

GOOD TASTE—AND NOVEL READING.

There is no objection to a little dessert after a hearty dinner, and should be none to a little indulgence in novel reading on the part of the college student who has done justice to a meal of mathematics and applied science. But lemon ice would be, although pleasant, scarcely a nourishing article for steady diet. Just so with the novel.

This is to be a lay sermon on novels, by one who is no critic by profession, but who has ravaged the whole list of authors from old Cap Collier up (or down?) to Ibsen and come to certain conclusions which are offered for what they are worth. There is development in appreciation for fiction just as in any other faculty of intellect or sense, and this development is bound to be upward if one gives it opportunity. The same is true in many other fields. People with an uncultured ear for music actually prefer "After the Ball" to "Schubert's Serenade," and think it affectation for others to express a preference for classical music. But if they should study music for years themselves, their own convictions would become the same, inevitably and *sincerely*. So in art. Any child would prefer a colored chromo presented by some Sarsaparilla fakir, to an etching by Gerome, but not so a person of refined taste.

Good taste is a real virtue. Even savages have it in some things, for we are told that in the best circles of the Cannibal Islands dudes and cigarette fiends are excluded from the cuisine.

Prof. Bryce, in the *American Commonwealth*, after applauding highly various characteristics of the American people, deplors their proneness to admire quantity rather than quality, and to prefer bizarre effects to genuine accomplishments. It is gratifying to feel, however, that in science, art and literature, we are becoming more thorough day by day.

What are the characteristics of the best novels? A hard question. It is easier to answer what are the best novels. In this, individual preference

must have much influence. I have tried to think what ten novels I should pick out if I were condemned to have no other reading in the lines of fiction for the rest of my life. Here they are: "Les Miserables," Victor Hugo; "Robison Crusoe," Defoe; "The Newcomes," Thackeray; "David Copperfield," Dickens; "Lorna Doone," Blackstone; "Ivanhoe," Scott; "The Deerslayer," Cooper; "Plain Tales from the Hills," Kipling; "The Master of Ballantrae," Stevenson; "Tess of the D'Urbervilles," Thos Hardy.

Nothing in this list by George Elliot, or Tolstoi or Ibsen, or Sarah Grand, I am sorry, but I must get in my ten favorites. I couldn't include anything from the last three mentioned in the best hundred novels. But I think "Les Miserables" the greatest work of fiction ever written and so do three people out of four who have read it. Robert Louis Stevenson and Thackeray are the writers of the best English prose ever put together, and Rudyard Kipling is the writer of the most graphic short stories ever imagined in all the world's history. If he shall try some day he may write a greater novel than "Les Miserables." "Trilby," is a splendid story but not one of the ten. The fiction of the new papers and magazines to-day is good but none of it, I think, immortal. Conan Doyle, Stanley Weyman, and Mark Twain, for instance. Popular fiction "Mr. Barnes of New York," and E. P. Roe's works, sell but they are not literature. Try to read one of them a second time and see how disgusted you become. Apply the same test to "Les Miserables," or even "Robison Crusoe," and learn the difference.

This whole subject of the best fiction is an interesting one, and a debatable one. No doubt the FREE LANCE would welcome contributions on it. QUISQUIS.

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FROM A MILITARY POINT OF VIEW.

The fact that we are related to the militia of the State through the law which makes cadet captains