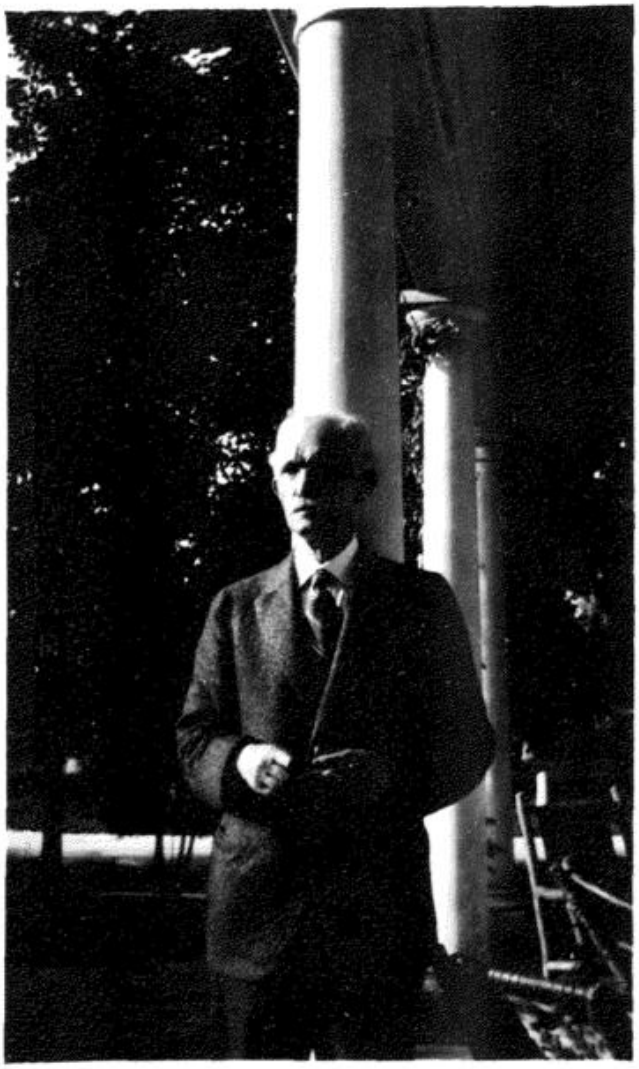

On the Vice of Novel-Reading.

BEING A BRIEF IN APPEAL, POINTING OUT ERRORS OF THE LOWER TRIBUNAL.

Paper Read Before the Western Association of Writers at Winona Park, Indiana, June 29, 1897.

By YOUNG E. ALLISON.

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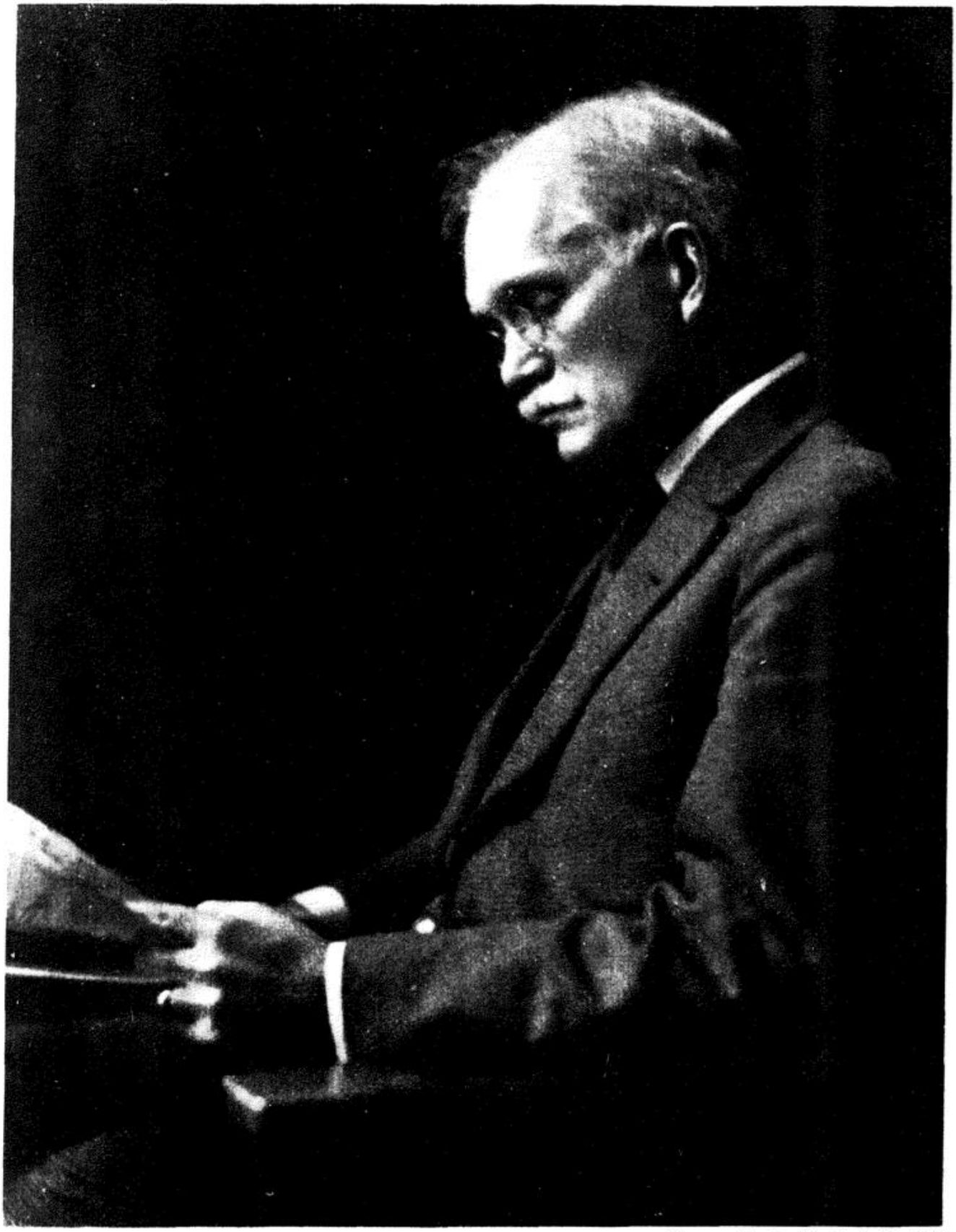

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YOUNG E. ALLISON

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ON THE VICE OF NOVEL READING.

Ever since the Novel reached the stage of development where it was demonstrated to be the most ingenious vehicle yet designed for conveying the protean thought and fancy of man, there has stood in the judgment book of Public Opinion the decree that novel-reading was a vice. Of course, that judgment did not apply exclusively to the reading of novels. It was a sort of supplementary decree in which the name of this new invention was specifically added to the list of moral beguilements against which that judgment had anciently stood. Poetry, the Drama, even the virtuous History, had had their noses disjointed by this tribunal. But their great age and the familiarity of their presence had softened the decree in its enforcement. The Novel was a young offender in aspect (though he had the nature and inheritance of the other three), and was, besides, strong in masculinity and virility. A certain sympathy thus sprung up for the three quaint old ladies, as for old offenders whose persistence had won the wink of toleration. They actually achieved a certain factitious respectability in comparison with the fresher and more active dangers afforded by the Novel. But the Novel was simply a combination of all three, more flexible and adaptable. It, therefore, merely shares in the old judgment directed against everything in literature—and in all the arts—that displays the seductiveness of fancy or taste. The judgments of public opinion have been consistently in the line of distrusting and discrediting everything that appeared to be purely spiritual and intellectual, and that could not at once be organized into a political or religious institution or into a mechanical industry with the prospect of large sales and quick profits.

Novel-reading is a vice, then, under this judgment, just as the reading of all fictions, fancies, inventions, and romances in all their forms, poetic, dramatic, and narrative. And if the reading is a vice the writing of them, in all common sense, can be no less than murder or arson. If it is a vice to devote time to the reading of novels it must be a crime to professionally pander to and profit by the vice. And if all this is true, what a wonderfully attractive corner that must be in Hades where are old Homer and the ever young Aristoph-

anes, Sophocles and Æschylus, Dante, Virgil and Boccaccio, Shakespeare and Moliere, Goethe and Hugo, Balzac and Thackeray, Scott and Dumas, Dickens and that wonderful child of Bohemia, who lately lay down to rest on Vailima mountain. Think of all these marvelous sons of genius gathered together for their meet punishment! In one especially warm corner, perhaps, Lope Felix de Vega, the most incorrigible of all, slowly expiating upon some most ingeniously uncomfortable gridiron the 1,160 volumes of crime and vice that are to be set down against him in the indictment, if it be a true bill. We may wonder whether the unknown authors of "Esther" and "The Song of Songs" and the psychological novel of "Job" are there, too, where they properly belong. It must be a great congress with these chief criminals as the senators and a lower house made up of the most agreeably vicious souls of earth, who, in their sojourn here, yielded for a moment to siren voices. If everything in fiction—from the astonishing conspiracies overthrown by "Old Sleuth" to the magnificent visions that old John Milton saw, of incarnate ambition like a branded criminal driven out before the radiant hosts of heaven—if all the fiction that makes up the spirit of the novel is included in this *index expurgatorius* of eternity, then we may well have a doubt, my friends, whether hell can hold us all.

It is a curious exercise for persons immersed in writing and study as an occupation, and possessing a catholic tolerance for all occupations, to hark back to the time when they were still within the jurisdiction of the world that acts but does not study. In all the average towns, hamlets and country-sides of the world human nature beats with exactly the same pulse. If a change come, it comes slowly and it changes all together, so that all are still alike. In the small towns novel-reading has been considered about as contemptuously as playing the fiddle, though admitted to be less dangerous than family card-playing. It was estimated that a novel-reader was confirming his indolence, and in danger of coming to the poor-house; a fiddler was prophesied to get into jail for vagrancy or larceny; while a card-player had entered a path that might lead as far as the gallows and comprehend all the crimes. This opinion still largely exists in towns and country-sides. We find it maintaining itself even in large cities, among all sorts of very good people, even among the most exceptional men of business,

of the professions and of the pulpits. Novel-reading, as a mental vice, according to this opinion, may be compared with opium-eating as a moral vice. It is thought to enervate and corrupt by means of a luxurious excitement, purely fictitious and temporary.

At an annual meeting of members of the public library of a large city, the librarian read the aggregate number of calls for books of each class during the year. Let us assume that there were calls for 65,000 works of fiction, 5,000 of history and biography, 2,000 of science and philosophy, and, say, 75 of theology. One of the trustees, who had pretentions as to responsibility for the public conscience that would have dwarfed the pyramid of Cheops, arose and appealed to the members to suggest a plan for counteracting the deplorable tendency of the times to the reading of fiction. It did not occur to anybody to recommend the abolition of the printing press, and so a discussion began. One of the most distinguished and scholarly ministers and educators of the world, who was a member, came to the rescue of the Novel. He said, in substance, that the large majority of the men and women in the world were laborers for the bread they ate, and it was his opinion that when such persons were resting after the day's toil, indulging their leisure, it was impossible to expect them to read works on theology and the abstruse sciences, while it was natural for them to seek amusement in novels and romances. He thought reading novels was much better than idle gossip, or loitering in saloons or in the streets. His remarks were received with great applause, and this declaration of his liberality of opinion was widely commented upon.

But is there any real liberality in considering the reading of novels as only just a better use of one's leisure than gossiping, guzzling in saloons or wandering idly about the streets?

The idea that novel-reading has no value except as a relaxation and amusement is born of the same dense and narrow ignorance which concludes that alcoholic drinks and wine serve no real purpose but to promote drunkenness and wife-beating; that opium promotes only luxurious debauchery, and that all the elegant, graceful and beautiful ceremonies and customs of society are invented merely to amuse and gratify the vain selfishness of the rich.

The most curious aspect of novel-reading, considered as a vice, is that the great majority of those indulging in it, like

those who indulge in drinking, gambling and other vices, are themselves willing to admit that it is indefensible if less perilous than other vices. They excuse it, just as the distinguished minister did, as an amusement so harmless, as compared with other vices, that you may indulge it and yet skirt hell-fire by a margin of a million miles. Some hypocrites conceal and deny the indulgence like your secret toper; others apologize for not indulging when they are in the company of notorious but pleasing offenders, as the hypocrite feigns benevolence. Every one of you doubtless has in mind the amiable man of business—maybe your tailor, your broker, your banker, your lawyer, your grocer—who cultivates your good opinion, and for the sake of the customer in you tolerates lightly the doubtfulness of your employment. He will even introduce the subject of books as a respectful and diplomatic concession to your heresies—much as all of us humor lunatics amiably and curiously, by broaching the subject of their delusions. He is tolerant because of fat success; his income is large, he spends it in a fine house, full of costly adornments, of which he has no knowledge except in the measure of cost and the correctness of their usage; he has equipages, and gives dinners and sits securely in Abraham's bosom of society. He pays you the deferential compliment of asking what books you are reading. It maybe you are just out of the profound philosophical complexities and pathetic problems of "Les Miserables." Perhaps you have immersed yourself again in the paradoxes of "Vanity Fair," or have been pumping up the flabby tires of your better nature with the fresh air of "David Copperfield." It is possible that "Tess of the Durbervilles," or "A Window in Thrums" has been newly received, and has been enlightening your mind and conscience as to your relations to the world about you. Whatever it has been, you suggest the fact.

"It is a novel?" He replies doubtfully:

"Certainly," you respond with enthusiasm. "A masterpiece."

"Well," protests the amiable Philistine, "I have—so little time—for *amusing* myself, you know. My daughter, now, she is a great novel-reader. She buys a great many novels. Last year I read a book called "The Greatness of Our Country." It is a wonderful book. It said in that book that the United States could support a population of 400,000,000. I had no idea of that before. I asked Prof. So and So

about it and he said why not: that China had 400,000,000 people. It is surprising what we learn from books," etc., etc., etc.

This man has got one bald statistical suggestion in his head out of a book that is made to sell on trains. He recognizes it. It recalls dimly mathematics which he was taught at school. It is a concrete suggestion; it requires no effort to understand or remember. It is so wonderful to him that he has no time to amuse himself with the heart allegories and the practical questions of the condition of those possible 400,000,000 as revealed in "Les Miserables." His daughter will do that and he buys for her novels, bicycles, gloves and chocolates with equal fond readiness to humor what he considers whims pardonable in children.

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The idea that novel-reading is a harmless and mere amusement expresses fully the judgment that it is a vice, an encourager of indolence. There may be two reasons for the judgment, one existing in the novel itself, the other in the tribunal. Let us first consider the nature of the tribunal.

The supreme constituted authority — not only of affairs in this life but in the ordering of all the future existences that man has conceived — is Public Opinion. Public opinion is the decree of human nature determined in impenetrable secrecy, enforced with ceremonious and bewildering circumlocution. It is thus double-natured. The organized public opinion that we see, hear, feel and obey is the costumed officialism of human nature, through ages of custom charged with enforcing upon individuals the demands of the many. The other is that tacit and nearly always unconscious understanding among men and women, which binds them in mysterious cohesion through a belief in or a dread of something that they can not understand, because they can not feel it with their hands, control it with their strength or disturb it with their threats. The myriads of mankind in this secret tribunal are silent because they are ignorant of speech. They are dull of brain and low in nervous organization, so that perception with them is a cerebral agony and even feeling responds only to the shock of actual physical suffering. Organized public opinion, when compared with this unnamable and resistless silent force of human instinct is like a small body of the police in the presence of a vast sullen mob. If the mob is determined and throws capable leaders forward, the police either

desert to the mob or disappear. If the mob does not understand itself and produces no leaders the police rule it. It is fair to speak of this tacit common instinct as ignorant, because the world always has been shared between Ignorance and his twin brother, Indolence. Knowledge is the rarest coin that circulates among men. No one can accumulate knowledge unless he possesses the broad catholicity of purpose to labor ceaselessly for truth, to accept it from whatsoever source it comes, in whatsoever guise, with whatsoever message it brings him, and to abide whatsoever results may follow. If he expects an angel and a devil comes, it is still the truth he is seeing, it is still knowledge he is gaining. The genius of knowledge-seeking was glorified in that obscure German chemist who, experimenting upon himself with a new solution into which a fatal wrong ingredient had entered, cried in the agony of death to his assistant: "Note my symptoms carefully and make an autopsy — I am sure it is a new poison we have liberated!" If the vast majority of men shrink from and evade irksome labor with their muscles — even though life and comfort depend upon it — a still vaster majority shirk the disciplined toil and tension of the mind, which, if it have real purpose, makes little of the only rewards that spur men to muscular labor.

The men who have really thought and labored and struggled for the abstract jewel of truth, and to beautify and make happy the world we live in, are, to the masses of indolent, ignorant, selfish human beings that have swarmed through the ages, as parasites upon some huge animal. The mass of humanity, considered as a whole, separated from these restless and stinging parasites, observed through the perspective of history, tradition and science, resembles nothing so much as some monstrous dull-brained and gloomy animal, alternately dozing and raging through the centuries, now as if stupefied in its own bulk or then as if furious with the madness of brute power. In fact, though mankind have achieved the dignity of a history that fills the thoughtful with wonder, yet as a mass they are filled with as much violence, injustice, ruthlessness and selfishness as if it were but yesterday they had emerged from the primitive struggles with wild beasts, the tangled forests, the trackless mountains, and the pitiless elements, and yet stood flushed with savage exultation but dull with physical weariness. In that vast human bulk that sprawls over every continent, the primitive

ferocity still exists, veiled perhaps under familiar livery and uniform, but untamed by centuries of training. It is this gloomy mass, saturated with superstitious cowardice, savage with the selfish instinct of greed, or dull with the languor of gorged and exhausted passion, that deliberates not in words or thought, but in some impenetrable free-masonry of instinct like that which beggars illustrate when they silently display their deformities and mutilations as the most eloquent appeals. This gloomy mass is at once the instigator and the instrument of mortal destiny. Individuals may escape for a time, but they must eventually fall or lift the mass to meet them.

The most profound philosophers and most patient students know as little of this silent, gloomy human force as geographers know of the archipelagoes of the Antarctic. The philosopher begins with pure reason and expands it; the student delves into the records of other students; in unfathomable depths below both are the myriads who eat, drink, sleep and seek their prey as their primitive parents once did when they disputed carcasses with the beasts of the forests.

It is this gloomy, savage force that has made the contemplative soul of spiritual inquiry writhe under the startling contradictions of history. When this force has been aroused with fear it has snarled and roared defiance; when it has been enraged by opposition or the lash of mastership it has cooled its ferocity in the blood of countless wars, pillages and sacrifices; when satiated or pleased it has grunted with pleasure or relaxed itself in orgies so gross and unspeakable that modern history, with instinctive decency, has kept the story of them veiled behind dead languages. This gloomy, savage force has always been the same whether mastered or mastering. When some daring and cunning genius of its own nature has cowed it, as the Alexanders, Cæsars and Napoleons have done, it has marched out to slaughter and be slaughtered with a sullen pride in the daring that this mightier ferocity has put upon it. When it has mastered its Drusus, its Domitian, its Nero, its Vespasian and its Louis XVI, it has indulged in wanton excesses of rage and destruction until, spent with exhaustion, a new master has arisen to tie it up like a whipped dog. It was this gloomy and savage force that crowded into the greatest tribunal of all history, and yelled with discordant and frenzied rage into the very face of the noblest and gentlest incarnation of spiritual light that ever spent its brief

moment on earth: "Crucify *Him!* Release unto us Barabbas, *the Thief.*" It was this savage force, serving all masters with equal ferocious zeal, that Theodosius turned against the Serapion at Alexandria, in the name of Christianity, to blot out of existence the inestimable treasures of knowledge and literature that had been accumulated by centuries of labor.

At all times this gloomy force has been more wantonly cruel than wild beasts. Man has been epigrammatically described as a reasoning animal, a laughing animal, a constructive animal and even as "an animal that gets drunk;" but the truest description is that he is the cruel and rapacious animal. The greatest student of the jungle, who has written of the beasts of the forest with the intuition of genius, has given us this formula:

"Now this is the Law of the Jungle—as old and as true as the sky,
And the wolf that shall keep it may prosper, but the wolf that shall break it must die:

* * * *

"Ye may kill for yourselves and your mates and your cubs, as they need and ye can,
But kill not for pleasure of killing, and seven times never kill man."

You may spend the remainder of your life attacking that formula of animal nature if you please, but you will find it at last still truth. Man kills not only the beasts, but his own species for pleasure, or in sheer wantonness of cruelty. He loves killing as an exercise; he loves it as a spectacle; he loves it as the origin of his greatest emotion. When that there is merely a brutish criminal to be hanged, human beings crowd the converging roads to the spectacle as centuries ago they crowded to the Colosseum. And it is to be recorded to the credit of wild beasts that no traveler ever yet came upon a battlefield that they had strewn with the dead bodies of their own kind.

Lest it be contended that this is a psychological portrait of the mass of mankind caricatured by bitter cynicism, let us examine the aspect of its physiology. The whole brain of an average Caucasian makes up fifty ounces of the 140 pounds weight of his body. There are thus 137 pounds of fleshly necessity to three pounds of intellectual possibility —forty-six parts of heavy dough to one part of leaven. The difference in the brain weight of races, and which decides the question of intellectual superiority, is about two ounces. The difference in the brain weight of individuals of the same race, indicating mental superiority is about two ounces.

Now as the brains of individuals of all races must in proportion be equally occupied with the execution of those functions which we call instinct and those acts that may be called merely automobile (since they are the results of training and constant imitation, and have utterly no relation to intellectuality or mental initiative), it may be fairly assumed that the spiritual essence of races and individuals exists in a little grayish pulp-like lump of brain weighing two ounces out of an average bodily weight of 140 pounds. In the mass of humanity, then, there is one part possible to flower into the noble perceptions of spiritual and intellectual life, to 1,120 parts of dull, uniform, automatic animalism.

What chance has this solitary microbe of spiritual and intellectual light against the swarming bacteria of animalism? That single microbe is merely a possibility. It may be mutilated, it may be dwarfed, it may fail from weakness, it may be corrupted. It is discouraging to think how few have grown into strong life through all the perils of existence.

Under these circumstances it is but natural that even the small proportion of mankind endowed with the divine possibilities conferred by two ounces of brain, should be contaminated with many of the corruptions from below. Of those who seem to be concerned with spiritual perceptions there is a vast number mere charlatans and pretenders who, like the ingenious Japanese, are content to make cunning imitations of the real things adapted to sell to the best advantage. They patter the formulas of religion, of science, of art and morals, and ostentatiously display themselves in the costume of intellectuality to flatter, cajole and mystify the gloomy ignorance of their fellows.

This is the select officialism of the secret human nature, its recognized and authorized police—the constituted authorities of Public Opinion. It is among these that we should find the possibilities of development much increased. What do we find? That the solitary microbe merely begins its struggle here. It dare not destroy its swarming enemies since upon their continued existence its own life depends. It must regulate, control and direct them if it would live and develop, or with cowardly cunning compromise the struggle at the outset and become a servant where it seems to command. This is the first terrace-step of superiority peopled by those who can understand others above them and interpret to the mass below.

The microbe that might have become glorious ounces of brain has been content to become merely a little wart of pulp which finds expression in skill and quickness and more of coveted leisure. There is the next higher terrace and another and another, until finally it becomes a pyramid, ever more fragile and symmetrical, the apex of which is a delicate spire, where the purest intellects are elevated to an ever increasing height in ever decreasing numbers, until in the dizzy altitude above the groveling base below they are wrapped little by little in the cold solitude of incarnate genius burning like suns with their own essence. It is so far up that the eyes deceive and men dispute who it is that stands at the top, but, whoever he may be, he has carried by the force of strength, determination and patient will the whole swarm of his evil bacteria with him. They swarm through every terrace below, increasing in force as the pyramid enlarges downward. It is the pyramidal bulk of human nature with its finest brain, true to anatomic principles, at the top. That radiance at the summit is the delight and the aspiration of all below. As it rises as slowly as growth of a coral reef it increases the courage of those below in proportion as they are near.

But the whole bulk is alive with the bacteria of animalism, under increasing control as it rises, still with the ferocity, rapacity and selfish passions of the gloomy mass at the bottom and forever in revolt. Is this not proved by history, written and unwritten? Is it not proved by the ghastly secrets of individual introspection that men never reveal or admit to others; secrets guarded by a system of conventions so impenetrable and vast that to attempt to personalize it in the sneaking figure of Hypocrisy would be as absurd as to try to enlarge the significance of an ivory chessman by setting it up on a lady's jewel box and naming it Moloch. All men feel how much of them is brute and how much is reason; but it is the unimpartable secret of human society whose betrayal has been rendered impossible by universal denials in advance, enacted into what we call criminal laws, under which admissions are denied by the brand of proportionate infamies, to demonstrate that the traitor who has acted or spoken has not put into expression the secrets of the mass. Great armies and constabularies are kept to commit upon a large scale the murders and violence which, when committed upon a small scale, they punish.

What is the record of the officialism of public opinion?

There has been nothing so abhorrent and cruel, so sordid, mean, frivolous, indecent or insane, that the representative fashion and respectability of some splendid civilization has not justified, approved and sustained it. It has licensed every wanton passion of the body. It has even indulged, contemptuously at times, those individuals inspired through the mysterious selection of immortal genius to safeguard the slender flame of spiritual light and life. But those indulged have always been made to feel that they were secure only as long as their performances excited jaded appetites as a novelty. If dwarfs and monstrosities staled; if dancing girls palled; if gladiators wearied; if there were no new games invented — then bring in a poet or artist — some queer fellow who had discovered something that he called truth or beauty, and let him amuse. But if he does not amuse, or if he wear out his welcome, away with him. In the history of our own civilization, as our ideals go, there was one divine incarnation of spiritual and intellectual life that struggled through the tears, blood and dirt of existence without one stain upon the purity of his nature. This essence was a beacon light that has shone steadily through nearly two thousand years. And Him the officialism of human nature, in exaltation of savage contempt, nailed upon a cross, and set up for an ominous warning to the whole world. It had already marked the noble Socrates, and, like Cleopatra to her slave, handed him a cup of poison. It was afterward to compel Gallileo to swallow in shame and agony his testimony to unalterable truth. Even in this year, under the title of a great church, it has, with pitiless persistence, forced a great student and educator, not to deny a historical fact that he had discovered, but to humbly regret its promulgation. As if the concealment of a truth for your advantage in moral controversy were not a greater crime than the concealment of a murderer for pay! Whenever this officialism has concluded to amuse itself with spiritual inquiries in the name of religious controversies, it has conducted them with fire and the sword, with thumbscrews and the boot, and all manner of ingenious ferocity.

The officialism of public opinion has always been ready to serve the demands of the base nature below. It was the great lawgiver, Lycurgus, who taught Spartan youths the commercial economy of theft and the virtue and advantage of lying. It was not only when Rome was in decay, but when

she was at the zenith of glory from the first Brutus to Octavius, when Cæsar, Cicero, Seneca, Horace, and the Plinys lived at the seat of the knowledge, wealth, art and power of the world, that women crowded the colosseums to feast their senses upon the ferocity of tigers and give the death signal to the gladiator who charmed by his fatal skill. It was while Shakespeare lived that English gentlemen and mothers apprenticed their sons to the trade of piracy. In our own century and country we have seen Abraham Lincoln, the liberator, himself, enlist under the flag of official public opinion to strike a blow in the extermination of red Indians who had committed the unpardonable crime of owning their own land whereon we are assembled to-day.

The fashions of lust and cruelty may change with the amusements they permit, but officialism promotes all with zeal. At present we laugh at Mesmer and study hypnotism; at present we sneer at the incarnations of Vishnu and inquire into Theosophy; at present we condemn the sacrificial "great custom" of King Prempeh and order our killings by twelve men and the sheriff and by elaborate machinery; at present we shudder at the sports of Commodus and wait breathlessly upon bulletins from Carson City. Those who scouted the fetiches of Dahomey have waited on their knees in the Cathedral at Naples for the liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius, or crawled in agony of hope to the saving pool at Lourdes. There have been those melted to tenderest compassion at the sight of a wounded dog or an overdriven horse, who have yet owned human slaves and contended that it was right, even if harsh, to sell a mother and her child from one auction block to different owners. There have been those so wounded by the shortcomings of their neighbors that they have organized white-capped bands of virtue to wipe out immorality in the cleansing blood of murder. A man may reject the miracle of Jonah and yet see an airship.

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Now this is the tribunal that has handed down the judgment that novel-reading is a vice. Is it not a most natural, just and honest opinion? Could such a tribunal properly pronounce any other? Is it not such a judgment in fact as vindicates the integrity of the court, while it crowns the culprit with glory? In expressing the idea that the reading of novels is only an amusement—to be taken up when there is nothing else to do—your average grocer, tailor, lawyer, or

what not, has but spoken to you the world's judgment. In fact there are countless readers of novels who have grown up in this atmosphere of conviction that novels are meant only to amuse. They are so habituated to the idea that novels, to them, are valueless—mere sentimental unrealities or spiced narratives of heated invention—so that they go through the treasure houses of genius without ever hearing the soft-voiced persuasion of knowledge or seeing the marvelous, vivid panorama of human life, illustrating its aspirations, sorrows, struggles, triumphs and failures. Such readers, convinced in advance that everything in a novel is fictitious, because the personages discussed are fictitious in name, never dream that study of the conduct of these personages may be useful to influence their own manners, conduct, morals or sympathies. Indeed, some of them are so confident of the unreality of novels that when they are confronted with their own counterparts in fictitious personality they feel a certain sense of humiliation as of being convicted of eccentricity, of an unlikeness to actual persons, which must be concealed as branding them "fit to be put into a novel." To such persons novel-reading is a vice, because it is an indolent excitement, a mental opium-eating; the useless butting—against an unscalable wall—of brains intended to be fully occupied in developing those parts of the nervous and muscular systems that find their highest application in vigorous devotion to the washboard or the laying of gas pipes down.

What a different result is achieved by the reader who knows the secret that imagination is the soul of thought, that taste is the power of truth and that the abstractions produced by imagination and taste dealing with fact to convert it to fiction, or carefully assembling fiction to convert it to fact, have been the stars that have lighted up the night of human history. By the light of these in their varying forms man discovered Religion, Philosophy, Science, Government and the possibility of orderly Liberty. To such a reader the novel comprehends all human society, its customs and secrets. The untraveled man may sit in his library and become as familiar with the world as with his native town; the diffident student may mingle familiarly in the society of courts; the bashful girl may learn the most engaging manners; the slow may learn the trick of wit; the rich may learn sympathy for the poor; the weak may be warned against the pitfalls of temptation and every one may there survey himself in every

aspect, subjected to discussion and exhibition under various disguises and under various circumstances; and, if he have courage and the desire, he can decide what he thinks of himself and the possibilities of improving the opinion in the light of full knowledge of the subject.

The Novel has come as the solvent of all literary art. In its possibilities all the essentials of other literary forms are combined and conveyed without injury. Professedly not History, it performs all its wonders in the guise of History and adds a light and a human interest to chronicle that gives increased value. We do not get sympathetic and human knowledge of England from History, but from Scott, Thackeray and her splendid historical novelists. We do not turn to Guizot and Thiers for any knowledge of French history except its stated public facts, its documents with royal seals and its verified dates and details—it is to Dumas, Merimee. Balzac that all but the professional students of history go, We do not seek in the rapid sketches of Gibbon for the story of Nero, but in the pages of "Quo Vadis." Where do we find the breathing history of Spain except in the countless novels that its picturesque subjects have suggested? I would scorn to underestimate the profound and substantial value that the great muse of History has conferred upon the world. In all literature she deservedly ranks first in dignity, power and usefulness; but who will say that at her court the Prime Minister is not the Novel, which by its lightness, grace and address has popularized history all over the world?

While the Novel has none of the guise of poetry, yet it has its every essence, neglecting only form and rhyme. In the Novel you may find the measure, the accent and the figures of the whole range of poetry, and a capacity for inspiring enthusiasm and emulation quite as great as poetry unjoined to the divine enchantress, Music.

Plainly not Drama, yet what is more dramatic than the Novel? In the miracle of its pages you find theater, scenery, actors, audience and author. You may sit at your ease in your library chair and command the services of the most innumerable company of comedians, tragedians, lovers, ladies, buffoons, soubrettes and pantomimists that the world ever knew. How many novels have been turned into dramas, how few dramas have been successfully expanded into novels!

Thus the Novel, while it is not History nor Poetry nor the Drama, is a combination of all. And it possesses more than

this. Its lightness enables it to tell the history of the commonest peasant—a subject that History disdained until the Novel bent to the task. Its flexibility makes it possible to write the history of types and classes; its capacity enables it to convey science, to teach morals, to illuminate the abstract difficulties of every philosophy, to utter the despairing human protests stifled elsewhere, and to embrace every purpose for which words were created and human aspirations were kindled. That it has lent itself to base uses is true. How could it escape the contamination that has smirched every other art? And, as in every other art, that which is base and false in fiction soon dies of its own inherent weakness and is forgotten. But decade by decade the Novel grows more powerful, more noble, and more adaptable to the spiritual uses of man. The time will come when the Novel will stand on the bookshelves with history, the philosophies and the sciences, as of equal honor and use--necessary to complete the education of every scholar; yet even then there will probably be a tribunal to pronounce it to be, if not a vice, at least of doubtful utility.