

dowments were prostituted to the one ardent desire of their own corrupt hearts—a paricidal zeal to extinguish a sense of Duty. Well might Hall exclaim, with such examples before him,—‘Miserable men’ proud of being the offspring of chance, in love with universal disorder; whose happiness is involved in the belief of there being no witness of their designs, and who are at ease only because they suppose themselves inhabitants of a forsaken and fatherless world!’

But there has sprung up with the present generation, a host of ephemeral writers, whose individual efforts, like the component parts of the fourth plague, are trifling, but whose aggregate power is fearfully corrupting; for, like the flies, their works are found throughout the whole land, in the hovels of the poor, as well as in the abodes of power. ‘They are greeted at your doors, in their occasional, or periodical visits, with a hearty welcome. They disgrace your centre tables, and by their fascinating character hold you, as by a magical spell, and charm you even while they prey upon your peace, and destroy your hopes.’

The impressions received through these channels, are not only contrary to sound morals, but opposed to true religion; and fostering a sentimental and speculative theology, tend inevitably to *skepticism*.

II. IMMORALITY, is another alarming tendency of our modern literature.

To deaden and destroy any of the kind or tender feelings of the soul, can be no light offence against a pure and holy God. Nor can he be a friend to his race, who, under the potent dominion of selfishness, would scatter the withering blight of impurity over the virtuous principles and moral sentiments of our nature. Yet there are those who, coveting reputation rather than truth, and fearless of Heaven’s threatened wo, ‘call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!’ and then enjoy, with a high, though malicious relish, the alarm excited by their gross and wicked perversions.

This open hostility, however, is confined to the few, who have resigned themselves to the wasting desolation which has passed over all their nobler principles and affections; while other authors, by their efforts to enlist our sympathies in behalf of depraved and vicious characters, exhibit a more secret, but not less inveterate hatred for some of the settled principles of morality. In this connection, we might again allude to the works of Lord Byron, whose vulgar Don Juan has, perhaps, done more to corrupt the mind, and weaken the restraints of virtue than any other book of the past century; and whose Childe Harold, by its cheerless, but sublime misanthropy, has contributed to the most serious social ruptures, and taught thousands to regard every exhibition of generosity and friendship as heartless hypocrisy.

But if from our standard literature, we turn to the floating and fictitious effusions of less noted authors, we shall discover in them the same alarming tendency. Their prominent characters are invested with peculiar interest, and lauded, though identified with the most base designs. We read of the contrivance of some clever sharper to elude justice; some intriguing politician to accomplish his purpose, some needy impostor to succeed in passing as an honest man; or of an accomplished villain, whose life and talents are devoted to the subversion of female virtue; and while we openly detest their wickedness, we fear their detection or secretly applaud their success. Now, when it is considered how often our worldly interests place us in circumstances in which the desire of the natural heart is to secure a present pleasure, it cannot be made a question, but that our weak principles are in imminent peril from the polluting recollection of instances in which truth and virtue have been violated, without exposure, or visible retribution.

Or, to view the subject in another light, if it be dangerous to associate with low characters in real life, can it be safe to hold converse with them in the secret ‘chambers of imagery?’ If the perfect portraiture be admired, how can the original be despised? If ‘evil communications,’ when orally presented, ‘corrupt good manners,’ what reason have we to anticipate a different result when wicked sentiments are thrown before us in a more tangible and permanent form?

III. MENTAL IMBECILITY is another obvious consequence of our popular literature. We have before intimated that the mind receives its character from the objects which engross its thoughts. If they be manly and virtuous, they elevate and ennoble; if puerile and mean, their tendency is to weakness and decay. The capacities of the soul are vast, its desires boundless, and its destiny eternal progression. But if its powers be sacrificed to trifles, and its desires fed on fancies, its progress will be interrupted, and its destiny turned.

In reference to the subject now under consideration, we may with great propriety repeat the question proposed by our holy Redeemer in illustrating the infallible test of Christian character—“Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?” In other words—can we reasonably anticipate pleasing and refreshing fruits from barren and obnoxious weeds? Now such is the character of fictitious and wild romance, that while it may please it cannot profit; while it may gratify the imagination, it cannot enlarge the heart, and mature the judgment—The wise man has said—“The heart of him that hath understanding seeketh knowledge; but *the mouth of fools feedeth on foolishness.*” How abundant then must be the supply of this last class, in the uncounted issues of a corrupt press. But, with all their stores, they perish with a mental famine.

One of our own gifted poets thus describes, in a most imitable and accurate strain of imagery, the feverish and sickening tendency of such reading upon one of the sex most prone, perhaps, to its indulgence.

“Look now directed by yon candle’s blaze,
Where the false shutter half its trust betrays—
Mark that fair girl, reclining in her bed,
Its curtains round her polished shoulders spread,
Dark midnight reigns, the storm is up in power,
What keeps her waiting at the midnight hour?
See where the volume on her pillow lies—
Claims Radcliffe, or Chaconne, her frequent sighs?
’Tis some wild legend, now her kind eye fills,
And now cold terror every fibre chills;
Still she reads on,—in fiction’s labyrinth lost—
Of tyrant fathers, or of true love cross’d,
Of clanking fetters, low, mysterious groans,
Blood-erusted daggers, and uncoffined bones,
Pale, gliding ghosts, with fingers dropping gore,
And blue flames dancing round a dungeon’s door.
Still she reads on—even though to read she fears,
And in each key-hole moan, strange voices hears,
While every shadow that withdraws her look,
Glares in her face—the goblin of the book.
Still on the leaves her craving eye is cast;
On all she feasts, yet hungers for the last,
Counts what remain, now sighs there are no more,
And now even those half tempted to skip o’er,
At length the bad are killed, the good are pleased,
Her thirsting curiosity appeased,
She shuts the dear, dear book that made her weep,
Puts out the light, and turns away to sleep.”

SPENCER.

But these sad effects are not confined to the gentler sex. What works are occupying the attention and engrossing the time of our young men? Where are the students of Locke and Reid? Where the admirers of Milton and Cowper? Where, among all the rising generation, shall we find worthy representatives for the strong-minded and masculine men of past ages? The places of these have been usurped by Dumas and Sue, by Bulwer and James, and the earliest development of mind is now suppressed, and the first kindlings of genius extinguished by the grovelling and desolating influence of a licentious literature.

Our last remark is directed more particularly to professors of religion.

IV. SUCH READING IS FATAL TO VITAL GODLINESS. The Christian warfare contemplates the complete subjugation of every evil thought, every wicked desire, and every wandering imagination. The noble aim of every pious heart is, to bring “into captivity every thought unto the obedience of Christ.” But how numerous, and powerful are the devices of the great adversary to defeat us in this protracted and painful contest! To accomplish his hellish purpose every channel of influence is corrupted, and every discovery in science, with every progression in art, is made subservient to the interests of his fallen empire. A cheap and promiscuous literature, however,