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## Life, Literature and Education.

### Our Next Literary Society Topic.

Essays on "Popping the Question" are coming in rapidly, and we are now assured that our Literary Society, as judged from results, is an established institution and a recognized success. Next time we are to have a debate. The subject is not a hard one, yet one which is of deep moment to farmers' sons and daughters. Besides, it is one which affords ample room for discussion, as there is much to be said for each side. Here it is:

"Resolved that a High-school Education Qualifying for a Teacher's Certificate is of More Advantage to a Farmer than an Education Qualifying Him for a Diploma from a Business College."

This time we have decided to make the "time" much shorter than previously; we think interest in the Society will be better whetted so. Hence all essays must be sent to this office not later than March 1st. Other rules governing the debate are as follows:

1. Essays must not contain more than 500 words.
2. Take either side you like. Decision will depend more on the strength of the points than the numbers who enter.
3. Full name and address, with nom de plume, if one is used, must accompany each contribution.
4. Write neatly, and on but one side of the paper.

We have every confidence that our readers will join in making this debate a most animated one. When writing, state whether, in event of securing a prize, you would prefer a book or a pin.

### An Appreciation of the Novel.

If I am not one of the "Oldest Inhabitants" in the F. A. Home Magazine circle, I am assuredly an old-time reader. As such, I would like to say that whoever originated the idea of the F. A. & H. M. L. S. deserves a vote of thanks from us. It was a happy thought. A friend of mine used to say to me most impressively, "Thoughts are things." Of a truth, they are, and most apparent to the senses when somebody gives them form and life. This Literary Society is going to be very much alive. Therefore, whoever gave the idea reality, should have a still more hearty vote of thanks. It makes our Home Magazine just about perfect. By contribution or suggestion we can all help to make it "Go." I like it because it is a sure indication that there is "something doing." Let us all take a hand in it.

But this is not what I was going to say. I'm one of those men who believe in "speaking out in the open." My say is about novel-writing, which our friend, Mr. J. Taylor, so sweepingly censures. It can be carried to a debilitating ex-

cess, and not a few novels are a combination of froth and trash, but the standard fiction of the literary world is a precious heritage, and lives because it is the expression of truth in classic form. Our friend reminds me of a speaker who, in my hearing, at a convention, once declared that if he had his way he would "burn 'em all up." Whew! As a youth, I delighted in the fairy tale and "Robinson Crusoe," and hope I'll never grow too old to love them. Childhood is a happy world of romance. Uncle Tom's Cabin is fiction, but it helped powerfully to free enslaved millions. George Eliot's "Romola" is fiction, but it portrays with all the vividness of an ancient seer the peril of tampering with conscience and the consequent deterioration of character. In Victor Hugo's imperishable "Les Misérables" we have enacted before us the lifelong conflict of God and Satan for the mastery of a human soul, and witness in Jean Valjean the glorious recovery from sin and selfishness to Christian service and self-sacrifice. Stevenson, whose rare life was lately portrayed in these pages for us, describes in "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" the terrible battle between good and evil, as the Apostle Paul describes it in the seventh chapter of Romans, from whence the novelist drew his inspiration. Hawthorne's "Scarlet Letter" points to the tribulations of conscience, the necessity and nobility of repentance, and the confession of sin. Well would it have been for many a blasted life had the moral of that matchless fiction, so we call it, been early burned into the consciousness. Space fails me to enumerate others, but our well-chosen shelves are full of them. The world owes a debt of gratitude for the reforms and the moral progress which the novel has hastened on. These great books illustrate and emphasize eternal truth, and reverently let me say, the Divine Teacher Himself utilized the very method and vehicle of thought in the story of the "Prodigal Son," and in scores of other instances.

I hope this friendly discussion will help us to discern what is great and good in the realm of fiction. If we come to understand the novel of merit, and what it has done to cheer, relieve and uplift humanity, we shall be better prepared to appreciate its true place in the world's best literature, and be less sweeping in our condemnations.

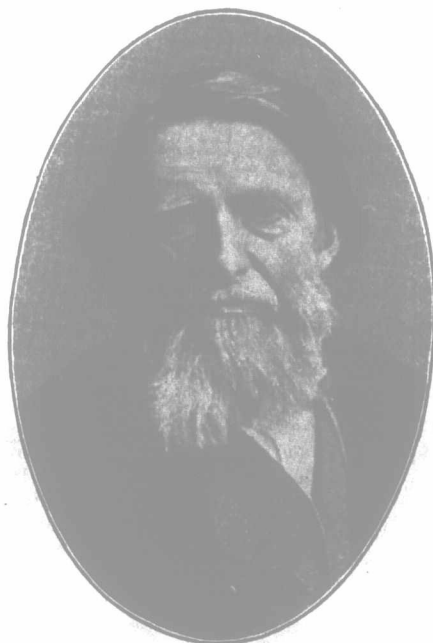
T. W. SAVAGE.

### John Ruskin.

There are those among us who, reading here or there a chance sentence, glittering like a gem, perhaps, among the more common pebbles of some magazine, and followed by the meager subscription, "Ruskin," have been inspired to seek out some of the ponderous tomes written by this eminent critic of art and life—"Modern Painters," "Seven Lamps of Architecture," "Stones of Venice," etc. Assiduously, perhaps, we have wandered over page after page, wading, sometimes painfully, through much which, by reason of limitations of circumstance, we could grasp but imperfectly, yet held to our reading for the sake of the jewels scattered

here and there for all men, and only to be found by a steadfast going on.

How we have longed during such hours for the purse and the leisure which would permit a European trip, to see with our own eyes the cathedrals he describes; to examine and compare from the originals the pictures of Claude, and Constable, Perugino, Leonardo, Michael Angelo, and, above all, of the much vaunted Turner; and to prove if, by such means, we could get a grip upon even a few of those things which Ruskin has seemed to seize upon with superordinary vision. And yet, possibly, with neither the purse nor the leisure, we might have done better. There are books and books filled with magnificent engravings of the cathedrals. There are prints—devoid of coloring, to be sure, yet giving some clue to the idea—of nearly all the famous paintings, and to be had from two to five cents apiece, quite suitable for framing, too, from Brown & Co., Beverly, Mass.; Perry



John Ruskin.

Co., Malden, Mass.; Cosmos Co., 296 Broadway, New York, and others.

Nevertheless, even without these illustrations, we have felt amply compensated in reading Ruskin. Not only a critic of art, with a grip upon language comparable only to that possessed by some of the best among the poets, he has written some of the finest passages of English in our literature. See, for example, this scintillating bit of description: "Then let us pass farther towards the North, until we see the Orient colors change gradually into a vast belt of rainy green, where the pastures of Switzerland, and poplar valleys of France, and dark forests of the Danube and Carpathians stretch from the mouths of the Loire to those of the Volga, seen through clefts in grey swirls of rain-cloud and flaky veils of the mists of the brooks, spreading low along the pasture lands; and then, farther north still, to see the earth heave into mighty masses of leaden rock and heathy moor, bordering with a broad waste of gloomy purple that belt of field and wood, and splintering into irregular and grisly islands amidst the northern seas, beaten by storm,

and chilled by ice-drift, and tormented by furious pulses of contending tide, until the roots of the last forests fail from among the hill ravines and the hunger of the north wind bites their peaks into barrenness; and, at last, the wall of ice, durable like iron, sets, deathlike, its white teeth against us, out of the polar twilight." Or, this daintest of pastels, whose subject is the cloud-bank of the summer sky: "Who, among the whole chattering crowd, can tell me of the forms and precipices of the chain of tall white mountains that girded the horizon at noon yesterday? Who saw the narrow sunbeam that came out of the south and smote upon the summits until they melted and mouldered away in a dust of blue rain? Who saw the dance of the dead clouds when the sunlight left them last night, and the west wind blew them before it like withered leaves? All has passed, unregretted as unseen. . . . And yet it is not in the broad and fierce manifestations of the elemental energies, not in the clash of the hail, nor the drift of the whirlwind that the highest characters of the sublime are developed. God is not in the earthquake, nor in the fire, but in the still, small voice."

Yet, not only is the charm of Ruskin confined to his fine writing, on account of which, he complained, he was sometimes read rather than for the sake of the truths he tried to bring out. His deepest fascination lies in the bits of philosophy to which he wanders off again and again, and again, whether he describes a Gothic window, a cloud passing over the heavens, or a bit of Venetian glass. And why should he not wander off, since, underlying all his criticisms on art there heaved continually his one great object—to raise mankind and render it happier. Ruskin was a man with a purpose. Does he speak in appreciation of a painter? It is because he recognizes that upon the true artist lies the "responsibility of a preacher." Does he laud a type of architecture? It is because he perceives the mind of man working through that architecture—all noblest architecture but the expression of a noble idea, a noble manhood. Does he rave over a cloud, or sunbeam, or the shadows beneath a tree? It is because he considers that we should "receive the word of God from clouds, and leaves, and waves." And all of these things he would impress upon us for our good.

He would have mankind reach its highest possible development, and he pleads well the cause of the middle classes—the great horde of manual workers, compelled, too often, to lead mechanical lives. Individual, interested effort, invention, must be cultivated at all hazards, and no man must be a slave. "But, above all," he says, "in our dealings with the souls of other men, we are to take care how we check, by severe requirement or narrow caution, efforts which might otherwise lead to noble issue; and still more, how we withhold our admiration from great excellences because they are mingled with rough faults. Now, in the make and nature of every man, however rude or simple, whom we employ in manual labor, there are some powers for better things; some sturdy