

in its influence upon the minds and hearts of the people, may be said to surpass the sheet in which so many ephemeral events are chronicled, read about, and forgotten?

The magazine is an implement of high importance, capable, in an age so much given to reading, of exerting a mighty force, since it addresses itself to multitudes who have not time, inclination, or capacity for entering to any extent upon the world of books. And in this respect, also, magazines differ markedly from newspapers; no one, save for reference, turns up a newspaper even of a month's age, while magazines are frequently collected into volumes, and establish themselves in the library as a marked feature of its contents. Another circumstance which has done and is doing much towards the wider diffusion of magazine literature, is the facility with which, through lending libraries, clubs, and book societies, such periodicals can be read without purchasing them. And though it is quite true, that to some persons, what is said or asserted in a magazine is of comparatively little weight as set against book matter, yet it is as true that, with many others, deeper effects are produced by magazine than by book literature, from the fact that a magazine often influences an individual unconsciously to himself, and acts upon his mind at a moment when it is in a receptive state, and with the critical faculty dormant or only slightly aroused.

So extensive is our magazine literature at this time, that we are accustomed to break it up into sections. We have what we call "high-class" magazines, and we have others, pretty numerous, alas! which, whether we designate them so or not, are "low-class" enough. Price, size, quality of paper and type are open to endless variation; but passing by these differences, we find some religious, some partly religious, partly secular, others entirely secular; we have magazines intended for general diffusion, and those intended for a town or neighbourhood; there are magazines for various trades, or other organizations of a friendly or necessary sort; and again, magazines chiefly dedicated to certain sciences or pursuits. Some of these are so aberrant as scarcely to deserve to be entitled "magazines" at all, or so sober and matter-of-fact that they may with more propriety be reckoned as "journals," or "chronicles," rather than magazines. For what is the idea of a magazine? Its contents should contain an abundant variety, ranging from "grave to gay, from lively to severe," the present and the past should be laid under contribution; and imagination should have its full scope, while graver and historical details are not neglected. A kind of repertory, in fact, a storehouse of reading, containing compositions which would suit different and very diverse tastes, though there ought to be pervading the whole a species of harmony, so that passing from one article to another there should be no strong or unpleasant revulsion of feeling. The idea that such a performance in literature was, as it were, a storehouse or treasury, led to the application thereto of a name applied to a place where provisions or necessary articles were stored up, kept in a repository, whence they were readily available for the use of men, and yet in a position of security. By one of those changes which come over a word, "magazine," as designating a place, has become almost restricted to one devoted either to the manufacture of warlike materials, or to the storing of them. May not this be also, in a qualified sense, only too true of our modern printed magazine, that too universally it will be found ministering harm rather than nutriment, supplying material which stirs up war amongst the passions of man, and wounds the susceptible spiritual nature, instead of giving it strength and a wholesome stimulus? For we could easily pick out a score of our magazines, magazines too in high repute, and saleable, which are not at all more likely to help to usher in the Golden Age than are cartridges and cannonballs! Utility is not at present the prominent idea which serves as the guiding-star to the bulk of contributors, editors, and publishers connected with our magazines.

In a paper which does not pretend to go into the subject at all exhaustively, it would obviously be unadvisable to single out by name any one or more, and apply either praise or blame to these, since it would be scarcely possible to form a correct estimate of them, unless their position in our magazine literature

could be fully determined by contrasting or comparing them with their competitors or compeers. To one not inclined to be hypercritical or censorious it is far more agreeable to commend than to censure; yet honesty will not, we believe, admit of a favourable judgment being passed upon our magazine literature as a whole. A literature which is to lead a nation onward, to mould a people into nobler forms of life, and supply aspirations and high hopes to the hesitating, the timid, and the erring, must needs be in advance of the age in which it acts its part. Magazines, therefore, which are too truly the mere representations of the age which has developed them, may seem to satisfy the exigencies of the hour yet fail to fulfil what should be their purpose, and it is a wonder if they pass away without actual mischief.

The reader who has accompanied us thus far will now be prepared to receive our assertion that, looking at modern magazines with no jaundiced eye, it is sufficiently obvious to a capable critic that, viewing them as a whole, we cannot regard them as adequate agencies, considering how very largely their sphere has widened in these recent decades. There are many conspicuous, nay, illustrious exceptions, but the revolution which has swept over our literature, and has made, not patrons and publishers, but the million-voiced and ever-ensluring public, the real stay of writers for the press, has not failed to operate injuriously upon current magazine literature. To write so as to please the public taste has become a seeming necessity to the great host of contributors to magazines, and when that public taste becomes depraved, there are few indeed who will set themselves to the Quixotic enterprise of endeavouring to change it. Far more agreeable, as well as profitable, is it to furnish a literary aliment which just suits that taste, false though it be, and, indeed, a considerable number of authors are not satisfied to run alongside the public in their race after the morbid and extravagant in literature, but foreseeing whither the public movement tends, they rush ahead of it, and lead the people farther astray. That this has been so with what is called the sensational fiction of our day is unquestionable, and the only hope which remains to us is, that from the well-known phenomenon of reaction, readers will ultimately be first satiated and then disgusted with the luxurious and highly flavoured fare which is served up to them in the pages of those magazines which have the popularity of the hour. The responsibilities resting upon those who pander to a diseased appetite in literature are very great, and it appears to us that the veriest Grub-street scribe who, in the last century, connected lampoons and scurrilous pamphlets, was quite as good (or as bad) a man as the sensational novelist, whose pen rolls him off more dollars in a month than the petty scribbler could raise in a year by harder work. But the one is flattered and favoured by the *élite* of society, only too often, and the other, *he*, why, his career ended mostly in a pauper's funeral and a nameless grave. But some will urge, in defence of the course pursued by modern novel-writers in magazines and elsewhere, that authors must live; and as the public seek what is hurtful or worthless, and will be supplied somehow, one person may as well be the medium of communication as another. This, however, suggests to us the well-known retort of Lord Chesterfield, who, when censuring another writer for a composition which was notably feeble, added an observation to the effect that this individual had better not handle the pen at all. "But I must live," exclaimed the criticised person, in an injured tone, "I do not see the necessity of that," was the reply. A too cutting rebuke, it may be, and yet if living be a necessity, writing is certainly not. An author had better renounce his profession, at least in so far as publishing his thoughts goes, and betake himself to the most menial of employments, nay, even beg of his friends, if he cannot work, than cast off all recollections of the pure, the noble, and the good, and give himself up to the weaving of a fabric which may be compared to the fatal gift of Nessus, and which will cling about him, to his horror, at the most dread crisis of his life, poisoned with the sorrows and maledictions of those who, though culpable in having surrendered their minds to the vile and debasing in literature, will not cease to curse the instrument which helped to betray them.

We have dwelt on this with emphasis, because the position