

seen from the point of view of one who has caught from Christianity a conception of life as it ought to be. I do not ask him even to deal out poetic justice to all his characters and shut the prison doors on the bad people while he rings the wedding bells for the good. I ask him only to show me good as good and evil as evil; to quicken my love for those who do their best, and deepen my scorn for those who do their worst; to give me a warmer sympathy with all sorts and conditions of men who are sincere and loyal and kind; to strengthen my faith that life is worth living even while he helps me to realize how hard it is to live well; to leave me my optimism, but not to leave it stone blind; not to depress me with cheap cynicism, nor to lull me with spurious sentimentalism, but to nourish and confirm my heart with Sir Walter Scott's manly faith, that "to every duty performed there is attached an inward satisfaction which deepens with the difficulty of the task and is its best reward."

The use of fiction either to defend or to attack some definite theological dogma seems to me illegitimate and absurd. I remember a devout and earnest brother who begged me to write a story to prove that Presbyterians never held the doctrine of infant damnation. I would as soon write a story to prove the binomial theorem. But that fiction may serve a noble purpose in renewing our attraction to virtue in sharpening our abhorrence of selfishness and falsehood, in adding to the good report of things that are pure and lovely, in showing that heroism is something better than eccentricity tinged with vice, and, at its deepest, in making us feel anew our need of a divine forgiveness for our faults, and a divine Master to control our lives this is true beyond a doubt; for precisely that is what our best fiction from "Waverley" down to "The Bonnie Brier Bush" and "Sentimental Tommy" has been doing. Name half dozen of the great English novels at random—"Henry Esmond," "David Copperfield," "The Cloister and Hearth," "Lorna Doone," "Romola," "The Scarlet Letter"—and who shall dare to deny that there is in these books an atmosphere which breathes of the vital truths and the brightest ideals of Christianity?

It must be admitted that there is a great mass of printed books, fearfully current at present, of which this cannot be said. Some of them breathe of patchouli and musk, some of stale beer and cigarettes, some of the gutter and pesthouse, many do not breathe at all. The presses of England and America are turning out, for every day in the year, about six new works of fiction, most of them works of affliction. It is a deplorable waste of time and labor, to say nothing of brains. But I do not see in it any great or pressing danger. The chemists tell us that the paper on which these books are printed will not last twenty years. It will not need to last so long, for the vast majority of the books will be forgotten before their leaves disintegrate. Superficial, feeble, fatuous, insane, they pass into oblivion, and the literature which emerges and abides is that which recognizes the moral conflict as the supreme interest of life, and the message of Christianity as the only real promise of victory. There are three mischievous and perilous tendencies in our modern world against which the spirit of Christianity, embodied in a sane and virile and lovable literature, can do much to guard us.

Perilous Tendencies of the Times.

The first is growing idolatry of military glory and conquest. It is one thing to admit that there are certain causes for which a Christian may lawfully take the sword. It

is another thing to claim, as some do, that war in itself is better for a nation than peace, and to look chiefly to mighty armaments on land and sea as the great instruments for the spread of civilization and Christianity. The forerunner of Christ was not Samson but John the Baptist. The Kingdom of heaven cometh not with observation, nor with acquisition, nor with subjugation. If all the territory of the globe were subject to one conquering emperor to-day, no matter though the Cross were blazoned on his banner and his throne, the kingdom of heaven would be no whit nearer. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord." That is the message of Christianity. A literature that is Christian must exalt love not only as the greatest but as the strongest thing in the world. It must hold fast the truth bravely spoken by one of America's foremost soldiers, General Sherman, that "war is hell." It must check and reprove the lust of conquest and the confidence of brute force. It must firmly vindicate and commend righteousness, and fair-dealing, and kindness, and the simple proclamation of the truth, as the means by which alone a better age can be brought nigh and all the tribes of earth taught to dwell together in peace. It must repeat Wordsworth's fine message:

"By the soul
Only the nations shall be great and free."

The second perilous tendency is the growing idolatry of wealth. Money is condensed power. But it is condensed in a form which renders it frightfully apt to canker and corrupt. A noble literature, truly in harmony with the spirit of Christ, will reiterate in a hundred forms of beauty and power his teaching that "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." It will expose with splendid scorn and ridicule the falsehood of the standard by which the world, and too often the Church, measure what a man is worth by his wealth. It will praise and glorify simple manhood and womanhood, "plain-living and high thinking." It will teach that true success is the triumph of character, and that true riches are of the heart.

The third perilous tendency is the growing spirit of frivolity. A brilliant British essayist in his life of Robert Browning has just said that the Nineteenth Century has already become incomprehensible to us because it took life so seriously. This was probably not intended as a compliment, but if the Nineteenth Century could hear the criticism it would have good reason to feel flattered. An age that does not take life seriously will get little out of it. One of the greatest services that Christianity can render to current literature is to inspire it with a nobler ambition and lift it to a higher level. I remember an old woodsman in the Adirondack forest who used to say that he wanted to go to the top of a certain mountain as often as his legs would carry him such a feeling of "heaven-up-histedness." That is an uncouth, humble, eloquent phrase to describe the function of a great literature.

"Unless above himself he can
Erect himself, how mean a thing is man!"

I want the books that help me out of the vacancy and despair of a frivolous mind, out of the tangle and confusion of a society that is busied in bric-a-brac, out of the meanness of unfeeling mockery and the heaviness of incessant mirth, into a loftier and serener region, where through the clear air of serious thoughts I can learn to look soberly and bravely upon the mingled misery and splendor of human existence, and then go down

with a cheerful courage to play a man's part in the life which Christ has forever enabled in his divine presence.

The Moment of Greatest Danger.

It is a fact which all close students of human nature must have observed, that there is a backwater of temptation which is more deadly than its assaults. You may fight hard against a temptation, and fight victoriously. You may beat it off and crush it down, and then, when weary with the conflict you suffer the strain of vigilance to relax, it will steal in and easily master the citadel which lately it spent all its force to win. Beware of the moments in which you succeed the best. They are the most perilous of all. Just when the consciousness of triumph seems to permit and justify disarmament for a moment, the subtle foe with whom you have to deal will steal in on you and win a treacherous victory. Never relax the strain. Never forget that each new victory opens a new danger and gives fresh call for vigilance and courage to keep what has been won. Never believe that the devil is asleep; never believe that a besetting sin has been eradicated; never boast of a coming victory.—J. Baldwin Brown.

Character.

It is a very curious and interesting fact that the word "character," which comes into our English speech directly and without change of sound from the Greek, signifies first the sharp tool with which a seal or a die is engraved, and then the inscription or the object which is cut in the seal or in the die. Our character, then, is the image and the subscription which we cut upon our life; I say which we cut, for, however, much happens to us and bears upon us from outside causes beyond our control, it is true, in the last analysis, that we determine our character. We hold the tools which cut the legends on our life, we grave the die, we incise the seal. What are the tools with which we cut character upon ourselves? The tools are thoughts. As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he. The style and the subject of the engraved character depend on the choice of tools and on the manner of their use. The legend on the seal shows what was in the mind of the engraver as he cut with his tools. Here is a seal with a cross cut in it. That cross was the leading idea in the engraver's mind for that seal; and his busy tool translated that invisible thought of his mind into this fixed and visible sign. Character is invisible thought translated into visibility, and, fixed before the eye, cut on the life.—Rev. Charles Cuthbert Hall, D. D.

In 1835 a Buriat chief living near Lake Baikal, in Siberia, went to Mr. Swan, the London Society's Missionary, saying that he wished to establish a memorial of his baby boy who had died. The chief suggested that he be allowed to pay toward the expense of printing the Buriat Bible thirty-five cents, which had been given the child. He knew that the money would not pay for much of the Bible but he thought that perhaps it might pay the cost of the dot over the "i" in the word "Saviour." "I do not give the money to you," said the Chief, "I give it to print a dot over one letter in the name of my Saviour; and may this memorial of my dear dead baby be for the benefit of my friends who are yet without Christ." This incident, given by Mr. Canton of the B.F.S. in his "Little Hands," reads like a New Testament illustration of faith that is great.