

PREFACE.

MUCH has been said for and against the writing of "novels with a purpose."

As well might one argue for and against the finding of the Philosopher's Stone.

The work of fiction whose motive is not the faithful description of an impression from without, but the illustration of a thesis—though that thesis be the corner-stone of Truth itself—has adopted the form of the novel for the purposes of an essay, and has no real right to the name. So long as there is true consistency in the actions and thoughts of the characters, so long as they act and think because circumstances and innate impulse leave them no alternative, they cannot be fitted into exact correspondence with any view, or made into the advocate of any cause. If the author preserves his literary fidelity, rebellion among the actors inevitably springs up. Far from being puppets, as they are so often erroneously called, they are creatures with a will and a stubborn personality, who often drive the stage-manager to the brink of despair; and as for being ready to "point a moral and adorn a tale" at his bidding, they would sooner throw up their parts and leave him alone on the deserted stage, to lament his own obstinacy and their insubordination!

Human affairs are too complex, motives too many and too subtle, to allow a small group of persons to become the exponents of a general principle, however true. An argument founded upon this narrow basis would be without value though it were urged with the eloquence of a Demosthenes.

Certain selected aspects of a truth may be—indeed must be—presented to the reader with insistence, for the impressions made upon a mind by the facts of life depend upon the nature of that mind, which urges emotionally upon the neutral vision one fact rather than another, and thus ends in producing a more or less selective composition and not a photograph.

But this process—entirely purposeless—takes place in the mind of
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