

# THE COURIER

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"A," who this time gives his real name, continues the discussion of "Marcella" and didactic fiction in general, reiterating his position in favor of novels that are written for a purpose. He writes the follow-

interesting letter to the editor of THE COURIER:

You are right in saying that I was mistaken in stating that "S" said the novelist's chief end should be the love story. I see from reference to his statement that he did mention other stories. When I wrote that I had in mind "S's" illustration of John and Mary, and his objection to having their love story interfered with by discussing the regeneration of mankind, and to the fact that the novelist depends upon the love story as that having the greatest interest to the reader. Allow me to say that you are also mistaken in saying that I have an antipathy for the love story. I stated distinctly that I had a great respect for the love of John and Mary. I am not so churlish; I enjoy the love story when set forth in due proportion and with good taste as it is in the novels of Walter Scott and the best of our modern authors. The question is as you state—do we want lessons in our fiction? I say yes. In regard to Walter Scott, economic and social problems had no public interest in his day, so he gave them no attention in his works. But the reading public were interested in the themes of love and war, and these were his subjects. But Scott's fame does not rest entirely on his story telling powers, which were great. The intelligent reader is interested in his delineation of character, in his descriptions of the manners and customs of a past age, in his pictures of life in England in feudal times, how the Norman baron lived, and in what relation to the Saxon etc. Emerson is right when he says, "As an eminent antiquary who has shed light on the history of Europe and the English race, Walter Scott has high claims to our regard." In regard to Charles Dickens: He was far more than a mere story teller. Before his time the heroes of fiction were all found in the upper class. Dickens made his from the middle and lower classes. He brought child life into the novel, and whatever good or bad taste there is in combining social questions with the story of fiction, to Dickens belongs the merit or demerit of their introduction. His first novel, Nicholas Nickleby, aimed at the cruelties inflicted upon the unfortunate pupils of Yorkshire boarding schools, was the first social novel. In other works he attacks social wrongs in behalf of the poor, as in Oliver Twist, the poor workhouse child, drew attention to wrongs suffered in workhouses by the lowest strata of humanity. Thackeray in his works wrote for a purpose; he exposed the

shams and utter vacuity of much of what is termed high life, and was a great delineator of character. Now you may say, could Dickens not have attacked these social wrongs direct, and kept them out of his books? He might have written some newspaper articles on the subject which could have been read by some hundreds or thousands of the subscribers, and that would have been the end of it. Instead of which he put them in stories so interesting that they were read wherever the English language is spoken, and were effective in righting the wrongs he aimed at. In doing so I think he was wise and good. I know it is claimed by others besides "S" that these social questions derogate from the value of the novel, from an artistic point of view, as it is claimed that John Whittier's voice of freedom injures him as a poet. He did wisely in retaining them in his book of poems; he will be more admired as a man for them by the people. I have a poor opinion of the artist who can witness great public wrongs, and having a power within him to help right such wrongs, and yet, who, for the sake of art, will ignore it. It reminds me of Nero fiddling when Rome was in flames. And why complain? The social novel is here to stay—it is an accomplished fact and "S" knows that the people appreciate it—it is a step toward the goal of civilization. There is a passion for humanity growing wider with the years. JAMES AITKEN.

Some surprise has been expressed by those who have read and admired Du Maurier's latest work at Professor Sherman's review in the *Evening News*. That the author of the "Analytics of Literature" should not have shown a keener appreciation of the real merit of "Trilby" is more than passing strange. Professor Sherman reviewed the book as follows: "Trilby is no doubt a great book, yet it is regrettable that it was ever printed in America. To a Frenchman, or anyone who has ever lived upon the continent and grown cosmopolitan enough to endure the peculiar ethics of ateliers and artists, both atmosphere and incident may seem normal. Perhaps also to the average Londoner this story will appear as wholly rational and natural, for England, the England of the towns, is fast absorbing again that continental flabbiness in general and salacity in particular which made the Restoration a well-defined era of its own. England knows better than to play with pitch. It has always been traditional there that pitch defiles. Hence, while there has from time immemorial, been a Trilby now and then, it has not been usual to write books about them. It is un-Saxon, un-English to begin, in these days of purer types, of severer ideals, writing novels of this kind. In France, where Trilby's are a staple commodity, it is quite different. Human experience there has never discovered anything unpleasant about pitch, and we find it taken for granted everywhere. We expect to find it on the hands of novelists all years and all the year. The story of Trilby is strangely like the typical fiction of *Revue des Deux Mondes*, which is stacked away in the heavy tomes of that magazine untranslated to English eyes—mainly because too refined and mild in suggestiveness for our coarser public, and too Gallican for literary palates of the best sort. There is nothing essentially bad in Trilby. Men and women who know the world will not be much scandalized by it. Perhaps in book form it is well enough to have the story within reach—just as we

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