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it so imperfectly. We teach it so stupidly. We know that after twenty years more we shall be but a little more competent—just a little.

Now, when you meet a novel with high ideals but suggesting doubts about Christianity, don't let the reputation of the novelist carry you away. Remember that the brilliant novelist can claim no exemption from the

common lot. He must remain ignorant on subjects which he has not carefully studied. When you meet Mr. Wells' crude attempts at reconstructing religion or when you meet a novel like "Robert Elsmere," showing how easily a good clergyman had all his deepest beliefs shattered by sceptical arguments, it may frighten you. And when you meet another

well-known novel where clever people talk pathetically about the sweet sadness of poor humanity's mistaken fancies about a life to come, it may disturb you. But always remember that a man may be a brilliant novelist and yet have a very superficial acquaintance with Christianity and Christ, or being prejudiced against Christianity and Christ, he has the advantage of putting his own view attractively. Many men's faith has been shaken by forgetting this. Because the writer has a great name as a novelist they forget that he may know very little about Christianity.

Once more. It seems a shame to criticize the great noble novels, yet I fear that even the high type of religious novel which touches our heart with the deep sense of the eternal Fatherhood of God, and which helps to lift us up to a higher life, even this has frequently one great defect—it does not realize the "exceeding sinfulness of sin." There is a tone as if we could hardly help sin—as if it were but a discipline through which we had to pass to make us good, and that God looks very leniently on evil in us. Do you know the prayer of Martin Elginbrod:—

"Have mercy upon me, Lord God,
On me, poor Martin Elginbrod;
As I would do if I were God
And Thou wert Martin Elginbrod."

You see the mixture of good and evil there. The beautiful trusting faith in God as the kindly sympathetic Father—the feeling that we are to judge God by the best in ourselves, all so touchingly true. And yet the feeling too, that God ought to judge us by our own low standards of life.

You see the novelist is writing from the point of view of human nature, not from the point of view of the Bible, with its deep horror of sin. He judges the strength of God's displeasure against sin by the weak, languid moral displeasure of our own hearts.

You know that you and I do not think so very badly of our sins. So often your novelists, even the noblest of them, make you feel not merely that God is infinitely compassionate with the repentant sinner, but that God is as lenient toward sin as we are, and that He ought to be.

It is a great blessing when a widely read novel is suggesting to hundreds of thousands the deep, touching tenderness and forgiveness of God. Yet there is so often the danger of making us lose the horror of sin and thinking of the loving God as a mere good-natured indulgent Father, to whom sin is not exceeding sinful, whose chief thought is to make his child stop crying and be happy.

IX.

This, then, is the conclusion of the whole matter. Do not hesitate to accept as God's gift to tired people a good novel written for your pleasure and amusement.

But do not let yourself go. Do not acquiesce in low ideals. Keep yourself safe and keep your ideals high by contact with God's high ideals in His Word.

Some time ago I read a famous novelist's autobiography, and it was deeply touching to see her high ideal of the office God had called her to and her prayerful hope that she might lift men by her work. Ah, it all brings us back to religion after all. If real love and service of God were in our hearts, the clergyman, and the merchant, and the lawyer, and the doctor, and the writer of plays, and the novel writer, would all feel they were in their separate provinces God's ministers for the helping of humanity, and the words of His apostle would ring out equally to all, "Brethren, let every man wherein he is called therein abide with God."

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