

492. Dialogues are subject to the following **rules**:

1. They must create interest by presenting lifelike characters, placed in interesting situations, and conversing in a natural and unaffected manner.

2. If didactic they must treat of some theme, and develop it with sufficient regularity, so as to give a clear insight into the views of the author on that subject.

3. They must be replete with wisdom, or at least with good sense.

4. They must be couched in refined language, with tasteful and modest ornament.

493. **Exercise I.** Write a descriptive dialogue exhibiting the character of a miser, a spendthrift, a fop, a flatterer, a young hero. (For a model see *Fabiola*, c. ii.)

494. **Exercise II.** Write a didactic conversation on the advantages of a thorough education, of music, of good company; on the Crusades, the Inquisition, on Galileo. (For a model see a dialogue between *Fabiola* and her slave Syra in the sixteenth chapter of *Fabiola*.)

CHAPTER VII.

NOVELS.

495. A **Novel** is a fictitious narrative in prose, embracing a complete series of events, and exhibiting some phase of human life.

Such phases of human life are, for instance:

(a) *Peculiar conditions of society*, as in Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*, his *Leatherstocking Tales*, etc.

(b) *The manners of certain periods of history*, as in historical novels generally. Such are Cardinal Wiseman's *Fabiola*, Cardinal Newman's *Callista*, B. O'Reilly's *Victims of the Mamertine*, McKeon's *Dion and the Sibyls*, Bailey's *Pearl of Antioch*, Conscience's *Lion of Flanders*, Lady Fullerton's *Constance Sherwood* and *Too Strange not to be True*.

(c) *The workings of the passions*, as in Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield*, Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, etc.

(d) *The tendencies of institutions and popular movements*, as in Bresciani's *Few of Verona* and *Lionello*, and in Brownson's *Spirit-Rapper*.

(e) *Peculiar views of the world*, as in Dickens' *Christmas Carols*.

496. Some novels may be called **philosophical**, being intended to set forth special views and systems of doctrine. To this class belong religious novels. In all such it is important that not only the doctrines inculcated be sound, but also that the composition possess literary beauty and

proper interest, and that the moral tone of the characters be favorable to virtue. We can mention no more excellent model than the *Fabiola* referred to above. Gen. Lew Wallace's *Ben-Hur* deserves praise.

497. Others are called **Society Novels**: these are usually written to ridicule the extravagances of prevalent tastes and practices, thus answering the same purpose as comedy. Such is Bulwer's *My Novel*. Many of these give little attention to plot, being chiefly taken up with the exhibition of character. All such compositions may be useful in their way; but unfortunately not many can be recommended for the perusal of those who care to keep their hearts undefiled by the contamination of vice.

498. **Sensational Novels** are still more objectionable. These stir up the passions by frequent vivid sketches of exaggerated and unreal scenes. They create a morbid craving for exciting stories, and impair that calm of mind which is an essential element of a prudent and considerate character.

499. Well-written novels possess certain **advantages** over other species of literature:

1. They reach those who will not read more serious books;
2. They may fill up profitably an occasional hour of needed relaxation, even with earnest men;
3. They may widen the reader's knowledge of the world;
4. If well chosen they may improve his heart;
5. They may enlarge his stock of words and phrases.

500. The **objections** universally urged against promiscuous novel-reading are numerous; the principal are:

1. They cause great waste of time;
2. They produce desultory habits of mind, which disqualify a person for earnest attention to duty;

3. They give false views of life;
4. They make the reader familiar with vice and vicious characters, thus lowering his standard of virtue by showing that many others are worse than himself;
5. They often make vices look like virtues, or at least like excusable foibles;
6. They develop in the reader that spirit of the world which is diametrically opposed to the spirit of Christ.

(See further objections to novel-reading in Jenkins' *British and American Literature*, pp. 322, etc.)

501. There are **two schools** of novelists, the *realistic* and the *ideal*. The **ideal** is the older school; it has more of the spirit of poetry. It presents men not as they usually are, but as they may exceptionally be, and as we love to imagine them—more noble, more disinterested, more heroic. Such novels are called Romances; most French novels belong to this class. Their effect on the reader is often elevating, analogous to that produced by epic and tragic poetry; but they are apt to become unreal and extravagant, as were the tales of knight-errantry in the Middle Ages. They are also liable to another objection, for they often exalt passions that should rather be checked, in particular the passion of love, which up to the time of Walter Scott made up the plot of nearly all novels.

502. The **realistic** school is more prosaic; it is also more favorable to common sense. It is well exemplified in the novels of Charles Dickens. It describes men and things just as they are, and makes persons act in a probable, natural manner. This process also has its inconveniences. Brownson is severe on Dickens for making his readers so familiar with vulgar and vicious characters.

503. Most of the precepts that should direct this species

of composition have been treated in this work under the heads of Narration (book iv. c. iii.) and Description (c. iv.) We shall here add a few **special rules**.

Rule 1.—Let the novel be **interesting** to the class of readers for whom it is intended; some novels written for very laudable purposes are undeniably dull.

Rule 2.—It should **aim at a higher purpose** than mere amusement—namely, to deck valuable knowledge and true wisdom in the pleasing garb of fiction, so as to captivate the imagination, and thus more readily gain mind and heart to what is worthy of man.

Rule 3.—It should give a right direction and a **healthy tone** to the passions. No amount of interest can atone for the slightest injury to mind and heart.

Rule 4.—It should, in order to be a true work of art, either portray **characters** in a very natural and pleasing manner, or excite great interest by a well-developed **plot**, combining variety of incident with unity of the general plan.

504. **Novelists.**—De Foe was the father of the English novel as distinguished from the more romantic tales of knight-errantry; Fielding and Richardson soon followed him; but those novelists are now almost forgotten by the general public. Every year brings new authors into general notice. But none, perhaps, have gained so continued and general favor as Walter Scott.

Novelists are by this time so numerous that it were vain to attempt a criticism upon their respective merits. Gerald Griffin, the Banim Brothers, Marion Crawford, Miss Rosa Mulholland, Christian Reid, Kathleen O'Meara—also known as Grace Ramsay—and especially Bolanden, may be mentioned, in addition to those referred to with praise in the above precepts, as novelists that have written in a moral spirit; while George Eliot, Victor Hugo, Charles

Reade, Wilkie Collins, George Sand, Balzac, and many others are immoral and often blasphemous. Bulwer's early novels are objectionable, but his later ones are better.

505. **Exercise.**—Analyze a novel according to the following plan:

1. What is known of the author?
2. To what school or class of novels does the work belong?
3. Is a definite purpose, philosophical, political, moral, or religious, discernible in the novel?
4. What is the plot? Analyze it briefly.
5. In what lies the principal excellence of the work?
6. What are its leading characters and how naturally are they presented throughout?
7. Is the style beautiful and properly varied to suit the different characters?
8. What of the descriptions? the narration? the dialogues?