

The Pernicious Effects of Novel Reading:

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The Methodist Episcopal campaign against
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Abstract

From 1865-1920, Methodists took aim at the "danger" of fiction in American society, believing it to be at the root of social problems affecting American society like urban crime, rising divorce rates, mental illness, and the corruption of the American character. Methodists strove to help readers realize the danger that literature posed and to turn readers' attention to pious literature. Some ministers argued that it was more useful to serve as literary guides, steering readers toward the virtuous. At the same time, Methodism itself emerged in American fiction with such authors as Edward Eggleston, Harold Frederic, and Stephen Crane. Finally, the "threat" of fiction seemed to pass when the Church's attention was drawn to the new "threats" of cinema and radio in the course of the early twentieth-century.

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