

Fiction and Ellen White: Another View



Keith Clouten

Summary of my Paper

- 1 The Fiction Question Is Still Alive
- 2 Writings About the Topic, 1965 +
- 3 Fiction in 19th Century America
- 4 What 19th Century Librarians Said
- 5 What I Learn From All This

The Fiction Question Is Still Alive

Viewpoint # 1: Fiction is bad. Ellen White said so!

All novels are pernicious in their influence

(Testimonies, vol.2)

Fiction unfits the mind for any spiritual exercise.

(Signs of the Times, 1880)

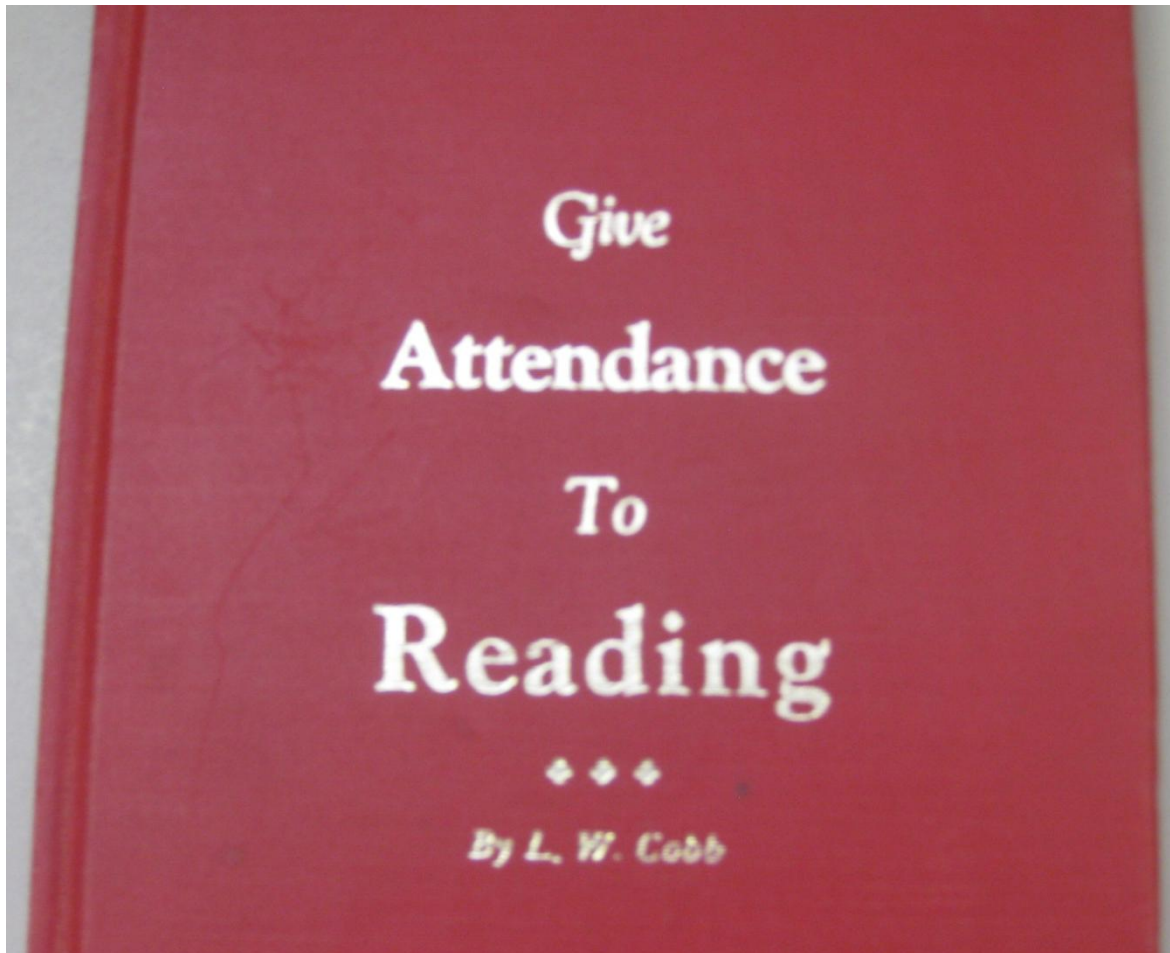
Novel readers are mental inebriates.

(Signs of the Times, 1887)

Novel and story-book reading are the greatest evils
in which youth can indulge.

(Testimonies, vol.3)

- ❖ In many Adventist schools and academies, the teaching of literature, including fiction, is still a controversial and contentious issue. (Survey by Shirley McGarrell)
- ❖ Some students are home-schooled or attend an independent school rather than be exposed to fiction in Adventist schools and universities.
- ❖ Works of fiction are banned or removed from some Adventist school libraries.



“The reading we choose may be a life-and-death matter.” p.8

Viewpoint # 2: Fiction is OK. Just ignore Ellen White.

- ❖ Ellen White was basically uneducated
- ❖ She came from an ultra-conservative background
- ❖ Much of what she wrote was uninspired

Fiction in the Bible

Parables

Examples:

The Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31)

The Parable of the Trees (Judges 9: 8-15)

Conflicting versions of the same story.

Examples:

Healing of the Centurion's Servant

(Compare Matt. 8: 5-13 with Luke 7:1-10)

Death of Saul

(Compare 1 Sam. 31:4-6 with 2 Sam. 1:1-10)

-I HEAR YOU GOT BOOKS
HERE FILLED WITH STORIES OF
NO-ACCOUNT WOMEN, LOW-DOWN
MEN, RAPE, INCEST, MURDER,
LUST AND DEVIL WORSHIP!

..YES, WE HAVE BOTH THE
REVISED STANDARD AND
THE KING JAMES VERSION....



Jim Day '00
LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

Writings About the Topic, 1965+

A Contextual Study of Ellen G. White's
Counsel Concerning Fiction.

John O. Waller, 1965.

A 24-page paper read to a meeting of SDA
college English teachers at the Quadrennial
Session on Higher Education,
La Sierra College, August 1965.

Writings About the Topic, 1965+

Max Phillips: “Fiction, E.G. White, and the Bible.”
Insight (2), 15 June, 1971, 6-11.

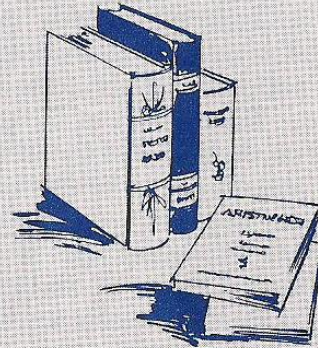
Concludes that Ellen White did not consider all non-factual material as fiction.

Examples: *Pilgrim's Progress*, and stories that she clipped for *Sabbath Readings for the Home*.

“Some feel it is all right to read anything factual and wrong to read anything nonfactual. Such a rule is arbitrary, artificial, unreasonable, and contrary to what we find in the Bible.”

Writings About
the Topic, 1965+

*Guide to the
Teaching of Literature in
Seventh-day Adventist Schools*



prepared by the

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
6840 Eastern Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20012

Guide to the Teaching of Literature
in Seventh-day Adventist Schools
Prepared by the Department of Education, General
Conference, [1972] 12p.

Contains recommendations for the selection of literature for Seventh-day Adventist schools. Several criteria are given:

- It should be serious art.
- It should avoid sensationalism
- Not be characterized by profanity or offensive language.
- Evil should not appear desirable; goodness should not appear trivial.
- Avoid excitingly suspenseful, plot-dominated stories
- Be adapted to the maturity level of the class or group.

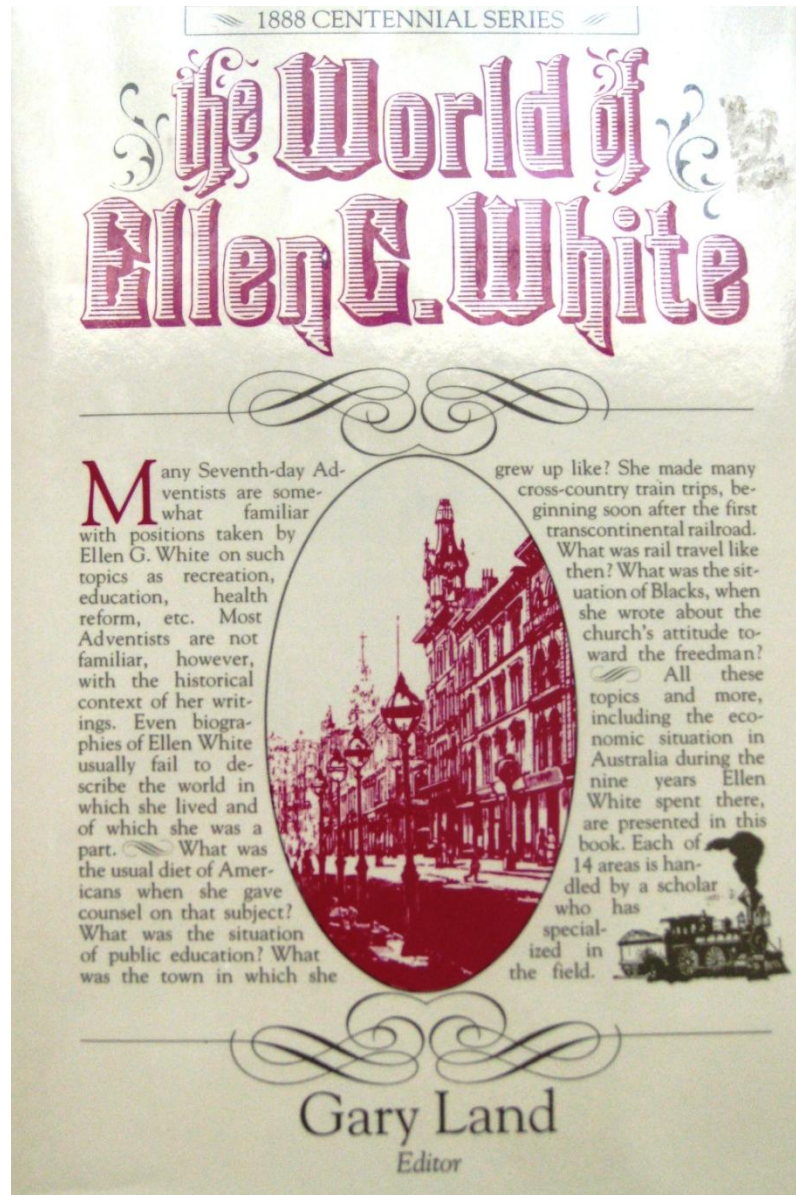
Writings About the Topic, 1965+

John Wood: “The trashy novel revisited: popular fiction in the age of Ellen White.”

Spectrum (7), April 1976, 16-24

A valuable discussion of creative writing in America during the second half of the 19th century. It helps us understand the context out of which Ellen White’s statements about fiction and novels arose.

Writings About the Topic, 1965+



Writings About the Topic, 1965+

Delmer Davis: “Literature for the nation.”
(Chapter 12 in *The World of Ellen G. White*, edited
by Gary Land. Review & Herald Publishing, 1987.)

A useful summary of American literature
during the 19th century,
showing how the significant literary figures
of the time were overshadowed by
the explosion of the popular novel.

Writings About the Topic, 1965+

Scott Moncrieff: “Adventists and fiction:
another look.”

College and University Dialogue (8), 1996, 9-12.

A concise re-examination of the issues;
understanding Ellen White’s legacy
on the subject of fiction;
suggestions for a new way of approaching fiction.
A useful list of references.

Writings About the Topic, 1965+

Shirley A. McGarrell: “Should Adventist Academies Teach Literature?”
Journal of Adventist Education,
Oct/Nov 2002, 22-27

Reports on a survey of English teachers in Seventh-day Adventist secondary schools in the Caribbean.

“In many regions, the teaching of literature, including fiction, is still a controversial and contentious topic in Adventist schools.”

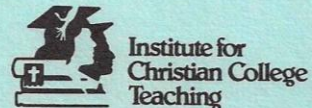
Writings About the
Topic, 1965+

CHRIST IN THE CLASSROOM

Adventist Approaches
to the Integration of Faith and Learning

Volume 7

Compiled by
Humberto M. Rasi

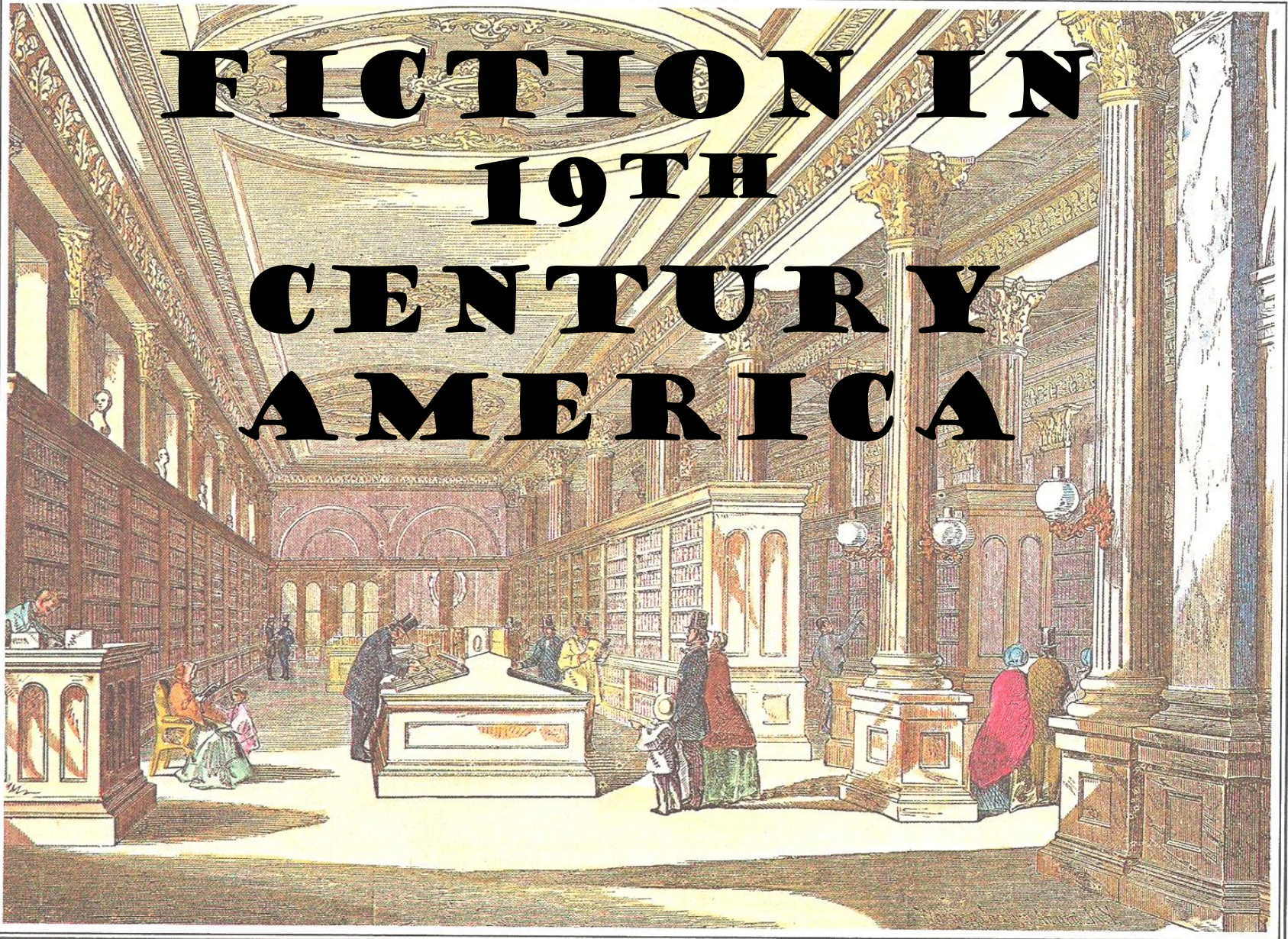


Writings About the Topic, 1965+

Keith Clouten: “The Library of Faith: an exploration of the role of the library in a Seventh-day Adventist college.”
Christ in the Classroom (7), 1992. 39-54.

Appendix compares some of Ellen White’s statements about fiction with opinions of librarians who were her contemporaries

FICTION IN 19TH CENTURY AMERICA



1 Growth of Public School Education



Growth of Public School Education

Mostly private schools in America until the 1840's. Then there was rapid expansion of free public schools. By 1870 all states had free public education.

This created a new literate and reading-hungry class of young people.

“A confirmed literary dram-drinker can, I believe, commence and finish a full-sized novel in one day, and he needs little or no rest before proceeding to another.” (Waller, quoting from a British magazine, 1889)

“Many of the young are eager for books. They read everything they can obtain. ... Some would even deprive themselves of sleep to finish some ridiculous love story.” (EGW, 2T 1870, p.410, 236)

2 Sentimental Novels for Young Women



Tremendous growth of the “sentimental” or “domestic” novel starting in the 1850’s. The plots featured unfaithful or drunken husbands, and struggling wives: “the loveless marriage.”

Literally hundreds of women authors. Some popular novels sold up to 2 million copies. (Wood)

“If a novel was successful enough to arrive eventually in the beautifully embossed and gilt bindings ... it was considered ‘high class’ fiction.” (Wood)

Sentimental Novels for Young Women

“How many young persons of both sexes have been totally spoiled by the novel-reading mania! How many students in our boarding schools and colleges have, through this mischievous agency, lose all relish for study, and finally become totally disqualified for severe mental toil of any kind.” (Methodist Quarterly Review, 1846, quoted by Waller)

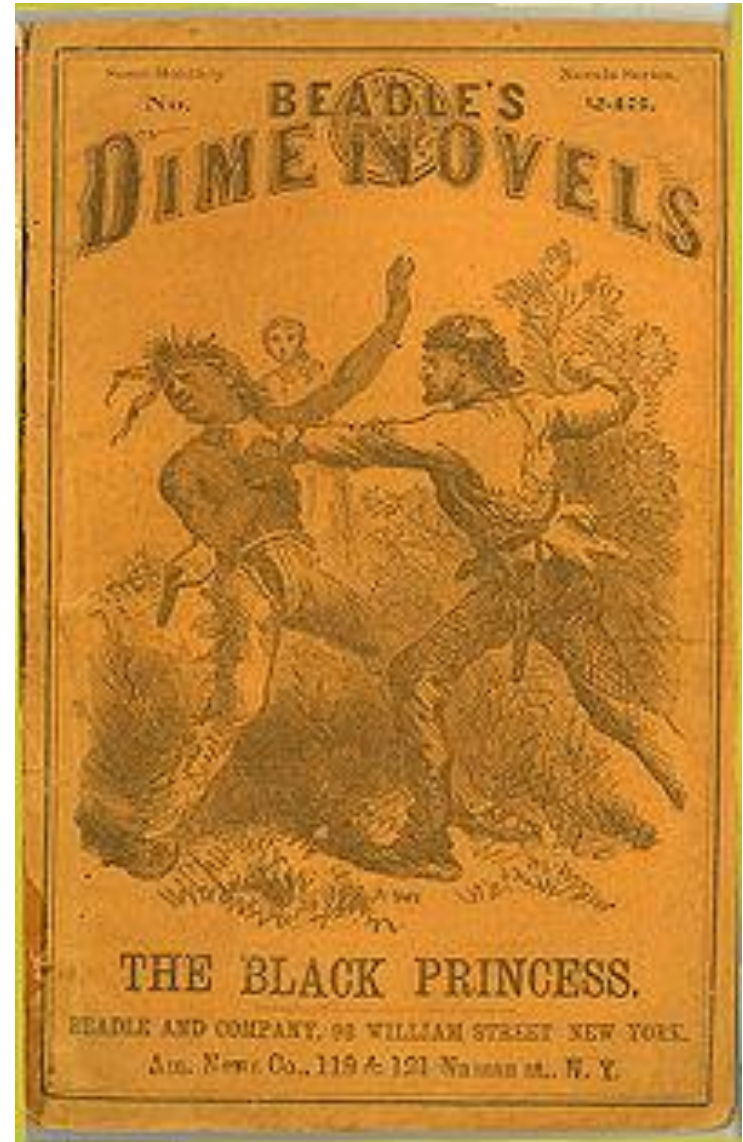
“It is love for storybooks, tales, and other reading which does not have an influence for good upon the mind ... It produces a false, unhealthy excitement, fevers the imagination, unfits the mind for usefulness, and disqualifies it for any spiritual exercise.” (EGW, 1T, 1860, p.241)

“You have been injured by reading love stories and romances.” (EGW, 2T, 1870, p.599)

3 Dime Novels for Boys & Young Men

The dime novel originated in the early 1860's and quickly became popular.

Often issued in series ,the novels began with Indian themes, and soon expanded to “wild west” themes.



Dime Novels for Boys & Young Men

Dime novels were responsible for popularization of American heroes as Billy the Kid and Buffalo Bill.

Sometimes referred to as “Sensational Stories”, dime novels were stories of crime, intrigue, immorality, bloodshed, and other violence. They thrived on excitement, suspense, and hairbreadth escapes.

“Literally millions of boys collected whole libraries of dimes.” (Wood)



Copyright 1878-1884, by Beadle & Adams. Entered at Post Office, New York, N. Y., as second class matter. Mar. 15, 1880

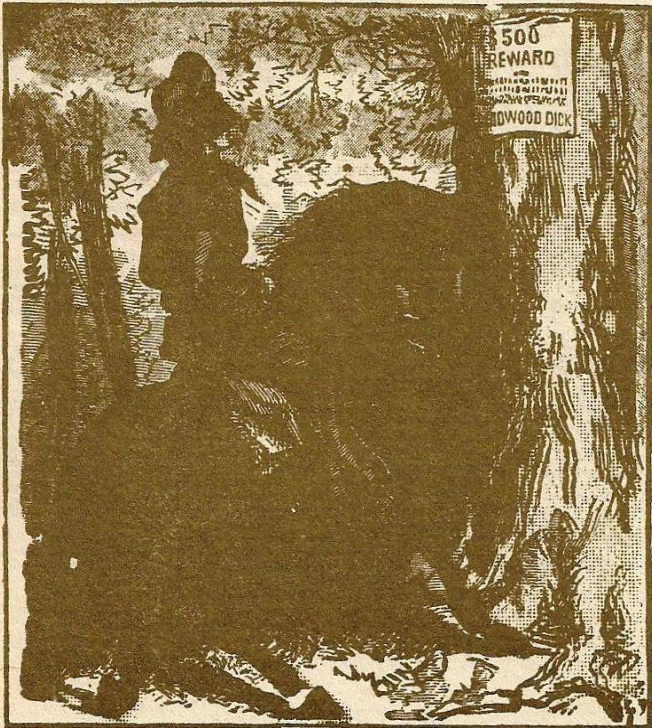
No. 1

THE ARTHUR WESTBROOK CO.
Cleveland, Ohio

Vol. I

DEADWOOD DICK, THE PRINCE OF THE ROAD: Or, The Black Rider of the Black Hills.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER.



Dime Novels for Boys & Young Men

“In the department of murder, the instruction given by the dime-novel writers is all that could be desired. There is not a possible method of murder that is not fully described. ... Our boys are taught how to kill.”

(Anthony Comstock. *Traps for the Young*, 1883)

“Parents had much better burn the idle tales of the day, and the novels as they come into their houses. It would be a mercy to their children.” (EGW, *Review & Herald*, Jan. 13, 1863)



being formed in a deep, natural pocket and mixed alternately with sand and rock.

During the remaining four days of that week the two lucky miners took out enough gold to evidence their supposition that they had struck one of the richest fields in all the Black Hill's country. Indeed, it seemed that there was no end to the depth of sand in the shaft, and as long as the sand held out the gold was likely to

When, just in the flush of their early triumph, the old humpback was visited by another geomantastic fit, and this time he discovered gold deep in the northern mountain-side, and prophesied that the quartz rock which could be mined therefrom would more than repay the cost and trouble of opening up the vein and of transporting machinery to the gulch.

We need not go into detail of what followed; suffice it to say that immediate arrangements were made and executed toward developing this as yet unknown territory.

While Redburn set to work with two Ute Indians (transported to the gulch from Deadwood, under oath of secrecy by the "General") to blast into the mountain-side, and get at the gold-bearing quartz, the old locator in person set out for Cheyenne on the secret mission of procuring a portable crusher,* boiler and engine, and such other implements as would be needed, and getting them safely into the gulch unknown to the roving population of the Hills country. And most wonderful to relate, he succeeded.

Two weeks after his departure, he returned with the machinery and two score of Ute Indians, whom he had sworn into his service, for, as a Ute rarely breaks his word, they were likely to prove valuable accessories to the plans of our two friends. Redburn had in the meantime blasted in until he came upon the quartz rock. Here he had to stop until the arrival of the machinery. He however busied himself in enlarging the cabin and building a curb to the shaft, which occupied his time until at last the "General" and his army returned.

Now, we see these two successful men standing and gazing at the result of their joint labors, each financially happy; each growing rich as the day rolls away.

The miners are in a prosperous condition, and everything moves off with that ease and order that speaks of shrewd management and constant attention to business.

The gold taken from the shaft is much finer than that extracted from the quartz.

The quartz yielded about eighteen dollars to the ton, which the "General" declared to be as well as a feller c'd expect, considerin' things, more or less!

Therefore, it will be seen by those who have any knowledge whatever of gold mining that, after paying off the expenses, our friends were not doing so badly, after all.

"Yes, yes!" the "General" was remarking, as he gazed at the string of mules that alternately issued from and re-entered the fissure on the opposite side of the valley; "yes, yes, boys, things are workin' as I like ter see 'em at last. The shaft'll more'n pay expenses if she holds her head 'bove water, as I opine she will, an' w'at ar' squeezed out uv the quartz ar' clear 'ntment for us."

"True; the shaft is more than paying off the hands," replied Redburn, seating himself upon a boulder, and staring vacantly at the dense column of smoke ejected from the smoke-stack in the roof of the crusher building.

"I was looking up accounts last evening, and after deducting what you paid for the machinery, and what wages are due the Utes, we have about a thousand dollars clear of all, to be divided between three of us."

* A crusher is said to have been the first introduced into the Black Hills.

"Exactly. Now, that's w'at I call fair to middling. Of course that'll be more or less expense, hereafter, but et'll be a consider'ble less o' more than more o' less. Another month'll tell a larger financial tale, I opine."

"Right again, unless something happens more than we think for now. If we get through another month, however, without being nosed out, why we may consider ourselves all-fired lucky."

"Jes' so! Jes' so! but we'll hev ter take our chances. One nateral advantage, we kin shute 'em as fast as they come—"

"Ho!" Redburn interrupted, suddenly, leaping to his feet; "they say the devil's couriers are ever around when you are talking of them. Look! invaders already."

He pointed toward the east, where the passage led out of the valley into the gorge beyond.

Out of this passage two persons on horseback had just issued, and now they came to a halt, evidently surprised at the scene which lay spread out before them.

No sooner did the "General" clap his eyes on the pair than he uttered a cry of astonishment, mingled with joy.

"It's that scarlet chap, Fearless Frank!" he announced, hopping about like a pig on a hot griddle, "w'at I war tellin' ye about; the same cuss w'at deserted Charity Joe's train, ter look fer sum critter w'at war seechin' fer help. I went w'at the lad fer a ways, but my jacksack happened to be more or less indispositioned—consider'ble more o' less than less o' more—an' so I made up my mind not ter continue on his route. There last I see'd o' the lad he disappeared over sum kind o' a precipice, and calkylin' as how he war done fer, I rejined Charity Joseph, an' kin on."

"He has a female in his company!" said Redburn, watching the new-comer keenly.

"Yas, peer to me he has, an' et's more or less likely that et's the same critter he went to resky w'en he left Charity Joe's train!"

"What about him? We do not want him here; to let him return to Deadwood after what he has seen would be certain death to our interests."

"Yas, that's more or less truth in them words o' yours, b' yee—consider'ble more o' less than less o' more. He ken't go back now, nohow we kin fix et. He's a right peart sort o' a kid, an' I think ef we war ter guv him a job, or talk reason'ble ter him, thet he'd consent to do the squar' thing by us."

Redburn frowned.

"He'll have to remain for a certain time, whether he wants to or not," he muttered, more savage than usual. It looked to him as if this was to be the signal of a general invasion. "Come! let's go and see what we can do."

They left the foothills, clambered down into the valley and worked their way toward where Fearless Frank and his companion sat in waiting.

As they did so, headed by a figure in black, who wore a mask as did all the rest, a band of horsemen rode out of the fissure into the valley. One glance and we recognize Deadwood Dick, Prince of the Road, and his band of road-agents!

CHAPTER XII.

MAKING TERMS ALL AROUND.

Old General Nix was the first to discover the new invasion.

"Gorra mighty!" he ejaculated, flourishing his staff about excitedly, "d'ye mind them same w'at's tuk et inter the'r heads to invade our sancty sanc-torium, up yander? Howly saints from their culkender! We shall be built up inter an entire city 'twixt this an' sunset, ef ther populatin' sect becum any more numersome. That's a full fifty of them starts, more or less—consider'ble more o' less than less o' more—an' ef we hadn't got ter hold a full hand

in order to clean 'em out, why, ye can call me a cross-eyed, hare-lipped hyency, that's all."

Redburn uttered an ejaculation as he saw the swarm of invaders that was perhaps more forcible than polite.

He did not like the looks of things at all. If Ned Harris were only here, he thought, he could throw the responsibility all off on his shoulders. But he was not; neither had he been seen or heard of since he had quitted the valley over a month ago. Where he was staying all this time was a problem that no one could solve—no one among our three friends.

The "General" had made inquiries in Deadwood, but elicited no information concerning the young miner. He had dropped entirely out of the magic city's notice, and might be dead or dying in some foreign clime for all they knew. Anita worried and grew sadder each day at his non-return; it seemed to her that he was in distress, or worse, perhaps—dead. He had never stayed away so long before, she said, always returning from his trips every few days. What, then, could now be the reason of his prolonged absence?

Redburn foresaw trouble in the intrusion of the road-agents and Fearless Frank, although he knew not the character or calling of the former, and he resolved to make one bold stroke in defense of the mines.

"Go to the quartz-mines as quickly as you can!" he said, addressing Nix, "and call every man to his arms. Then rally them out here, where I will be waiting with the remainder of our forces, and we will see what can be done. If it is to be a fight for our rights, a desperate fight it shall be."

The "General" hurried off with as much alacrity as was possible, with him, toward the quartz-mine, while Redburn likewise made haste to visit the shaft and collect together his handful of men.

He passed the cabin on his way, and, seeing Anita seated in the doorway, he came to a momentary halt.

"You had better go inside and lock the doors and windows behind you," he said, advisively. "There are invaders in the gulch, and we must try and effect a settlement with them; so it is not desirable that they should see you."

"You are not going to fight them?"

"Yes, if they will not come to reasonable terms, which I shall name. Why?"

"Oh! don't fight. You will get killed."

"Humph! what of that? Who would care if I were killed?"

"I would, for one, Mr. Redburn."

The miner's heart gave a great bound, and he gazed into the pure white face of the girl, passionately. Was it possible that she had in her heart anything akin to love for him? Already he had conceived a passing fancy for her, which might ripen into love in time.

"Thanks!" he said, catching up her hand and pressing it to his lips. "Those words, few as they are, make me happy, Miss Anita. But, stop! I must away. Go inside and keep shady until you see me again," and so saying he hurried on.

In ten minutes' time two-score of brawny, half-dressed Utes were rallied in the valley, and Redburn was at their head, accompanied by the "General."

"I will now go forward and hold parley," said Harry, as he wrapped a kerchief about the muzzle of his rifle-barrel. "If you see me fall, you can calculate that it's about time for you to sling in a chunk of your lip."

He had fallen into the habit of talking in an illiterate fashion, since his association with the "General."

"All right," assented the old locator; "ef they try ter salt ye, jes' giv' a squawk, an' we'll cum a-terrarin' down ter yer resky at ther rate o' forty hours a mile, more or less—consider'ble more o' less than less o' more."

Redburn buckled his belt a hole tighter, looked to his two pistols, and set out on his mission.

to the right of the fissure, and formed into a compact body, where they halted and watched the rallying of the savages in the valley.

Fearless Frank and his lovely companion remained where they had first halted, awaiting developments. They had stumbled into Paradise and were both surprised and bewildered.

Redburn approached them first. He was at loss how to open the confab, but the Scarlet Boy saved him the trouble.

"I presume I see in you one of the representatives of this concern," he said, doffing his hat, and showing his pearly teeth in a little smile, as the miner came up.

"You do," replied Redburn, hewing stiffly. "I am an owner or partner in this mining enterprise. 'Tis rich, until your sudden advent, has been a secret to the outside world."

"I believe you, pilgrim; for though I am pretty thoroughly acquainted with the topography of the Black Hills country, I had not the least idea that such an enterprise existed in this part of the territory."

"No, I dare say not. But how is it that we are indebted to you for this intrusion—for such we feel justified in calling it, under the existing circumstances."

"I did not intend to intrude, sir, nor do I now. In riding through the mountains we accidentally stumbled into the fissure passage that leads to this gulch, and as there was nothing to hinder us, we came on through."

"True; I should have posted a strong guard in the pass. You have a female companion, I perceive; not your wife?"

"Oh, no! nor my sister, either. This is Miss Terry, an estimable young lady, who has come to the Black Hills in search of her father. Your name is—"

"Redburn—Harry Redburn; and yours, I am told, is Fearless Frank."

"Yes, that is the title I sail under. But how do you know aught of me?"

"I was told your name by a partner of mine. Now then, concerning the present matter, what do you propose to do?"

"To do? Why, turn back, I suppose; I see nothing else to do."

Redburn leaned on his rifle and considered.

"Do you belong to that other crowd?"

"No, indeed!" Frank's face flushed half angrily. "I thank my stars I am not quite so low down as that yet. Do you know them? That's Deadwood Dick, the Prince of the Road, and his band of outlaws."

"What—is it possible? The same gang, whom the Pioneer is making such a splurge over every week?"

"The same. That fellow clad in black is Deadwood Dick, the leader."

"Humph! He in black; you in scarlet. Two contrasting colors."

"That is so. I had not thought of it before. But no significance is attached thereto."

"Perhaps not. Have you the least idea what brought them here?"

"The road-agents? I reckon I do. The military has been chasing them for the last two days. Probably they have come here for protection."

"Maybe so—or for plunder. Give me your decision, and I will go and see what they want."

"There is nothing for me to decide more than to take the back track."

Redburn shook his head decidedly.

"You cannot go back!" he said, using positiveness in his argument; "that is, not for a while. You'd have all Deadwood down on us in a jiffy. I'll give you work in the shaft at three dollars a day. You can accept that offer, or submit to confinement until I see fit to set you at liberty."

"And my companion here—"

"I will place under the charge of Miss Anita for the present, where she will receive hospitable treat-

4 Religious Fiction

The late 1880's saw the emergence of a popular type of religious fiction. Sunday schools and churches set up circulating libraries. Novels were serialized in Sunday school papers. (Wood)

In 1892 the *Youth's Companion* developed as a family paper, filled with religious fiction. Circulation quickly rose to 500,000.

Sunday school papers “catered to youthful desires for the excitement and sensation of extravagant adventure.” (Wood, quoting Mott: *Magazines, 1885-1905*)

Religious Fiction

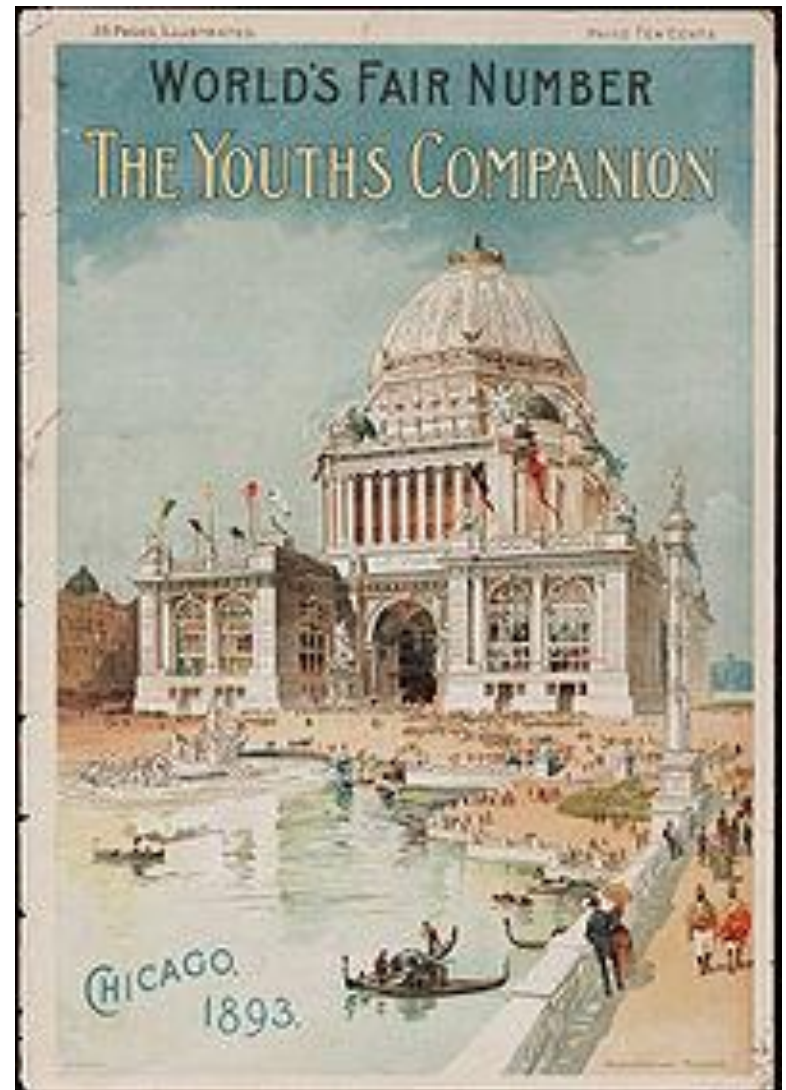
As the 19th Century went on, story-paper fiction became bound by a rigid code of “morality.” By this was meant the arbitrary conventions of the time. “Religious sentiments” as Ellen White described them. (Wood)

“Love stories, frivolous and exciting tales, and even that class of books called religious novels,—books in which the author attaches to his story a moral lesson,—are a curse to the readers. Religious sentiments may be woven all through a story-book, but, in most cases, Satan is but clothed in angel-ropes, the more effectively to deceive and allure.” (EGW, 7T, 1902, p.165.)

Religious Fiction

“Sunday-school libraries were filled with stories of dedicated girls who found and converted atheists with the same zeal that boys in the dime novels shot and skinned buffaloes.” (Wood, quoting H.W. Papashvily: *All the Happy Endings*, 1956)

“The Christian world is cursed with religious fiction. This is especially exhibited in Sunday-school books which are early thrown into the laps of children as their first series for instruction.” (EGW, *Signs of the Times*, Feb 3, 1876)



5 Genuine Literature Held Hostage

The best 19th century American writers (Hawthorne, Melville, Thoreau, Emerson, Walt Whitman) had limited success with sales of their works in the mid-19th century because of the influence of popular culture and cheap novels. (Davis)

“America is now given over to a damned mob of scribbling women.” (Nathaniel Hawthorne)

“American tastes in literature and reading were largely without formal educational molding throughout a large portion of the nineteenth century. The study of the ancient languages centered on the classics of Homer, Virgil, Cicero and Horace, but often failed to emphasize anything but linguistic competence.” (Davis)

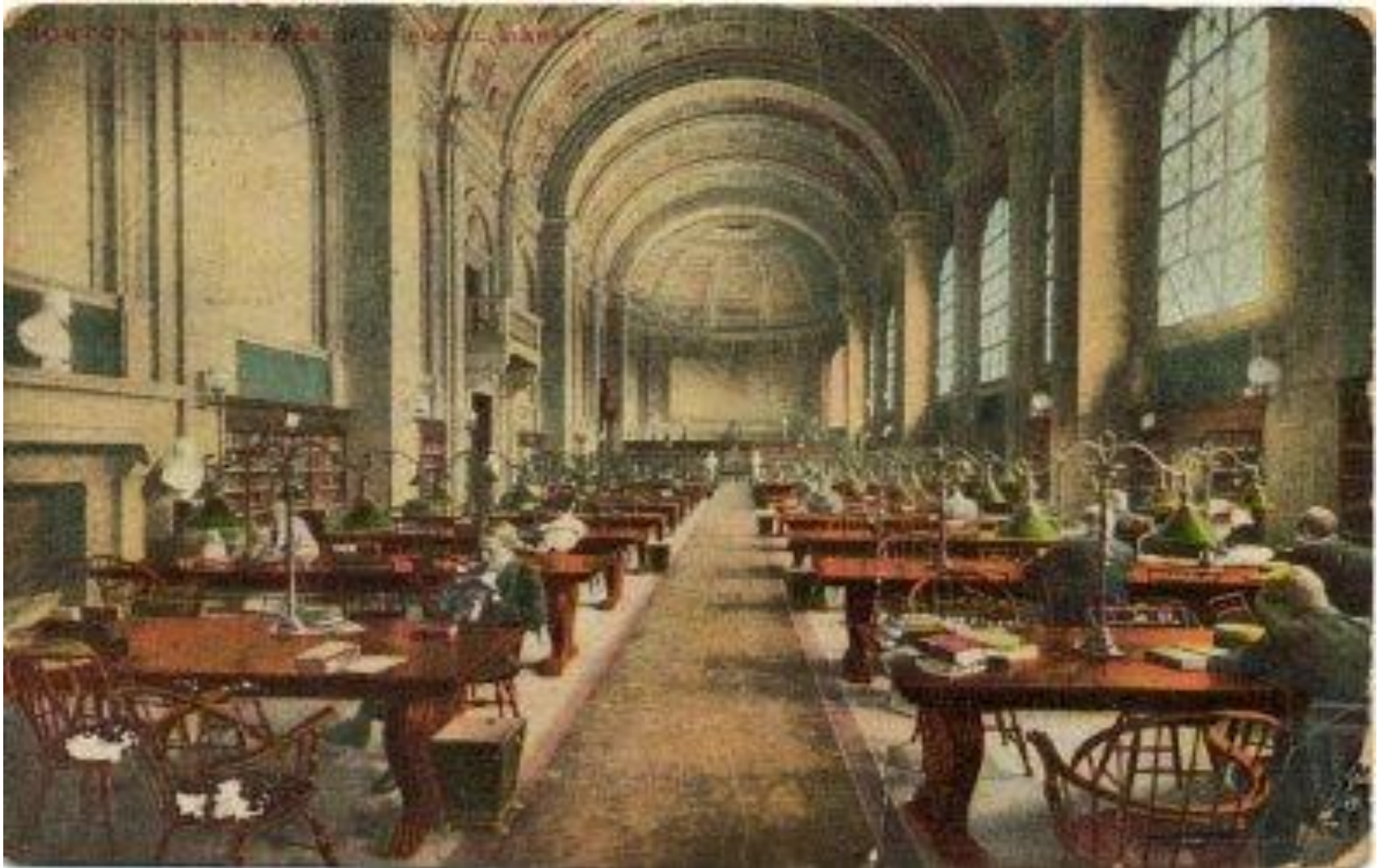
Genuine Literature Held Hostage

In 1876, Harvard appointed its first full-time professor of English. Most American universities did not treat English and American literature seriously until 1900 or later.

Seventh-day Adventists opened their first college at Battle Creek, Michigan, in 1874. The literature courses offered were solely in the Latin and Greek classics. Bible was taught only in a limited way. After years of controversy and temporary closure, the college closed permanently in 1901.

Adventist colleges appeared in several North American locations between 1885 and 1910. Ellen White wrote much to guide these schools in the choice of authors and books for study, especially in science and literature. She wanted them to avoid the mistakes made at Battle Creek College.

WHAT LIBRARIANS SAID



WHAT LIBRARIANS SAID

The City of Boston claims to have had the first public library in America, as early as 1836. By the 1870's, Boston Public Library was regarded as one of the largest and finest in the United States.

In 1876, The Library Journal was founded by Melvil Dewey. Among other topics, the first issues dealt with the issue of fiction in public library collections.

THE Library Journal

OFFICIAL ORGAN OF THE

LIBRARY ASSOCIATIONS OF AMERICA AND OF THE UNITED KINGDOM.

ASSOCIATE EDITORS:

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Vol. III. No. 2.

APRIL, 1876.

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WHAT LIBRARIANS SAID

“There is a vast range of ephemeral literature, exciting and fascinating, apologetic of vice or confusing distinctions between plain right and wrong, fostering discontent with the peaceful, homely duties which constitute a large portion of average men and women’s lives, responsible for an immense amount of the mental disease and moral irregularities which are so troublesome an element in modern society.” (Report of the Examining Committee, Boston Public Library, 1875, quoted by Waller)

“The librarian who should allow an immoral novel in his library for circulation would be as culpable as the manager of a picture gallery who should hang an indecent picture on his walls.”
(William F. Poole, in *Library Journal*, 1 (2), 1876, p.50)

WHAT LIBRARIANS SAID

“Representing the Young Men’s Christian Association of New York ... Our Association aims to reject not only the immoral, but the sensational and the trivial—such works as fill the mind with false, wild ideas of life. I believe the influence of this class of books is decidedly injurious.” (*Library Journal*, 1 (2), 1876, p.98)



WHAT ELLEN WHITE SAID

“Our youth and children, and even those of mature age, should firmly pledge themselves to abstain from indulgence in reading the fascinating novels and sensational literature of the day.” (EGW, *Review & Herald*, Nov. 9, 1886)

WHAT LIBRARIANS SAID

“Do novels teach them [young people] contentment with their lowly but honest occupations? The factory girl, as she tends the loom or her spinning jenny, turns over in her thoughts the fortunes of the heroine of the last novel she has read, raised by impossible suppositious incidents from humble life to princely fortune, and she pines for a lover to so lift her into notoriety.” (William Kite, Friends Free Library, Germantown, PA, in Library Journal, 1 (8), 1876, p.278)

WHAT ELLEN WHITE SAID

“I am acquainted with a number of women who have thought their marriage a misfortune. They have read novels until their imaginations have become diseased, and they live in a world of their own creating. ... From what the Lord has shown me, the women of this class have had their imaginations perverted by novel reading, daydreaming, and castle-building, living in an imaginary world. They do not bring their own ideas down to the common, useful duties of life.” (EGW, 2T, 1871, p.463)

WHAT LIBRARIANS SAID

“The boy reads of equally false deeds of daring—fortunes made by unjust dealings, glossed over as to half conceal their iniquity—and his bewildered mind is unfitted for the hard duties of life.” (William Kite, p.278)

“If we take the majority of present day novels, the sensational fiction which is so eagerly sought and read at our libraries, it is a matter of considerable doubt if they ought to find a place in them at all. To their character and tendency, the testimony of public writers, of teachers, and the thinking portion of the community, is pretty uniform.” (Peter Cowell, Library Journal, 2, 1877, p.155)

“We hear that such and such works of fiction are classical and may be safely read by educated minds as recreation. As the world contains so much that is better, I can readily dispense with such books.” (William Kite, Library Journal, 1876, p.279)

WHAT ELLEN WHITE SAID

“It is often urged that in order to win the youth from sensational or worthless literature, we should supply them with a better class of fiction. This is like trying to cure the drunkard by giving him, in the place of whisky or brandy, the milder intoxicants. ... For the lover of fiction the same rule holds true. Total abstinence is his only safety.” (EGW, *Counsels to Teachers*, p.383-384. 1912)

“If the intellectual and moral taste has been perverted by the over-wrought and exciting tales of fiction, so that you are disinclined to apply yourself to the diligent study of God’s Word, then you have a battle to fight with yourself to overcome this depraved habit. A love for fictitious reading should be broken up at once.” (EGW, *Review and Herald*, Oct 9, 1883.)

WHAT LIBRARIANS SAID

“It is evident that as long as the vulgarizing books for the young are within their reach, they will prefer them to those which ennoble. There is still a good deal of the barbarian in the average boy, and the novel of blood and destruction is just what he takes to naturally.” (W.M. Stevenson, Librarian of Carnegie Free Library of Allegheny, PA. *Library Journal*, 22, March 1897, p.133-134)

WHAT ELLEN WHITE SAID

“The course pursued by the base and vile, is kept before them [young men] in the periodicals of the day, and everything which can excite curiosity and arouse the animal passions is brought before them in thrilling and exciting stories. ... Novel and storybook reading are the greatest evils in which youth can indulge.” (EGW, 3T, 1875, p.472)

WHAT LIBRARIANS SAID

“I may say that I have taken pains to follow the reading of certain devotees of this kind of literature, fiction-fiends as they might be called, and I have never yet discovered a case of improvement among adult readers. Once the habit is formed it seems as difficult to throw off as the opium habit. .” (W.M. Stevenson, Library Journal, 22, March 1897, p.133-134)

WHAT ELLEN WHITE SAID

“I have known persons of well-balanced minds, whom God had endowed with mental powers of no ordinary character, to take up the reading of romance; and the more they indulged the appetite for this kind of mental food, the greater was the demand. The imagination constantly craved its accustomed stimulus, as the inebriate longs for his wine or tobacco.” (EGW, Signs of the Times, 1887)

WHAT LIBRARIANS SAID

“The most inveterate fiction readers are among the idlest class in the community. ... The fiction question remains the vital question for librarians.” (W.M. Stevenson, *Library Journal*, 22, March 1897, p.133-134)

WHAT ELLEN WHITE SAID

“The world is flooded with novels of every description ... Some are immoral, low, and vulgar; others are clothed with more refinement; but all are pernicious in their influence.” (EGW, *Testimonies*, v.2, 1870, p.236)

Chronology of Ellen White's Writings about Literature and Reading

Writings in *Testimonies for the Church*, 1855-1909

1850's	4 pages
1860's	5 pages
1870's	16 pages
1880's	12 pages
1890's	4 pages [Australian years, 1892-1900]
1900's	7 pages

Articles in Periodicals (*Review & Herald*, *Signs of the Times*, *Youth's Instructor*), 1863-1913

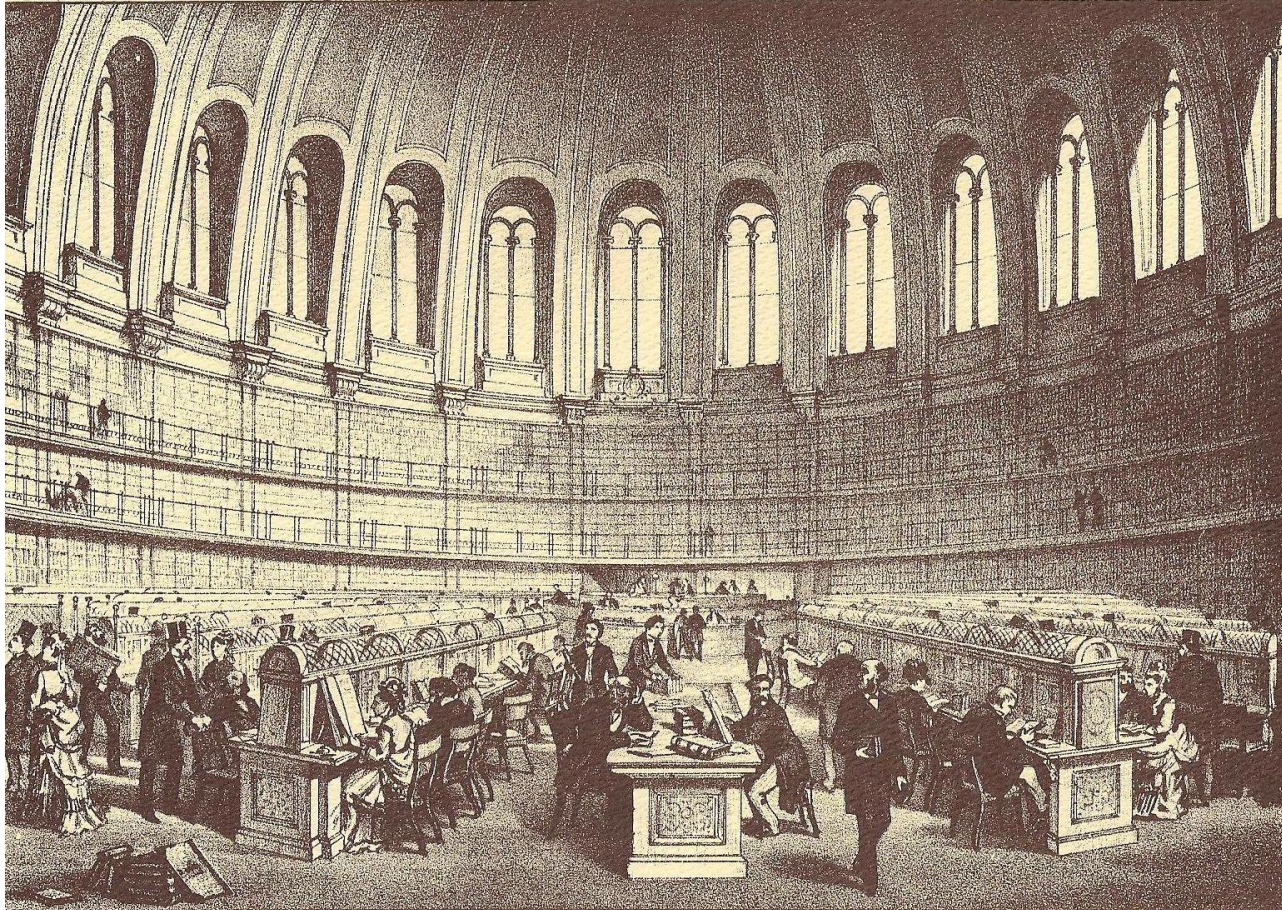
1880's	6 articles
1890's	none [Australian years]
1900's	4 articles

Chronology of Ellen White's Writings about Literature and Reading

Prior to the Australian years (1892-1900), her writings about literature are almost always directed at the trashy fiction and sentimental novels of her time.

After returning to America in 1900, Ellen White's counsels on books and reading relate mainly to education and the choice of appropriate reading materials. She emphasizes the danger of "infidel authors" as well as hasty and superficial reading. "Fiction" is rarely identified as such.

What I Learn From All This



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READING ROOM IN BRITISH MUSEUM

What I Learn From All This

- 1 I should not expect Ellen White to be more liberal than the secular thinkers of her day.
- 2 Ellen White's original writings about books, fiction, novels, and reading occupy a very small percentage of her publishing counsels. The multiple repetition of her statements in compilations conveys the impression that she emphasized the subject more than she did.

Testimonies for the Church (1855-1913)

52 pages out of 4,812 pages = 1 percent

Periodicals (Review & Herald, Signs of the Times, Youth's Instructor)

10 articles

Books (Counsels to Teachers, Education, Ministry of Healing)

31 pages out of 1,380 pages = 2.2 percent

What I Learn From All This

- 3 Ellen White did not consistently judge literary works by their factuality or non-factuality.
- 4 Today's "sensational" stories and "dime novels" appear in new forms: movies, TV, Internet, as well as much current fiction.

"The death of the dime novel, if it ever occurred, was accompanied by the birth of the nickelodeon, the motion picture, and the radio, which simply transferred the old stories of cowboys, desperadoes, and Indians to more dynamic forms." (James D. Hart, *The Popular Book: A History of America's Literary Taste* (1950))

What I Learn From All This

- 5 Literature courses should be designed to equip students for an intelligent, discriminatory approach to all literary genres.

“We ought to continue to view all forms of popular and high brow culture with critical attention, but the novel no more so than other forms.” (Scott Moncrieff)

“Fiction, at its best, is a mirror made of words that reflects what humans and reality are.” (David James Duncan, “On the Necessity of Fiction in the Life of Faith.” *Spectrum* 27 (4), 1999, p.68)

- 6 As librarians, we have an important responsibility in literature selection to choose works that build up rather than tear down.

“The purpose of the Christian college is to instruct and capture the life of the student for Christ without violating his freedom or bypassing his right to think for himself.” (Edward Heppenstall, “Academic Freedom and the Quest for Truth.” *Spectrum*, 1 (4), 1969, p.37.)

What I Learn From All This

- 7 As a librarian, I have a unique opportunity to share my knowledge, helping my staff, student workers, faculty colleagues, and others in their understanding of Ellen White's writings about fiction.