

with care, to have selected the very worst features in the style of great writers, and to have adopted them, exaggerated, deformed, distorted and unbalanced, as the characteristic of their own system. They have stolen from Kingsley his admiration of physical strength. They have purloined from Dickens his occasional confusion of grotesqueness with humor, and of passion with strength. They have plundered from Bulwer his perception of the strange fascination of crime—his habit of coupling and contrasting physical beauty with moral deformity; and from Thackeray they have appropriated the mistrust of humanity—the hopeless sense of its infirmity, that runs, in mournful undertones, beneath the sparkling current of his wit and satire. And having thus, unlike bees, skilfully extracted the poison from the most beautiful and fragrant flowers, they have stored it in cells, of which the framework has been adapted from Gauthier, Zola or Dumas the younger; and, like dealers in quack medicines, coining a word to express the rubbish that they sell, have ticketed the product of their labors with the label of “sensational” literature.

All ideas of nobleness or elevation are absurdly out of place in association with this school of novel manufacturers—for they can hardly be called writers. Under its hands, Fiction might be imaged as standing gazing wistfully on the door of the Divorce Court, and sentimentally on the Gallows, instead of pointing to the Cathedral porch, or gazing upwards to the bright blue sky. If they have a system at all, it is to drag out of the darkness the images of the murderer, the seducer, and the shameless woman, and set them where the gorgeous rays of fancy

can stream over them, and brighten the repulsive harshness of their features with soft light, and decorate them with its own brilliant coloring. The sole effect of their writings is to present sin and guilt, with their rottenness painted over, and their shame varnished with brightness, as habitual and pleasant subjects for amusing contemplation. If they raise any voice to disclaim their sympathy with the vice they represent, it is expressed in faint warnings, that read like extenuations; and in reprobations so gentle and tender, that they seem almost allurements and enticements.

The Clergy clearly owe to society the duty of plain speaking in this matter. It is not now as it was in the early days of this country, when all novel reading was put aside by religious people, as polluted and defiled, and evil in itself. In those times, no particular warning was needed against any special style of fiction, because all that appealed to the imaginative sense was considered as a stranger to religion, and that in the old meaning of the word in which stranger was synonymous with enemy. It would be useless to denounce novel reading as sinful in itself. It would be vain to attempt to put the exercise of the imagination altogether under a ban, or even to persuade people that its only permissible employment is on subjects exclusively devotional. Surely the time is come for very plain outspokening in the matter, now that the press is pouring forth a flood of novels, which seem to contend in nameless rivalry, and, expressing loose morality in yet more loose grammar, in undermining, with equal recklessness, the purity of English morals and the purity of the English language.

Strong language can only be justified by producing proof, not