for literary garbage. The good books find some purchasers, perhaps many; but the bad ones are eagerly and industriously hunted up and their contents ravenously devoured. Like produces like. The filth of the author's mind corrupts the mind of his reader. The disease spreads and creates an unhealthy appetite,—a mental *bulimy*. The demand for pernicious literature becomes greater and greater, and base-minded novelists, fatten upon diseased imaginations. All love for that which enobles, elevates, and purifies the mind, is destroyed, and the soul becomes a cage of unclean birds. The imbruting and debasing stimulants have been taken until they have lost their power to stimulate. In other cases indifferent books produce their