

Talks about Books.

I KNEW a boy who would commence a sentence thus: "I have read somewhere in an improving book." That boy needed improving. We are no more called upon always to read improving books than we are to eat improving dinners. It is all a matter of taste. In "The Inner House," Walter Besant wants to be improving, and, like some improving preachers, is intolerably dull. Yet I ought not to blame him, for, when a friend read his book, she said to me, "He must have heard you on the land of Homœia." Now the Land of Homœia was a sermon, preached several summers ago to children and bushwhackers on the text "One star differeth from another star in glory," and told how a little girl was transported from the lap of luxury to a region in which very common people possessed very common things in common, and, after enduring all sorts of miseries at the hands and from the lips of these levellers, awoke, in a new world, to a realization of the utter falsity of all principles of human equality, for there, in a perfect state, were principalities and powers, angels and archangels, seraphim and cherubim, and the children's guardians in the inner court of heaven's nobility who always beheld the face of the Father in heaven. It was preached in a spirit of well meaning endeavor to bring into discredit the teachings of a local embryo socialist, and was fairly successful in its aim. Mr. Besant's aim is lower, for God, and his laws, and the government of heaven, have little part in his book. Seeking to discredit modern science in its relations to social life, which he makes it to rule with a uniform rod of iron, he prophetically brings the world into a state of Homœia or dreary monotony, out of which it escapes, through a daring young lady's efforts on the minds of her companions, into the old realm of music and dancing, dressing, love making and war. It is true that the churches are also restored, but the reason for this is not very obvious. Yet "The Inner House" is a straw that shows which way the wind is blowing, for Mr. Besant goes with the wind, and indicates a current of public opinion blowing cold upon the arrogant pretensions of physical science. Mr. Grant Allen, in his novel that bears the inelegant title of "The Devil's Die," and which tells how a great investigator of disease germs sought to poison his wife but himself fell a victim, shows the compatibility of the highest attainments in physical research with the most degrading passions of humanity.

The mention of these novels is an evidence that the writer of Talks about Books has been agreeing with Horace that *dulce est desipere in loco*,