

desire for popularity, he, with many misgivings, surrenders the talisman of his predecessors, assumes the costume of his profession, and becomes an additional link in the mystic circle.

Aware that the public will appreciate his work as he has ingenuity to thrill their souls, he, as a result, studies his patron rather than his novel. Controlled and helplessly led on by this impulse, he at length becomes as ignorant of the province of fiction, as the dupes of his sensational vulgarity. Leaping from the summit of a majestic art, he pursues his course to a sluggish bay. Torn from his intellectual models, he falls a prey to an uncultured criterion. Then his literary taste becomes a bankrupt, and the novel a mere whim in classical literature.

We are told that the literary curse of this country exists in the fact that the novelist conceives such flippant notions of his ideal art, that he depreciates the value of his office until he cannot sustain a limited degree of popularity. What incentive is there, I ask, to aspire to a higher plain of action? Where has the public in the last hundred years offered an inducement for consummate execution? Is poverty and humiliation an incentive? Is ridicule and literary ostracism an inducement? When public taste becomes so perverted, when the national thought becomes so indifferent, can we wonder at the tone of contemporary fiction? Why, then, hurl upon the novelist a censure for present abuses. Far better be it to turn upon the public, and, in its own words of stigma and reproach demand why *it* so relishes this same flippant notion and, if it itself carries not the deceitful curse to shoulder it upon the novelist.

With a single impulse the classical tinge of the novel has faded, it seems never to return. With it has disappeared an illustrious standard of literary excellence. Conscious of the degenerate state into which literary taste has fallen, the critic now exhorts the novelist to establish a more artistic standard for the con-

trol of his imagination. But why the need of this exhortation? Has the novelist in the last century produced nothing but inferior and insipid stories? Has he offered to the world no works of perfected art? Let classic literature bear witness. Time and again has he planted his standard in the midst of public ribaldry; and as often has the public, enraged at his audacity, hurled it to the ground and infamy upon its author. After such experience, there remains little novelty and less pleasure in the repetition of the act; and ere the public is again lavished with novels of an artistic type, it must first give some proof of a returning admiration for studied execution and design.

The unfortunate condition to which the novelist is subjected, renders success in the higher field of literary splendor, beyond profitable acquisition, to American genius. Not yet have we attained that regal wealth, which permits the artist of fiction to adorn society with decorations of the novel. Hence the workshop and the office receive thousands of gems, that under other circumstances would flash in literary circles. With no inducement to overcome the utilitarian spirit of the age, we cannot but feel that the consummation of its sparkling genius, is only robbing the novel of its vitality. Some there are, who will attribute the decline of the novel to inherent vices and herald the setting of its sun. But others, with more sympathy for art and the preservation of the highest mental faculty in its acquired perfection, will struggle to retain the last vestige of its relics.

To know that his art culminated in a highly intellectual state of society is a sense of satisfaction to the American novelist. If it be charged that through his neglect it lost its lustre, the imperative demands of public taste vindicate his fidelity. If vices predominate to-day, they have been instituted at no other pleasure than that of the popular will. Not idly has the novelist stood welcoming calamity; but endeavoring to turn the stream of infection from his luxurious fields, he has, in turn, been swept along with the plunging current. Like the drama and the forensic art, the artistic value of his work is sacrificed to an imperic standard rather than to intellectual appreciation. C. E. S.