Just now the newspapers are giving a great deal of space to the discussion of irrigation. Irrigation for the western part of this state is absolutely essential if there is to be a permanence of prosperity; and it is important that there should be a prompt movement in this direction. But in the discussion of this question there is invariably exaggeration in the estimate of the results to be achieved. Notwithstanding the showing made in the article by Professor Harrington Emerson in the current number of the Irrigation Age, and which has been reprinted in nearly all of the leading daily newspapers in this state, it is a pretty generally accepted fact among the well informed that there is a large portion of the state that cannot be placed under irrigation, Professor Emerson is entirely too optimistic.

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A considerable portion of northwestern Nebraska is admirably adapted for the grazing of stock, and to tell the truth, this is the only purpose it can be profitably put to. In many districts irrigation is impossible. A very great mistake was made when the stock was driven off this range country and the land divided up into farms. There must inevitably be a return to the original conditions, and it will be a good thing when this is done. Grazing is profitable, and a large cattle growing industry would be valuable to the state. A feature of this return to first principles must be a shrinkage of land values. It would of course be impossible to raise cattle on a large scale on land that has a farm value; and this land must go back to value commensurate with the use to which it is put. Somebody has got to lose. In many cases both the eastern man who holds the mortgage and the man who holds the title will be affected. This is an unfortunate condition of things; but it must be met.

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A gentleman signing himself "A" writes to THE COURIER as follows: "In the last issue of THE COURIER the critic on Marcella bewails the fact that so much sociological, religious, etc., discussions are contained in the novel of today—outside of the love story, which 'S' thinks should be the chief end of the writer of fiction. I may be mistaken, but I cannot help thinking that 'S's' view thereof is not quite up to the times. It seems to me that we have outgrown the time when men and women gave their spare time to the reading of mere love stories. The view of the intelligent reader of today is that the less of love a novel contains the better it is. I question the statement of 'S' that it takes more skill to write a simple love story than the novel of today, and should like to know who the masters were that wrote such admirable simple stories a generation or two since. I do not know any who wrote only love stories who are read or thought of by the reading public of today. 'The novel is taking the place of the pulpit,' says a distinguished preacher, and somewhat of a statesman too, I think. I have a great respect for the love of John and Mary, but the love season is but a small part of the life of most people; the other, and far greater part, is quite other than sentimental. The love story is like the golden thread running through the web; it makes it more beautiful and desirable, but the main part is, after all, for service. If the authors of today, by the application of genius, can throw light on the ever changing and complex problems of life, and make them interesting and instructive by combination with the love story, they are doing good service. Such service I think Mrs. Humphrey Ward has nobly done in Marcella. Mrs. Ward cannot be a socialist. 'S' admits that Marcella had changed her mind on that subject after her experience in the service of the working class in London. It was shown by her speech at Hallin's home, to the workingmen's leaders, to Hallin's surprise; and also by her acceptance of Aldous Raeburn. No; Marcella is a soundly conservative book. There is no comfort for the radical socialist there; at least so I read."

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"A" is mistaken when he says that the reviewer of "Marcella" thinks the love story should be the chief end of the writer of fiction. The writer of the review in question deprecated the introduction of so much sociological discussion in the modern novel, saying in part; "Imagine a lover telling his passion in one breath and explaining his conviction on the silver question in the next! The thing is incongruous, and somehow this intermingling of socialism with fiction is not to the taste of those of us who admire the simple stories produced by the masters a generation or two ago before sociophobia had become epidemic. We should prefer to take our novels and love stories without the admixture of this leaven. When we are once interested in the love affairs of Mary and John what care we for such things as the regeneration of mankind? The regeneration of mankind is all right in its place but it has no business interefering with the course of the love of Mary and John." "S" did not speak for the love story alone but for the old-fashioned novel that depended upon its story to arouse the interest of the reader, the novel that did not preach. But after all, love in some form must forever be the theme of the novel, and the men and women of the present day, progressive though they may be, have not outgrown appreciation for that kind of fiction that has, for instance, a noble representative in the last two books of Du Maurier or in the novels of Blackmore. Will "A" not admit that infinitely more art is displayed in "Triby" or "Lorna Doone," which are the simplest kind of stories, love stories, if you will, than in "Robert Elsmere" or "Marcella," so called novels that aroused public interest, not by the stories they told, but by the questions they raised? Andrew Lang has discussed this matter in a particularly interesting fashion, and "A" might find pleasure in reading what this author has to say on the modern preaching novel.

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In speaking of the masters who wrote such admirable simple stories a generation or two ago "S" did not say they were all "love stories." "A" allows his evident antipathy for the love story to interfere with his discrimination. Thackeray might be mentioned as one of the masters who wrote novels full of personal interest, but ignoring altogether all serious discussions of religion and political economy or sociology. Most of Dickins' stories stand on the great skill of the author in the telling rather than on any lessons contained in them. Dumas managed to awake the keenest interest by his novels which deal almost entirely of love and war. We remember and love D'Artagan not because of any socialistic cabal with which he surrounded himself but, because of his strong character and great achievements. And Walter Scott wasted very little time in lecturing on economic problems as he conducted his characters through the pages. Richard the Lion Hearted and Rob Roy and Scott's countless heroes and heroines may have had strong convictions on the questions of a land tax, or the equal distribution of property, or the eight hour law, but they kept them to themselves, to the relief of the reader. And coming down to a later period Du Maurier and Blackmore and William Black and Howells and Henry James contrive to be tolerably interesting to their readers without the introduction of much sociology. William Black can make his hero catch a hundred salmon without so much as a word about game laws or class privileges.

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The modern novel may be attempting to take the place of the pulpit; but with as little propriety as there would be in the pulpit resorting to the methods of the novelist in order to command attention. The novelist and the preacher each has his separate and individual field. It is the privilege of one to amuse by the relation of fictitous incidents, and of the other to hold out salvation to mankind. The lecturer and the politician also have fields of their own.

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If the author of today can throw any valuable light on the complex problems of life he would do well to throw it out direct, and not mix it with fiction. It may get lost in the pages of a novel.

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The concluding sentences of "A's" communication cannot be gainsaid. "Marcella" is, indeed, conservative in its teachings, and it is to be commended for the position it takes. The only question is whether we want "lessons" in our fiction.
