

### *Some Reason Why*

Oh yes, Mrs. Grote, the woman murmured to herself; there is always some reason for it. If people stare at you look at yourself in a mirror; if people do not like you, ask yourself if you are likable; if your accounts do not come right, look to your addition; if your neighbour is "luckier" than you, imitate her perseverance or tact; before you stamp a symphony as dull, inquire if you are a competent judge of classical music; before you criticise a portrait think of the possible characteristics of artist and sitter. There is always some reason why.

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### BLEACHING THE BRAIN

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"I CANNOT come now, I am bleaching my brain."

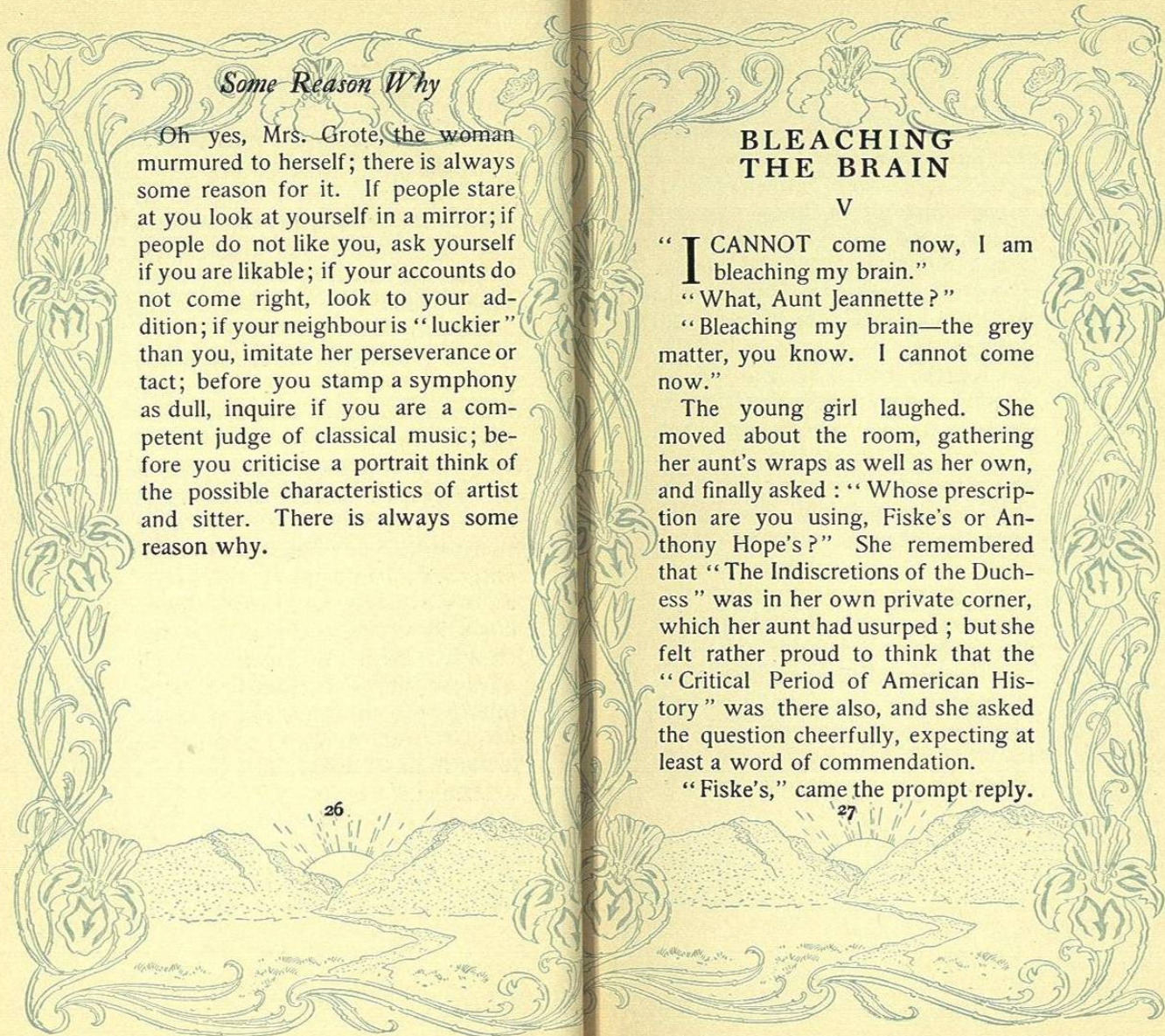
"What, Aunt Jeannette?"

"Bleaching my brain—the grey matter, you know. I cannot come now."

The young girl laughed. She moved about the room, gathering her aunt's wraps as well as her own, and finally asked: "Whose prescription are you using, Fiske's or Anthony Hope's?" She remembered that "The Indiscretions of the Duchess" was in her own private corner, which her aunt had usurped; but she felt rather proud to think that the "Critical Period of American History" was there also, and she asked the question cheerfully, expecting at least a word of commendation.

"Fiske's," came the prompt reply.

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"The other would serve, but this is quicker. There are two ways of bleaching, you know," she continued, as she smilingly laid down the book and accepted the bonnet and hat-pin which her niece held out to her. "One is to employ the kind of books which keep your head cool and empty."

"And the other, the quicker way?"

"To take the best books and mis-read them. To turn the page, after your eye has blankly followed each line upon it, while your mind has been out the window climbing the Berkshire Hills or hurrying across Spain. It is the quicker process, because it is more complex. It destroys one's power of attention, and at the same time fosters the self-deception that one is improving her mind."

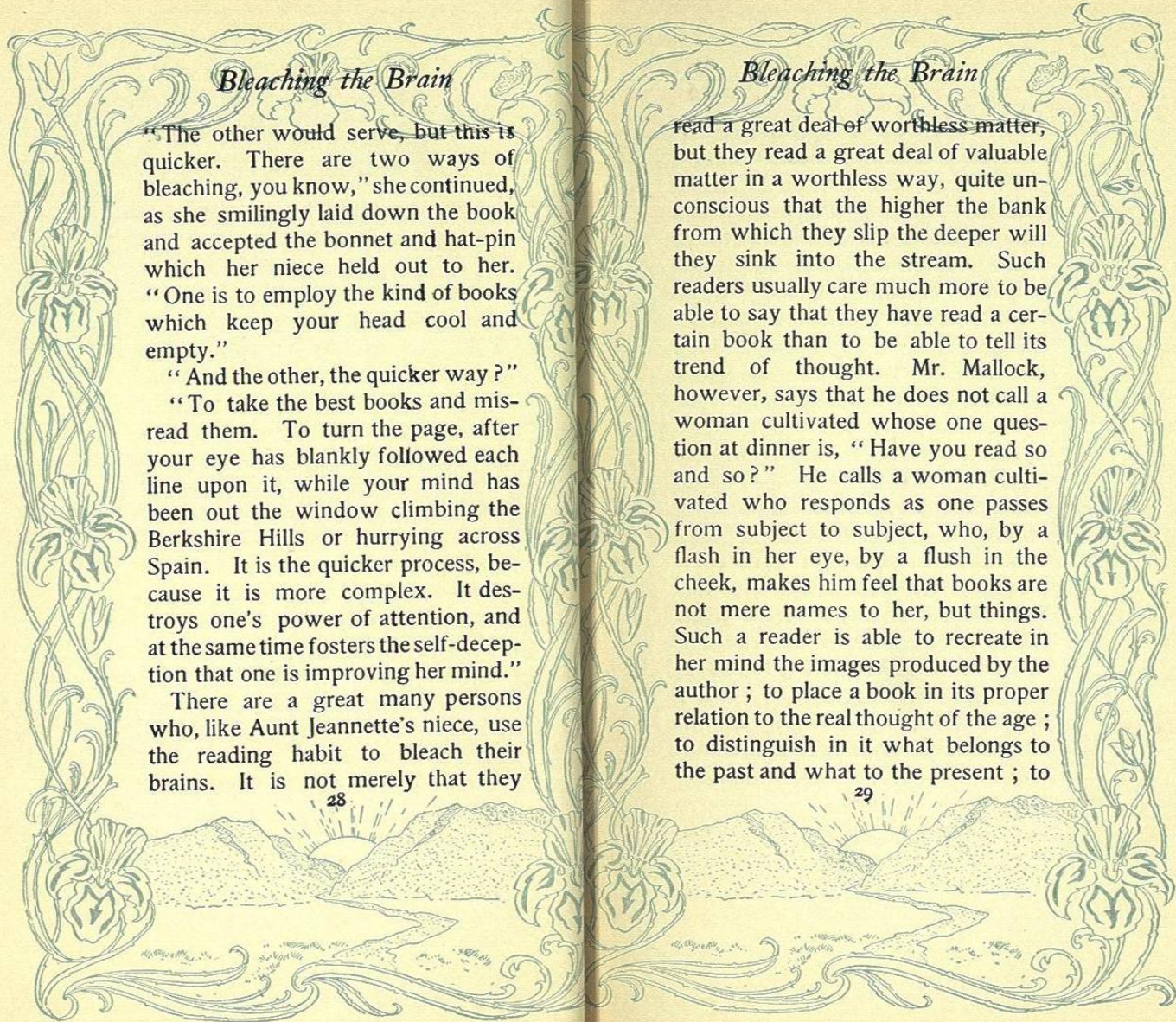
There are a great many persons who, like Aunt Jeannette's niece, use the reading habit to bleach their brains. It is not merely that they

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read a great deal of worthless matter, but they read a great deal of valuable matter in a worthless way, quite unconscious that the higher the bank from which they slip the deeper will they sink into the stream. Such readers usually care much more to be able to say that they have read a certain book than to be able to tell its trend of thought. Mr. Mallock, however, says that he does not call a woman cultivated whose one question at dinner is, "Have you read so and so?" He calls a woman cultivated who responds as one passes from subject to subject, who, by a flash in her eye, by a flush in the cheek, makes him feel that books are not mere names to her, but things. Such a reader is able to recreate in her mind the images produced by the author; to place a book in its proper relation to the real thought of the age; to distinguish in it what belongs to the past and what to the present; to

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seize upon what is of practical import to herself ; to aim at insight rather than information. Reading without thought—and thoughtful reading may be proved by what one remembers and what one can pass on to others—is simply worse than no reading at all. It is a mere shift for killing time, for keeping one's thoughts in "a state of agreeable titillation," for avoiding the trouble of digestion and reflection.

The reading habit when properly directed, is a boon simply priceless ; and proper direction means careful selection as well as thoughtful attention. When there is so much inviting us what are we to take, what will best nourish us in our growth towards perfection? "Do you not know," asks Ruskin, "that what you lose to-day you cannot gain to-morrow? Will you go and gossip with your housemaid, or your stable-boy, when you may talk with kings and

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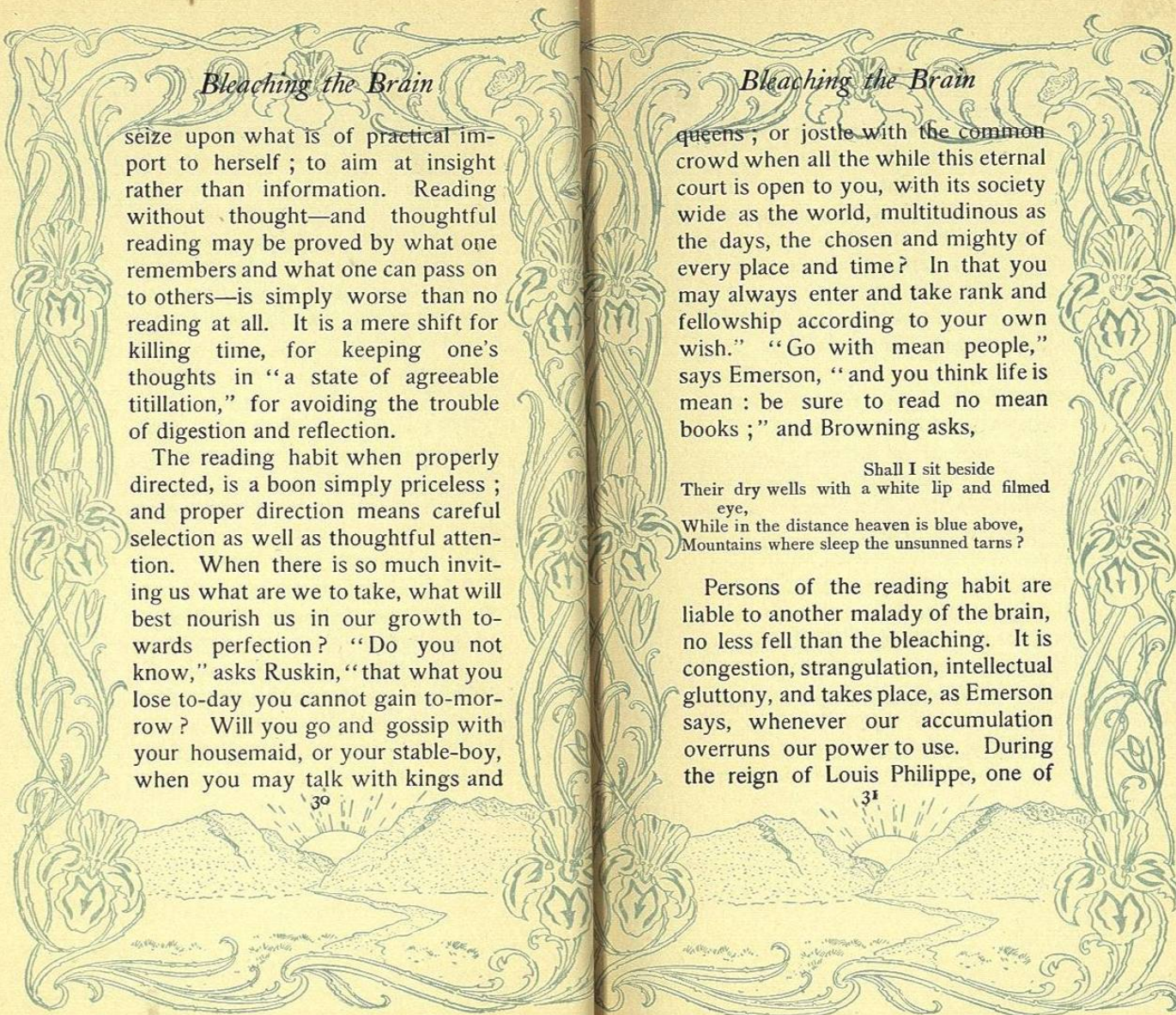
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queens ; or jostle with the common crowd when all the while this eternal court is open to you, with its society wide as the world, multitudinous as the days, the chosen and mighty of every place and time? In that you may always enter and take rank and fellowship according to your own wish." "Go with mean people," says Emerson, "and you think life is mean : be sure to read no mean books ;" and Browning asks,

Shall I sit beside  
Their dry wells with a white lip and filmed  
eye,  
While in the distance heaven is blue above,  
Mountains where sleep the unsunned tarns ?

Persons of the reading habit are liable to another malady of the brain, no less fell than the bleaching. It is congestion, strangulation, intellectual gluttony, and takes place, as Emerson says, whenever our accumulation overruns our power to use. During the reign of Louis Philippe, one of

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the secret agents of the French police rendered most important service. Having read Cooper's "Spy," he aspired to the sort of ambition which distinguished the hero of that work, and was desirous of playing in France the part which Cooper assigned to Harvey Birch during the War of Independence. Harvey Birch, for he adopted this name in all his reports, never belied his professions of fidelity. He rendered services which would have merited a fortune; but when the term of them ended, he contented himself with asking for a humble employment, barely enough to supply his daily necessities.

In some such practical way will the quality and manner of our reading make itself visible. Ethics no longer sanction self-cultivation purely for the benefit of self, and we must ever remember the poet's warning :

Know not for knowing's sake,  
But to become a star to men forever.

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### CEREBRAL CREASES

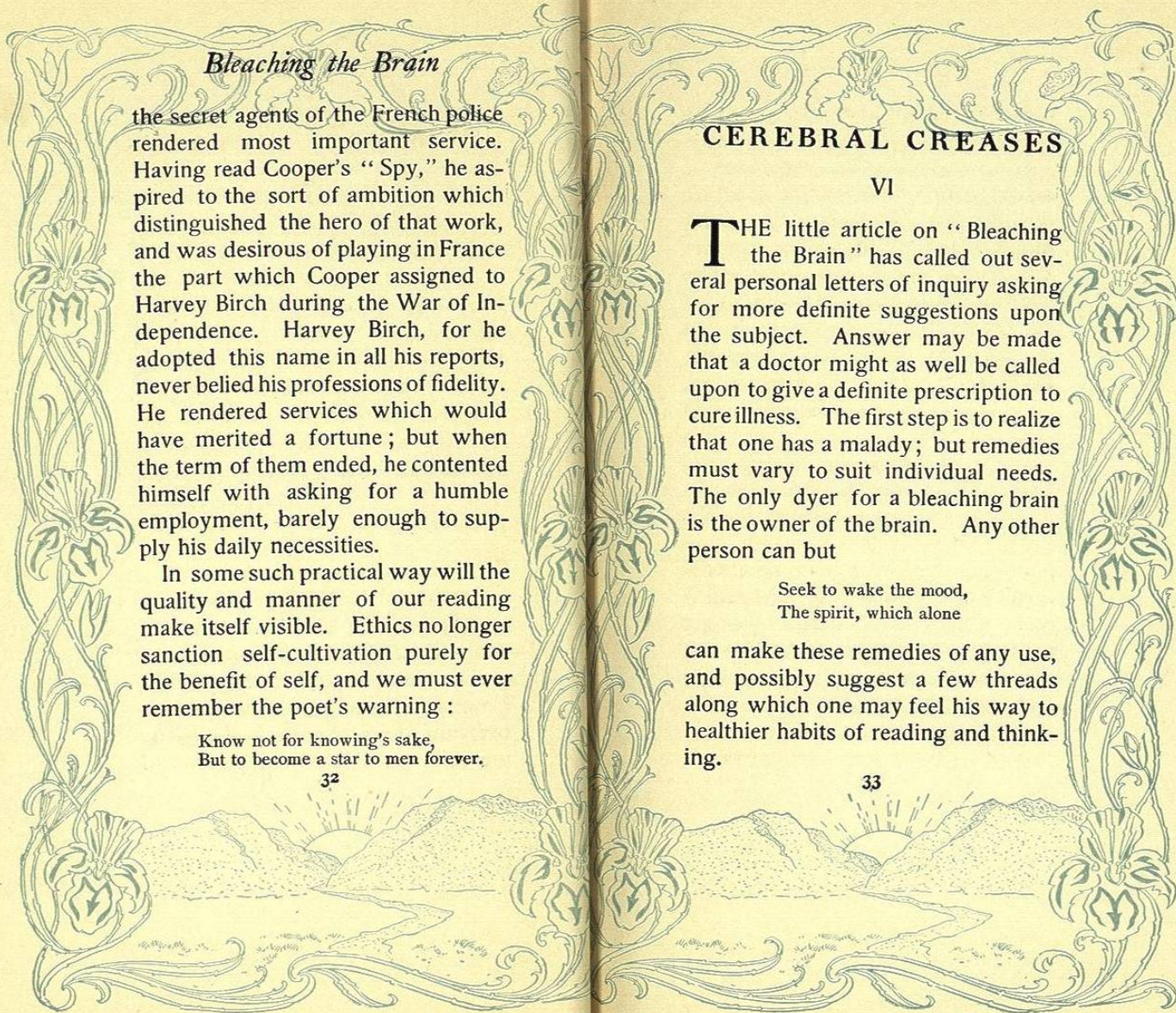
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THE little article on "Bleaching the Brain" has called out several personal letters of inquiry asking for more definite suggestions upon the subject. Answer may be made that a doctor might as well be called upon to give a definite prescription to cure illness. The first step is to realize that one has a malady; but remedies must vary to suit individual needs. The only dyer for a bleaching brain is the owner of the brain. Any other person can but

Seek to wake the mood,  
The spirit, which alone

can make these remedies of any use, and possibly suggest a few threads along which one may feel his way to healthier habits of reading and thinking.

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### *Cerebral Creases*

The surface of the brain, scientists tell us, is made up of innumerable cells of past and present impressions, which, when grouped, constitute thought and emotion; and among these clustered cells run sharp furrows, upon the number and irregularity of which depends in some way the amount of our intelligence. In the lower animals, idiots, savages, and young children, the furrows are shallow and symmetrical and few in number. These furrows are, to speak very simply and unscientifically, channels of communication between the thought-cells. The acquisition of a new idea is attended by the transit of a wave along a new path, and the more often this path is traversed the more indissoluble will be the idea. One might compare the furrows to a far-branching system of railroad tracks, and the impression-cells to the little towns along the route. The railroad alone is what

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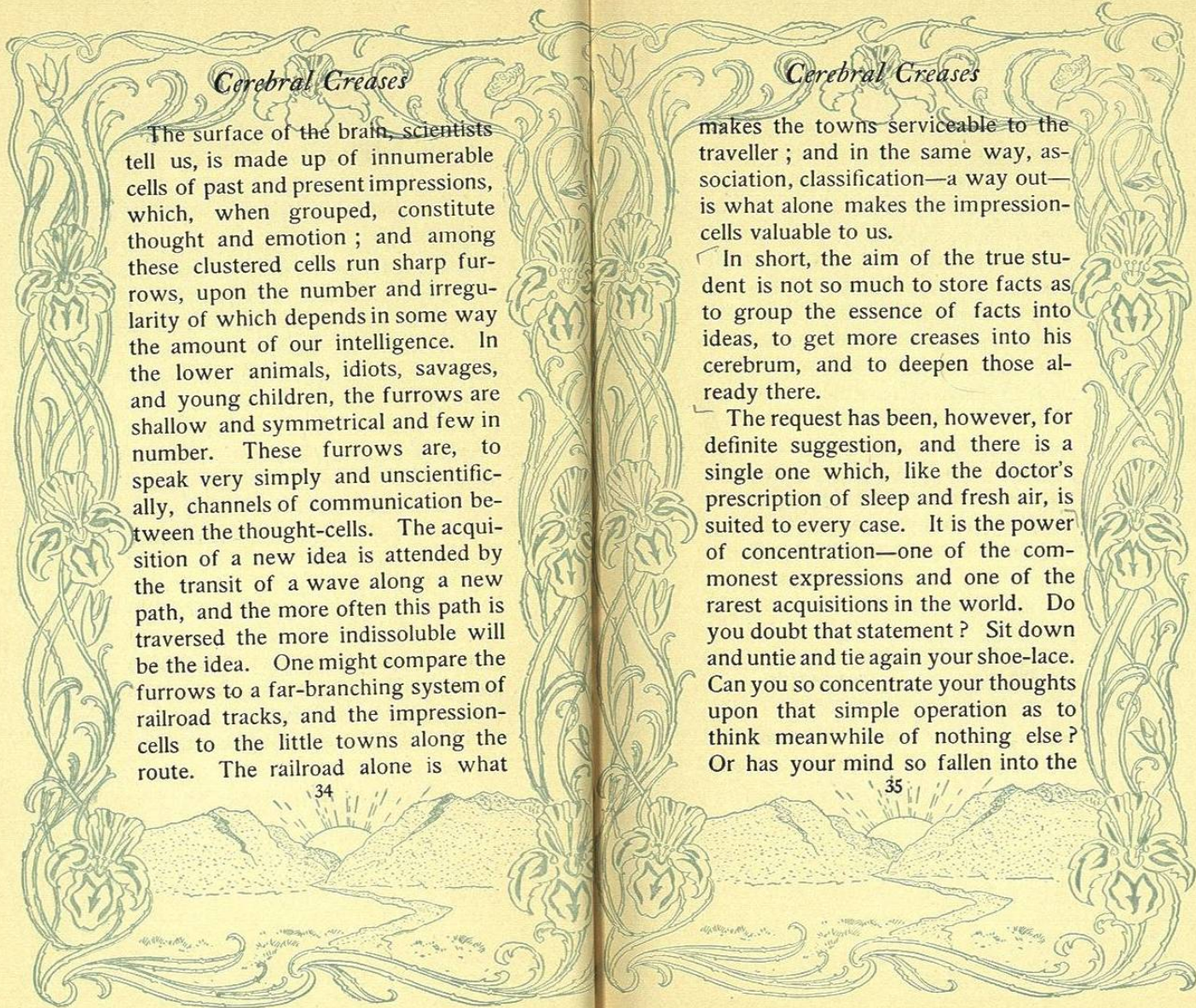
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makes the towns serviceable to the traveller; and in the same way, association, classification—a way out—is what alone makes the impression-cells valuable to us.

In short, the aim of the true student is not so much to store facts as to group the essence of facts into ideas, to get more creases into his cerebrum, and to deepen those already there.

The request has been, however, for definite suggestion, and there is a single one which, like the doctor's prescription of sleep and fresh air, is suited to every case. It is the power of concentration—one of the commonest expressions and one of the rarest acquisitions in the world. Do you doubt that statement? Sit down and untie and tie again your shoe-lace. Can you so concentrate your thoughts upon that simple operation as to think meanwhile of nothing else? Or has your mind so fallen into the

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habit of straying off over a dozen matters a minute that you have lost—or never learned—the power of focusing it on any single thing for five consecutive minutes? If you can perform the feat, you possess one of the greatest powers of the universe. If in any moment of mental distress you can turn, if but for a moment, your whole thought to treading upon a certain line of nails in a sidewalk, you are, for that moment relieved of anxiety ; you have gained an atom of concentrative power, and are on the road to control over mind and mood.

The power of concentration is of inestimable value to the reader, the writer, and the student. Too often we sit idly, like Matthew Arnold's Scholar Gypsy,

Twirling in our hand a withered spray,  
And waiting for the spark from heaven to fall,

when the spark must be kindled from  
our own fires. Horace Greeley could

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sit on a door-step and write editorials on his hat while the great war processions passed by ; Frederick the Great could withdraw all his thought from a critical battle to send a note of assurance to his mother, and make all the princes sign their names thereto ; Napoleon could lie down and fall asleep instantly while cannon roared about his ears ; Darwin could calmly pursue his investigations of science on the top of a crowded coach.

Inexorable law reads that we prepare ourselves for sudden deeds by "the reiterated choice of good or evil that gradually determines character." To wait for a propitious retirement, for silence and leisure, is often to lose the opportunity of a lifetime ; while the ability to concentrate one's attention upon the single matter in hand, irrespective of environment, means enormous economy of time, of effort, of thought, of achieve-

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### *Cerebral Greases*

ment. Perhaps no other single talent serves so effectively to open up cerebral transit-ways, which, like the Continental roads to the Eternal City, lead straight to the Intellectual Life.

### THE FAIR FLOWER— CONVERSATION

#### VII

“THERE grows within each heart,” says Browning, “the giant image of perfection.” It is this longing for improvement which makes pardonable the discussion of so threadbare a topic as conversation. What to say and how to say it are the only elements of the art, and all that can be written has been written about them; but just as the child is impressed by each new combination of the kaleidoscope, so comment upon this subject calls attention to it, and we thereupon make one more little step of progress.

For, indeed, that is the chief consideration: to have attention called to our slipshod methods of speech; to listen to ourselves as others hear