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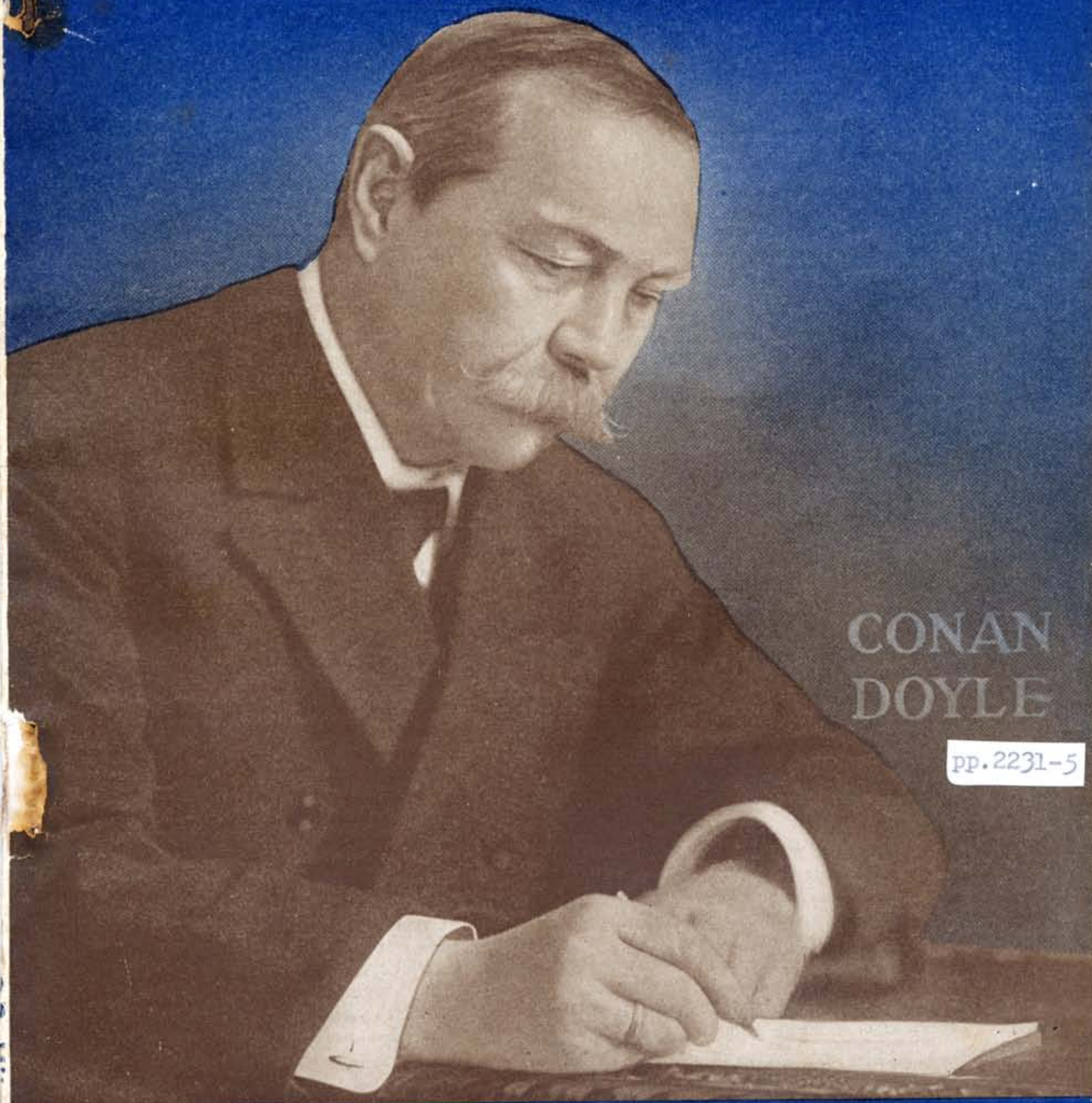
PART 24

The World's Great Books In Outline

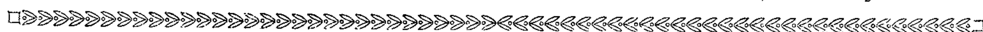
ONE SHILLING

EDITED by J. A. HAMMERTON



pp.2231-5

See Publishers' Binding Announcement in Back Page



Contents of this Part

	PAGE
'German Thoroughness' in History	
VON RANKE'S HISTORY OF THE POPES ..	2225
The Creator of Sherlock Holmes	
SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE	2231
A Critical Appreciation by H. E. Bates	
Founder of the Science of Eugenics	
GALTON'S HEREDITARY GENIUS	2235
Powerful Study of Religious Bigotry	
BJORNSON'S IN GOD'S WAY	2242
A Vindication of Christian Truth	
KANT'S CRITIQUE OF PRACTICAL REASON	2248
A Pupil's Homage to a Great Schoolmaster	
STANLEY'S LIFE OF THOMAS ARNOLD, D.D.	2252
First Revelations of a Forbidden City	
PERCEVAL LANDON'S LHASA	2257
Outlined by the Author	
Enduring Pictures of Life on the Road	
GEORGE BORROW'S THE ROMANY RYE	2264
A Literary Classic of Nature Study	
GILBERT WHITE'S THE NATURAL HISTORY OF SELBORNE	2270
The Most Amusing Latin Comedy	
AULULARIA BY PLAUTUS	2275
The World's Most Famous Allegory	
BUNYAN'S PILGRIM'S PROGRESS	2278
Sublime Reflections on Life and Death	
JEREMY TAYLOR'S HOLY DYING	2285
Immortal Expressions of a Sublime Love	
PETRARCH'S VERSES TO MY LADY LAURA	2289
Intimate Glimpses of Famous Figures	
FANNY BURNEY'S DIARY AND LETTERS OF MME. D'ARBLAY	2294
A Herald of the English Renaissance	
SIR PHILIP SIDNEY'S ARCADIA	2299
Modern Genius Transforms a Classic Theme	
GOETHE'S IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS	2303
History by One Who Helped to Make It	
EARL OF CLARENDON'S HISTORY OF THE REBELLION IN ENGLAND	2307
Travel-Novel by a Brilliant Frenchwoman	
MADAME DE STAEL'S CORINNE	2315
Photogravure	**SIR A. CONAN DOYLE**

FROM THE EDITOR'S TABLE

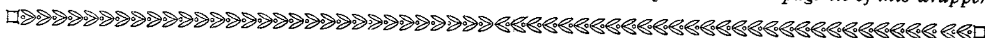
The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

THIS Part completes the fourth volume of *The World's Great Books*, and as usual I desire to draw subscribers' attention to the publishers' advertisements of the arrangements they have made for binding the Parts. The frontispiece, which will be given away with the table of contents, will be a portrait of Goethe. Also as usual, I have analysed the contents of the six Parts which make it up and find that the volume contains in all outlines of 107 masterpieces of the world's literature. Thirty-one of these are outlines or studies of works of fiction; 12 dramas are studied; biography and poetry are each represented by 10 works; miscellaneous literature has 9 outlines devoted to it: history is represented by 8 important works; philosophy and science by 7 each; religion and travel by 6 apiece; and Pliny's Letters are the sole representative of epistolary literature.

THE total number of books so far dealt with in the four volumes now available is 399, and I hope that my original intention of including a minimum of 700 works in the entire publication will be realized. As the work develops the tendency is for the more serious branches of literature to be more fully dealt with and for the number of works of fiction studied to diminish to a certain extent. This, I think, is as it should be, and I am sure will have the approval of the majority of subscribers.

IN the next volume the distinguished writers of whom photogravure portraits will appear are D'Annunzio, Sir Edmund Gosse, Maxim Gorky, William Morris, Maurice Maeterlinck and John Masefield. All these men will be made the subject

[*Continued on page iii of this wrapper*



A Conan Doyle

To face page 2231

SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

THE MAN AND HIS BOOKS

A Critical Appreciation by H. E. Bates

I—The Boy, the Man and the Author

'L'HOMME,' wrote Flaubert to George Sand, 'c'est rien,—l'œuvre c'est tout.'

True as this may be, it is nevertheless necessary to begin this study with some account of the man before discussing the work which has made him famous.

The creator of Sherlock Holmes, Sir Nigel Loring and Rodney Stone, was born in Edinburgh on May 22, 1859. He came of an artistic family, having a father who combined the art of painting with an appointment in the civil service, and a grandfather who was a political and literary caricaturist. Three uncles on his father's side were artistic, too. It is consequently not surprising to find him at the age of six writing and illustrating his first story, one in which the clash of a tiger and a man made terrible adventures fly like sparks from a tinder-box. Only qualms as to the nature of the story after the death of a man would seem to be responsible for the young author withholding his pen.

This gift of narration, having once asserted itself, Conan Doyle did not long allow it to remain idle. Only four years later, when he was at school at Stonyhurst, he wove mysterious and bloody tales for the amusement of his fellows. By the age of seventeen, when he entered Edinburgh University as a medical student, his gift had become so great as to inspire a longing to devote himself completely to literature. Within two years it had gained its first material encouragement from the acceptance, by Chambers' Journal, of The Mystery of the Sasassa Valley, a tale based upon a Kaffir superstition about a gloomy passage inhabited by a supposed demon, whose eyes glowed from under the shadow of a cliff.

Within two years he left the University and, signing on as the unqualified surgeon of an Arctic whaler, spent the best part of a year adventuring. During those months he found himself more than once nauseated by what he has called 'those glaring crimson pools upon the dazzling white of ice-fields,' an interesting admission in face of the enormous measure of blood he caused to be shed in his own pages of historical romance. However, it seems true that the work held no deep fascination for him, and he returned to Edinburgh. There he first met Dr. Joseph Bell, to whom he dedicated The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes and whom he declared to be the original of the great detective. Simultaneously a struggle began—medicine or literature? Dependent on the one, he had an innate longing for the other and, forced by the fundamental necessity of living, he took up a medical practice in Southsea. But literature began gradually to become something more than his mistress, and though he seems for the next few years to have worked diligently and got little by her, it before long became his chief interest.

HE began to write novels, of which A Study in Scarlet, published in Beeton's Annual in 1886, was the first. There Sherlock Holmes made his first appearance. Micah Clarke followed, to be steadily refused by house after house of publishers and then to come to incredible popularity when at last issued by Longmans. Later came a second detective story, The Sign of Four, in 1889. Then,

with popularity rapidly illuminating him, he chose to spend two years in research for and the writing of a novel of fourteenth-century England. In preparation for what was to prove very little more than a first-class historical and romantic thriller, full of colour and sound writing as it admittedly is, he read more than a hundred books in English and French. The result was The White Company. After writing it the practice at Southsea was abandoned, the author came to London, went later to Vienna and Paris, and on returning again to England relinquished medicine entirely and set to work to satisfy an increasing demand for Sherlock Holmes.

Of the astounding success of that figure it is needless to write; but of his personality, his extraordinary powers both of logic and of insight, his 'methods,' his many-sidedness, his egotism and his remarkable observations not only of human action but of human nature, it is necessary to say much. So widely diverse are the pictures of England's knightly, valiant, fourteenth-century green and pleasant land, and those of the genius of 221B, Baker Street, that Doyle's work inevitably splits itself into two parts. And remembering that early story of the man-eating tiger it is perhaps fittest to give first attention to the historical romances.

II—The Historical Romances

Of these, The White Company has the zeal and freshness, despite its occasional too close attention to heraldic lore, of a tale written not only under an inspiration but with infinite care. The laborious research in a hundred books was not wasted. Without it the pictures of English life in the reign of Edward III could not have been set forth with the sharp power and truth they now have; that of the state of France would not have been the piece of vividness which now makes it one of the features of the book; and the story, seriously deficient not only in spirit, would never have gained recognition as a piece of accurate historical education. But although these are important and distinctive qualities they are governed by another which has always been a powerful characteristic of Doyle. Above all, he is a story-teller. Although always strong at this point he is never better than in the stringing together of a thousand events concerning young Alleyne Edricson, the clerk with his motley company, Sir Nigel Loring, Aylward, Lady Maude and the many other characters of the romance.

But this is a story above all dear to the English. It is active, breathless; the darkness of one deed is quickly outbalanced by the chivalry of another. Further it is moral, extols English manhood and English bravery; in it the dastardly die, the righteous are spared for marriage and contentment on the last page. It is all very like an Ivanhoe of lesser girth. There is bloodshed, horror, lust, cruelty, yet all carried off with such simplicity and restraint as to save it from morbidness. Besides the hand of Scott is visible that of Dumas, and if it were not that he came too late, one might say of Mr. Jeffery Farnol too. Such a passage as this is strongly reminiscent of the last named:

> "Mon Dieu! Alleyne, saw you ever so lovely a face!" cried Ford . . . "So pure, so peaceful and so beautiful!"
>
> "In sooth, yes, and the hue of the skin the most perfect that I ever saw. Marked you also how the hair curled round the brow? It was wonder fine."

The insipidness and falseness of, for instance, 'wonder fine,' can only excite derision. The mind of the schoolboy may not detect it, but nothing goes so near to spoiling this excellent chronicle of stirring deeds as its pseudo-medieval language. So cheap a device should have been scorned by the writer of such scenes as the duel between young Alleyne and the bully, Tranter:

> On and on came Alleyne, his jagged point now at his foeman's face, now at his throat, now at his chest, still stabbing and thrusting to pass the line of steel which covered him. Yet his experienced foeman knew well that such efforts could not be long sustained. Let him relax for one instant! . . . Already the thrusts were less fierce, the foot less ready. Tranter, cunning and wary from years of fighting, knew that his chance had come. He brushed aside the frail weapon which was opposed to him, whirled up his great blade, sprang back to get the fairer sweep—and vanished into the waters of the Garonne.

Here is not only simplicity but a piece of dramatic surprise characteristic of Holmes himself. Furthermore, the passage is not isolated but kept equal company by scores of others. The descriptions of the court of the Prince of Wales, the lists of Bordeaux, the White Company itself and the fighting at the French châteaux are all vividly and admirably done.

The fortunes of Sir Nigel Loring, thus hectic, could not fail to fill more than one volume and in Sir Nigel is told a second stirring and, except for the old faults of language, an honest and straightforward story of English renown.

In Micah Clarke, however, a story following that figure through the disastrous Monmouth Rebellion, is something a shade different. Here again are bloodshed and much painful incident, but Doyle has been unable to escape the deep tragedy of the time, with the consequence that the book is permeated with a higher quality than the fourteenth-century stories. The flashes of romance and calm are also truer and more intimately felt. The pictures of Cornet Joseph Clarke, father of Micah, and of Solomon Trent, an old sailor hero, are filled in with humour as well as charm.

The impossibility of accompanying the central figure through all his adventures is as evident here as with other Doyle characters. Like those of Sir Nigel and young Alleyne, they are numerous enough not only to satisfy the adolescent most greedy for excitement, but to keep interested the more experienced reader. Youth will respond faithfully and age with a start to scenes of this kind:

> Right in front of the door a great fire of wood faggots was blazing, and before this, to our unutterable horror there hung a man head downwards, suspended by a rope which was knotted round his ankles, and which, passing over a hook in a beam, had been made fast to a ring in the floor. The struggle of this unhappy man had caused the rope to whirl round, so that he was spinning in front of the blaze like a joint of meat. Across the threshold lay a woman . . .

For less than this, and in attempts to portray life faithfully, men have been called morbid and unhealthy, but under cover of a bygone century Doyle escapes—and with some triumph, too. But while he is successful here it is a success aroused by sensationalism and ghastliness and has none of the quality of his descriptions of that ill-trained, pitiful peasant army which blundered darkly to its destruction on Sedgemoor. Here the attraction comes not from any delineation of strength but from the desperate valour of the weak. In a fight which began in darkness and for the cause of which there was never the remotest chance, the peasants 'trodden down by horse, slashed by dragoons, dropping by scores under the rain of bullets, still fought on with a dogged, desperate courage for a ruined cause and a man who had deserted them.'

But tragic as the spectacle of the ghastly dead may be, that of the dispirited living is deeper and more moving. Sympathy with the ragged, exhausted fugitives and wounded prisoners in the 'dim yellow light streaming over the earnest pain-drawn faces and the tattered mud-coloured figures' is arrested and held. This is a simple, moving story, ending with a picture of the famous Judge Jeffreys, 'the devil in wig and gown' which is as good as he was ruthless.

There follows a long line of historical novels of which The Refugees, dealing with court intrigues in the reign of Louis XIV of France, and Rodney Stone, one of the earliest novels of prize-fighting, are the best. There is good work too in The Exploits of Brigadier Gerard, a series of stories published in 1896. Uncle Bernac (1897) is a novel of Napoleonic days, as exciting in its episodes as The Tragedy of Korosko. Medical experiences are told in Round the Red Lamp and The Stark Munro Letters.

Here it must be observed that not only is Doyle sound and conscientious, but versatile too. Granted that with his many thousand pages of war he has not once equalled in power the The Red Badge of Courage, that little epic of a war never seen by its young American author, Stephen Crane, it is apparent that at the same time in Sir Nigel, The White Company, Micah Clarke, The Refugees, etc., he has drawn a series of historical pictures good enough to bring him at least contemporary fame. Yet there remains what might be the creation of another mind—Sherlock Holmes.

III—The Adventures and Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes

So much criticism, so many exhausting controversies and so much enthusiasm have been aroused by the great detective that it seems little is left to be done about him. Yet just as much is true of, for instance, Pickwick, Mrs. Malaprop, Peter Pan and many others whose names are now household words. As much controversy may arise over the origin of Pickwick and Peter Pan as over that of the detective. A thousand parents may point out how much of their sons they recognize in Barrie's boy. Equally well may critics say how much of Poe's Monsieur Dupin and of Gaboriau's Lecoq they see in the friend of Dr. Watson. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle may reply with his own explanation—that he is nothing more than a figure modelled on his old Edinburgh tutor, Dr. Joseph Bell, to whom the first Adventures were dedicated. But whatever is done he must remain primarily a member of that race of happy accidents of which perhaps Peter Pan is the best example. Just as hosts of men and women knew the famous boy before Barrie put him into a play, so must many have been acquainted with Dupin, Lecoq and Dr. Bell himself. But it remained, as always, for a single eye to absorb and use what others missed. The result in this case was a character whose name has become a national byword.

It is not easy to say where lies the attraction of this man who on his first appearance caught and ever since has held the enormous interest of the public mind.

Taken physically, he is strong and compelling but not attractive ; in manner he may be by turns brusque, nonchalant, egotistical, dramatic and ironical, but never charming. Emotionally—but he seems to have no emotions, for in The Scandal in Bohemia we are told : 'It was not that he felt any emotion akin to love . . . all emotions, and that one in particular, were abhorrent to his cold, precise but admirably balanced mind. He was, I take it, the most perfect reasoning machine that the world has seen ; but as a lover he would have placed himself in a false position. He never spoke of the softer passions save with a gibe and a sneer.'

There occurs the word 'perfect,' followed immediately by 'machine.' At that point seems to lie the secret. Peter Pan, though having the enviable quality of eternal youth, is far from perfect. Mrs. Malaprop, Pickwick, Falstaff, Malvolio, The Three Musketeers are not perfect. Still less are they machines. On the contrary they are each fascinating, warm and living where Holmes is precise, cold and admirably balanced. They are examples of the truth that the imperfect eternally excites not only love, but sympathy and pity ; the amazing friend of Watson only fills in the other side of the medal : that for perfection, while it may be astounding, powerful and incredible, we can have only admiration.

Consequently we admire Holmes, but from a distance, and decide that, as he himself is incapable of loving, so he can never be loved. And he never will be. Among his many women readers and clients is none who says, 'I love him,' or 'He is lovely.' We read, 'Mr. Holmes, you are wonderful. How can I repay you ? ' but never 'Mr. Holmes, you are wonderful. You darling ! ' He is, in short, something of a god. At his feet are laid apparently insoluble mysteries, involving human misery and destiny, which he unravels with the air of a magician. His interest in those who bring him these mysteries is at the time intense. His care is endless. "Spare no details," he urges, "and I will spare no pains." Yet for all that he is a god with a short memory. His satisfied clients he casts off much as a spider sucked flies. Even Miss Violet Hunter, in The Copper Beeches, whom he describes as 'a quite exceptional woman' he speedily forgot 'when once she had ceased to be the centre of one of his problems.' Only Irene Adler, from whom he took one of his few defeats, interested him enough to make him procure her photograph and afterwards refer to her as *the* woman. But scorn is easily detectable in his voice when he mentions his failure against her wit.

"I have been beaten four times," he says, "three times by men, and once by a woman."

Besides scorn is evident anger—the anger of the machine when the spoke is thrust into the wheel. A second time he is shown as a piece of mechanism. His powers of logic and observation strengthen this idea. Only the mind of a machine would, for instance, deduce from simply glancing at a tattered black hat :

That the man (its owner) was highly intellectual . . . also that he was fairly well to do within the last three years, although he has now fallen upon evil days. He had foresight but has less now than formerly, pointing to moral retrogression, which, when taken with the decline of his fortunes, seems to indicate some evil influence, probably drink, at work upon him. This may account for the obvious fact that his wife has ceased to love him . . . He has, however, some degree of self-respect. He is a man who leads a sedentary life, goes out little, is out of training entirely, is middle-aged, has grizzled hair which he has had cut within the last few days, and which he anoints with lime-cream . . . Also, by the way, it is exceedingly improbable that he has gas laid on in his house.

But his other accomplishments are no less remarkable. Chemistry, anatomy, the violin, boxing, fencing, law, the taking of cocaine, disguise, knowledge of tobacco, analysis of human emotions and motives—all these and more are among them.

Nevertheless, machine as he may be, he teaches us all to think and observe.

Of the books in which he figures, The Adventures contains excellent stories in The Speckled Band, The Blue Carbuncle, and The Man with the Twisted Lip. Those of The Memoirs, The Return, His Last Bow, The Sign of Four, and A Study in Scarlet, are equally good and come fresh to the mind at a second and third reading. In The Hound of the Baskervilles, the story of the terrorising of the West country by a gigantic hound, he is at his best.

Besides the detective stories are a book of essays in Through the Magic Door, a vigorous piece of history in The Great Boer War, and dramatic versions of some of his novels. Only Doyle's poems are really unfortunate — calm, moral and platitudinous things which Watson would have liked reading in the absence of Holmes. They mar the otherwise remarkably interesting career of a man whose own personality is best summed up as being a strange combination of those two famous inhabitants of 221B, Baker Street, London.

Founder of the Science of Eugenics

SIR FRANCIS GALTON

HEREDITARY GENIUS

In Hereditary Genius, which was published in 1869, Galton adventured upon a field of science hitherto unexplored save by himself in two articles, dealing with certain aspects of the subject, that had appeared four years earlier. The book raised a storm of criticism, much of which has subsequently been shown to have been baseless. While attempting to state the laws and trace some of the consequences of 'hereditary genius,' Galton did not look upon genius as being demonstrable as a special quality: afterwards he preferred to describe his subject as 'hereditary ability,' and this title does, in fact, indicate more adequately the nature of his investigations. He wrote several important works substantiating and enlarging his original thesis ; of these the most notable are English Men of Science, Their Nature and Nurture (1874), Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its Development (1884)—of which an outline appears elsewhere in *The World's Great Books*—and Natural Inheritance (1889). Throughout, Galton was firmly convinced of the desirability of attempting to improve future generations physically and mentally by systematically putting some check upon the birth-rate of the unfit and encouraging the productivity of the fit.

I—The Purpose and Plan of the Inquiry

At the time when this book was written the human mind was popularly thought to act independently of natural laws, and to be capable of almost any achievement, if compelled to exert itself by a will that had a power of initiation. Even those who had more philosophical habits of thought were far from looking upon the mental faculties of each individual as being limited as strictly as those of his body ; still less was the idea of the inheritance of ability clearly apprehended.

The direct result of this inquiry is to make manifest the great and measurable