

**AN ESSAY ON LIGHT READING,
AS IT MAY BE SUPPOSED TO
INFLUENCE MORAL CONDUCT
AND LITERARY TASTE**

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An essay on light reading, as it may be supposed to influence moral conduct and literary taste
by Edward Mangin

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EDWARD MANGIN

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AN
ESSAY ON LIGHT READING.

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AND
LITERARY TASTE.

BY
THE REV. EDWARD MANGIN, M. A.

..... Hæ nugæ seria ducent
In mala. HOR.

... In the morn and liquid dew of youth
Contagious blastments are most imminent.
SHAKSP.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR JAMES CARPENTER,
OLD BOND STREET.
1808.

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ESSAY, &c.

IN the following observations upon the subject of LIGHT READING, I shall not extend my view to works which might receive that title from such persons as Aristotle, Locke, or Newton; but, excluding from my definition of light literature, all folios, quartos, and crown-octavos of voyages, travels, tracts

of divinity, politics, metaphysics, &c., shall endeavour to call the attention of the reader to some remarks on a few of the various consequences which may be supposed to arise from the perusal of *novels, romances, and poems of a particular class*: in other words, to the ordinary contents of a circulating library.

Vanity already prompts me to believe that this my little volume has itself some chance of a place in one of those repositories, and therefore a chance of being read. Already, methinks, I see it take its post in a sky-blue or rose-coloured covering, upon the counter or in

the window; and that this first and important difficulty being surmounted, every thing else, connected with its reputation, will follow of course.

It will receive condemnation or praise—it matters not which—from the reviewers; be turned over, thrown down, taken up again, cut open, read, and returned to the shop with the usual and flattering marks of having seen service; viz. a leaf or two torn out, scratches of pins, scorings of thumb-nails, and divers marginal illustrations, executed by means of a crow-quill, or a black-lead pencil.

But if, contrary to these suggestions of a vain heart, it should be the lot of my book to take rank amongst the *chartæ ineptæ*; to lie in cold obstruction on the highest shelf, and constitute a sort of *fee-simple* to the first spider that gets possession of it, I must console myself with the reflection of having tried to merit a happier fate.

Before I examine the effects of which the light reading alluded to may be thought productive, I shall arrange the different orders of works of fancy under their proper heads.

Thus, to borrow a phrase from the

system of the naturalist, the word *novel* is a generical term ; of which romances, histories, memoirs, letters, tales, lives, and adventures, are the species. And these again have their appropriate characters ; and are either merry, mournful, or of a mixed kind.

Of these, all, except the romance, profess to be resemblances of truth : that is to say, representations of manners and persons actually living, or who have lived on this our planet. And their object, when they happen to have one, is, or should be, to teach us, by virtuous and vicious examples, what