

NOVEL READING.

True as Solomon's declaration,—“Of making many books there is no end,”—may have been in his time, it is still more so to-day; and, perhaps, no age has produced more books than the present. Many of these are of great value, and their publication is a blessing to the world; while others cannot be perused without detriment to heart and mind. Pre-eminent among the latter class stands the modern novel.

Novel reading weakens the intellect. The mental powers cannot be strengthened by any process that fails to tax their energies, and every book that fosters mental indolence, weakens the mind. Who will claim that novel reading tasks the intellect? Dickens' and Lover's writings can be understood without any great exertion of mental power. One finds no substantial food for the intellect in Sue's novels. The reading of works of fiction also weakens the mind, by keeping it employed upon trivial objects. Silly love stories are the material of which most novels are composed, and the execution is generally on a par with the plan. Most novelists would have but few readers, if their popularity depended upon the real literary merit of their works. And, does not the mental character of most readers become assimilated to that of their favourite authors?

The advocates of novel reading assert, that works of this kind often charm the young into a love of reading, which they would not otherwise possess. In one sense, this may be true. It may beget a love for light and trifling reading, but those who read the most novels, generally pay the least attention to works of sterling merit. The Waverly Novels may fit the young to love those of Ingraham and Lippard, but they never yet led any to study the writings of Chalmers or Miller. Let any one who has been accustomed to the perusal of books which tax all the energies of the mind, commence reading novels, and it will seldom be long before his interest in works of a more solid character begin to diminish. Can such a process take place without weakening the intellect?

Novels unfit their readers for the duties of life. They feed the imagination much more than either the reason or the heart. Few of the heroes of novels are such as are found in the common walks of life.—They are either angels or fiends, and their homes are either palaces or hovels.

The reader often associates with them until he or she lives in an imaginary world, a world very different from the one in which common mortals move. Shall she who has become so familiar with lovers who possess superhuman virtues, link her destinies with

“A being not too bright or good,
For human nature's daily food?”

Shall she be expected to descend from her aerial height to the prosaic duties of a daughter, sister, or wife; merely because the happiness of a few persons may depend upon her performing those duties? Is it not absurd that so refined a sentimentalist as she is, should be expected to know how to darn stockings, or cook a dinner? Is such a dreamer fit for the duties of life?—will she prove of much use in the world? Did a habitual novel reader ever make an Elizabeth Fry, or a Hannah Moore?

But this is not the worst feature in this matter, for most novels tend to render their readers positively vicious. Persons generally imbibe the character of those with whom they associate, and no one can be much of a novel reader without being constantly brought into communion with the vilest characters. True, some novelists try to represent their heroes as christians; but their christianity is generally very different from that of the New Testament. It is evident that most novelists know very little about either christianity or virtue. Sue intends to represent the Prince, who figures so largely in the “Mysteries of Paris,” as a paragon of virtue, yet how defective is the moral character. Many of the other personages that are represented in that tale are monsters, whose originals could only have been found in Pandemonium,—or Paris. Can the mind be brought into daily intercourse with such characters as frequently appear in the writings of Dickens, without drinking of their spirit? Did the youthful reader of the pages of Scott, or Bulwer, ever fail to close one of their volumes with less detestation of vice than he possessed when he opened it?

There is no necessity that persons should spend their time in the perusal of works of fiction, for there are books enough that combine a pure moral tendency, with a high degree of literary merit, to furnish reading matter to all who desire it. Is it no sin for us to waste our time in reading works that weaken the intellect, while the vast fields of knowledge that stretch out before us remain unex-

plored? What novel can be more fascinating than Macaulay's History of England, or Irving's Compend of Greece? It will be time enough to turn to novels when there are not works enough that afford both pleasure and profit at the same time.

TRAVELING IN ITALY

The most pleasant, and decidedly the most profitable way of traveling in Italy, is on foot. You dress in peasant costume, which is easy, comfortable, and suited to walking; and besides, you are not so harassed by beggars, nor so liable to be imposed upon by guides and hotel-keepers. You set out from Leghorn, for instance, at daylight, with a few clothes and something to eat strapped on your back. By eight or nine o'clock you arrive at Pisa, having, if you are alive to the beauties of Nature, enjoyed your walk, and with a most healthy appetite. In some quiet little inn you make a delicious breakfast of broiled chicken, fresh eggs, luscious fruits, and a bottle of pure country wine. After resting awhile, you go around the city, and visit its numerous objects of interest. Late in the afternoon, when the heat of the day is past, you set out again, and by dark you arrive at some other place, rich in associations, painting, and celebrated ruins connected with ancient history. Sometimes you are charmed with the scenery of some mountain lake, and you take up your abode in a picturesque cottage of some old peasant, and wander around its shores, or sail upon its blue waters, and read and fish. The country is so densely settled, or richly cultivated, and so thickly studded with cities, towns and villages, that you never feel lonely. There is always something to interest you; and after walking fifteen or twenty miles, you feel as if you had merely taken a morning promenade.—*Cor. N. C. Presbyterian.*

A BEAUTIFUL THOUGHT.—When I gaze into the stars, they look down upon me with pity from their serene spaces, like eyes glistening with tears, over the little lot of man. Thousands of generations, all as noisy as our own, have been swallowed up by time, and there remains no record of them any more; yet Arcturus and Orion, Sirius and the Pleiades, are still shining, in their courses, clear and young as when the shepherd first noted them from the plain of Shinar. What shadows we are, and what shadows we pursue!—*Thomas Carlyle.*