Novel and The Common School

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Table of Contents

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There has been a great improvement in the physical condition of the people of the United States within two generations. This is more noticeable in the West than in the East, but it is marked everywhere; and the foreign traveler who once detected a race deterioration, which he attributed to a dry and stimulating atmosphere and to a feverish anxiety, which was evident in all classes, for a rapid change of condition, finds very little now to sustain his theory. Although the restless energy continues, the mixed race in America has certainly changed physically for the better. Speaking generally, the contours of face and form are more rounded. The change is most marked in regions once noted for leanness, angularity, and sallowness of complexion, but throughout the country the types of physical manhood are more numerous; and if women of rare and exceptional beauty are not more numerous, no doubt the average of comeliness and beauty has been raised. Thus far, the increase of beauty due to better development has not been at the expense of delicacy of complexion and of line, as it has been in some European countries. Physical well−being is almost entirely a matter of nutrition. Something is due in our case to the accumulation of money, to the decrease in an increasing number of our population of the daily anxiety about food and clothes, to more leisure; but abundant and better−prepared food is the direct agency in our physical change. Good food is not only more abundant and more widely distributed than it was two generations ago, but it is to be had in immeasurably greater variety. No other people existing, or that ever did exist, could command such a variety of edible products for daily consumption as the mass of the American people habitually use today. In consequence they have the opportunity of being better nourished than any other people ever were. If they are not better nourished, it is because their food is badly prepared. Whenever we find, either in New England or in the South, a community ill−favored, dyspeptic, lean, and faded in complexion, we may be perfectly sure that its cooking is bad, and that it is too ignorant of the laws of health to procure that variety of food which is so easily obtainable. People who still diet on sodden pie and the products of the frying−pan of the pioneer, and then, in order to promote digestion, attempt to imitate the patient cow by masticating some elastic and fragrant gum, are doing very little to bring in that universal physical health or beauty which is the natural heritage of our opportunity.

Now, what is the relation of our intellectual development to this physical improvement? It will be said that the general intelligence is raised, that the habit of reading is much more widespread, and that the increase of books, periodicals, and newspapers shows a greater mental activity than existed formerly. It will also be said that the opportunity for education was never before so nearly universal. If it is not yet true everywhere that all children must go to school, it is true that all may go to school free of cost. Without doubt, also, great advance has been made in American scholarship, in specialized learning and investigation; that is to say, the proportion of scholars of the first rank in literature and in science is much larger to the population than a generation ago.

But what is the relation of our general intellectual life to popular education? Or, in other words, what effect is popular education having upon the general intellectual habit and taste? There are two ways of testing this. One is by observing whether the mass of minds is better trained and disciplined than formerly, less liable to delusions, better able to detect fallacies, more logical, and less likely to be led away by novelties in speculation, or by theories that are unsupported by historic evidence or that are contradicted by a knowledge of human nature. If we were tempted to pursue this test, we should be forced to note the seeming anomaly of a scientific age peculiarly credulous; the ease with which any charlatan finds followers; the common readiness to fall in with any theory of progress which appeals to the sympathies, and to accept the wildest notions of social reorganization. We should be obliged to note also, among scientific men themselves, a disposition to come to conclusions on inadequate evidence−−a disposition usually due to one− sided education which lacks metaphysical training and the philosophic habit. Multitudes of fairly intelligent people are afloat without any base−line of thought to which they can refer new suggestions; just as many politicians are floundering about for want of an apprehension of the Constitution of the United States and of the historic development of society. An honest acceptance of the law of

gravitation would banish many popular delusions; a comprehension that something cannot be made out of nothing would dispose of others; and the application of the ordinary principles of evidence, such as men require to establish a title to property, would end most of the remaining. How far is our popular education, which we have now enjoyed for two full generations, responsible for this state of mind? If it has not encouraged it, has it done much to correct it?

The other test of popular education is in the kind of reading sought and enjoyed by the majority of the American people. As the greater part of this reading is admitted to be fiction, we have before us the relation of the novel to the common school. As the common school is our universal method of education, and the novels most in demand are those least worthy to be read, we may consider this subject in two aspects: the encouragement, by neglect or by teaching, of the taste that demands this kind of fiction, and the tendency of the novel to become what this taste demands.

Before considering the common school, however, we have to notice a phenomenon in letters−−namely, the evolution of the modern newspaper as a vehicle for general reading−matter. Not content with giving the news, or even with creating news and increasing its sensational character, it grasps at the wider field of supplying reading material for the million, usurping the place of books and to a large extent of periodicals. The effect of this new departure in journalism is beginning to attract attention. An increasing number of people read nothing except the newspapers. Consequently, they get little except scraps and bits; no subject is considered thoroughly or exhaustively; and they are furnished with not much more than the small change for superficial conversation. The habit of excessive newspaper reading, in which a great variety of topics is inadequately treated, has a curious effect on the mind. It becomes demoralized, gradually loses the power of concentration or of continuous thought, and even loses the inclination to read the long articles which the newspaper prints. The eye catches a thousand things, but is detained by no one. Variety, which in limitations is wholesome in literary as well as in physical diet, creates dyspepsia when it is excessive, and when the literary viands are badly cooked and badly served the evil is increased. The mind loses the power of discrimination, the taste is lowered, and the appetite becomes diseased. The effect of this scrappy, desultory reading is bad enough when the hashed compound selected is tolerably good. It becomes a very serious matter when the reading itself is vapid, frivolous, or bad. The responsibility of selecting the mental food for millions of people is serious. When, in the last century, in England, the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Information, which accomplished so much good, was organized, this responsibility was felt, and competent hands prepared the popular books and pamphlets that were cheap in price and widely diffused. Now, it happens that a hundred thousand people, perhaps a million in some cases, surrender the right of the all−important selection of the food for their minds to some unknown and irresponsible person whose business it is to choose the miscellaneous reading−matter for a particular newspaper. His or her taste may be good, or it may be immature and vicious; it may be used simply to create a sensation; and yet the million of readers get nothing except what this one person chooses they shall read. It is an astonishing abdication of individual preference. Day after day, Sunday after Sunday, they read only what this unknown person selects for them. Instead of going to the library and cultivating their own tastes, and pursuing some subject that will increase their mental vigor and add to their permanent stock of thought, they fritter away their time upon a hash of literature chopped up for them by a person possibly very unfit even to make good hash. The mere statement of this surrender of one's judgment of what shall be his intellectual life is alarming.

But the modern newspaper is no doubt a natural evolution in our social life. As everything has a cause, it would be worth while to inquire whether the encyclopaedic newspaper is in response to a demand, to a taste created by our common schools. Or, to put the question in another form, does the system of education in our common schools give the pupils a taste for good literature or much power of discrimination? Do they come out of school with the habit of continuous reading, of reading books, or only of picking up scraps in the newspapers, as they might snatch a hasty meal at a lunch−counter? What, in short, do the schools contribute to the creation of a taste for good literature?

Great anxiety is felt in many quarters about the modern novel. It is feared that it will not be realistic enough, that it will be too realistic, that it will be insincere as to the common aspects of life, that it will not sufficiently idealize life to keep itself within the limits of true art. But while the critics are busy saying what the novel should be, and attacking or defending the fiction of the previous age, the novel obeys pretty well the laws of its era, and in many ways, especially in the variety of its development, represents the time. Regarded simply as a work of art, it may be said that the novel should be an expression of the genius of its writer conscientiously applied to a study of the facts of life and of human nature, with little reference to the audience. Perhaps the great works of art that have endured have been so composed. We may say, for example, that "Don Quixote" had to create its sympathetic audience. But, on the other hand, works of art worthy the name are sometimes produced to suit a demand and to please a taste already created. A great deal of what passes for literature in these days is in this category of supply to suit the demand, and perhaps it can be said of this generation more fitly than of any other that the novel seeks to hit the popular taste; having become a means of livelihood, it must sell in order to be profitable to the producer, and in order to sell it must be what the reading public want. The demand and sale are widely taken as the criterion of excellence, or they are at least sufficient encouragement of further work on the line of the success. This criterion is accepted by the publisher, whose business it is to supply a demand. The conscientious publisher asks two questions: Is the book good? and Will it sell? The publisher without a conscience asks only one question: Will the book sell? The reflex influence of this upon authors is immediately felt.

The novel, mediocre, banal, merely sensational, and worthless for any purpose of intellectual stimulus or elevation of the ideal, is thus encouraged in this age as it never was before. The making of novels has become a process of manufacture. Usually, after the fashion of the silk− weavers of Lyons, they are made for the central establishment on individual looms at home; but if demand for the sort of goods furnished at present continues, there is no reason why they should not be produced, even more cheaply than they are now, in great factories, where there can be division of labor and economy of talent. The shoal of English novels conscientiously reviewed every seventh day in the London weeklies would preserve their present character and gain in firmness of texture if they were made by machinery. One has only to mark what sort of novels reach the largest sale and are most called for in the circulating libraries, to gauge pretty accurately the public taste, and to measure the influence of this taste upon modern production. With the exception of the novel now and then which touches some religious problem or some socialistic speculation or uneasiness, or is a special freak of sensationalism, the novels which suit the greatest number of readers are those which move in a plane of absolute mediocrity, and have the slightest claim to be considered works of art. They represent the chromo stage of development.

They must be cheap. The almost universal habit of reading is a mark of this age−−nowhere else so conspicuous as in America; and considering the training of this comparatively new reading public, it is natural that it should insist upon cheapness of material, and that it should require quality less than quantity. It is a note of our general intellectual development that cheapness in literature is almost as much insisted on by the rich as by the poor. The taste for a good book has not kept pace with the taste for a good dinner, and multitudes who have commendable judgment about the table would think it a piece of extravagance to pay as much for a book as for a dinner, and would be ashamed to smoke a cigar that cost less than a novel. Indeed, we seem to be as yet far away from the appreciation of the truth that what we put into the mind is as important to our well−being as what we put into the stomach.

No doubt there are more people capable of appreciating a good book, and there are more good books read, in this age, than in any previous, though the ratio of good judges to the number who read is less; but we are considering the vast mass of the reading public and its tastes. I say its tastes, and probably this is not unfair, although this traveling, restless, reading public meekly takes, as in the case of the reading selected in the newspapers, what is most peristently thrust upon its attention by the great news agencies, which find it most profitable to deal in that which is cheap and ephemeral. The houses which publish books of merit are at a disadvantage with the distributing agencies.

Criticism which condemns the common−school system as a nurse of superficiality, mediocrity, and conceit does not need serious attention, any more than does the criticism that the universal opportunity of individual welfare offered by a republic fails to make a perfect government. But this is not saying that the common school does all that it can do, and that its results answer to the theories about it. It must be partly due to the want of proper training in the public schools that there are so few readers of discrimination, and that the general taste, judged by the sort of books now read, is so mediocre. Most of the public schools teach reading, or have taught it, so poorly that the scholars who come from them cannot read easily; hence they must have spice, and blood, and vice to stimulate them, just as a man who has lost taste peppers his food. We need not agree with those who say that there is no merit whatever in the mere ability to read; nor, on the other hand, can we join those who say that the art of reading will pretty surely encourage a taste for the nobler kind of reading, and that the habit of reading trash will by−and−by lead the reader to better things. As a matter of experience, the reader of the namby−pamby does not acquire an appetite for anything more virile, and the reader of the sensational requires constantly more highly flavored viands. Nor is it reasonable to expect good taste to be recovered by an indulgence in bad taste.

What, then, does the common school usually do for literary taste? Generally there is no thought about it. It is not in the minds of the majority of teachers, even if they possess it themselves. The business is to teach the pupils to read; how they shall use the art of reading is little considered. If we examine the reading−books from the lowest grade to the highest, we shall find that their object is to teach words, not literature. The lower−grade books are commonly inane (I will not say childish, for that is a libel on the open minds of children) beyond description. There is an impression that advanced readers have improved much in quality within a few years, and doubtless some of them do contain specimens of better literature than their predecessors. But they are on the old plan, which must be radically modified or entirely cast aside, and doubtless will be when the new method is comprehended, and teachers are well enough furnished to cut loose from the machine. We may say that to learn how to read, and not what to read, is confessedly the object of these books; but even this object is not attained. There is an endeavor to teach how to call the words of a reading−book, but not to teach how to read; for reading involves, certainly for the older scholars, the combination of known words to form new ideas. This is lacking. The taste for good literature is not developed; the habit of continuous pursuit of a subject, with comprehension of its relations, is not acquired; and no conception is gained of the entirety of literature or its importance to human life. Consequently, there is no power of judgment or faculty of discrimination.

Now, this radical defect can be easily remedied if the school authorities only clearly apprehend one truth, and that is that the minds of children of tender age can be as readily interested and permanently interested in good literature as in the dreary feebleness of the juvenile reader. The mind of the ordinary child should not be judged by the mind that produces stuff of this sort: "Little Jimmy had a little white pig." "Did the little pig know Jimmy?" "Yes, the little pig knew Jimmy, and would come when he called." "How did little Jimmy know his pig from the other little pigs?" "By the twist in his tail." ("Children," asks the teacher, "what is the meaning of 'twist'?") "Jimmy liked to stride the little pig's back." "Would the little pig let him?" "Yes, when he was absorbed eating his dinner." ("Children, what is the meaning of 'absorbed'?") And so on.

This intellectual exercise is, perhaps, read to children who have not got far enough in "word−building" to read themselves about little Jimmy and his absorbed pig. It may be continued, together with word−learning, until the children are able to say (is it reading?) the entire volume of this precious stuff. To what end? The children are only languidly interested; their minds are not awakened; the imagination is not appealed to; they have learned nothing, except probably some new words, which are learned as signs. Often children have only one book even of this sort, at which they are kept until they learn it through by heart, and they have been heard to "read" it with the book bottom side up or shut! All these books cultivate inattention and intellectual vacancy. They are−− the best of them−−only reading exercises; and reading is not perceived to have any sort of value. The child is not taught to think, and not a step is taken in informing him of his relation to the world about him. His education is not begun.

Now it happens that children go on with this sort of reading and the ordinary text−books through the grades of the district school into the high school, and come to the ages of seventeen and eighteen without the least conception

of literature, or of art, or of the continuity of the relations of history; are ignorant of the great names which illuminate the ages; have never heard of Socrates, or of Phidias, or of Titian; do not know whether Franklin was an Englishman or an American; would be puzzled to say whether it was Ben Franklin or Ben Jonson who invented lightning−−think it was Ben Somebody; cannot tell whether they lived before or after Christ, and indeed never have thought that anything happened before the time of Christ; do not know who was on the throne of Spain when Columbus discovered America−−and so on. These are not imagined instances. The children referred to are in good circumstances and have had fairly intelligent associations, but their education has been intrusted to the schools. They know nothing except their text− books, and they know these simply for the purpose of examination. Such pupils come to the age of eighteen with not only no taste for the best reading, for the reading of books, but without the ability to be interested even in fiction of the first class, because it is full of allusions that convey nothing to their minds. The stories they read, if they read at all−−the novels, so called, that they have been brought up on−−are the diluted and feeble fictions that flood the country, and that scarcely rise above the intellectual level of Jimmy and the absorbed pig.

It has been demonstrated by experiment that it is as easy to begin with good literature as with the sort of reading described. It makes little difference where the beginning is made. Any good book, any real book, is an open door into the wide field of literature; that is to say, of history−−that is to say, of interest in the entire human race. Read to children of tender years, the same day, the story of Jimmy and a Greek myth, or an episode from the "Odyssey," or any genuine bit of human nature and life; and ask the children next day which they wish to hear again. Almost all of them will call for the repetition of the real thing, the verity of which they recognize, and which has appealed to their imaginations. But this is not all. If the subject is a Greek myth, they speedily come to comprehend its meaning, and by the aid of the teacher to trace its development elsewhere, to understand its historic significance, to have the mind filled with images of beauty,and wonder. Is it the Homeric story of Nausicaa? What a picture! How speedily Greek history opens to the mind! How readily the children acquire knowledge of the great historic names, and see how their deeds and their thoughts are related to our deeds and our thoughts! It is as easy to know about Socrates as about Franklin and General Grant. Having the mind open to other times and to the significance of great men in history, how much more clearly they comprehend Franklin and Grant and Lincoln! Nor is this all. The young mind is open to noble thoughts, to high conceptions; it follows by association easily along the historic and literary line; and not only do great names and fine pieces of literature become familiar, but the meaning of the continual life in the world begins to be apprehended. This is not at all a fancy sketch. The writer has seen the whole assembly of pupils in a school of six hundred, of all the eight grades, intelligently interested in a talk which contained classical and literary allusions that would have been incomprehensible to an ordinary school brought up on the ordinary readers and text−books.

But the reading need not be confined to the classics nor to the master− pieces of literature. Natural history−−generally the most fascinating of subjects−−can be taught; interest in flowers and trees and birds and the habits of animals can be awakened by reading the essays of literary men on these topics as they never can be by the dry text−books. The point I wish to make is that real literature for the young, literature which is almost absolutely neglected in the public schools, except in a scrappy way as a reading exercise, is the best open door to the development of the mind and to knowledge of all sorts. The unfolding of a Greek myth leads directly to art, to love of beauty, to knowledge of history, to an understanding of ourselves. But whatever the beginning is, whether a classic myth, a Homeric epic, a play of Sophocles, the story of the life and death of Socrates, a mediaeval legend, or any genuine piece of literature from the time of Virgil down to our own, it may not so much matter (except that it is better to begin with the ancients in order to gain a proper perspective)whatever the beginning is, it should be the best literature. The best is not too good for the youngest child. Simplicity, which commonly characterizes greatness, is of course essential. But never was a greater mistake made than in thinking that a youthful mind needs watering with the slops ordinarily fed to it. Even children in the kindergarten are eager for Whittier's "Barefoot Boy" and Longfellow's "Hiawatha." It requires, I repeat, little more pains to create a good taste in reading than a bad taste.

It would seem that in the complete organization of the public schools all education of the pupil is turned over to them as it was not formerly, and it is possible that in the stress of text−book education there is no time for reading at home. The competent teachers contend not merely with the difficulty of the lack of books and the deficiencies of those in use, but with the more serious difficulty of the erroneous ideas of the function of text−books. They will cease to be a commercial commodity of so much value as now when teachers teach. If it is true that there is no time for reading at home, we can account for the deplorable lack of taste in the great mass of the reading public educated at the common schools; and we can see exactly what the remedy should be−−namely, the teaching of the literature at the beginning of school life, and following it up broadly and intelligently during the whole school period. It will not crowd out anything else, because it underlies everything. After many years of perversion and neglect, to take up the study of literature in a comprehensive text−book, as if it were to be learned−−like arithmetic, is a ludicrous proceeding. This, is not teaching literature nor giving the scholar a love of good reading. It is merely stuffing the mind with names and dates, which are not seen to have any relation to present life, and which speedily fade out of the mind. The love of literature is not to be attained in this way, nor in any way except by reading the best literature.

The notion that literature can be taken up as a branch of education, and learned at the proper time and when studies permit, is one of the most farcical in our scheme of education. It is only matched in absurdity by the other current idea, that literature is something separate and apart from general knowledge. Here is the whole body of accumulated thought and experience of all the ages, which indeed forms our present life and explains it, existing partly in tradition and training, but more largely in books; and most teachers think, and most pupils are led to believe, that this most important former of the mind, maker of character, and guide to action can be acquired in a certain number of lessons out of a textbook! Because this is so, young men and young women come up to college almost absolutely ignorant of the history of their race and of the ideas that have made our civilization. Some of them have never read a book, except the text−books on the specialties in which they have prepared themselves for examination. We have a saying concerning people whose minds appear to be made up of dry, isolated facts, that they have no atmosphere. Well, literature is the atmosphere. In it we live, and move, and have our being, intellectually. The first lesson read to, or read by, the child should begin to put him in relation with the world and the thought of the world. This cannot be done except by the living teacher. No text−book, no one reading−book or series of reading−books, will do it. If the teacher is only the text−book orally delivered, the teacher is an uninspired machine. We must revise our notions of the function of the teacher for the beginners. The teacher is to present evidence of truth, beauty, art. Where will he or she find it? Why, in experimental science, if you please, in history, but, in short, in good literature, using the word in its broadest sense. The object in selecting reading for children is to make it impossible for them to see any evidence except the best. That is the teacher's business, and how few understand their business! How few are educated! In the best literature we find truth about the world, about human nature; and hence, if children read that, they read what their experience will verify. I am told that publishers are largely at fault for the quality of the reading used in schools−−that schools would gladly receive the good literature if they could get it. But I do not know, in this case, how much the demand has to do with the supply. I am certain, however, that educated teachers would use only the best means for forming the minds and enlightening the understanding of their pupils. It must be kept in mind that reading, silent reading done by the scholar, is not learning signs and calling words; it is getting thought. If children are to get thought, they should be served with the best−−that which will not only be true, but appeal so naturally to their minds that they will prefer it to all meaner stuff. If it is true that children cannot acquire this taste at home−− and it is true for the vast majority of American children−−then it must be given in the public schools. To give it is not to interrupt the acquisition of other knowledge; it is literally to open the door to all knowledge.

When this truth is recognized in the common schools, and literature is given its proper place, not only for the development of the mind, but as the most easily−opened door to history, art, science, general intelligence, we shall see the taste of the reading public in the United States undergo a mighty change: It will not care for the fiction it likes at present, and which does little more than enfeeble its powers; and then there can be no doubt that fiction will rise to supply the demand for something better. When the trash does not sell, the trash will not be produced, and those who are only capable of supplying the present demand will perhaps find a more useful

occupation. It will be again evident that literature is not a trade, but an art requiring peculiar powers and patient training. When people know how to read, authors will need to know how to write.

In all other pursuits we carefully study the relation of supply to demand. Why not in literature? Formerly, when readers were comparatively few, and were of a class that had leisure and the opportunity of cultivating the taste, books were generally written for this class, and aimed at its real or supposed capacities. If the age was coarse in speech or specially affected in manner, the books followed the lead given by the demand; but, coarse or affected, they had the quality of art demanded by the best existing cultivation. Naturally, when the art of reading is acquired by the great mass of the people, whose taste has not been cultivated, the supply for this increased demand will, more or less, follow the level of its intelligence. After our civil war there was a patriotic desire to commemorate the heroic sacrifices of our soldiers in monuments, and the deeds of our great captains in statues. This noble desire was not usually accompanied by artistic discrimination, and the land is filled with monuments and statues which express the gratitude of the people. The coming age may wish to replace them by images and structures which will express gratitude and patriotism in a higher because more artistic form. In the matter of art the development is distinctly reflex. The exhibition of works of genius will slowly instruct and elevate the popular taste, and in time the cultivated popular taste will reject mediocrity and demand better things. Only a little while ago few people in the United States knew how to draw, and only a few could tell good drawing from bad. To realize the change that has taken place, we have only to recall the illustrations in books, magazines, and comic newspapers of less than a quarter of a century ago. Foreign travel, foreign study, and the importation of works of art (still blindly restricted by the American Congress) were the lessons that began to work a change. Now, in all our large towns, and even in hundreds of villages, there are well−established art schools; in the greater cities, unions and associations, under the guidance of skillful artists, where five or six hundred young men and women are diligently, day and night, learning the rudiments of art. The result is already apparent. Excellent drawing is seen in illustrations for books and magazines, in the satirical and comic publications, even in the advertisements and theatrical posters. At our present rate of progress, the drawings in all our amusing weeklies will soon be as good as those in the 'Fliegende Blatter.' The change is marvelous; and the popular taste has so improved that it would not be profitable to go back to the ill−drawn illustrations of twenty years ago. But as to fiction, even if the writers of it were all trained in it as an art, it is not so easy to lift the public taste to their artistic level. The best supply in this case will only very slowly affect the quality of the demand. When the poor novel sells vastly better than the good novel, the poor will be produced to supply the demand, the general taste will be still further lowered, and the power of discrimination fade out more and more. What is true of the novel is true of all other literature. Taste for it must be cultivated in childhood. The common schools must do for literature what the art schools are doing for art. Not every one can become an artist, not every one can become a writer−−though this is contrary to general opinion; but knowledge to distinguish good drawing from bad can be acquired by most people, and there are probably few minds that cannot, by right methods applied early, be led to prefer good literature, and to have an enjoyment in it in proportion to its sincerity, naturalness, verity, and truth to life.

It is, perhaps, too much to say that all the American novel needs for its development is an audience, but it is safe to say that an audience would greatly assist it. Evidence is on all sides of a fresh, new, wonderful artistic development in America in drawing, painting, sculpture, in instrumental music and singing, and in literature. The promise of this is not only in the climate, the free republican opportunity, the mixed races blending the traditions and aptitudes of so many civilizations, but it is in a certain temperament which we already recognize as American. It is an artistic tendency. This was first most noticeable in American women, to whom the art of dress seemed to come by nature, and the art of being agreeable to be easily acquired.

Already writers have arisen who illustrate this artistic tendency in novels, and especially in short stories. They have not appeared to owe their origin to any special literary centre; they have come forward in the South, the West, the East. Their writings have to a great degree (considering our pupilage to the literature of Great Britain, which is prolonged by the lack of an international copyright) the stamp of originality, of naturalness, of sincerity, of an attempt to give the facts of life with a sense of their artistic value. Their affiliation is rather with the new literatures of France, of Russia, of Spain, than with the modern fiction of England. They have to compete in the

market with the uncopyrighted literature of all other lands, good and bad, especially bad, which is sold for little more than the cost of the paper it is printed on, and badly printed at that. But besides this fact, and owing to a public taste not cultivated or not corrected in the public schools, their books do not sell in anything like the quantity that the inferior, mediocre, other home novels sell. Indeed, but for the intervention of the magazines, few of the best writers of novels and short stories could earn as much as the day laborer earns. In sixty millions of people, all of whom are, or have been, in reach of the common school, it must be confessed that their audience is small.

This relation between the fiction that is, and that which is to be, and the common school is not fanciful. The lack in the general reading public, in the novels read by the greater number of people, and in the common school is the same−−the lack of inspiration and ideality. The common school does not cultivate the literary sense, the general public lacks literary discrimination, and the stories and tales either produced by or addressed to those who have little ideality simply respond to the demand of the times.

It is already evident, both in positive and negative results, both in the schools and the general public taste, that literature cannot be set aside in the scheme of education; nay, that it is of the first importance. The teacher must be able to inspire the pupil; not only to awaken eagerness to know, but to kindle the imagination. The value of the Hindoo or the Greek myth, of the Roman story, of the mediaeval legend, of the heroic epic, of the lyric poem, of the classic biography, of any genuine piece of literature, ancient or modern, is not in the knowledge of it as we may know the rules of grammar and arithmetic or the formulas of a science, but in the enlargement of the mind to a conception of the life and development of the race, to a study of the motives of human action, to a comprehension of history; so that the mind is not simply enriched, but becomes discriminating, and able to estimate the value of events and opinions. This office for the mind acquaintance with literature can alone perform. So that, in school, literature is not only, as I have said, the easiest open door to all else desirable, the best literature is not only the best means of awakening the young mind, the stimulus most congenial, but it is the best foundation for broad and generous culture. Indeed, without its co−ordinating influence the education of the common school is a thing of shreds and patches. Besides, the mind aroused to historic consciousness, kindled in itself by the best that has been said and done in all ages, is more apt in the pursuit, intelligently, of any specialty; so that the shortest road to the practical education so much insisted on in these days begins in the awakening of the faculties in the manner described. There is no doubt of the value of manual training as an aid in giving definiteness, directness, exactness to the mind, but mere technical training alone will be barren of those results, in general discriminating culture, which we hope to see in America.

The common school is a machine of incalculable value. It is not, however, automatic. If it is a mere machine, it will do little more to lift the nation than the mere ability to read will lift it. It can easily be made to inculcate a taste for good literature; it can be a powerful influence in teaching the American people what to read; and upon a broadened, elevated, discriminating public taste depends the fate of American art, of American fiction.

It is not an inappropriate corollary to be drawn from this that an elevated public taste will bring about a truer estimate of the value of a genuine literary product. An invention which increases or cheapens the conveniences or comforts of life may be a fortune to its originator. A book which amuses, or consoles, or inspires; which contributes to the highest intellectual enjoyment of hundreds of thousands of people; which furnishes substance for thought or for conversation; which dispels the cares and lightens the burdens of life; which is a friend when friends fail, a companion when other intercourse wearies or is impossible, for a year, for a decade, for a generation perhaps, in a world which has a proper sense of values, will bring a like competence to its author.

(1890.)