Is it possible to increase indefinitely the numbers of the book-buying public? Some of our authors, at least, are firmly convinced that it is. They say that the cheaper a book is, the more widely it will circulate, and that the increased circulation will make up for the decrease in profit on single copies. They point to the death of the three-volume novel, and urge that the six-shilling novel should be brought down to three shillings sixpence or two shillings sixpence. Some of the publishers are at present going in this direction. It is no secret that one author at least, whose popularity is unchallenged, has determined to make a great experiment with his next book, which may conceivably be published in the autumn of 1902. For my part, I stand in doubt. The living novelists who flourished in the day of the three-volume novel complain of the change as all for the worse, and I think most publishers would say the same. In fact, the number of six-shilling novels which involve loss becomes so alarming that the wiser firms are touching them very charily. The average novelist is the person likely to suffer. It ought to be borne in mind that it is not easy to go back. Once accustom the public to books at a lower price, and they will rebel against any attempt at reversion to the old custom.

One of the most curious things about the book-buying public here is their resolute aversion to books bound in boards. There was a time when the yellow-backed novel at two shillings almost monopolised the trade at the railway bookseller's. Now it has practically disappeared. The publishers have found that by putting the books into cloth boards they can sell in very large numbers. The sixpenny novels are tolerated in paper covers simply because their price is so low. Some of the publishers of sixpenny novels think of raising the price to sixpence net, but I rather think the sixpenny novel in its present form has had its day, and that something new will be tried.

After all, the British public is not so bad as some would make you believe. I heard the other day that Mr. Grant Richards issued in his amazingly cheap and excellent reprints a volume of Emerson's Essays, and that 10,000 copies were im-

mediately bought up, the larger number in the leather binding.

We had a remarkably pleasant gathering at the Whitefriars Club the other night, when Mr. Edwin D. Mead, editor of the *New England Magazine*, was the guest. Though I have heard some of the most brilliant men of the day on these occasions, I have never listened to a more entertaining, and at the same time a more instructive, speaker than Mr. Mead. He took for his subject "Some Literary Landmarks in England." It turned out that he had been investigating the places connected with the Pilgrim Fathers, and that in so scholarly and thorough a fashion that he was able to enlighten every man present, although one or two might be called experts on the subject. Mr. Mead complained, and very justly, that we did not take sufficient note in England of our historical and literary landmarks; but when he spoke of erecting statues to great men like Wiclif and Milton, some of us protested. It would be all very well if we had the power of making statues which would be a pleasure to look at, but will anyone say so who goes through the gloomy images of London? The man who would arrange for carting away half of them in the night would be a public benefactor. Mr. Mead, at the request of the audience, afterward gave his views on the relations between America and England, and the power of the New England element in the United States of today. He took an unhopeful view. The New England element did not now rule America, and would rule it less than ever. There was no possibility of England and America fighting under the same banner. He viewed a war between England and America as inevitable, and this war would be the result of a conscienceless commercialism. Mr. Mead, who was an early friend of Thomas Davidson, the philosopher, and of William Clarke, the brilliant journalist, is pursuing his various researches in London, and will be with us for some time. Such a man ought to be better known both in our country and in yours.

A very large number of books are in the market, and the bookbinders report themselves as exceedingly busy, which is a good sign, for nowadays publishers are very careful not to over-bind. But the booksellers are timid in their orders. Probably the prolongation of the South African War, which is exciting the utmost impatience, is beginning to affect trade, but it is too soon to speak with any confidence. Among the more successful books in point of sale is the life of Stevenson. It is comparatively brief, and contains very little new matter of importance, but it is a convenient summary of the whole subject, and is written in an excellent tone, so that on the whole its reception has been very favourable. Some 5000 copies were disposed of at a high price, a further proof, if proof were needed, of the undying interest in the personality of Stevenson.

In the world of journalism great attention has been attracted by the *Spectator*, which published various stories and suggestions about a sum of money given by Mr. Rhodes to Mr. Schnadhorst, the chief official of the Liberal party. I need not go into the story. The general feeling is one of astonishment that a paper with the antecedents of the *Spectator* should have taken it up and managed it so badly. Its career for many years has been singularly free from sensationalism and unworthy personalities. No doubt the lesson will be taken. I may mention what is not generally known, that Mr. Meredith Townsend, co-editor with Mr. Hutton, still retains his position. He is working on the *Spectator* as diligently as ever, though he now lives in Surrey. One of his daughters also shows literary faculties, and is interested in theological questions. It is a noteworthy illustration of what higher education is bringing us to, that Miss Townsend contributed a paper on "Immortality" to the *Spectator*, which was very ably criticised by Miss Dorothea Price Hughes, daughter of the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes, in her father's journal, the *Methodist Times*.

Mr. Maarten Maartens, the well-known novelist, has been in bad health, and has taken a house in Paris for the winter. He has now finished the long novel in which he has been engaged for a considerable time, but the book awaits serialisation.

Thomas Hardy's theory that the Immortals make sport of human beings goes back to Greek tragedy. It was promulgated, however, in the eighteenth century. I happened to be turning over

Dr. Johnson's works and read his review of *A Free Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil* by Soame Jenyns. The review is a masterpiece of sarcasm and pleasantry, and justly received the praises of Macaulay. Jenyns imagined "that as we have not only animals for food, but choose some for our diversion, the same privilege may be allowed to some beings above us, *who may deceive, torment, or destroy us for the ends only of their own pleasure or utility.*" Johnson's robust intellect makes great play with this fancy. "He might have shown that *these hunters, whose game is man*, have many sports analogous to our own. As we drown whelps and kittens, they amuse themselves now and then with sinking a ship, and stand round the fields of Blenheim or the walls of Prague, as we encircle a cock-pit. As we shoot a bird flying, they take a man in the midst of his business or pleasure, and knock him down with an apoplexy. Some of them, perhaps, are virtuosi, and delight in the operations of an asthma, as a human philosopher in the effects of the air-pump. To swell a man with a tympany is as good sport as to blow a frog. Many a merry bout have these frolic beings at the vicissitudes of an ague, and good sport it is to see a man tumble with an epilepsy, and revive and tumble again, and all this he knows not why." Johnson goes on to suspect that the merry malice of these beings finds means of enjoyment in the creation of authors. They make a poor wretch proud of his parts, and induce him to write, beginning perhaps with an ode or an epistle, and passing on to a treatise of philosophy. This explains to Johnson the production of most new books. "Many of the books which now crowd the world may be justly suspected to be written for the sake of some invisible order of beings, for surely they are of no use to any of the corporeal inhabitants of the world. Of the productions of the last bounteous year, how many can be said to serve any purpose of use or pleasure?"

W. Robertson Nicoll.