

afore—about not takin' no thought for your wittles and your clothes. I'd heard it many a time afore you read it, Bessie, but it was your readin' of it that brought it to my mind. We ain't fowls as flies in the air, or flowers as grows in a gardenin'.

'You'd look comikle a flyin' in the air or a-growin' in a gardenin', Granny,' laughed Bessie, who had not lost her liking for looking at the ludicrous side of things. The old woman's temper was ruffled by her grand daughter's irreverent conceit, and she paid very divided attention to the explanation I tried to give her of her difficulty. So I contented myself with reading the whole of the latter part of the chapter to her, that it might teach its own lesson—a plan which I have often found to be efficacious under similar circumstances. Except in so far as it removes difficulties caused by differences of time and place, or gives a passing hint that enables one's hearers to make a personal use of circumstances that seem at first things that can have nothing to do with them, the less exposition is mixed up with the reading of the Scriptures in the houses of the poor the better, I think. The mere reading of a chapter may, I know, be made as mechanical an operation as the twirling of a 'praying cylinder,' on the part both of the reader and the hearer; but when the reading is not a perfunctory performance of official duty, the words have often a marvellous power of explaining themselves for purposes of identification. Mrs. Jude echoed the last sentence of the chapter, and gave also, without knowing it, Jeremy Taylor's comment on the text. 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,' she said. 'Ah, that it be. I'm tired to the very tips o' my finger nails. You never knew what it was to ache all over in your lines an' every one o' your joints—you never stood at a wash tub, sir—so it's easy talkin'.' But I won't deny that I can't rest my legs to-night by thinkin' how tired they'll be to-morrow an' day after. I mayn't be alive to-morrow. I can't last long, slavin' as I do, an' then, when you've lost me, you'll know how good I've been to you, Bessie. But I won't deny, sir, that you must ha' took pains w' her readin', an' I've no objection to her readin' to me again. Now we've done up the place a bit, you can sit down in a bit o' comfort, an' it's a beautiful book to listen to, I won't deny; though it do make ye feel that ye ought to be somehow as ye ain't. But there's mys'mes none of us knows the rights of, wise as we may think ourselves, I guess.'

In spite of the parting shot at myself, I could see that Bessie had made a very good beginning on Grunty. The clearing up of their room—although Bessie had been the chief agent in the joint-stock operation of which Mrs. Jude (except in the case of the broken window) claimed the chief credit—led to greater personal cleanliness and tidiness in both. The reading of the Bible at home led to Mrs. Jude's being prevailed upon to go to church again, although her church-going was only very slightly profitable to her in a pecuniary point of view.

She never became what is called 'a cheerful Christian,' but I believe that, in a genuine sense, she did at last become a Christian. She learnt to feel the saving power of the divinity manifested in Christ—to know that she ought, at any rate, to think little of herself, and to strive hard, and to pray hard, for the curbing of her unchristian temper, and the cultivation of a more christian character.

Bessie's missionary work amongst her neighbours was not quite so judiciously begun. The brave little body went about reproving sin of all kinds like a little Nathan, with a considerable infusion of the small Pharisee, and the sinners would not 'stand her cheek.' Bessie was very proud at first of the persecution she had provoked, but when she found that no good came of it, she adopted a quieter tone. When I think that any one is actuated by a good motive—which can have been given only by 'the good God' (to use what is a pleonasm in English), I am very reluctant to interfere with the modes of action to which that motive urges, simply because they do not tally with my own idiosyncrasy. But I suggested to Bessie that only the Sinless Man had a right to speak to sinning men and women as if He did not share their sinfulness, and that that was a stand-point which He did not take. Bessie's quiet work succeeded far better than her Boanerges business. She became more carefully anxious than she had been before to make her conduct harmonize in little things—which, as a rule, because they are always turning up for notice, are really great things—with the principles she professed. She conquered the prejudices entertained against her by the young folks of the Rents very speedily. As soon as she 'larked' with them, in an innocent way, again, she was so good a hand at larking that she secured us sundry even of the least likely of her boy and girl neighbours as pupils for our Sunday-school. She used to introduce the half-scared, half-saucy, shock-headed tatterdemalions with 'Here's another, sir—much as if she had lugged in a ragged, restive colt from the marshes by the burr-buttoned mane.

That she ever did much amongst the adults of the Rents, I cannot say, but she did something. After a time they ceased to snub her and swear at her. They even recovered a good deal of the kindly feeling they had entertained towards her before she had taken to being 'a saint.' With a difference, however. They felt that that she was no longer 'their sort,' and though they could not help owing to themselves that it was she who had risen by the change, the necessity of being obliged to make such a confession even to themselves somewhat chilled their friendly feeling for little Bessie. She proved herself such a willing, helpful little body, however, in the way of fetching water, running to the chandler's, nursing babies that must otherwise have been tossed about in the Rents' gutter very much like its cabbage-stalks, at odd times of her very scanty leisure, that

\* "Sufficient, but not intolerable. But if we look abroad, and bring into one day's thoughts the evil of many, certain and uncertain, what will be, and what will never be, our load will be as intolerable as it is unreasonable."

two or three of the Rents' women who had very large families, came to the church now and then out of gratitude to her. It was partly genuine gratitude, looking back upon the past. Bessie had helped them, and so they wanted to please her by going to a place to which she said they ought to go. But it was partly also, I must own, the prospective gratitude which cynical cleverness has defined. 'I was at church yesterday afternoon, so you'll come an' nuss my Johnny, won't ye, Bessie?' is a specimen of the appeals that were often made to my little lay assistant. She was greatly amused when I called the Rents her 'parish.' 'Anyhow,' she said, slyly, 'there's people in ter Rents that'll let me talk to 'em, as wouldn't let a parson inside their places—let alone a missioner. Why, big Sam's wife—he's the fightin' sweep, you know, sir—pitched a missioner into the dust-cart, an' she said she'd serve you jist the same; but I said she shouldn't—not if I was by to help ye.'

One of Bessie's parishioners was of a very different type from any I have as yet referred to: an old apple-woman who 'pitched' just outside the mouth of the Rents. Bessie ran evening errands for her, and sometimes kept her stall for her: when the old woman wanted to go home for a little time. When rheumatism laid the poor old body up, Bessie looked in before she started on her rounds, to light her old friend's fire for her, and make her as comfortable as she could for the day. As soon as weary little Bessie got back from her rounds, she looked in again on Mrs. Reynolds—thereby making Mrs. Jude feel very jealous, in spite of her hard struggles to think that it was all right that Bessie should do so when she knew (as was always the case when she did it) that her granny was not 'ailing more than ordinary.' Mrs. Reynolds was a widow, without a soul in the world to care for her but Bessie; and she doated on Bessie accordingly. She was a very simple-minded woman, strictly honest, and willing to 'do anybody a good turn,' in her little way; but so far as any definite belief about God's government of the world was concerned, her mind was a blank sheet when Bessie first took her in charge. Her heart, nevertheless, was half consciously thirsting for something that would make life a more satisfying thing than merely giving fair ha'porths of apples in a muddy street. However fair she might make them, she did not feel comfortable when she got home at night. She wanted something to make her feel at peace, though what it was she could not tell. She found out soon after Bessie had begun to read the New Testament to her. 'Lor, sir,' said the old woman, to me once, 'that little gal's been next door to a hangel o' light to me. Afore she come an' read to me, I knew I wasn't as good as might be, but I comforted myself w' thinkin' I was as good as my neighbours. But there she read about him as called hisself the chiefest o' sinners, arter all he'd done—an' what I had done like him? I was awful scared at first, but then she'd read to me about Jesus, too, an' she talked to me about Jesus in a surprisin' manner for a little gal like her. So now I try to do the best I can, and I just trust to Jesus for the rest.'

Systematic theologians might, perhaps, object to this creed of Mrs. Reynolds', but under the circumstances I did not see that I could improve upon it by shaping it into more regular form.

### THE NOVEL-READING DISEASE.

Physicians are familiar with a complaint which, although sufficiently specific, has yet no name of its own. The patient suffers from an alarming and morbid thirst, and consumes a perfectly fabulous amount of fluid, almost always of an unwholesome nature. Tea in a highly dilute shape, *cau sucre*, raspberry vinegar and water, soda water, or some other abominable mess, is taken by the gallon, and the craving is stimulated by indulgence. Wholesome food is refused; no exercise is taken, and the patient finally sinks into a flabby and sickly condition, which nothing but severe and determined treatment will shake off. This dropsical habit of body finds its exact analogue in the species of mental dropsy which is produced by over-indulgence in three-volumed novels. This terrible complaint is one of the worst evils which modern civilization has brought with it. Its progress is gradual, very insidious, and almost imperceptible. At first, all that is noticed is that the sufferer is apt to be found bent over a novel—unnatural hours—as, say, in the early morning, or in the middle of a beautiful summer's afternoon. Soon, however, the disease becomes more pronounced, and in its worst stages novels are got through at the rate of three or four, or even five, a week, or at an average, in a severe and chronic case, of some two hundred and fifty or three hundred a year. At first some discrimination is exercised, and one writer is, perhaps, preferred to another—Mr. Trollope, say, to Mrs. Ross Church, or "Ouida" to the author of "Guy Livingstone." Very soon, however, the taste becomes deadened and blunted, and all power of distinction and appreciation is lost. In this stage the unhappy patient can no more go without her novel than can a confirmed dipsomaniac without his dram. The smaller circulating libraries, which lend out very second-hand novels indeed at a penny a volume, are put under contribution, and any amount of garbage is swallowed wholesale. Quality is held absolutely of no importance, and quantity is everything. The very process of reading becomes more or less mechanical, and seems to afford a species of mechanical pleasure, or satisfaction, a novel of the feeblest possible type being read as religiously from cover to cover, and yielding apparently as much enjoyment as if it were a second "Romola." It is no uncommon thing for a young lady, in whom the com-

plaint has assumed a chronic form, to have read the whole of Scott, the whole of Thackeray, the whole of Dickens, the whole of Trollope, the whole of Annie Thomas, the whole of Mrs. Ross Church, the whole of Miss Braddon, the whole of Lawrence, and, into the bargain, some four or five hundred other novels by less famous hands. When the disease is thus confirmed, the dropsical habit of mind becomes apparent. The conversation of the patient becomes flabby and limp. Her interest in all ordinary subjects—except, perhaps, the latest fashions, or the more scandalous portion of the evidence in the Tichborne case, or the marriage of the Princess Beatrice—flickers feebly in the socket, and finally dies out. The last stage—that of absolute imbecility—is now, unless very powerful remedies are exhibited, a mere matter of time.

So much for the symptoms or diagnosis of the disease. Its prognosis depends greatly upon the natural constitution of the patient; but is, as a rule, unfavourable. Even where vigorous treatment has been adopted, and has apparently effected a radical cure, there is always danger of a serious relapse. And even if the cure be permanent, the patient is none the less permanently enfeebled, and will always remain incapable of any severe or protracted mental exertion. It is, indeed, upon the whole, unwise to encourage delusive hopes of a complete cure. The disease is as obscure as insidious, and as little capable of control as is softening of the brain itself; and it is doubtful whether we ever do more than for a while to arrest its course. What is most sad, is the self-deception of the patient herself, which is very analogous to that of the habitual drunkard. She is, as a rule, perfectly convinced that her evil habit is under her own control; that she could, if she chose, begin to-morrow, and never open a novel again. She is, indeed, fruitful in such good resolutions; but, if any attempt is made to secure total abstinence even for a day, she will resort to subterfuges as pitiful as those to which a dipsomaniac will have recourse if deprived of his accustomed dram, and will tell any falsehood, or use any evasion, rather than struggle with the cravings of her diseased appetite. In such hopeless cases, even the most judicious firmness is of very little avail.

It is curious and interesting to observe that as this comparatively new female disease has grown more virulent and intense, the old disease of scandal-talking has become comparatively rare. It is, of course, physically difficult to talk scandal and to read a novel at one and same time. Our grandmothers used to devote three or four hours every day to discussing the virtues and vices of absent friends over a dish of tea. Our sisters loiter in American chairs, and listlessly turn over a third volume; and the concentrated and slightly venomous interest which used to be excited by the peccadilloes of some half-dozen neighbours is now languidly diffused over the doings of some four or five hundred washy creations of a washy imagination. It is, of course, possible, nay, even probable, that, were novel-reading sternly repressed, scandal and gossip would revive. Were it not for this consideration, it is an open question whether the novel traffic ought not to be dealt with as stringently as Mr. Bruce proposes to do with the liquor traffic; whether it would not be well to enable the rate-payers of a district to limit the number of circulating libraries, or even to close them altogether; and to place the "habitual" novel-reader under some such paternal restraint as that to which Dr. Dalrymple wishes to subject an "habitual drunkard."

It is too clear, unfortunately, why it is that so many women thus waste their time and rot their minds. They read novels, exactly as some young men smoke and drink bitter beer, for sheer want of something to do. What a woman needs is an education which shall enable her to read and follow the Parliamentary debates instead of the police and divorce reports; and, when women are thus educated, then feeble novels and feeble novelists will vex our souls no longer to the horrible extent to which they irritate us at present. Of such an education we may say that it is *ouk ostrakou peristrophe alla psuches peragogos*, not as it to be got in books, unless, indeed, books can give sound, healthy common-sense, and wholesome interest in common subjects. But men can give it by making the women of their family their companions; and that they should neglect to give it, shows, after all, how inveterately deep-seated is the extraordinary notion that the intellectual difference between men and women is one of kind and not of degree.—*Examiner*.

An old negro in the West Indies was very anxious to learn to read the Bible. He lived a long way from the missionary's house, and yet he would come to learn a lesson whenever he had time. It was such hard work, and he made such little progress, that the missionary got tired, and told him one day that he had better give it up. "No, massa," said he, with great earnestness, "me nebbber gives it up till me die." And pointing with his finger to the beautiful words which he had just spelled out in John iii., 16, "God so loved the world," etc., he said with tears in his eyes, "It's worth all de trouble, massa, to read dat one verse!"