

work becomes a drudgery, and the school suffers in consequence. Now, if he had been content with studying for an hour or two in the evening, and had spent part of his time reading one of these much-decried novels, how much better it would have been for him. His time would have passed more pleasantly, he would have done more studying, and would have received benefits from the novels he read. I am supposing, of course, that our teachers are of ordinary understanding, not likely to be led away by the tales of blood and thunder which schoolboys devour, or the sentimental, sensational rubbish which finds eager readers among the servant girls of our cities and towns. I am supposing that where the chance was offered them they would take the works of our standard novelists, the works of those who have won fame by the beauty of their language, the grandeur of their imaginations, the variety and faithfulness of their descriptions, and their wonderful knowledge of human character. And what are the benefits we should derive? (1) A clearer view of different classes and conditions of people, their modes of living, and their various trials and temptations; (2) a better knowledge of our own characters; (3) a better idea of what good composition is; and (4) a more sympathetic heart, arising from a richer and more extensive knowledge of human nature. I believe that more insight into our own character may be gained by reading novels than in almost any other way; that is, if they are read in a right manner. A person in reading a novel should observe carefully the characters of the different people in the book—should note attentively all shades of character that resemble his own—should trace out these shades, and examine in what points there is a resemblance—should follow them on and see what effect they have on

the person's life, and whether the effects stated are reasonable or probable—examine, in fact, whether they are traits of character which should be encouraged and strengthened, or checked and weakened. Used in this way, I see no reason why novel-reading should not become a great moral aid in building and strengthening our minds. If a friend or relative quietly informs us of some weak point in our character, we generally feel a little sore—feel like reminding him or her of the passage about the mote and the beam, and very likely go away with the idea, too, that our friend is wrong in his suppositions. But when we find this weak or bad point in a character in a book, and reading of or seeing the inevitable consequences that flow from it, it does not seem as if we had been told of it, but as though we had discovered it for ourselves; and, therefore, to make some use of our own discovery, we immediately set to work to conquer the habit, be it what it may. But in whatever line you read, whether it be in Science, Philosophy, History, Travels, Poetry, or Novels, or all together, read the best books and only the best books. Read them carefully, read them thoroughly, read them thoughtfully; for in them you will find facts that will interest, truths that will instruct, sentiments worthy of attention, and ideas deserving of thought. Say not that you have no time, or that you are too busy. Make time. How much of your time do you waste in idleness and folly? And even suppose you waste no time, an hour or two a night taken from study for this purpose would be well spent. Think you that scientists and philosophers, from Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, to Mill, Spencer, Tyndall, Huxley, and Darwin, have studied and thought and written for nothing? Think you that historians, from Herodotus and Thucydides, to Gibbon, Hallam, and