

Many excellent practical mothers make little rules for their daughters' guidance, such as 'no novels or stories must be read before four o'clock in the day,' or 'no book must be read on Sundays that is not true;' and thus stories and romances are forbidden, and travels, biographies and histories are recommended—in fact, as one young girl put it to me very suggestively only the other day: 'Before four o'clock, and on Sundays, mother does not like us to read anything that interests us, she wants us to improve our minds.' So I think the great thing to do is to arouse a thirst for knowledge, and I venture to think that the principal use of reviewers and critics is to make people thirsty, so as to try and make readers want to read really interesting books. Now, the average novel and serial story is not interesting, and the test of this is that when we have read it and found out the stupid plot, and married off or killed off all the stupid characters, the story itself fades from our memory. Now, I don't think any story or book is worth reading *that lets itself be forgotten.*

Confirmed novel readers get mentally idle and refuse to open any book that requires the smallest exercise of their thinking powers. The fact is, the last thing that such people want is to be made to think. They don't read to encourage thought—on the contrary, they read to drown thought.

But, of course, there are times in everybody's life when they do want to drown thought—and I should be the last person in the world not to acknowledge the immense value to weary and lonely hearts and tired brains of a course of novel reading. Perhaps only those who have gone through great mental trouble can appreciate what an excellent district visitor Messrs. Mudie's carts are—and experience alone teaches what great comforters in sorrow a batch of new library books can be to old, sick and weary people; but I would like to argue that novel reading can never be of permanent value to anyone. Like some narcotic medicine that at a particular crisis in a malady is invaluable and may even save life and reason, if persevered in, it must be pernicious to the constitution.

Of course when I speak of novel reading I do not refer to the great novels of literature; Thackeray, Dickens, C. Brontë, George Eliot, W. Scott and George Meredith are of the very highest educational value, but they require mental exertion, and the average commonplace novel reader does not read their works more than once. They read them possibly over for the story, and then they lay them aside.

The personal influence is very great of a powerful book, and never greater than when we recognise in its pages some of our own obscure and undeveloped ideas."

In conclusion, Mrs. Gordon said that even if they did nothing else, books aroused a new interest in life, and every new interest is an enormous gain. She cordially recommended the scheme of the Nurses' Library.

Miss Isla Stewart, in a very charming speech, laid before the meeting the principles on which the Nurses' Library at St. Bartholomew's Hospital was formed. She said in her early Hospital days she had suffered severely from the dearth of books, and consequent inability to keep up with the times and the world's doings. As a Sister she belonged to Mudie's, but found the subscription a tax, and very often had not energy or leisure to change the books as frequently

as she would have liked, but she made up her mind that when she was the Matron of a Hospital she would organise a really good Library for the "Sisters and Nurses." When she first suggested the formation of a Library at St. Bartholomew's, the idea was warmly taken up by Sisters and Nurses, many of whom presented books. Messrs. Macmillan sent thirty volumes. The Hospital authorities presented a room and fitted it up with bookshelves; otherwise the Library was entirely supported by the Nursing Staff. The Library was started some seven years ago, and now consisted of some 1,240 volumes, a large proportion being novels. There were also standard works, such as Emerson, Carlyle and Dickens; but she thought Nurses needed light literature. During training they had plenty of mental discipline. In their leisure they needed to be amused. They had also a good Reference Library, and also took in current literature, such as two morning papers, the *Pall Mall Gazette* in the evening, two weeklies, the *Spectator* and *NURSING RECORD*, and monthlies, such as the *Strand* and *Fortnightly Review*. The Hospital presented them with the *Nineteenth Century*, *Harper's Magazine*, *Punch* and a daily paper.

The subscription was four shillings a year for each member, which gave them about £12 a quarter to spend.

The rules were that two books might be taken out at a time for a fortnight, and renewable for another fortnight. This enabled Nurses to take the books away on their holidays. After this period a fine of one halfpenny a day was imposed. The books were given out four times weekly. Each November all the books were called in for a fortnight; old books were replaced or destroyed. She concluded by impressing on the meeting the necessity for reading and the value of entering into other people's lives by means of fiction.

Miss Stewart's speech was very warmly received, and after some questions and discussion a Committee was formed to decide on the further steps to be taken.

The Committee, with power to add to its number, consists of Miss Stewart, Mrs. Fenwick, Miss Butler, Mrs. Gray, Mrs. Bouchier, Mrs. Greenway, Mrs. Gordon, Mrs. Crawford, and Miss H. Kenealy.

Inventions, Preparations, &c.

CHEVIOT SERGES.

WE have received from the Providence Mills Spinning Company, of Thornton Road, Bradford, samples of their Cheviot and other Serges. The Cheviot Serge can be obtained in shades of dark green, brown, maroon, navy blue and black, and as their width is from fifty-two to fifty-four inches, and their quality excellent, the fact that the price is only 1s. 3d. per yard makes the material one of the cheapest as well as one of the most durable which is at present obtainable. The samples of other serges of lighter weight and colour are of the best and softest quality, and are from forty to forty-two inches in width, and the prices for these vary from 1s. 1d. to 2s. 9d. per yard. With such excellent

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