

I had to confess that I did not.

"These cheap books," he continued, "have made great changes in literature, and they are destined to make more yet. They themselves have changed, as you may have noticed, since they first made their appearance. Most of them started out as dime publications, and for some time they were sold at that price. But the price was too low. Even when the matter of the book was 'borrowed' from England and cost the publisher nothing, the expense of the mechanical work was too great for such a price. Now, as you know, most of the cheap editions are sold for either 20 or 25 cents. This allows a fair margin of profit to the publisher, even when he pays the author for his work; so there is every probability that the cheap editions will last. Perhaps you do not know how much a simple little machine has done towards making cheap literature possible—I mean the machine that binds pamphlets with a tiny bit of wire, much faster and cheaper than they can be sewed. I see that some of the publishers (presumably those who do not publish any 'cheap editions') complain that these cheap books are to be found even in the houses of wealthy people, 'who would not hesitate to pay \$150 for a single chair.' Why should they not be? It is a homely old saying, but a very true one, that what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. The publishers will not pay in America for what they can get for nothing in England; why then should readers pay \$2 for what they can buy for 20 cents? I do not believe, however, that the cheap books interfere with the sale of well bound, handsomely printed books that will last. They rather help the sale of any book that is worth preserving."

"I almost suspect," I told him, "that you must have been in the publishing business yourself at sometime or other."

"No, I have not," he replied; "but I have a friend who is a publisher, and so, perhaps know more of the ins and outs of the business than I otherwise should. I think the cheap editions help along good books in this way: they give readers a chance to buy and examine them in the cheap form, and then, if they prove to be worth preserving, the reader buys a bound copy for his library, when most likely he would not have bought it if he had not read it. This, of course, is looking at the matter from the publishers' standpoint. For the public I think the cheap editions are a great boon. They give everybody an opportunity to keep informed of the literature of the day at small cost. Even the boys are reading them. Not long ago, if I called an office boy, I would see him stuffing some miserable dime novel, Indian story, or one of the flashy boys' papers into his pocket; now I frequently see them reading books of a much higher class, because they are equally cheap and equally interesting, even to a boy with any brains. If cheap works, by good authors, can drive out the wretched stuff that has heretofore been sold to boys and girls in this country, that alone is a sufficient excuse for their existence. I can tell you of another good work they are doing."

"What is that?" I asked.

"They are disgusting people with the nauseating Sir Charles and Lady Clare Marble Hall type of novel, in which impossible people who use ridiculously stilted language are put in ridiculously impossible situations, and eventually marry and live happily ever afterwards. Have you not noticed that very few—comparatively few—of such books are printed now? It is because the cheap editions have given people such a dose of them. The ordinary reader can stand so much of that sort of thing and no more. And the publishers are not slow in finding out what there is for demand and what there is not. Perhaps a few lovesick girls still read such novels, but hardly anybody else. It was only necessary for people to have a good dose of them, and they have had it. A few years ago I was kept in the house for several weeks by a trifling accident, and I took advantage of the rest to read Wilkie Collins entire, from the first thing he published to the last that had come out at that time. Though I am an admirer of Wilkie Collins and always take pleasure in reading his new works as they come out, I never was so tired of anything in my life. One of his deep plots and one set of his odd characters at a time are a pleasure; but take them all in a lump and one tires of them."

"Then what," I asked him, "do you consider has taken the

place of the novels you describe—of the Sir Charles and Lady Clare sort?"

"I will answer your question by asking another," he replied. "Do you know of any living writers of fiction whose works sell more rapidly in this country than those of W. Clark Russell, Robert Louis Stevenson, and H. Rider Haggard? A new book by any of these men is eagerly bought by tens of thousands of the readers of 'cheap editions.' For my part I should not stop to look at the title of any book that had one of these names attached to it; I should simply buy it, and carry it home to read. Now what do they write. Clark Russell's sea stories are tales of adventure, rather than novels. Robert Louis Stevenson's books, without an exception, as far as I can recollect, are all stories of adventure. Mr. Haggard's two books are made up of adventures of the wildest sort; and I wonder that either his works or Stevenson's are classed as novels. But they show what direction the public mind is taking. Unable to get works of fiction that can rank with the publications of a few years ago, and disgusted with the 'soul painting' of the present time, people fall back upon adventure. I have done it myself, and I know that a great many others have. If I cannot get a new *Waverley* or a new *Pickwick* or a new *Pendennis*, I am thankful for a good lively story of adventure. But here is your station. When you are up my way, come in and see whether I do not keep adding as many new books to my library as if there were no 'cheap editions' in existence." — *William Drysdale, in New York Times.*

#### THE REFLECTIVE IN LITERATURE.

THESE have been but few volumes of *pensées* or reflections on men and things published within the last five years that have made the world richer by their coming. It requires a rare combination of qualities of mind and heart to write a book of thoughts and reflections that will stimulate nobler thoughts in others. A clear, logical mind, a course of varied and deep readings, quick sympathetic observation, an individuality that rises superior to mere egotism, and a desire for the truth in all things, these rarely exist together. The strong temptation is to sacrifice the truth to brilliancy, to accept the striking at the expense of plainer, simple, yet nobler thoughts. It develops an almost morbid seeking after secondary meanings, turning and twisting the most simple phenomenon in order to torture it into a spiritual or moral truth. All things are made types of something else, and the most trivial commonplace are polished to appear original and brilliant, while the writer unconsciously cheats himself into believing this mechanical colouring of his thoughts with sentimental tints to be genuine poetry. It is not necessarily so, for sacrificing ideas to mere prettiness of expression is never poetry.

These diaries of nature and humanity, written in a neat running hand, consist chiefly of cheap tinted sentimentality sprinkled with exclamation and interrogation marks:—

**SUNDAY.**—How calm and beautiful the lake is this evening! Not a shimmer across its silver bosom, not a ripple, nor a sound. No motion, merely waiting! Glorious emblem of a joyous resting life. Am I happy? Can I rest calm and serene at night like this placid lake? Answer, my soul!

**MONDAY.**—I have just seen the first crocus, happy herald of the returning spring. As it lifts its pretty head to me while I gaze upon it, it seems to have some message, which it fain would tell. Where shall I be next spring, where the spring after, where in the long years that may follow? Alas, I know not, and yet, and yet, I know not why. How that rock shades and protects it! Yes, but its presence lends beauty to the grim old rock. Thus is not all the good we do in life meted back to us? Oh, that I could take this more fully to my heart!

**WEDNESDAY.**—How happy nature looked as I took my morning walk. I saw a pig trying to get under a gate; as the porcine thrust his nose under the sharp stakes, the staples hurt him and chafed him, yet he pressed on. Blind, foolish pig! Vainly seeking to war against the inevitable and cope with events beyond its strength! Oh, man; dost thou not often try to get under gates when thou canst not!