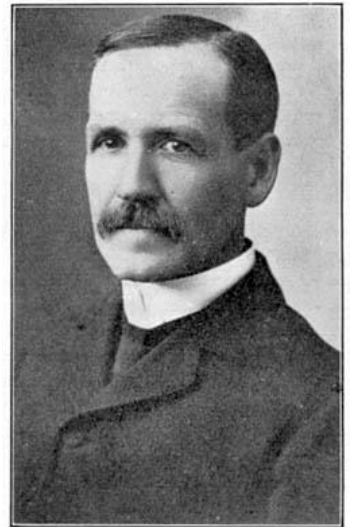


## “A Most Deplorable State of Morals”

*The Board of Education has just had their attention directed to a most deplorable state of morals existing in our schools; and the evil has been traced to some degraded persons . . . poisoning the minds of boys and girls.*

Reverend Samuel J. Shaw, pastor of the United Presbyterian Church, was righteously concerned when the book *The Decameron* was brought to the attention of the San Diego school board in January 1903. Several chapters in the famed novel by the 14th century author Giovanni Boccaccio seemed objectionable. “For the sake of public morals,” the reverend argued in a letter addressed to the Public Library trustees, the book needed to be removed from the library shelves, lest the volume “pollute the thoughts and hearts of our boys and girls.”

Responding to Rev. Shaw, Trustee Secretary Lydia Horton was apologetic: “It was owing to a mistake” from a library attendant that the book appeared on an open shelf. Books such as this, she explained, were considered “unfit for general circulation” and normally kept separately from the public collection. *The Decameron*, however, would remain on the shelves, albeit in “a special place” accessible only to the librarians.



Rev. Samuel J. Shaw

San Diego, California, January 14, 1903.

To the Trustees of the Free Public Library,

San Diego, California;-

A book entitled, "The Decameron of Boccaccio (numbered 853. I.A.) was brought by the Teachers Committee to the attention of the Board of Education at their meeting on Tuesday, January 6th, 1903, with a statement that in their judgment such a book should not be allowed to have a place upon the shelves of our Public Library. It was referred to the chairman of the committee on Course of Study and School Library of the Board, with the request that he make an examination of the book; and report his opinion to you as to the advisability of retaining the book. I have looked over this book, especially the chapters suggested by the Teachers committee; and am decidedly of the opinion that this book should not for the sake of public morals be retained in our Public library.

The Board of Education has just had their attention directed to a most deplorable state of morals existing in some of our schools; and the evil has been traced to some degraded persons who copied some poetry from a vile book, and it has been <sup>e</sup>cretly circulated, poisoning the minds of the boys and girls. The Board through one of its committees, of which I am a member, has been working hard to suppress and eradicate this evil, and to restore those who have fallen from the path of purity; and we hope that the Trustees of our Public Library will cooperate with us in this good work, by removing this and every other volume which is ready to pollute the thoughts and hearts of our boys and girls.

Yours respectfully,

S. J. Shaw  
Chairman of Comm. on Course of Study

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MARY E. WALKER, LIBRARIAN

## Free Public Library

Cor. Fifth and F Sts.

SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA, Jan. 22<sup>nd</sup> 1903

Rev. S. G. Shaw

San Diego Cal.

My Dear Mr Shaw

Your letter addressed to the board of library trustees was read at our last meeting and the following action was taken. It was moved, seconded and carried that Mr Shaw's letter be handed to Miss Walker with instructions to withdraw all such books mentioned from the book-shelves, and that these books be kept in a separate part of the library, where they will not be placed in general circulation.

It was <sup>owing to</sup> a mistake of one of the desk attendants, that the book you

referred to in your letter was placed upon the shelves, books considered unfit for general circulation are marked with a white cross on the back and have a special place of their own, which is only accessible to the librarians and her assistants. The desk attendant failed to notice the cross on the back and placed it with the other books to be put away instead of returning it to its place. We hope it will not occur again. The library trustees <sup>are desirous of</sup> ~~will be very glad to~~ co-operating with the board of education in this matter and in every other way for the welfare of the public.

Very truly yours

Lysia M. Horton

Secretary -