Public Library

What Should Its Attitude Be on Fiction?

By DR. HORACE G. WADLIN, Librarian Boston Public Library

IN OUR TIME the novel has become the principal form of literary expression. It is within the best novels that one finds the clearest interpretation and the keenest criticism of life. It is a common fallacy to speak of fiction as if it were "light" literature, unworthy of serious attention, and to group all other kinds of books together, without much discrimination, as the only profitable reading. But a book that stimulates the imagination or the emotions may be in the best sense educational, and many books written with distinct educational purpose are of little real value. Besides this, fiction is now more widely read than any other sort of literature, and therefore it is through this medium that those who would move men today make their appeal.

In the large output there is, nevertheless, much trash. As Cervantes once said: "There are men that will make you books, and turn them loose into the world with as much dispatch as they would a dish of fritters," and much of the fiction of the day fails to rise above what somebody has called "promiscuous mediocrity."

Standards of taste differ, and librarians are not infallible. Nevertheless there is a fairly distinct line separating the wheat from the chaff. It should always be remembered that the selection must be uninfluenced by personal bias, and that merit in a novel is not confined to its literary style, but includes other values—notably truth to life, high ideals, broad human interest and the power to furnish sane and healthy entertainment to the average reader.

These principles, if applied in practice, will necessarily exclude many books of the day, which in six months or so will be forgotten. But under this standard no book of abiding merit will be disregarded; there are too few of them.

No two public libraries have the same local conditions, but unless books are to be bought without discrimination the problem of selection must be faced. This, of course, is where the question of fiction becomes troublesome. It cannot be ignored, however, since no public library can buy all, and in most cases only a few of the novels of the day, and every public library is morally bound to make the best possible use of its funds.

Horace G. Wadlin.

Muscular Work Reduces Brain Power

By S. S. Bradenin, Utica, N. Y.

In reply to an article in "When to Read," it can be said that muscular work reduces the power of the brain. When the food is being digested the organs conducting this work need blood. The blood therefore leaves the brain and flows away to assist the stomach and intestines. If, nevertheless, the brain is put to hard reading, the blood will be drawn away to the brain. Poor digestion and difficult reading must certainly result. "You can't do good work by doing two things at once."

I tried an experiment once in order to prove this. Before departing on a bicycle ride one day I fastened a watch on the handle bars. At one time there was a clear road on a smooth boulevard. Taking advantage, I rode on at top speed, urging every muscle in my legs to its utmost and at the same time keeping my eyes fastened on the watch. What happened? I tried to read the time, but the letters dimmed before my eyes. The muscles in my legs required so much nourishment that the blood hurried there from the upper regions of my body.

Another case: I have attended high school and on occasions done considerable physical labor. Suppose that after a hard day's work, worn out with fatigue, I should have attempted to solve a problem in geometry or write an English essay. Do you suppose that my brain would respond? Hardly. A feeling of listlessness and a dull mind would have resulted.

At some gymnasium meets I have noted that the participants prepared their home work beforehand.

So, too, in regard to examinations. No pupil should think of studying the night before an "exam."

All famous athletes refrain from too much mental exercise.

Women Make Good in Business Field

By J. K. Harpsion, Boston, Mass.

Anyone who believes that woman's field of activity in business is limited should be convinced to the contrary by reading the following figures from a report of the London board of trade: Women bankrupts were less numerous than in 1910, the figure being 399, against 495.

The woman grocer was the least successful among the tradesmen of the sex, taking the number of failures as a criterion; the woman milliner and dressmaker next, then the woman draper and haberdasher, and, fourth, the woman lodging house keeper.

Married women are slightly in the majority of the failures (161) and single women greatly in the minority (81). There were 157 widows. The woman bankrupt entered into many fields.

Among others one notes in the list eleven bakers, four butchers, seven farmers, five fishmongers, four nurses, two photographers, eight restaurant keepers, five schoolmistresses, six tobacconists, two gardeners, nine toy dealers, six stationers and three undertakers.

Aviation Chances Seem Most Hopeless

By Jennie Adamsen, Cicero, Ill.

Of all the experiments the world has ever known, it strikes me very forcibly that aviation is the most preposterous and its chances for success the most hopeless. The other day at the Clearing aviation field another life was sacrificed, thereby adding one more name to the long list of those that have been killed.

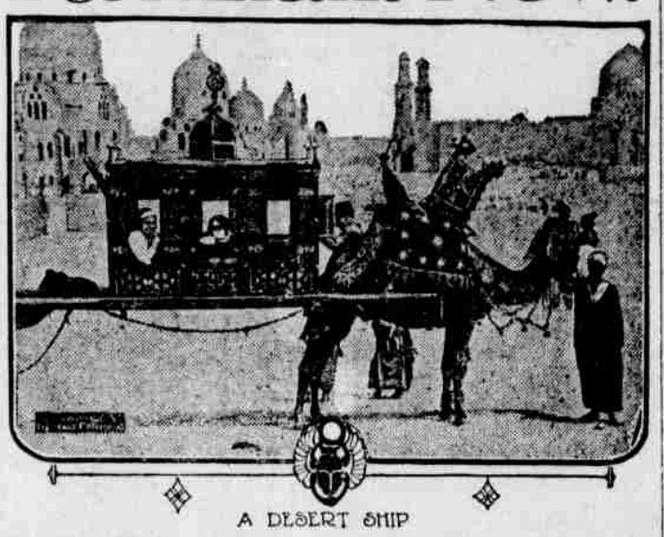
Some persist in believing that the end for which they are striving will be accomplished. But are not the odds too great against them and the loss of such brave and fearless men a loss to the world in general?

When one realizes the anxiety and sorrow caused in each individual case, it seems that some action ought to be taken to prevent such legalized form of suicide, even though, for reasons unknown to the vast number of doubters, aviation be all that can be wished for.

I dare say that humanity will never suffer for the need of it.

The world will progress without it till the end of time.

Once Great Empire; Remnant Now.



A DESERT SHIP

UP IN the far northwestern corner of Africa, where the sun beats down hot and fierce, lies the little country of Morocco, blinking insolently across the Straits of Gibraltar at Spain and regarding with equal contempt the rest of the civilized world. For civilization has touched Morocco but lightly and at heart its white-robed inhabitants are as savage as were their ancestors who, fighting beneath the Crescent, tried to conquer Europe for Mohammed twelve hundred years ago.

Those warriors of the prophet failed, but their descendants still show the same savage spirit now and then, and when they do it is a good time for those of other faiths to barricade the doors and windows of their houses if they cannot flee. Only a few weeks ago there was a bloody massacre in Fez, the capital of Morocco, in which hundreds of Jews, their wives and their daughters, were slain.

But the power of Morocco is gone, and Spain today is in no danger from the fierce little country that clings to the northern edge of the Sahara. The Moors may look across to Gibraltar and reflect that it and all the country to the north of it once was theirs, but there is little danger that the flag of the prophet ever will be unfurled again on Spanish soil.

Counted It a Privilege to Die.

It was early in the eighth century that the Moors streamed across the straits and into Spain. All Northern Africa was aflame with the new religion of the prophet. From Arabia the followers of Mohammed had come with fire and sword, converting by force of arms and counting it a privilege to die fighting for the advance of Islamism. Northern Africa, whose only religion was a decadent Christianity, had not been long in taking the new faith up, though there was some stubborn fighting against the Arab invaders. The Berbers, who were the principal inhabitants of Morocco, had at first resisted, then taken up Mohammedanism with a rush. And then, led by the Arab priests and generals and aided by two or three treacherous grandees of Spain, they had sailed across the narrow strip of water which separated them from Europe and started out conquering Spain. The Gothic kingdom which had flourished there was destroyed. Many of the sturdiest of the Christian inhabitants of the land fled to the mountains and upland country rather than submit to Moor jurisdiction.

Many who remained professed their conversion to Mohammedanism, while others were allowed to remain Christians, although under many hampering restrictions. Gradually little Christian kingdoms were built up in the north of Spain, and these made war against the Moors, who were regarded as the incarnation of all that was evil. As a matter of fact, they seem to have been industrious, skillful and capable of achievements in architecture and general culture which were considerably in advance of anything the Spaniards themselves had accomplished.

Left Some Wonderful Buildings.

The relics of their civilization which exist today, principally in the form of old buildings, palaces and archways, are among the most beautiful things in Spain. The Alhambra, where the Moorish kings of Granada lived, is a wonderful labyrinth of walls and balconies and terraced gardens.

Perhaps time has cast something of a glamour over those ancient Moors, but certainly they seem to have been foemen of finer sort than the swarthy cut-throats who make up the population of present day Morocco. Although their skins were dark from long residence in a tropical climate, the Moors were not negroes. Their features were fine and regular, their intelligence above the ordinary, and we even read of Moorish knights fighting tournaments against fair-haired warriors and being treated as honorable enemies. Othello was a Moor, and in "The Merchant of Venice" Shakespeare has the prince of Morocco coming as a suitor for the hand of Portia, and losing very gamely.

But for all that, Moors were regarded as natural enemies in Spain, and, although they hung on for almost eight hundred years, were eventually driven from the country. As the Christian kingdoms in the north of Spain grew stronger and united, the Moors were driven farther and farther south, until at last only the kingdom of Granada remained to them. In 1492 that last remaining bit of territory fell before the armies of Ferdinand and Isabella.

The last of the Moorish kings was Boabdil, and guides point out still to the traveler the rocky point of land beyond the city walls where Boabdil looked his last upon Granada before he rode away forever from the kingdom he once had ruled. The place is called "The Last Sigh of the Moor." In "Scila," a novel published in 1838, Bulwer-Lytton gave a fanciful description of the surrender of Granada. He told how Boabdil rode out from his fallen city and met King Ferdinand and his queen amid all the triumphant pageantry of Spain, and how smiling that he might not weep, the young Moorish king knelt and delivered up to Ferdinand the keys of the city. Ferdinand gave the keys to his wife and they say that Isabella, looking upon the vanquished prince's sad face, wept in sympathy.

"Fair queen," said he with mournful and pathetic dignity, "thou canst read the heart that thy generous sympathy touches and subdues; this is my last but not least glorious conquest. But I detain ye; let not my aspect cloud your triumph. Suffer me to say farewell."

So the king rode away. At last he and his little cavalcade reached the summit of a mountain pass that led away to the small principality that was left Boabdil beyond the Alpuxarras. There they halted. From the pass the vale, the rivers and the towers of Granada were clearly to be seen, basking in the midday glow. Bulwer-Lytton says:

"Suddenly the distant boom of artillery broke from the citadel and rolled along the sunlighted valley and crystal river. A universal wail burst from the exiles; it smote, it overpowered the heart of the ill-starred king, in vain seeking to wrap himself in the eastern pride, or stoical philosophy. The tears gushed from his eyes and he covered his face with his hands. The band wound slowly on through the solitary defiles; and that place, where the king wept at the last sight of his lost empire, is still called the Last Sigh of the Moor."

Killed the Grub Thief.

Two lumbermen in the employ of the W. C. Edwards Lumber company, named Lafreniere and Leplatt, had a somewhat exciting adventure while camping in the woods north of Manbwaki, which resulted in their bagging a fine black bear.

The two men were running lines in the timber limits in the afternoon, and on their return to camp found that something had been into their grub pack. Suspecting a bear, they watched part of the night, but with no luck.

Finally Laplatt tied the grub sack with a rope attached to it to his foot and went to sleep. He awoke feeling something tugging at his foot, and shouted to Lafreniere, who got his rifle and fired a shot at random.

Lighting a lantern, they discovered that the shot was a lucky one, as a small bear was lying dead a few yards away.—Ottawa Citizen.

Takes Two Days to Land Fish.

To hook a large yellowtail fish one day and land him the next day was the novel experience of G. J. Murphy of St. Joseph, Mo. Mr. Murphy was trolling near White's Landing and after a strike the yellowtail ran out with nearly a hundred feet of line and entangled itself in such a manner that it could not be freed. It was therefore decided to cut the line and leave the yellowtail staked out, as it were, overnight. Next day the angler returned to the spot, lowered the gaff hook and pulled the broken line to the surface. The fish, being almost exhausted by this time, was easily hauled in, and when weighed was found to be a thirty-four pounder.—Avalon (Cal.) correspondence, New York Telegram.

THE CHILDREN

NOVELTY IN A MOUTH ORGAN

Case Is Held Stationary in Person's Mouth While Slides Back and Forth Within It.

Any man, who, as a small boy has played, or thought he played, a mouth organ, will probably remember how sore his mouth became from sliding the instrument back and forth. An Iowa genius has invented a harmonica which can be played without any such annoyance. The organ proper slides

Novel Mouth Organ.

back and forth in a casing, which is held stationary in the mouth. A handle at one end provides the means for sliding the inner portion. In the front of the casing is an opening through which the player blows or draws in his breath, as the case may be, and the harmonica is operated as the various openings along its body pass this opening in the case. The effect is exactly the same as that achieved with the old-style mouth organ, but there is no danger of cutting the lips on the tin.

UNIQUE LITTLE AERIAL TOY

Anything That Savors of Aviation Is of Especial Interest to the Young People Right Now.

In these days of aeronautical experiments, any aerial invention is of unusual interest, even if it is only a toy. The toy shown in the cut was devised by a California man, and its peculiarity is that a glider is blown into the air, describes an arc over the head of the person who blew it, and returns to his feet from the rear. A cylindrical casing has a shaft journaled in it and extending through it and radially projecting blades secured to the shaft.

Novel Aerial Toy.

A blow pipe connects with the casing in eccentric relation to one side, and diametrically opposite the point where the blow pipe enters there is an outlet opening. A glider in the form of an elongated plate, with turned down ends, is set upon pegs on the casing, and when air is puffed through the blow pipe the glider takes its flight

Fashions for African Brides.

An Oil river African belle threads a single row of tiny cowrie shells and hangs these round her hips, leaving to the severe propriety of her spouse-to-be the ordering of more elaborate costuming. He puts his money into wire and disks of brass, and hangs them on his bride. She is weighted from ankle to knee so that she can barely walk, and never knows an hour of ease. When hard times come he removes and sells one of her garments, which is a coil of wire or a plate of brass, the wearing of which has made her straddle deplorably all her married days. The bride of central Australia is dowered with an apron, with which it is the privilege of her husband to chastise her.

Putting on Frosting.

For the first time Ethel chanced to see her father preparing to shave. Running into the kitchen, she exclaimed: "Oh, mamma, guess what papa is doing!"

"I don't know, dear. What is he doing?"

"He's making a cake out of his face," replied Ethel. "He's puttin' the icing on it now."

DEFINITION OF WORD CARAT

Has Different Meaning When Applied to Pureness of Gold and Size of Precious Stone.

You have probably often heard of the word carat applied in jewelry and such things, but perhaps you do not know that it has an entirely different meaning when it is used for a ring and for a diamond in the ring.

The jeweler tells you that the ring or your watch case is 18 carat gold and you have an idea that it must be pretty good, as you never have heard of any that was 20 or 22. What the jeweler means is that eighteen twenty-fourths of the ring is pure gold and that the rest is copper.

Pure gold is 24 carats fine and would be too soft for every-day use, so it is mixed with an alloy to make it harder. The best alloy known for this purpose is copper, as it interferes very little with the color of the gold.

If a ring is only 14 carat, that means that nearly half of it is copper, and many that are sold for that are not even 14 carats. In England all such rings are stamped to show exactly what they are.

But when we come to the diamond in the ring and the jeweler tells us that it is two carats or one and a half he does not refer to the pureness of the stone at all as he did when speaking of the gold, because a carat is a weight when spoken of in connection with a diamond.

Precious stones are weighed by Troy weight, which runs 480 grains to the ounce, and a carat is only about three and a fifth grains.

LITTLE TRICK WITH PENCIL

Clever Illustration of How Our Senses Are Often Deceived—Many Make Wrong Guess.

Here is a little trick to try on your friends. Ask one of them to close his eyes and cross his fingers. When he has done this take a pencil and touch the tips of the crossed fingers with

Pencil Trick.

it. Then ask him how many pencils he feels. Nine times out of ten he will insist that there are two pencils touching his fingers instead of one. This trick illustrates how our senses often deceive.

TREE PUZZLERS.

1—What is the double tree? (Pear.)
2—What tree is nearest the sea? (Beech.)
3—Name the languishing tree. (Pine.)
4—What is the chronologist's tree? (Date.)
5—What tree is adapted to hold shirt-waists? (Box.)
6—What tree will keep you warm? (Fir.)
7—What is the Egyptian plague tree? (Locust.)
8—What is the tree we offer friends at meeting and parting? (Palm.)
9—The tree found in churches? (Elder.)
10—The fiery tree? (Burning Bush.)
11—The tree used in wet weather? (Rubber.)
12—The tree that protects from the fierce heat of the sun? (Umbrella.)
13—The tree used in kissing? (Tulip.)
14—The level tree? (Plane.)
15—The tree used in a bottle? (Cork.)
16—The fisherman's tree? (Basswood.)
17—The tree that belongs to the sea? (Bay.)
18—An immortal tree? (Arbor Vitae.)
19—A tree worn in Oriental countries? (Sandal.)
20—A tree used in battle? (Bayonet.)
21—A tree used in drawing an accurate line? (Plum.)
22—A tree used to describe pretty girls? (Peach.)
23—An emblem of grief? (Weeping Willow.)
24—A personal pronoun tree? (Yew.)
25—The sweetest tree? (Manle.)

Trick.

"Twice 10 are 6 of us. Six are but 3 of us. Nine are just 4 of us. Twelve are but 6 of us. Five are but 4 of us. What are we?"

To people who have never heard the puzzle before the above is a poser indeed, and the ignorant may spend hours hunting for a solution. The answer is the number of letters in each numeral mentioned, viz., f-i-v-e, f-o-u-r, t-w-e-l-v-e, s-i-x, and so on.

Something Missing.

It was Bobbie's first day at church and when the organist began to play he asked: "What's that?"

"Hush, dear," said his mother. "That's the organ."

"Well," queried Bobby, "where's the monkey?"