

(From the New Era.)

## THE PRESS AS AN EDUCATOR.

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The times in which we live may reasonably be denominated "the epoch of the press;" for were a search instituted throughout the volume of the world's history, a similar period could not be found. The pages of history bear no record of an age at all to be compared with the present, with regard to the amount of reading dispatched by the masses. There never was a period when the publications of this mighty "Armstrong gun" of moral conflict were scattered so broadcast throughout the earth. And never was there a period when its issues were so varied and extensive.

The productions of this most prolific of producers are profusely spread around us in almost every shape and size:—from the diminutive "extra" to the broad, many-colored news sheet; from the small juvenile paper; to the large, full and instructive "monthly" or "quarterly;" from the short story to the closely printed, mance; from the pamphlet to the bulky octavo or quarto.

It would be well if these issues of the press varied in appearance only; but it is a lamentable fact, that the publications of the present day not only possess these diversified externals, but that they are frequently characterized by opposite qualities, and, as a consequence, exert influences which are oftentimes as widely different as the meridian sun and midnight darkness—the one influence being highly beneficial, while the other is of that pernicious nature, which every philanthropist would wish, not only that there might be an end, but that there had been no beginning.

In what manner does the press exert an influence which is pernicious in the education of youth? We will begin with that which is least detrimental in its effects upon the mind of the rising generation. The time spent in the perusal or study of those books or papers, the contents of which afford none, or considering what might be gathered from their ranks, comparatively little instruction, nor conduce to the refining of the mental taste, is time misapplied. And it may be laid down at once and for ever as an axiom, the truth of which will not be questioned,

that whatever leads to the misimprovement of time is baneful in its effects, however innocent otherwise. When we consider that a few brief years comprise our allotted time on earth, this fact alone should cause us to aspire for at least a portion of that universe of knowledge, of which as yet we have acquired comparatively nothing. When such a mind as Newton's, which was unceasingly at work, had only comprehended a drop out of the immense ocean of science, intellects of a more limited order cannot afford to fritter away time, but must be "up and doing."

A very pernicious influence is also exerted by the publication of many works not of questionable utility only, but of a character decidedly demoralizing and licentious. The book-stores, circulating libraries, and private libraries too, are teeming with such trash, not to mention those which are hid during the day and read when the reader should be asleep. Included among these is a vast number of the multitude of novels and romances, which are printed in a cheap and attractive form, and disseminated far and wide, contaminating and ruining the impressible minds of the young. The fruits of such publications may be dollars to the authors and venders, but to those who read them are physical, mental and moral ruin. We have no hesitation in making the assertion, that many a noble young mind, just as its capacity was budding out to enjoy the blessings and to partake of the honours of life, has imbibed some of these destructive productions, and has, in consequence, been lost to self, to friends, and to the public. It was said not long since by no less a literary authority than the *Edinburgh Review*—"The press is pouring out every day a tide of books which distract the attention, weaken the judgment, corrupt the taste, and defy the criticism of the public by their very multitude. Every one, young or old, man or woman, fool or wise, thinks himself able to say something that may catch the peoples' eye to raise himself, either by money or notoriety. The whole world has become a great school, where all the people have turned themselves into teachers; and the ravenous appetite of an idle people, always craving for some new excitement or amusement, and ready to swallow the most unwholesome food, is daily stimulating the market."

The question may perhaps be asked, are novels and romance to have no place in our select literature for the rising gen-

eration? In presuming to present an opinion on this subject, we think it our duty to state, that to place such works indiscriminately in their hands is most improper, and cannot but be attended with evil consequences; yet hesitate not in stating, that well written works of fiction; the some of which is moral and instructive, and without the tendency of originating improper thoughts in the mind, or in the least degree of dissipating the imagination, so that other and more useful subjects should have their influence marred, may possibly, when judiciously selected, and a certain time allotted for their perusal by natural and experienced minds, be productive of some good. It would be none of our intention were we possessed of the qualifications for such a position, to fill the office of censor, and decide what works are or are not suitable for the perusal of those upon whom will soon devolve all the responsibilities of political and social government; but there should undoubtedly be some one to direct in such cases, and who could exert a more beneficial influence on this most important matter than the instructor of youth, or, in other words, the Common School teacher.

In a great majority of cases where the reading of fiction is much pursued; didactical subjects are neglected and discarded. What reflecting and observing mind has not observed this fact? It is notorious that many persons, old and young, seldom, or perhaps never read biography or history, a book of science or a poem.—How shameful, and yet how well known a reality it is, that the most of parents are so very deficient in this respect.—They have no taste for reading themselves, seldom or never is a book or a newspaper found in their hands; hence they are quite incapable of directing their children as to what they should read and what leave unread. Ought not all who admit the truth of the statements we have enunciated, and to whom the mental training of the rising generation is intrusted, lend all their influence to foster a taste for the purest literary knowledge?

Another phase of the pernicious influence of the press is witnessed in the diligence of some to propagate that which leads to excite the passions of the curious. To particularize, for instance, how often do our editors publish detailed accounts of trials of criminal cases, thus pandering to the morbid craving of minds morally diseased for the sake of pecuniary gain. By this means, as well as others, the press has been unfortunately discrimina-