

the mind against the influence of what is frivolous or injurious; for reading matter is as various as it is abundant; and it is very important to discriminate between the useful and pernicious. Better not read at all, than have the mind enervated and polluted by those works, which depend for their influence upon appeals to the baser passions of the heart. To this class belong most works of fiction. These clothe vice in the garb of virtue, thus rendering that which is inherently odious, attractive, and even fascinating. They pervert the judgment, by distorting truth, and imparting a false coloring to all the circumstances and relations of life—they influence the passions, and sling loose the reins of a corrupted imagination.

That the imagination should be improved and invigorated, when weak, cannot be doubted; and on this plea is urged, by many, the propriety of novel-reading. It is asked, why we possess this faculty, if it is not proper to exercise it? And if proper to exercise it, why not in fictitious reading? We answer, in the forcible interrogatories of Watson—"Is the real world so barren of incident, that we must create an ideal one, to furnish it? Is man, as he is, so barren a subject of speculation, that we must contemplate him as a faultless, or faulty monster, that the world never saw? Is it so difficult to find originals, that we must ever laugh at the daubing of caricature?"

The habitual use of the stimulus of fiction, is as enervating to the intellect as ardent spirits are to the physical system. Novels are indeed the diffusive and insinuating moral poison of the day; and they swarm in America, as did the locusts in Egypt; making the otherwise beautiful and verdant, a scathed and fruitless waste; nay worse, causing to spring forth, instead, into luxuriant growth, the weeds and brambles of the human heart.

To preoccupy, then, and fortify the mind against the wasting influence of this species of reading, is preëminently the result of a taste for sound and healthful literature.

THE LAST GLADIATOR.

BY MRS. S. T. MARTIN, N. Y.

"AND so, my Marcus, thou hast seen Rome—the magnificent, eternal Rome. What hast thou to say of its wonders, that may interest a recluse like myself, into whose cell so little of vanity finds entrance?"

The youthful soldier thus addressed, stood carelessly leaning against the rocky door-way of a spacious grotto, while his casque and burnished arms were lying on the couch from which he had just risen. His cloak was thrown carelessly about a form remarkable for strength and manly grace; and his ingenuous countenance beamed with animation as he turned to look at the speaker, who had laid aside the calamus with which he had been describing a part of the Holy Scriptures, while his guest was enjoying the profound repose of youth and innocence. The hermit, though the elder of the two, was still in early manhood, and his noble and intellectual features, if less beautiful than those of the soldier, were far more interesting, for they reflected every movement of the spark of divinity within. The habitual expression of his open face was that of quiet cheerfulness, and it was stamped with that ingenuous modesty which seems left by youth on the countenances of some, in mature manhood, and preserved there by the purity of that wisdom which is from above. He had left the rude table at which he had been writing, and approaching the young soldier, waited his reply, and listened with delighted attention, while he spoke of Rome, the customs and manners of her people, of her churches and palaces, her wonders of art, her aqueducts, baths, pictures, and statues. There was one statue, of a dying gladiator, which rivetted the attention of the amiable recluse. His full gaze was fixed on the eloquent speaker, and a deep sigh heaved his manly breast. "Alas!" he exclaimed, when his companion ceased speaking, "in what a fearfully degraded state Rome once was! What a vivid picture does your description of this statue bring before me, of the manners of pagan Rome! I can almost see before me the breathing form of the wounded gladiator. What reason have we to rejoice, my Marcus, that a brighter day has at length dawned on

this benighted world, and that the gospel of our blessed Lord has introduced such a different order of things among these noble Romans!"

"But what wilt thou say, Antonius," replied the soldier, "when I tell thee, that these things may now be seen even in christian Rome! I might indeed have described the statue of the dying man to you, from the gladiators whom I have so lately seen gasping, fainting and dying in the arena of the Coliseum. The same moon, my Antonius, that poured its soft lustrous into this quiet cell, where I found you last night, seated in peaceful meditation; that very moon rose above the vast walls of the Coliseum, filled with countless myriads of gazers, and shone on the flashing swords of the doomed gladiators, who were brought there to encounter each other in mortal combat, to suffer, and to die. I saw—but how shall I describe to you the scene which wrung my heart? As the youthful combatant came forward to meet his antagonist, he suddenly stopped, stood as if transfixed, the sword dropped from his nerveless hand, and as his antagonist pressed upon him, he fled. An angry murmur arose among the crowd; and the seeming coward was doomed to instant death. He understood the upturned thumbs of the audience, came forward with a calm step and resolute look, and received the fatal stab without one shudder; but, as he fell, one word escaped his lips: that word was, BROTHER! The gladiator from whom he had fled was indeed his only brother, from whom he had been long separated; while both had endured privation, captivity and sufferings of various kinds, and whom he had thus met for the first time after their sad parting, in deadly encounter. They had loved each other as we love, my Antonius," continued the soldier, clasping the hands of the hermit, who stood horror-struck, gazing in his face, "but they were forced to meet as murderers. And who were the men who thus broke the bonds of nature, and wrung human hearts with mortal anguish? They were the professed disciples of the compassionate Jesus, the Prince of Peace."

The hermit and his brother parted that night, but not until they had knelt down together in the dear Redeemer's name, and commended themselves to their heavenly Father's care. After Marcus had departed, he turned once more to look upon the quiet grotto and its kneeling inmate. He still remained where he had received the last embrace of his brother; and, as the moonbeams fell on his calm brow and earnest eyes, they disclosed also the tears that were slowly trickling down his face. The soldier wept in sympathy, for he knew it was for him those tears were flowing; and as he went forward through the wilderness, his thoughts dwelt on the contrast which his own and his brother's life presented. The perfect calm of solitude—the limpid fountain, with its graceful palms—and the peaceful hermitage, were the possessions of the one—the stir of busy life, the din of a camp, and the perils of the battlefield, marked the lot of the other. How little he dreamed, as he journeyed onward, that before the light of day had gilded the mountain range before him, his brother had gone forth to a busier world than that of the Syrian city to which he was hastening. He little thought that even then, the cell in the desert was left vacant, and that in after years he should return to find it even more desolate than the dreary wilderness around it; that he looked for the last time on the placid countenance that was dearer to him than aught on earth beside.

It was a festival day in Rome, when a stranger stood by the tomb of Cecilia Metella, on the celebrated Via Appia; and wherever he turned his eyes, the causeways were thronged with people dressed in holiday garments, and every face lighted up with joy. The stranger was clad in the coarse weeds of a way-faring man; but though no smile sat upon his benevolent countenance, a deep spirit of gladness pervaded his heart. His long pilgrimage was ended, though the object of his mission was not yet accomplished. Resting for a few moments on his staff, he inquired of a gentle matron who stood near him, the occasion of the general rejoicing. From her he heard, that the Romans were about to celebrate the famous victories, in which Stilicho, the general of the emperor Honorius, had defeated and driven back Alaric, the king of Visigoths. The emperor himself was in Rome, and had passed in triumphant procession through the