

**THE DELICIOUS VICE: PIPE  
DREAMS AND FOND ADVENTURES  
OF AN HABITUAL NOVEL-READER  
AMONG SOME GREAT BOOKS  
AND THEIR PEOPLE**

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The Delicious Vice: Pipe Dreams and Fond Adventures of an Habitual Novel-reader Among  
Some Great books and their people by Young E. Allison

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**YOUNG E. ALLISON**

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By

YOUNG E. ALLISON.

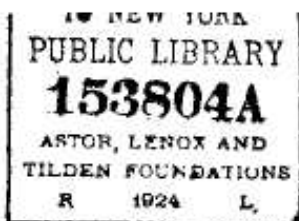
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## THE DELICIOUS VICE

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### I.

#### A RHAPSODY ON THE NOBLE PROFESSION OF NOVEL-READING.

**I**T must have been at about the good-bye age of forty that Thomas Moore, that choleric and pompous, yet genial little Irish gentleman, turned a sigh into good marketable "copy" for Grub Street and, with shrewd economy, got two full pecuniary bites out of one melancholy apple of reflection:

"Kind friends around me fall  
Like leaves in wintry weather,"

—he sang of his own dead heart in the stilly night.

"Thus kindly I scatter thy leaves on the bed  
Where thy mates of the garden lie scentless and  
dead,"

—he sang to the dying rose. In the red month of October the rose is forty years old, as roses go. How small the world has grown to a man of forty, if he has put his eyes, his ears and his brain to the uses for which they are adapted. And as for time—why it is no longer than a kite string. At about the age of forty everything that can happen to a man,

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death excepted, has happened; happiness has gone to the devil or is a mere habit; the blessing of poverty has been permanently secured or you are exhausted with the cares of wealth; you can see around the corner or you do not care to see around it; in a word—that is, considering mental existence—the bell has rung on you and you are up against a steady grind for the remainder of your life.

It is then there comes to the habitual novel reader the inevitable day when, in anguish of heart, looking back over his life, he—wishes he hadn't; that he asks himself the bitter question if there are not things he has done that he wishes he hadn't. Melancholy marks him for its own. He sits in his room some winter evening, the lamp swarming shadowy seductions, the grate glowing with siren invitation, the cigar box within easy reach for that moment when the pending sacrifice between his teeth shall be burned out; his feet upon the familiar corner of the mantel, at that automatically calculated altitude which permits the weight of the upper part of the body to fall exactly upon the second joint from the lower end of the vertebral column as it rests in the comfortable depression created by continuous wear in the cushion of that particular chair to which every honest man who has acquired the library vice sooner or later gets attached with a love no misfortune can destroy. As he sits thus, having closed the lids of, say, some old favorite of his youth, he will inevitably ask himself if it would not have been better for him if he hadn't. And the question once asked must be answered; and it will be an honest answer, too. For no scoundrel was ever addicted to the glorious vice of novel-reading. It is too tame for him. "There is no money in it!"

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## История

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And every habitual novel-reader will answer that question he has asked himself, after a sigh. A sigh that will echo from the tropic deserted island of Juan Fernandez to that utmost ice-bound point of Siberia where by chance or destiny the seven nails in the sole of a certain mysterious person's shoe, in the month of October, 1831, formed a cross—thus:



while on the American promontory opposite, "a young and handsome woman replied to the man's despairing gesture by pointing silently to heaven." The Wandering Jew may be gone, but the theater of that appalling prologue still exists unchanged. That sigh will penetrate the gloomy cell of the Abbe Faria, the frightful dungeons of the Inquisition, the gilded halls of Vanity Fair, the deep forests of the noble red man, the esoteric haunts of Brahmin and fakir, the jousting list, the audience halls and the petits cabinets of kings of France, sound over the trackless and storm-beat ocean—will echo, in short, wherever warm blood has jumped in the veins of honest men and wherever vice has sooner or later been stretched groveling in the dust at the feet of triumphant virtue.

And so, sighing to the uttermost ends of the earth, the old novel-reader will confess that he wishes he hadn't. Had not read all those novels that troop through his memory. Because, if he hadn't—and it is the impossibility of the alternative that chills his

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soul with the despair of cruel realization—if he hadn't, you see, he could begin at the very first, right then and there, and read the whole blessed business for the first time. For the FIRST TIME, mark you! Is there anywhere in this great round world a novel reader of true genius who would not do that with the joy of a child and the thankfulness of a sage?

Such a dream would be the foundation of the story of a really noble Dr. Faustus. How contemptible is the man who, having staked his life freely upon a career, whines at the close and begs for another chance; just one more—and a different career! It is no more than Mr. Jack Hamlin, a friend from Calaveras county, California, would call "the baby act," or his compeer, Mr. John Oakhurst, would denominate "a squeal." How glorious, on the other hand, is the attitude of the man who has spent his life in his own way, and, at its eventide, waves his hand to the sinking sun and cries out: "Good-bye; but, if I could do so, I should be glad to go over it all again with you—just as it was!" If honesty is rated in heaven as we have been taught to believe, depend upon it the novel-reader who sighs to eat the apple he has just devoured will have no trouble hereafter.

What a great flutter was created a few years ago when a blind multi-millionaire of New York offered to pay a million dollars in cash to any scientist, savant or surgeon in the world who would restore his sight. Of course he would. It was no price at all to offer for the service—considering the millions remaining. It was no more to him than it would be to me to offer ten dollars for a peep at Paradise. Poor as I am I will give any man in the world one hundred dollars in cash who will enable me to re-

## A P R O P O S I T I O N

move every trace of memory of M. Alexandre Dumas' "Three Guardsmen," so that I may open that glorious book with the virgin capacity of youth to enjoy its full delight. More; I will duplicate the same offer for any one or all of the following:

"Les Miserables," of M. Hugo.

"Don Quixote," of Senor Cervantes.

"Vanity Fair," of Mr. Thackeray.

"David Copperfield," of Mr. Dickens.

"The Cloister and the Hearth," of Mr. Reade.

And if my good friend, Isaac of York, is lending money at the old stand and will take pianos, pictures, furniture, dress suits and plain household plate as collateral, upon even moderate valuation, I will go fifty dollars each upon the following:

"The Count of Monte Cristo," of M. Dumas.

"The Wandering Jew," of M. Sue.

"The Memoirs of Barry Lyndon, Esq.," of Mr. Thackeray.

"Treasure Island," of Mr. Robbie Stevenson.

"The Vicar of Wakefield," of Mr. Goldsmith.

"Pere Goriot," of M. de Balzac.

"Ivanhoe," of Baronet Scott.

(Any one previously unnamed of the whole layout of M. Dumas, excepting only a paretic volume entitled "The Conspirators.")

Now, the man who can do the trick for one novel can do it for all—and there's a thousand dollars waiting to be earned, and a blessing also. It's a bald "bluff," of course, because it can't be done, as we all know. I might offer a million with safety. If it ever could have been done the noble, intellectual aristocracy of novel readers would have been reduced to a condition of penury and distress centuries ago.

For who can put fetters upon even the smallest