

CONCERNING PRINTED POISON

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Concerning Printed Poison by Josiah W. Leeds

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JOSIAH W. LEEDS

**CONCERNING
PRINTED POISON**

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CONCERNING
PRINTED POISON.

BY
JOSIAH W. LEEDS.

EIGHTH THOUSAND.

PHILADELPHIA:
No. 528 WALNUT STREET.
PUBLISHED FOR THE AUTHOR.

1885.

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MEMORANDUM.

A considerable part of the little Essay which follows, appeared the first day of the present year in the PUBLIC LEDGER, of this city. The subject of which it treats has become a somewhat prominent one at this time, and, in the belief that the views herein presented may be both suggestive and helpful to not a few in other communities, this pamphlet edition of the expanded article (with some other matter appended), has now been printed. It is commended to the serious consideration of the editors, publishers, librarians, and others into whose hands it may come.

In undertaking to lay the responsibility for the prevalence and continuous increase of the "printed poison" evil where it rightly belongs, a care has been exercised not to so far rest the blame on the shoulders of the purveyors of demoralizing prints and of pernicious literature generally, as to excuse the indifference or negligence of very many parents respecting the character of the reading matter which falls into the hands of their offspring. Neither, whilst referring to the laxity frequently shown by officers of the law concerning pictured indecency, has the writer condoned the supineness of so many professing Christians in never letting it appear in their daily walk that they have any convictions upon the subject that are worth the trouble of upholding. Respecting how best to deal with, and how far to tolerate, the liquor-drinking habit, there may be much honest difference of opinion, but, that *public decency* is a valuable possession to be maintained with all

vigilance, ought surely to be affirmed by every one of ordinary moral discernment—whatever his color, nationality or politics, his ethical views or religious belief.

It scarcely need be added, however, that it will be of little avail to possess a right apprehension of the truth in this matter, if we never, as occasions arise, express and maintain it, or, if we are fearful as to what our outspoken testimony is likely to cost us. The president of a certain corporation, upon being requested to prohibit the sale of a paper of a confessedly scandalous character, replied, that although "heartily concurring with any principle which would correct the morals of our community, yet in our business we cannot afford the ill will of any one, more especially newspapers." The argument, or, rather, the line of pleading, thus expressed, is doubtless a prevalent one. Nevertheless, I fail to perceive how we can be true to the Master whose name we take, or lay claim to that Christian manliness which ought to be ours, or ever cast away the abomination of demoralizing literature which is in our midst and all around us, if we are concerned to place ourselves upon no higher plane than this.

PHILADELPHIA, Second Month 10th, 1885.

CONCERNING PRINTED POISON.

There is a wise law of this State—though it is a law which I am sorry to say is very much set at naught—which provides that the convicts in our penitentiaries shall be confined in separate cells. When visiting the penitentiary in this city several years ago, I remember to have seen in a certain cell a middle-aged man and a fair-haired youth. The former was teaching the latter—if I remember aright—the art of basket making, yet at the same time he so rallied the lad in the language of recklessness and bravado, that it was easy to believe the boy would acquire much more of harmful knowledge than of that which would be helpful.

Now, all the education in crime which a boy or girl might get from old and hardened law-breakers within a prison cell, may be freely obtained at hundreds of the news stands—the great majority of them, in fact—which are to be found upon our city sidewalks. “In the old story books,” said a writer, quoted in the *Ledger*, perhaps two years ago, “it was assumed that truthfulness, honesty and obedience to parents were virtues, and that the Christian religion was not wholly devoid of merit,” but, in “the dime and half-dime novels of the criminal school, which are now read by all (?) our boys either openly or secretly, the pleasures of burglary

The old reading and
the new.

and highway robbery, the manliness of gambling and fighting, and the heroism of successful lying are set forth in what is regarded by youthful readers as glowing eloquence, while the great truths that all parents are tyrants, that all religious people are hypocrites, and that disobedience to fathers and teachers is obedience to the nobler instincts of juvenile nature, are sedulously taught."

A notable effect of indulgence in literature of this description, is to indispose the youthful mind to any reading which is not of the like pernicious quality. For instance, the librarian of the Friends' Free Library, at Germantown, had a call not long ago from a fellow-librarian, who, having queried what method could be adopted for inducing the young to make choice of improving, or at least not harm-

The drift toward the
 simply sensational. | fully-entertaining books, gave the follow-
 ing as illustrating the drift toward the
 simply sensational: He had assisted a lad to select a book,
 by recommending for his perusal a well-written work upon
 a very interesting and stirring period of English history.
 The boy, however, quickly brought back the book, at the
 same time taking care to let his adviser know that he felt
 he had been imposed upon. He would like him to under-
 stand that he had no notion of giving up his time to a
 course of dull reading like that!

There can be no mistaking the direct agency of the cheap and trashy reading matter of the day, taken in connection with variety theatre visitation, in turning out juvenile misdemeanants and well developed criminals, and that by the wholesale. Upon three lads arrested for highway robbery

in Schuylkill county, this State, there were found four revolvers, a number of photographs of actresses, and several dime novels. In one of our Philadelphia public schools, seven pistols were found in the possession of as many lads, whilst their stock of literature was made up of considerably over one hundred pernicious publications. The public were some months ago made acquainted with a Buffalo Bill organization among the lads of Milwaukee, a revelation which was stated to have alarmed the whole town and necessitated an increase of the police force. And only yesterday came a telegram from Reading, telling of the arrest of several little law-breakers eight to ten years of age, and the further discovery of a gang of thirteen who had been systematically robbing stores, factories and dwellings. On the east side of the city of New York similar bands of youthful desperadoes are a constant menace to the holders of movable property within the circuit of their depredations. The current Report of the Penna. Society to Protect Children from Cruelty, referring to the evil effect of "flash" literature upon the young, says, that "the officers of the Society, in the prosecution of their work, have frequent occasion to notice the dreadful and pernicious influence of the cheap novels which abound in our midst."

Flash literature and
juvenile law-breakers

In Paris there must have been a rather uneasy state of affairs recently to have prompted the sending of an ocean telegram telling of a suddenly developed and alarming increase of crime on the part of juvenile thieves, and the calling out of extra patrols of night policemen. But in