

NOTES
ON
AMERICAN LITERATURE

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IN speaking to you on the subject of American literature, I propose especially to treat of those authors whose acquaintance would be, in my opinion, of literary value to you. A very large part of what is called American literature could not be of much benefit to you. Again I propose to speak of work which appeals rather to the imagination than to the intellect, because I am convinced that, in the study of literature in Japan, it is especially the imaginative part of literature which has been neglected (so far as the foreign study is concerned); and I think that the imaginative part of literature is not only important, but that it is the only part of a foreign literature which can be of real benefit to you. Studies of style, of methods, of constructions—these can scarcely be of very much use, unless indeed you hope to write works of merit in another language than your own. In all Western countries—I suppose in Eastern countries too—the natural course of literary study begins with the cultivation of a child's imagination. The child reads stories, fairy tales, everything of that kind; and his fancy is nourished and caressed by home teaching, which is the best of all teachings just because it is the most sympathetic. Unfortunately it can last but a short time;—thereafter the boy plunges into the school world of matter-of-fact study, and is obliged to stop dreaming. But in Western schools some attention is always given to imaginative work, and private studies of fiction and poetry are warmly recommended and encouraged. I presume that this rule holds good in the case of Japanese studies, but it has not held good in the case of foreign fiction and foreign imaginative literature of any sort. One reason, I believe, may have been the dearth of foreign books, but I do not think that this dearth would explain the indifference with which foreign imaginative work is generally regarded by Japa-

nese students throughout the country. Sometimes I have suspected that there is a kind of pride, intellectual pride in the way. I have been often told by young men of talent that they want to read *serious* things—history, biography, science, etc. They plainly hinted that they supposed imaginative literature unworthy of them. This seems to be so serious a mistake, that I think it well to say a few words about it. I shall begin by saying that the literary value of the *serious* works which the student is willing to read depends upon its relation to exactly that kind of literature which he is disinclined to read. The best histories, with few exceptions, are those which depend upon the imaginative faculty; the best biographies are those which have the interest of a novel. And the best works of science are the books which not only appeal directly to the imaginative faculty, but which force it to expand itself. I think that every single great name in Western fiction is the name of a man who gave the utmost attention to imaginative literature from the time of his childhood. The dramatists, the poets, the essayists of France and Germany, England and Italy, have all been great devourers of fiction, and learned their art to a very great extent from fiction. But let us take some serious names for illustration. Macaulay was certainly a very serious man—probably the most solidly practical Englishman of his time, and a mighty influence in literature. Nobody reads *The Arabian Nights* more often or to better purpose than did this terribly serious Lord Macaulay; and it was he that first taught to Englishmen the immense value of the Oriental tales for purposes of illustration and of symbolism. He was also a constant reader of fiction of his time. Ruskin has been all his life a reader of novels and stories; and his style owes much of its beauty to the cultivation of his fancy by such studies. The grim Carlyle was also a great reader of such books. There is not a noteworthy author of the Victorian period—not even the poet Tennyson—who has not been a constant reader of novels in many languages. Having stated these facts, merely by way of suggestion,—allow me to say that I believe it impossible to properly study a foreign literature by reading only the serious part

of it. Any attempt to do so must be exactly like the attempt to learn a language by means of a grammar. I do not deny that there have been born two or three men able to learn languages merely by a grammar;—there is a story of one gifted Italian who learned a language entirely by the help of a dictionary. But these were extraordinary cases of genius in faculty, and these were not creative minds. The power to create is the special power which the study of literature should cultivate, and the power to create can scarcely be developed without a love for both poetry and fiction. Of course making these remarks, I suppose that the truths they contain are recognized in studies of Japanese literature. But it is highly important that they should also be recognized in the study of foreign literatures. Every literature in the world is developed by influences from outside of itself. Left to itself a literature will die for want of food. English literature has lived only through the inspiration obtained from all the other literatures of the world made accessible to it. And it is certain that if a great movement in creative work again takes place in Japan, it must get its inspiration from outside sources. These sources are extraordinarily rich; but I believe that very little attention has yet been paid to them. The serious part of foreign literature has indeed been studied zealously; but I am of opinion that this part is of no more use by itself than a body without a heart. The heart of all literature is its imaginative power. Now as this term is brief, in taking up the next subject, I shall deal only with the heart of it—with its poetry and with its fiction.

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American literature really exists in a very small quantity. An immense deal of printed matter that Americans have called literature would not now be so called even by themselves. About twenty-five or thirty names would include all the writers of real importance; and even out of these we should have to make a careful selection for the purpose of an effective lecture. One of the greatest of modern English critics indeed has declared that an American literature does not exist,—that it could

be represented by two or three names. He takes, however, a very high standard by which to measure American literature: if we accept American literature as a second or third class matter, the range ought to extend far beyond two or three names. On the other hand, if we look to America for classics comparable with the greatest of English literature, it is true that we find almost nothing. Poetry is a test;—we can measure the power and value of a literature best by its poetry—for poetry is the highest form of literary expression. And America has produced very little poetry above the third class and none at all of the first class—if we except a few lyrics of singular beauty. Nothing like an epic poetry is offered by American literature with the sole exception of Longfellow's¹ *Hiawatha*²—written in a measure imitated from the much greater Finnish epic, *The Kalevala*. *Evangeline*³ is indeed a poem of great beauty, though not of the epical kind; but it fails to reach the high standard by reason of the imperfect character of the measure in which it is written. Thus Longfellow, beyond all question the greatest American poet, ranks at his best scarcely above what English critics would call the third class. Bryant,⁴ a pale shadow of 18th century literature, has given us a few lines of almost perfect verse in the poem *Thanatopsis*⁵ and some other pieces; but his good work is so small in quantity that he can hardly be said to have done more than attempt to maintain a tradition. It is not until we count the lyrists that we find anything worthy of the highest admiration; and even American lyrical poetry is curiously light and thin. Whittier⁷ would take a very high place here; yet Whittier managed well only the very simplest forms of verse,—the distich, as in *Maud Muller*,⁷ and the quatrain in the multitude of his emotional short pieces. In other words he excelled only in the very easiest ballad-measures; and the beauty of the work is in simple feeling rather

¹ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882).

² *The song of Hiawatha* . . . Boston, 1855; London, 1855; Leipzig, 1856.

³ *Evangeline, a tale of Acadie* . . . Boston, 1847; London, 1848; Hamburg, 1870.

⁴ William Cullen Bryant (1794-1878).

⁵ *Thanatopsis, a poem* 1874.

⁶ John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892).

⁷ *Maud Muller* . . . *With illustrations by W. J. Hennessy*. Boston, 1867, 1872.

than in literary craftsmanship. There is indeed, as Professor Gosse has said, but one American poet who shows a really noteworthy mastery of verse; and that one poet is Edgar Poe.¹ Yet Poe wrote very little. To publish his poems in a separate volume it is necessary to print them in very large type and on very thick paper in order to make a book of reasonable size. But it must be confessed that the power of this small cluster of verses is so great that almost every poet, English or American, during the latter half of the 19th century, has been affected by it. Tennyson shows its influence; and so do other great Victorian poets. Leaving Poe aside, first-class American poetry can scarcely be said to exist. What does exist is a good deal of charming lyrical poetry of the second and third class. It is very much scattered, and is the work of a multitude of writers of varying degrees of merit. No one single volume of such poetry would show a general second-class level, but here and there in a mass of work, we can discover one or two jewels. It is now proposed to attempt an anthology of American poetry; the editor being Stedman.² When this volume appears, I believe that the result will be surprisingly interesting. From hundreds of sources, choice verses are to be collected, representing hundreds of small names, but very few well-known names. There is going on in America a sort of poetical incubation which promises well; but which will scarcely produce anything great for two generations to come. Of the light dainty verse, there is no lack; and there is in it a particular delicate quality distinguishing it from English verse. To define this quality would be very difficult: it is something to be felt rather than explained;—I can only say that it seems to depend upon a particular way of thinking which shows itself in philosophical suggestion as well as in exquisite choice of words. One characteristic poem, *Atalanta's Race*, I cited for you in a previous lecture. It is very beautiful. Let me now cite one or two other examples of the modern kind of light verse. The other day one of my students gave me a little book of Japanese poems on

¹ Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849).

² *An American anthology 1787-1899: selections illustrating the editor's critical review of American poetry in the 19th century.* Edited by E. C. Stedman 1900.

the subject of frogs. The treatment of the same subject by a recent American writer may interest you.

TO A TOAD

Blue dusk, that brings the dewy hours,
Brings thee, of graceless form in sooth;
Dark stumbler at the roots of flowers,—
Flaccid, inert, uncouth.

Right ill can human wonder guess
Thy meaning or thy mission here,—
Grey lumps of mottled clamminess,
With that preposterous leer.

But when I see thy dull bulk where
Luxurious roses bend and turn,
Or some slim lily lifts to air
Her frail and fragrant urn,—

Of these, among the garden ways,
So grim a watcher dost thou seem,
That I, with meditative gaze,
Look down on thee, and dream,

Of thick-lipped slaves with ebon skin,
That squat in hideous dumb repose,
And guard the drowsy ladies in
Their still seraglios.

*Edgar Fawcett.*¹

Toads and sometimes a large kind of frog are sometimes kept in gardens to protect the flowers from insects; contrast between the ugliness of the toad and the beauty of the flowers suggested to the poet the fancy of a black eunuch guarding the women of a Persian or Turkish harem. But the charm of the thing is altogether in the beautiful use of adjectives, culled with a skill almost equal to that of the best French poet. Now let us look at another little poem displaying the same kind of skill—a poem on the sea, compared to the monster Caliban in

¹ (1847-1904).

Shakespeare's play of *The Tempest*. Short as it is, I take this poem to be the very best thing that the author ever wrote; but, of course, it is only a very light poem.

MARSH SONG—AT SUNSET

Over the monstrous shambling sea,
Over the Caliban sea,
Bright Ariel-cloud, thou lingerest:
Oh wait, oh wait, in the warm red West,—
Thy Prospero I'll be.

Over the humped and fishy sea,
Over the Caliban sea
O cloud in the West, like a thought in the heart
Of pardon, loose thy wing, and start,
And do a grace for me.

Over the huge and huddling sea,
Over the Caliban sea,
Bring hither my brother Antonio,—Man,—
My injurer: night breaks the ban:
Brother, I pardon thee.

*Sidney Lanier.*¹

Here some of the verse is certainly defective but the choice of adjectives is almost magical; and the beauty of the composition is the grotesque art of the first line of the three stanzas. Those three lines prove that the writer might have become one of the very best of poets if he had not died quite young, after years of sickness and disappointment. He was the author of a new system for the teaching of poetical composition to students,—he proposed to teach measure by music, instead of the old and confused rules of prosody. And his book, *The Science of English Verse*,² is a very curious and valuable work.

Well, poetry of this kind swarms in America; there are countless minor voices, like a chirping of crickets to be heard at all times; and occasionally we catch a wonderfully sweet note. Therefore although I have not spoken much in praise of

¹ (1842-1881).

² 1880.

American poetry, I should not like to think that it is not worth examining. On the contrary, I believe that a good American anthology would be of immense value to the students because of the world of light, graceful, pretty fancies which it would contain and because of many beautiful suggestions which it would make to you of the thoughts belonging only to the philosophy of the 19th century. But until such an anthology shall have been published you cannot very well attempt to study American poetry as a distinct art; for you would have to search through hundreds of books to find a few beautiful pieces.

It is otherwise with American prose. American prose has had its influence upon English prose; and if the writers are few, it must be confessed that their power has been great. Irving,¹ for example, has a place in English literature of the very highest rank; indeed some English critics insist upon claiming him as an English writer. And most of his books first appeared in London. It was Sir Walter Scott who introduced him to the great English publisher Murray; and Murray paid him prices for his work such as few writers of to-day could hope to obtain. He was paid four hundred pounds for *The Sketch Book*,² one thousand guineas for *Bracebridge Hall*,³ fifteen hundred pounds for *Tales of a Traveller*,⁴ three thousand guineas for his *Life of Columbus*⁵ and two thousand pounds for *The Conquest of Granada*.⁶ I need not tell you very much about him; for all of you have read at least the story of *Rip Van Winkle* and other things from his pen. But I doubt whether the choice made by Japanese students of Irving's prose has been the best possible. Everybody has read *The Sketch Book*; but I doubt if many have read *Tales of a Traveller* or *Wolfert's Roost*,⁷ or that wonderful collection of magical tales entitled *Tales of the Alhambra*⁸ which has all the charm of *The Arabian*

¹ Washington Irving (1783-1859).

² *The sketch book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* [7 nos.] 1819-20.

³ *Bracebridge Hall; or, the humorists, by Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* 2 vols. 1822.

⁴ *Tales of a traveller.* By Geoffrey Crayon, Gent. [4 parts] Philadelphia, 1824.

⁵ *A history of the life and voyages of Christopher Columbus.* 3 vols. 1828.

⁶ *A chronicle of the conquest of Granada.* By Fray Antonio Agapida. 2 vols. Philadelphia, 1829.

⁷ *Wolfert's roost and other papers, now first collected . . .* 1855.

⁸ *The Alhambra: a series of tales and sketches of the Moors and Spaniards.* . . . 2 vols. Philadelphia, 1832.

Nights, although based upon real Spanish and Moorish legends. Without going further into any view of Irving, I want to call your attention especially to one story. Perhaps you do not know that *Rip Van Winkle* is not the most wonderful story of this kind that Irving wrote. There is another, much more like the story of "*Urashima*" than *Rip Van Winkle* is; and in spite of all the critics, and of popular judgment, I hold it to be the best of all Irving's short stories. It is founded upon a Portuguese legend and it is called *The Adelantado of the Seven Cities; or the Phantom Island*. I am sure that, if you know not yet, you will agree with me after having read it that it bears a very strong resemblance to the story of "*Urashima*." I do not say anything here about Irving's histories — most of which have become superseded in our own time; the history of *The Conquest of Spain*, for example, by the wonderful work of Dozy and Engelmann; the life of *Mahomet* by the much greater *Life of Mahomet* which we owe to Sir William Muir; and the *Life of Columbus*, superseded by the works of Fiske and Winsor. The main value of Irving for the student of English literature is altogether in his short stories.

Irving has already become a classic which *must* be read; and for many years to come a perusal of his work must be considered a necessary part of literary education. Therefore there is no doubt about the immense importance of the American name in the literature of the English speaking world. Next to Irving in importance, if not equally important, is Poe. Poe is altogether a unique figure in literature and demands special and careful attention.

Early in the century there was a young student at Baltimore studying law. His name was David Poe. He was fond of the theatre. One evening at the theatre he saw a beautiful young actress, Elizabeth Arnold, upon the stage, who had just come from England. The student at once sought and obtained an introduction to her; and the two fell desperately in love with each other. They married. But David Poe was too honourable a man to live at his wife's expense; and nevertheless he could not support her and continue his studies for the law. He re-

solved to abandon the law and to become an actor. He went on the stage, and acted with his wife. They were both very handsome and excellent actors. They travelled about the country from one town to another. And in Richmond, Virginia, their first child was born,—Edgar Allan Poe. What is very strange is that the father and the mother died within a few weeks of each other, not very long after. A kind merchant of Richmond named Allan adopted the orphan, sent him to England to be educated and afterwards sent him to the University of Virginia. Poe proved to be the cleverest student in the University; but he was also the worst behaved and he was at last dismissed. Then his friends tried to get him into the great American Military Academy at West Point, but after Poe had been at West Point for some time, he forced the authorities of the institution to expel him. The discipline at West Point is severe; and Poe never could submit to any sort of discipline. His next misfortune was a quarrel with his adopted father; and from that time all his life proved one succession of misfortunes. He married and lost his first wife; became editor of various papers and magazines, but always quarrelled sooner or later with the proprietors of those periodicals; and at the age of thirty-nine, on the eve of a second marriage, died in consequence of a drunken spree. Poe has his advocates as well as his enemies even at the present day. Some of his biographers consider him to have been unfortunate rather than bad, and claim that he had the best of hearts. This is perhaps extravagant; but it is now generally acknowledged that Poe was not the moral monster that his early biographers tried to prove him. He was simply one of those unhappily sensitive beings unable to exercise that self-control necessary for success in life. There was some reaction of late years against the influence of Poe in literature; but the best proof of the power of that influence is in the fact that the reaction has been followed by a counter-reaction in favour of Poe, and that new editions of his works have been brought out recently, not only in America but in other countries; for Poe has been translated into many languages. While the details of his life are still in dispute, we

cannot occupy much time in discussing them. What is not a dispute any longer is the fact that Poe remains the most original and most powerful influence in American literature, and we have to occupy ourselves with the meaning and quality of his extraordinary work.

I shall not say much about his poetry at present,—although at a later time I may have occasion to call your attention to some of its wonderful beauties. There is very little poetry in the volume of his work. The great bulk of what he has left consists of short stories, short essays and a quantity of light and sometimes cruel, but generally excellent, criticisms. The criticisms have long ago been superseded by better works; the essays are likely to become obsolete,—for they dealt with philosophical subjects that have received entirely new light from latter-day science. But the stories, which resemble no other stories in any other literature, have lost nothing by the lapse of time. They are masterpieces both of style and of imagination; they still give delight to both young and old; and they give Poe a place in literature apart from any other European or American writer.

Nevertheless it is not easy for me to define to you the reason of the popularity of these stories,—not simply in England, but in all countries. Many of the stories written by Hawthorne live because of the moral in them; and many of the world's great stories owe their immortality to the same fact. The stories of Voltaire, for example, are still read by everybody because they teach some philosophical, or human truth. The short stories of Goethe are still intellectual luxuries, because they all contain profound meanings which expand according to the intellectual capacity of the reader. Short stories, such as those of Prévost (*Manon Lescaut*), La Motte-Fouqué (*Undine*), and Mrs. Shelley (*Frankenstein*), are immortal because they are wonderfully didactic. Even our fairy tales—most of them—have deep meanings; and the fairy tales of Andersen are delightful to grown-up people because of their human and moral meanings. In all of Poe's stories there is nothing of this. There is nothing didactic; there is nothing touching in a

human sense; there is nothing moral—indeed, although none of the stories is in the least degree immoral; all of them are unmoral,—display no moral feeling at all. How then account for the extraordinary charm and influence of the stories? A story can only be great by reason of some truth in it, or some relation to truth suggested by it. *The Arabian Nights* offer analogous problems. They charm everybody; but not for the reasons that we usually seek. We must consider the stories of Poe, in one sense, just as we must consider *The Arabian Nights*.

The charm of *The Arabian Nights* is partly at least in the imaginary realization of all human wishes as presented in those wonderful stories. What we cannot have, we like to imagine we have; and therefore any story in which the delightfully impossible is made to appear delightfully possible pleases everybody with a vivid infatuation. It consoles us, after a fashion, to find our longings imagined and satisfied for us even in the dreams of another. But there is another kind of pleasure than this pleasure, which may make a story successful. I mean the pleasure of fear. Children are especially susceptible to this form of pleasure. Hence their love for fairy tales and ghost stories, which give them the sensation of fear in the midst of light, love, and safety. It requires very little art to give this pleasure to a child; because the child's imagination is so fresh and so sensitive that it can make a great many wonderful fancies out of very simple facts. With grown-up persons it is most difficult to excite this feeling; for the world has ceased to be mysterious for them as it is mysterious to the child. But there are experiences of fear, common to the man and to the child, of which a great artist can take advantage. Such are the fear of death and the fear of dreams. Dream-fear is a fear from which the wisest of us never can entirely escape; and its mystery has never been satisfactorily explained by psychologists. The one thing which especially distinguishes the stories of Poe from the stories of any other writer is this element of dream-fear—fear of darkness, and of things moving in darkness—fear such as we do not know in our waking life, but which comes upon us at intervals during sleep and especially such sleep as

sickness or weakness may influence. This is probably one of the oldest forms of fear in the world; but it is also one of the strongest, and its value in literature is likely to be recognized for hundreds of years to come. In our own day the great success of the writer Mæterlinck—whose dramas are being translated into every European language—is probably based upon the pleasure of fear.

All of Poe's stories are not, however, qualified by what I have called dream-fear. Some of them—even some of the cleverest—read as if they might have been written by somebody else. His early work was immediately recognized as the best of the kind ever done in America, and was immediately translated into French. But this work was more ingenious than imaginative;—it is called by critics “analytical.” The analytical story represents Poe's first period. Later on the story becomes less analytical in his hands and more terrible. Still later it comes altogether terrible or grotesque. Finally it becomes a pure nightmare. The nightmare period is the period preceding Poe's death. This extraordinary series of changes in his work, as pointed out by critical experts, suggested to Francis Gerry Fairfield the curious theory which he propounded some twenty years ago in an essay entitled *A Mad Man of Letters*.¹ Fairfield attempted a critical analysis from the medical standpoint. He studied Poe's work pathologically, like a physician studying insanity according to its modes of psychological expression. He considered that Poe was insane during a greater part of his literary career. At the beginning of that career, he was not insane;—then he wrote ingenious analytical stories only such as *The Gold Bug*,² *The Purloined Letter*,³ *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*,⁴ etc., etc. Later, a curious change appears in his methods. At first he wrote in the third person, but now he began to write in the first person. The stories written in the first person are much more gloomy and strange than the others. For a time the tales remain ingenious, even

¹ Printed in *Scribner's Monthly*, Oct. 1875.

² Ptd in *Dollar Newspaper*, 21. 28 June 1843.

³ Ptd in *The Gift*, 1845.

⁴ Ptd in *Graham's Magazine*, April 1841.

in their gloom; and several persons figure in them. At last, however, all resemblance to the real vanishes in these secondary persons; they become clear shadows, mere dreams, but the "I" becomes more intense, more passionate, and more terrible. At last the man is utterly mad;—then he writes only such things as *The Masque of the Red Death*,¹ *Shadow*,² *Silence*,³—or *The Fall of the House of Usher*,⁴—which is nightmare absolute,—perfect horror.

There is some truth, undoubtedly, in the theory of Fairfield; but a careful chronological study of the history of the tales does not bear out the whole of this theory. Nevertheless it is quite likely that in the latter part of his career Poe's mind was gradually giving way; and it is certain that his most terrible pieces represent a period of nervous prostration.

We may now attempt to classify the best of the stories in a rough way. First we may consider as forming a class by themselves the pieces entitled:—

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| <p>I. <i>The Murders in the Rue Morgue</i>
 <i>The Mystery of Marie Rogét</i>⁵
 <i>The Purloined Letter</i>
 <i>The Gold Bug</i>
 <i>A Descent into the Maelstrom</i>⁶
 <i>MS. Found in a Bottle</i>⁷</p> | } | <p>Mostly Ingenious
 or
 Analytical</p> |
|--|---|---|

The above group are for the most part healthy,—only in one, the last mentioned, though we find a suggestion of the morbid horror which was to unfold itself at a later day. All show a very uncommon quality of intellectual power. As for analytical ingenuity, *The Gold Bug* is certainly the best, including as it does an elaborate invention and interpretation of cipher. The most terrible is not the last, but the first in the above list; yet the terror is not in this case morbid; it is a terror

¹ Ptd in *Graham's Magazine*, May 1842.

² *Shadow: A Parable* (originally *Shadow. A Fable.*) Ptd in *The Southern Literary Messenger*, Sept. 1835.

³ *Silence—a Fable* (originally *Siope—A Fable.*) Ptd in *The Baltimore Book*, 1838.

⁴ Ptd in *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*, Sept. 1839.

⁵ *A Sequel to the Murders in the Rue Morgue.* Ptd in *Snowden's Ladies' Companion*, Nov. and Dec. 1842, and Feb. 1843.

⁶ Ptd in *Graham's Magazine*, May 1841.

⁷ Ptd in *The Baltimore Saturday Visiter*, 19 Oct. 1833.

of suggestion only, brought about by perfectly natural circumstances. I mean the fact that the detective discovered the murdered persons to have been murdered apparently by a being in human form, because of the prints of the strangling fingers, and yet a being stronger and more active and longer-handed than any man possibly could be. This inspires a sense of supernatural fear in the cleverest possible way—until we reach the fact that the murderer was a great ape. Still there is not very much in these stories to suggest an extraordinary and morbid personality. Clever as the whole group is, we feel that it might be the work of a very clever but not an extremely original mind.

A second group, which might be arranged thus, would interest us in a somewhat different manner; we should begin, while reading it, to suspect something very extraordinary in the personality of the author—something morbid also:—

II. *Thou Art the Man*!¹

*The Oval Portrait*²

*The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar*³

*The Pit and the Pendulum*⁴

*The Imp of the Perverse*⁵

*William Wilson*⁶

All of the above contain, besides their strangeness, some suggestion of supernatural horror. The second is somewhat beautiful, but the beauty is weird. It is the story of a painter painting the portrait of his beloved, but the soul and life of the woman gradually mixes up with the paint while he works, and when he finishes the portrait she is dead. Her life passed from her body into the picture, with the result that whoever looks at the picture feels at once terrified and charmed by it without being able to imagine why. In this story we get the first gleam of that new sense of mystery which obtains full development

¹ Ptd in *Godey's Lady's Book*, Nov. 1844.

² Originally *Life in Death*. Ptd in *Graham's Magazine*, April 1842.

³ Originally *Facts of M. Valdemar's Case*. Ptd in *The American Whig Review*, Dec. 1845.

⁴ Ptd in *The Gift*, 1843

⁵ Ptd in *Graham's Magazine*, July 1845.

⁶ Ptd in *The Gift*, 1840 [published before 17 Sept. 1839].

in the third group presently to be considered. *The Imp of the Perverse* is altogether morbid, and represents a phenomenon familiar to those physicians who care for the insane. It is the most unhealthy of the six, but not the most horrible. That is rather *The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar*—the story of a man mesmerically kept alive while his body is not only dead, but rotting: this hideous fancy of life in death returns in several other stories of Poe. *The Pit and the Pendulum*, a story of the prisons of the inquisition, is wonderfully ingenious, and might be classed with the first group of stories, were it not for the very horrible decorations of the *mise-en-scène*. On this account it cannot be placed with the healthier group of analytical tales. The last story was perhaps an original product of Poe's mind; but the idea existed long before Poe—the idea of a double personality, of a man continually tormented by an enemy looking exactly like himself. The enemy is at last killed in a fit of passion; then the murderer discovers that he has murdered himself. A much finer example of this kind of tale in modern literature is a short story by Théophile Gautier, who borrowed the fancy from Scandinavian literature. In the Northern story the warrior is represented as fighting with himself, and feeling the pain of every blow which he gives to his enemy. There is a beautiful moral in the Northern story; for it symbolizes the battle between right and wrong, which every man must wage with himself,—the struggle of the good principle against the evil. The French author fully recognized this. Poe does not. We do not get from him any deeper suggestion than that of a gloomy mystery and fate. Perhaps we might say that the story of *William Wilson* represents to some extent the history of Poe himself, self-destroyed by impulses over which he had no control. Anyhow this story, the last of the second group, fitly introduces us to the terrible third group, all of which are written in the first person,—except one.

III. *The Masque of the Red Death* *The Assination*¹

¹ Originally *The Visionary*. Ptd in *Godey's Lady's Book*, Jan. 1834.

*The Black Cat*¹
*The Cask of Amontillado*²
*The Tell-Tale Heart*³
*Berenice*⁴
*Ligeia*⁵
*Eleonora*⁶
*Morella*⁷
Shadow
Silence
The Fall of the House of Usher

These twelve stories represent the very highest expression of Poe's genius, but they also represent a very morbid condition of mind. We must not make the mistake, however, of belittling them on that account. Probably had Poe's mind been quite healthy and happy, such stories could not have come out of it; but in that case we should have lost some of the most splendid work in all modern literature,—work which has suggested new artistic effects and possibilities to hundreds of writers,—work also which taught us new values of words and new capacities of the English language.

The first two tales of this group give us suggestions of an imaginative quality quite different from anything to be found in the preceding lists. This quality expresses itself in gorgeous but tenebrous descriptions of luxury and splendour. Both occurrences narrated take place in palaces; and the description of these palaces is unlike anything else in any literature. As a decorative artist Poe was certainly great; but there is something infernal in his descriptions,—something suggesting the superhuman in his demonism. One becomes afraid while wandering through these palaces, these vast rooms, lighted by crimson glass; and the fear is the fear of strangeness, or rather the fear of something occult producing the strangeness. In *The Masque of the Red Death* the occult almost shows itself,

¹ Ptd in *United States Saturday Post*, 19 Aug. 1843.

² Ptd in *Godey's Lady's Book*, Nov. 1846.

³ Ptd in *The Pioneer*, Jan. 1843.

⁴ Ptd in *The Southern Literary Messenger*, March 1835.

⁵ Ptd in *American Museum*, Sept. 1838.

⁶ Ptd in *The Gift*, 1842. [Out in Sept. 1841].

⁷ Ptd in *The Southern Literary Messenger*, April 1835.

almost becomes tangible; and the horror is brought to a climax as in nightmare when the ghost touches us. In *The Assignment* the occult does not appear,—death takes its place. These wondrous chapters both reflect the impressions which old Italian and Venetian art and history produced upon Poe's brain. Where others would have seen all things luminous, he saw everything shadowy and terrible. In this his art very much resembles that of the great French artist Doré.

The next two stories are ugly—very ugly, because they picture for us two forms of vice,—brutal anger and studied revenge. Nothing more atrociously ugly than the story of *The Black Cat* was ever written. It reaches the utmost limit within which art can exist without becoming something lower than art; it is saved from vulgarity only by the power of the horrible in it. *The Cask of Amontillado* is horrible in quite another way; and it is quite natural,—if we imagine ourselves in the time of Renaissance. But *The Tell-Tale Heart* might have been written in a lunatic asylum,—indeed it pretends to be the story of a lunatic,—the confession of a madman and a murderer. The end of the story gives you exactly the feeling of nightmare;—you feel that, as a dream or distortion of fancy produced by a morbid condition, it is absolutely true. The fact that the murderer probably hears only the beating of his own heart,—not the beating of the heart of the murdered man,—does not diminish the terror of the thing in the least.

The sub group of four stories, each of which bears a woman's name, is quite unique. All are nightmares,—although in the dream some gleams of mystical love and beauty are discernible. Three of them deal with fancies more familiar in Japan than in America or Europe; but Poe did not get these fancies from Oriental sources. In *Ligeia* a second wife is possessed and destroyed by the spirit of the first wife, but with this curious additional operation,—that the ghost of the first wife, entering into the body of the second wife, completely changes and transforms that body, so that she is incarnated in her original form. The dominant fancy is that the will power of one soul or ghost may be much greater than that of another.

In *Eleonora* it is suggested that the dead wife is reborn into the body of a young girl so as to become re-united with her husband. In *Morella* it is the mother's ghost which enters into the body of her daughter. The vagueness and mystery of this story lend to it what we call mystical horror,—a horror somewhat different from that of other tales. In *Berenice* there is nothing ghostly; but there is a brutal kind of horror, that gives the precise effect of an abominable dream.

Next we have a sub-group of two little stories—to my mind the gems of the collection, and one of them the most perfect thing of its kind in any literature, ancient or modern. I mean the so-called fragment *Silence*. This is written in the style of an Arabian story, and it is left purposely unfinished. It only pretends to be a page from a lost manuscript giving us one astounding glimpse of the world of demons and of demon-wastes. The story is supposed to be told by a demon to a man. There is nothing else in English at all resembling this wonderful thing except that weird prose fragment by Coleridge entitled *The Wanderings of Cain*. Marvellous as Coleridge's fragment certainly is, it cannot be compared for artistic exquisiteness with Poe's fragment. No prose is so musical, so poetical, so astonishing as the prose of *Silence* which almost obliges you to sing while you read it, and which leaves an ineffaceable impression upon the mind. Many persons have learned it by heart, and I do not know anything better for a student of style to do than to learn by heart the prose of these two extraordinary compositions. Here Poe has surpassed even the French—even Baudelaire,—who dreamed of prose more perfect than poetry, and who wrote a book of prose-poems in imitation, perhaps, of the style of Poe. But he never attained the same effect in his prose. His best composition of this kind was the *Bienfaits de la Lune*, which is very weird and very beautiful, but in the melody, the sonority, the melancholy beauty of Poe's *Silence* there is something altogether foreign to the French language,—and Baudelaire could not repeat the effect of Poe. *Shadow* is very nearly, if not quite, as marvellous a thing. And it contains the singular fancy of a composite ghost, — millions of

dead combining to form one shadow and to utter one voice.

The last tale of the twelve, as I have said before, is an absolute nightmare,—the most terrible and the most perfect of all the nightmare stories in the group. Every kind of horror of the supernatural is combined in the story,—first, the vague fear that comes before the true nightmare; then the paralysis of will, the numbing of the limbs, the inability to move, then the feeling of a step coming from far-away, then the entrance of the thing feared; then the seizure of the dreamer. For a very young person such stories as these are not good reading: they affect the imagination too powerfully. Yet, perhaps for that very reason it is young people especially who delight in reading them, and who are influenced all through the rest of their lives by the style of them. The style is indeed their great value; there is not another such style, and the importance of some knowledge of it to the student of literature can scarcely be exaggerated.

There is yet a fourth group of stories, somewhat numerous, which we may call the grotesques. As I said in a lecture on Ruskin, it is necessary to remember that all grotesque art is made by a clever mixture of the playful and the terrible; and this is quite as true of literary art as it is of sculpture. The best of Poe's grotesques are the following:—

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|------------|---|--|
| IV. | { | <i>Bon-Bon</i> ¹ |
| Grotesques | | <i>Duc De L'Omelette</i> ² |
| | | <i>King Pest</i> ³ |
| | | <i>Hop-Frog</i> ⁴ |
| | | <i>Four Beasts in One</i> ⁵ |
| | | <i>A Tale of Jerusalem</i> ⁶ |
| | | <i>The Uparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall</i> ⁷ |

¹ Originally *The Bargain Lost*. Ptd in *Saturday Courier*, 1 Dec. 1832.

² Ptd in *Saturday Courier*, 3 Mar. 1832.

³ *King Pest: A Tale Containing an Allegory*. Ptd in *The Southern Literary Messenger*, Sept. 1835

⁴ Originally *Hop-Frog, or The Eight Chained Ourang-Outangs*. Ptd in *The Flag of our Union*, 17 Mar. 1849.

⁵ *Four Beasts in One: The Homo-Camelopard*. (Originally *Epimanes*.) Ptd in *The Southern Literary Messenger*, Mar. 1836.

⁶ Ptd in *Saturday Courier*, 9 June 1832.

⁷ Ptd in *The Southern Literary Messenger*, June 1835.

These are but a few out of many; but it may be said that Poe touched the high art of the grotesque only in a few instances. A curious fact is that whenever he tried to be simply funny he never could become really funny; the purely humorous sense was lacking to him. Therefore when he attempted real humour he fell somewhat below the grotesque, without succeeding in being truly amusing. A number of his efforts in a lighter vein are scarcely worth reading. But the above group is very interesting in itself, besides displaying an extraordinary amount of versatility. The first-named story *Bon-Bon* is of a metaphysician who, being drunk, attempts to sell his soul to the devil, who, being, as the proverb has it, a gentleman, refuses to take advantage of the situation. It is not the kind of story that makes one laugh outright, but it keeps the reader smiling and gives him a pleasant sense of excitement. The next story also takes us into Hell, or at least the ante-chamber of Hell, where a clever French nobleman saves himself by challenging the Devil to a game of cards. There is a lurid splendour in the descriptions of this scene admirably in keeping with the whole tone of the episode, half comical and more than half awful. One would imagine that Poe had been inspired by studies of such characters of the old French nobility as Taine describes in the chapters of his *Ancien Régime*. *King Pest* might, in the same way, have been partly suggested by reading Defoe's history of the plague in London. The ghosts here and the governor are of rather a material kind; but the pictures have a strange vividness like those scenes of drinking and feasting given us by Hogarth. *Hop-Frog* is almost more than grotesque; for the terrible here largely predominates; furthermore it is founded upon an actual incident in history. There was a French king who very nearly lost his life in attempting a practical joke of the kind described. *Four Beasts in One* takes us back to the time of the Roman amphitheatre. *A Tale of Jerusalem* assumes to be an incident in the siege of that city by Titus; there is a great deal of power in this sketch. The last story takes us to the moon; I have often wondered whether the great French story-teller Jules Verne did not get some in-

spiration from it for his much more wonderful story upon the same subject. Of course the art of Jules Verne is not grotesque; it is slightly humorous and delightfully happy even in its most serious passages. But the few scientific suggestions used by Poe might very well have been developed afterwards by the Frenchman who knew very much more about real science than Poe did.

Remember that I have called your attention only to what I believe to be the best of Poe's work. Many of his stories I have not mentioned at all. He has suffered very much from the indiscretion of his editors. Anything and everything that he ever wrote for a newspaper as well as for a magazine has been collected since his death, and very foolishly published together with his really matchless work. As for his metaphysical and miscellaneous essays and fragments, I cannot recommend you to give any time to them. His stories will probably prove immortal; the rest, if we except half a dozen poems, is now scarcely read.

In conclusion I would like to answer a question that must be shaping itself in the minds of some of you,—the question, "What is the use of stories of the impossible and the terrible that read like narratives of nightmare?" Apart from their value of style, stories capable of making powerful appeal to the emotion of fear have in themselves about the same value to literature as black has in value to painting. The quality of the terrible, like every other true quality, represents power, and all kinds of power have their worth for the creative artist, exactly as all kinds of colour have their value to the painter. The mere subject of the stories has nothing to do with the matter. By a clever use of the knowledge gained from the expression of the terrible in a ghost story, a great writer may find means to express even a religious truth more forcibly and more beautifully than he could have done before. The student of literature should never forget that a little of the element of fear enters into every great and noble emotion, and especially into the higher forms of æsthetic feeling. The sublime is more than the beautiful, because it is the beautiful capable of inspir-

ing awe as well as admiration; and even in the most sensuous forms of high art,—even in the perfection of a Greek statue,—there is always a something more than admiration which mingles with the feeling which it awakes in us,—a something very close to the element of fear.

If Poe suffered from his editors, still more did Hawthorne,¹ who ranks immediately after him among American story-tellers. A great deal of the material published in the definitive edition of Hawthorne's works is little more than rubbish. Perhaps we may say that one half ought not to have been published at all. The proportion of bad work to good is much greater in the case of Hawthorne than in the case of Poe. We need not refer at all to the volumes of his notes, his letters, his half finished studies,—nor even to those containing the multitude of little stories written to order for children or for provincial newspapers. But by his very best work, his reputation has become European as well as American.

No two characters ever were more dissimilar than those of Poe and Hawthorne. What was strikingly deficient in Poe was the moral sense; and Hawthorne had too much of the moral sense—so much of it that it glooms all his work more or less, and gives sombre touches to his happiest pages. Though not exactly a Puritan, he certainly inherited from his Puritan ancestry that austere sense of moral responsibility which toned his life as well as his work. The same inheritance might also account for the peculiar simplicity and severity of his method, which disdained all ornament. He could not play with words like Poe—could not make them flash and change colour and become luminous at will; neither could he put into his sentences that music which is scarcely ever absent from the serious style of Poe. A great French critic said that there are some words like phosphorus; they shine when you rub them. Poe knew this; Hawthorne did not. The art of the latter was certainly an art of imagination; but while Poe's imagination was entirely his own—unique and inimitable—Hawthorne's is recognizably

¹ (1804-1864).

the imagination of Puritan New England. The New England feeling haunted him even in Italy, among the sunniest scenes of Europe, even in the presence of the most exquisite works of art. His life too was always, even during poverty, regulated with methodical sameness. If he had any sense of romantic freedom, of its value to the creative artist, he certainly never allowed it to become visible either in his books or in his conduct.

He was born in 1804, the son of a shipmaster in the little town of Salem, Massachusetts, the very centre of the old Puritan feeling. Salem, you may remember, was a little town where witches were executed in the early days of the American colony; and even in Hawthorne's boyhood something of the old fanatical gloom must have lingered about the place. Probably Salem and its associations influenced his whole life; but he had advantages beyond those of his ancestors in regard to education. He graduated with Longfellow at the University, and felt such an inclination for literature that he determined to attempt the dangerous experiment of writing for a living. He was long unsuccessful; and the stories that he wrote during his early struggles were not his best; they are called the *Twice-Told Tales*.¹ Subsequently he obtained a government position in the Custom House, which helped him considerably; but he could not keep it owing to a sudden change in politics. Nevertheless his patient industry at last obtained its reward: he began to attract attention as a writer. In the latter part of his career he was appointed to an American Consulate at Liverpool—a position then worth 25,000 dollars a year. This signified for him a little fortune, and enabled him to devote the rest of his life to literary work without anxiety as to his means of existence. The most noteworthy of his books were not written during his youth.

Briefly, we can class all his productions under two heads—romances and short stories. Of the romances three deserve particular attention. These are *The Marble Faun*.² *The Bithe-*

¹ 2 vols. Boston, 1837. London, 1851. Bielefeld, 1852. 2 vols. Boston, 1842, 1851, 1864, etc.

² *The Marble Faun; or, The Romance of Monte Beni*. 2 vols. Boston, 1860.

dale Romance,¹ and *The Scarlet Letter*.² A fourth, *The House of the Seven Gables*,³ is a very remarkable book; but we need not say much about it because its merits will appeal chiefly to those who know the New England life, and because, as a whole, it does not come up to the fine merits of the other romances. A fifth, *Septimius Felton*,⁴ should not have been published—because the author had neither finished nor corrected the manuscript at the time of his death. So we shall speak only of the three romances; and I shall begin by observing that there is only one of them which I could recommend you to read—that is *The Marble Faun*.

In Rome Hawthorne saw a bust representing a young faun. The other day when we were reading *Lucretius*, there was occasion to explain the meaning of “faun.” Many representations of fauns have been preserved to us from Greek and Roman times; and some of them are very beautiful. You will find descriptions of them in Winckelmann. The faun was commonly represented as a slender young man, naked, playing on a flute. The head of a faun differed from the head usually given by sculptors to a god: the features were less regular and more human; there were two little horns on the forehead sometimes; sometimes, again, the ears were pointed like those of an animal. Hawthorne, seeing one such representation of a faun, was very much interested by the peculiar expression of the beautiful, playful, sensuous face. He said to himself that if there were a human being with such a face, that human being would have a character unfitting him to live in modern society. Such a being, he thought, would be very kind, very lovable, very playful, very intelligent; but also very passionate, very impulsive, and, under the influence of anger or any other emotion of a violent kind, would be uncontrollable and dangerous. Then it occurred to him to write a romance expressing these fancies. In the romance the faun becomes a young man of modern society—an Italian nobleman, whom chance throws into the com-

¹ *The Brithedale Romance*. . . . Boston, 1852.

² *The Scarlet Letter a Romance*. . . . Boston, 1850.

³ *The House of the Seven Gables, a Romance*. . . . Boston, 1851.

⁴ *Septimius, a Romance*. . . . London, 1872. *Septimius Felton*. . . . Boston, 1872.

pany of some American ladies paying a visit to Rome. Of course it is not until the very end of the story that we find out the identity of the faun and the count; but the suggestion runs through the entire tale. The faun is a most charming person; but he commits a murder for love's sake without any scruple at all, and the end of the romance is very sad indeed. We might say that Hawthorne intended in this story to suggest the history of the emotional nature of the Latin races in contradiction to the cold and self-suppressed character of the races of the north. But all through there is also that dark moral tone so peculiar to Hawthorne—the awful sense of responsibility and conscience, characteristic of the Puritan mind, insufficiently lightened by the brightest atmosphere of the 19th century feeling.

*The Blithedale Romance*¹ I cannot recommend you to read at this time; but it introduces us to the most interesting subject of the American ideal communities. After having talked a little about them with you, you will be able to decide for yourselves whether *The Blithedale Romance* could be useful reading for you.

A little before the middle of this century an extraordinary wave of intellectual feeling passed over America. It expressed itself in a great variety of ways, but in no way more strikingly than in the establishment of little societies the object of which was ideal life in the midst of a purely material civilization. American existence had long been a tolerably dismal affair. Men had no time to think, to study, to dream, to amuse themselves. Everybody was working at high pressure—much harder than men were obliged to work in Europe. Under all such conditions, however, there are always a certain number of men of culture and fine feeling, desirous of rebelling against such an order of things. Such men seek each other, form societies to discuss social and moral problems, attempt, or dream about attempting, to live in a better way. In the time I speak of, minds had been deeply stirred by the work of Fourier, and of other extraordinary thinkers, who believed it possible to reno-

¹ Boston, 1852, 1894.

vate society by changing its form. Fourier had many disciples in other countries than France, who preached his doctrines. His dreams were extravagant, impossible, in some respects even absurd. But they had a great attraction for unhappy minds before the time of the philosophy of evolution. We now know perfectly well that an ideal community is impossible; but we know this because of our new acquaintance with the laws of growth and development. Nobody knew it in the beginning of the second quarter of the century. Even such a mind as that of Emerson would have considered the experiment worth trying—and, from one point of view, worth trying it was. Parts of Fourier's theories were charming; parts were scandalous. His theory of communism embraced the communism of women. In short he preached free love. There was to be no more family; but all humanity should form one great family, subdivided into groups corresponding to cities and its districts. The head of everything was to be Constantinople, and the head of the human race was to be called the Omniarch. It is not necessary to go into the subject of his wilder theories, according to which the seas would eventually become something like lemonade for the benefit of the human race. Fancies like these could not equally appeal to all classes of minds, though they set all classes of minds in a ferment. The ferment in America manifested itself very differently. Some people tried, and succeeded in founding new religions. Others established what were called free love communities—in which no man had the right to call any woman his wife; nor any woman to call any man her husband; and in which to be jealous was the capital sin. Most of these extraordinary institutions, in which everything was to be held in common, broke up in a very short time—and in most cases because of this awful sin of jealousy! All this was funny enough. But one community actually succeeded—the famous Oneida community of New York. The Oneida people succeeded because they were religious fanatics, and allowed themselves to be ruled by a discipline of iron. This was a perfect case of communism; only remember that it was a religious communism, in which even the conception and birth of children was

strictly regulated by law. A combination of the churches at last broke up the regime of sect, by force of money and legal power—only to the extent of compelling the members to marry, and to abandon their free love doctrines.

Other communities simply tried economical experiments—tried to get along without money, substituted exchange of commodities for the ordinary operations of sale and purchase. In these communities the individual was not allowed to own anything; everything was owned by the society only; everybody worked for everybody also, and the good of one depended upon the good of all. The most remarkable of these communities was established in Kansas; but none succeeded. As a matter of fact only a religious order ever succeeded in living after this plan. It would be the partial application of the Jesuit system to industrial existence, and it could not succeed because it annihilates the great source of all progress, which is competition.

There was yet one other, and more sensible, kind of communism attempted. This was the work of men of culture; and its experiments were made in New England, at a beautiful place called Brook Farm. The object was altogether the moral and intellectual pursuit of happiness. About eighty or ninety cultivated men and women attempted at Brook Farm to form a perfect human society. The community expected to exist through the produce of the united labour of all the members composing it. Those who knew anything about agriculture tilled the soil, or attended to the fruit or vegetable gardens; those who were not strong enough for bodily labour turned teachers, and educated the children of the neighbourhood; those who had trades worked at them for the benefit of the rest. Besides all this, there were regular courses of intellectual study pursued by the community. Brook Farm was not only a farm and an educational centre; it was also a kind of philosophical academy. Lectures were regularly given upon all branches of strange philosophy; and these intellectual gatherings were further made pleasant by music and dancing. Really Brook Farm was a very wonderful place, and contained a very considerable number of remarkable men and women. Most of the

persons who afterwards became distinguished in New England literature — I might even say in American literature — were either members or close friends of the community. Hawthorne was a member, Emerson a faithful friend. To look at a list of the names of the New England school is almost to look at a list of the distinguished members of Brook Farm. But, of course Brook Farm did not succeed. It failed after three or four years. It did not fail simply because some of the members worked themselves to death, nor because all lost their money, nor because there was anything wrong to speak of in the objects and hopes of the society. It failed for reasons which probably every one of you students know, but very few people knew in the first half of this century. And that is simply this: — human society as it now exists is as good as it is possible for human society to be under the circumstances, and you cannot improve it. Moral and intellectual life are as rich as human experience has been able to make them, and you cannot improve human experience. All society, all morality, all cultivation is a natural growth; and nothing attempted in the way of living at variance with, and independently of, such growth, can be natural or successful. Evolutional philosophy proves this very plain. We can only have a perfect society when all men will have become perfect.

Hawthorne used his experience at Brook Farm as a source of literary inspiration. In his *Blithedale Romance*, he gives us a poetical picture of the existence which he and the other enthusiasts went through. It is very much poeticized of course; but it is founded upon real fact and observation. It offended Emerson and other friends of the society; but the reason is simply that Hawthorne could never look at any fact of life in a bright and optimistic way. His touch saddened everything; and *The Blithedale Romance* is a melancholy book. But the particular reason why I do not strongly recommend you to read it is that a proper understanding of American life in the forties and especially in New England, is necessary to a thorough comprehension of it.

About *The Scarlet Letter* I shall say very little. It is the

most gloomy of the writer's books,—although, for some strange reason, most popular. It is a story of New England life in the time of the Puritans, when a woman convicted of an adultery was condemned to wear for the rest of her life a dress on the front of which was sewn a great red letter "A." The novel is the narrative of the moral sufferings of a deserving woman subjected to this cruel punishment.

Leaving Hawthorne's novels aside, I will now speak only of his short stories. There are many volumes of these, and they are of the most unequal merit. The *Wonder-Book*¹ (a title taken from Andersen) are chiefly stories of Greek mythology rewritten for children. Only one book of this kind has ever been written which is really good,—and that is the exquisite *Heroes* of Charles Kingsley. The *Twice-Told Tales* are partly historical, and mostly dull. It is not so with the *Mosses from an Old Manse*² (2 vols.). In these there are many strange and pleasing things, and one composition which to my mind, and in the judgment, I am glad to say, of the great French critic Gautier, is the most excellent that Hawthorne ever wrote. You ought to read this little story which is called *Rappacini's Daughter*, because it is a very great bit of art. Like all of Hawthorne's shorter stories, it is moral; but here the moral is forgotten almost in the startling character of the fancy. A rich Italian physician, entirely devoted to botany, conceives the idea of nourishing his daughter on poisonous food. She becomes so poisonous that as she walks about in the sun, butterflies and gnats that come near her drop dead. She becomes so poisonous that her touch will burn the skin of a man like red-hot iron. Nevertheless, she is so beautiful that anybody who sees her immediately falls in love with her. The difficulty is to get a husband for her—because any ordinary man could not kiss her without dying immediately. Her father then decides to find the beautiful young man, and to make this young man sufficiently poisonous to become the husband of the girl. As chance would have it, a young student of medicine, living

¹ *A Wonder-Book for Girls and Boys*. . . . Boston, 1852, etc. London, 1852, etc.

² 2 vols. New York, 1846.

in the next house, sees the daughter, falls in love with her and is at once selected by her father for the experiment. For many months he is fed upon strange food until his whole body becomes saturated with poison—but he is quite unconscious of the fact. Then the old man says, “Now you shall marry my daughter. You and she are the most powerful, the most terrible of all human creatures. By your power you can possess the world.” But two young people are terrified at learning what has been done at them. They try, because they are good-hearted creatures, to destroy the effect of the poison by taking antidotes. But the result is fatal to the young girl;—only the man survives. I think you can see for yourselves the strange and powerful moral of this story. Its teaching, of course, is that by the administration of moral poison to young minds the most terrible consequences may result, and that attempt to remedy the mischief in adult life is more likely to cause death than to effect a cure. At all events, if you read this story, you have read the very best pages of Hawthorne.

If Hawthorne is remarkable for his gloom, Dr. Holmes¹ must be regarded as his antithesis. No more cheerful, light, sparkling mind ever appeared in America; and no American writer is more popular in England. Something of Holmes every student of literature ought to know; but there is a great deal of his work which is too local, too essentially American to be enjoyed by you. I should suggest only a selection from his works, of which I shall try to give you a brief sketch.

Holmes was born in 1809—so that he is one of the oldest of the great American writers under consideration. He was sent to France to study medicine, distinguished himself as a student, and afterwards became Professor of Anatomy and Physiology at Harvard University. He kept this position until 1883, when he abandoned it for literature, and the private practice of medicine. His professional studies are reflected in nearly all his work, but only in the very best way. The higher study of medicine develops, as perhaps no other scientific study does, the habits of observation and of thinking in relations;—

¹ Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809-1894).

perhaps it is for this reason that the literary work of doctors is nearly always marked by very solid qualities. In the case of Dr. Holmes, we have a medical writer who uses the best results of his studies without troubling the reader by scientific details. One might say that medical knowledge has a tendency to blunt emotional feelings and to chill impulses of sympathy. But Dr. Holmes' work affords us charming proof of the contrary. Warm sympathy and fine emotion are always there; but they are tempered by perception and comprehension such as can only be obtained through scientific study. A beautiful voice, he has shown us, does not touch the heart less because he happened to understand the mechanism of the vocal chords; and the pathos of grief need not be diminished because the observer has familiarized himself with its physiological accompaniments.

The work of Dr. Holmes is not very large in quantity; but it is very light and fine. The books which are most popular in England and in America,—the books which have most extended his reputation, are not the books which I would recommend to read by preference. They are intensely American; and without a thorough knowledge of American life, you would miss a great deal of their charm. But we must talk first about these. They form three volumes, respectively called *The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table*,¹ *The Professor at the Breakfast-Table*,² and *The Poet at the Breakfast-Table*.³ The first named is the most famous. Dr. Holmes took for the scene of his narrative an ordinary private boarding-house in Boston; and his chief figure, the Autocrat, is one of the boarders, who exercises a sort of autocratic intellectual dominion over his fellow-boarders, by reason of superior culture and knowledge. It is, however, a very gentle and kindly dominion. The book consists chiefly of reports of the conversations held every morning at the breakfast table; but there is a faint thread of romance which ties all these conversations together. Properly speaking, it is a book

¹ Boston, 1858. London, 1859. Edinburgh, 1883.

² *The Professor at the Breakfast-Table; with the Story of Iris*. . . . Boston, 1860 [1859]. London, 1860.

³ Boston, 1872.

without chapters — which is very extraordinary. Altogether the choice of scene was not a bad one. It is in a private boarding-house, such as is described, that persons of the most diverse characters may come together, and exchange the most diverse opinions upon all manner of subjects. And the book is a collection of such opinions, commonplace, brilliant, original or fantastic, all being eventually collected and explained by the Autocrat whose own opinion is invariably supposed to represent the advanced culture of the day. There are opinions about science, art, religion, social morality, love, music, beauty, — almost everything, except politics or subjects of that sort; and one point of the writer's art is to be noticed in this,—that the characters are not described: they describe themselves by their conversation. The Autocrat himself is never described; but we know perfectly well what kind of man he is: we can see him. It is Dr. Holmes. This book proved immediately successful. It was immensely successful because the subjects discussed were subjects common to all human experience for the most part,—nothing but the local colour and form being American. It became nearly as popular in England as in America shortly after its appearance; and the Queen at a later day asked for *The Autocrat* of Dr. Holmes—an honour accorded to very few foreign writers. The success of the volume induced the Doctor to write two more books in the same style,—*The Professor* and *The Poet* appearing in turn at the same breakfast table,—to discuss questions of science, philosophy and literature in the lightest and brightest way possible. It would be difficult to say that any one of these three volumes is much better than either of the others. All are good; and all deal with the largest subjects in the simplest and the strongest way. All are without chapters.

A striking peculiarity of this work is its tone. It is thoroughly optimistic—the most cheerful possible kind of writing, conceived in the most liberal spirit. There was no religious nonsense about Dr. Holmes;—he hated the cant and hypocrisy of the New England spirit, made himself its open enemy from the beginning (especially in regard to education); and religious

people were at first offended somewhat by his manner of talking. In spite of the optimism and cheerfulness of the books, they discerned another element in them not at all to their liking,—a very delicate tone of mockery. But it was not only a particular class of fantastic folks who were provoked by these books;—almost everybody who read them was a little provoked by them. Now it was just the provoking quality in Dr. Holmes' writing that assured his success. Everybody who reads him even to-day will find some of his own faults or weaknesses or prejudices or hobbies, beautifully dissected and gently ridiculed. Not only the man who has too much religion and therefore too much fear of science, but also the young man who wishes to be thought old, and the old man who wishes to be thought young, and the old maid angry at the world because she never married and the mischievous youth who laughs at the old maid, and the student who has just learned enough to make him think that he knows everything in the whole world, and the professor who expresses opinion about subjects of which he knows nothing. Almost every type of modern character is thus drawn,—drawn with the least little bit of caricature drawing. But Dr. Holmes never went far enough, or spoke harshly enough, to make people seriously angry. Everybody quickly forgave him and began to recognize that he was not mocking people merely for amusement, but as medicine;—that he was a physician of souls as well as of bodies. The books are full of what we might call moral tonic;—they make stronger and healthier the mind of everybody that reads it. If you can find pleasure in the first few pages of *The Autocrat*, I should advise you then to read the whole book—and remember that it is one of those books which you can open anywhere and in any time and learn something from. But if you do not feel interested after the first few pages, you had better put the book aside for the present and try again to read it in four or five years of time. Just now I should rather suppose that the extraordinary novel of *Elsie Venner*¹ would attract you.

Elsie Venner is not only the most extraordinary book that

¹ *Elsie Venner: A Romance of Destiny*. . . . 2 vols Boston, 1861.

Dr. Holmes wrote; it is also one of the most extraordinary novels of the 19th century. Nevertheless it did not become very popular. Perhaps it was too fine to win popularity, and perhaps, for an English public, a little too American. It was based, the Doctor assured us, upon a scientific fact;—we may at all events believe that only a scientific fact could have suggested it to a physician. The story circles about a New England school; and its principal characters (except Elsie) are the schoolmaster, a university student obliged to teach in the country for a living, and a young schoolmistress with whom he falls in love. The young girls who attend the school are almost grown women; and one of them, Elsie, complicates the situation by falling in love with the schoolmaster. She is the most attractive of all the pupils, — a dark, Spanish-looking beauty; but there is something sinister about her. Her fate forms the tragedy of the book and her history is a very strange one. Her mother, while pregnant with her, was bitten by a rattlesnake, and died of the poison, after having put her baby safely into the world. Elsie grows up very beautiful, but very queer; she has two souls. She has inherited, with the poison of which her mother died, the soul of a serpent and the grace of a serpent and the fascination of a serpent. She is able, by her gaze alone, to overcome the will of almost anybody at whom she looks,—to charm them, just as a serpent charms a bird. She has also a strange liking for poisonous plants. In the hottest period of the summer, she goes away into the wildest parts of the mountain to play with serpents. She had also a curious fancy for serpent-jewelry. But she has also a human soul and a human character, very loving and very sweet. Her life is tragical, because it is one endless fight between the two natures within her. When the woman nature is the strongest, Elsie is everything that man could wish for or admire. When the serpent character gets the upper hand, she is simply terrible,—and even her father is afraid of her. But the life of the rattlesnake can only last for about 18 years; while a life of human being may last five times longer. In her 18th year Elsie falls terribly sick;—and it is the year in which the serpent must die.

Unhappily the shock to the constitution is too great. With the death of the serpent soul, the human soul also passes away; and the tragedy is over. You can see that there is suggested by the story a very powerful moral problem. It is not only in the romance of *Elsie Venner* that beings exist who have inherited double natures, and suffer from the terrible conflict between the impulses of good and evil.

But every thing in the story is quite modern—reads like an ordinary novel. The character of the schoolmaster, the schoolmistress, the school proprietor—a typical Yankee of the meanest sort,—also the young Mexican who falls in love with Elsie and tries to kill the schoolmaster in a Mexican way; together with the country doctor, the school-bully, with whom the young student has to fight, and the various personages of the New England village which is the scene of the story,—all are drawn from actual observation. They live; they are very real, and proclaim their creator a great master. This queer book was first published under the title of *The Professor's Story*. It is not so well known, as it deserves to be. It is far superior to another novel by Holmes called *The Guardian Angel*,¹—which I cannot very strongly recommend.

Elsie Venner and the three volumes of breakfast conversations form the important part of Dr. Holmes' prose. If he had written nothing else he would have been still famous. But he wrote a great many other books and a good deal of poetry. Nearly all the other books are collections of essays—scientific, moral, and miscellaneous. In his old age he visited England, where he received great honour and was introduced to the highest personages. The results of his voyage he embodied in a volume of pleasant gossips entitled *Our Hundred Days in Europe*. As a poet, he has only written three or four compositions that will long endure; but all his poetry was very fair, and distinguished by the same qualities of mischievous good humour and light wit that characterize his prose. Of course such light poetry cannot be called great; yet if Dr. Holmes had

¹ Boston, 1867. London, 1867 [2 vols.]

² Boston and New York, 1887. London, 1888.

given his time only to verse, he would perhaps have done something very remarkable. One of his little poems *The Last Leaf*,¹—describing an old man in the 18th century living on into the 19th century—is so graceful and so daintily humorous that we can only compare it with the society verse of Frederick Locker or of Austin Dobson.

Those already named are the greatest figures in American literature. After Holmes—indeed long before his death—new forms of literature begin. We shall speak of them presently. Meanwhile I should observe to you that Cooper,² the great novelist of pioneer life in the American West, has not been particularly dwelt upon, because he takes high rank only as a story-teller, not as a stylist, nor as a man of letters in the truest sense of the word. His novels are now very little read by grown-up people; but, as novels of adventures, they will delight the young no doubt for many years to come. His work belongs to the first half of the century—all being done between 1820-1850. Thirty-two volumes represent the bequest he made to American literature. He had been a midshipman in the navy before he began to write; and his personal knowledge of sea life gives almost as much value to one class of his stories as the personal experience of Marryat gives to the captain's tales. Five novels by Cooper are sea novels; the best is *The Pilot*.³ Five others treat of the early conflicts between the American settlers and the Indians; these have been called *The Leather Stocking Tales*,—and one of them, translated into many languages, is read by everybody: I mean *The Last of the Mohicans*.⁴ Cooper also wrote some historical novels; but these were very bad, and are now almost unread. You are not likely to learn much from Cooper in the way of pure literature, but *The Pilot* and the other novels mentioned are delightful as stories. I say nothing about a number of smaller writers; and one very great writer can scarcely be of interest to you—

¹ Appeared in *Poems*. . . . Boston, 1836.

² James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851).

³ *The Pilot; a Tale of the Sea*. . . . 2 vols. 1823 [pub. Jan. 1824].

⁴ *The Last of the Mohicans. A Narrative of 1757*. . . . Philadelphia 2 vols. 1826.

Lowell.¹ Indeed I must express my conviction that the position of James Russell Lowell has been very much exaggerated. He was undoubtedly a very great influence,—for he was during many years extremely active in promoting American literature as the editor of various magazines, and during the Civil War he published a volume of political satires in the New England dialect which were admirable things of their kind. These satires in New England dialect (Yankee dialect) are certainly the best things of their kind in existence and among them is one dialect poem, in quatrains, *The Courtin'*, which is beautiful as well as witty. Besides this kind of work Lowell wrote a great number of very fair poems, chiefly of a serious sort—his longest effort being a piece somewhat in the style of Tennyson's *Idylls*, *The Vision of Sir Launfal*. None of this work, however, is great; and Lowell's popularity in England was chiefly due to his charming manner, and to his success as American Minister at the English court. His real greatness, like that of Burns, belongs to his witty work in dialect; and he wrote very little prose. Having mentioned Lowell we have closed the list of the first great group of American writers in prose.

It will be necessary to curtail this lecture considerably; and I shall therefore attempt grouping. The next remarkable figure in American literature is, I think, Bret Harte.² He introduces us to the new circle of story writers who have won the reputation beyond their own country. He was born in 1839 in the state of New York at the old-fashioned town of Albany—the son of a school teacher. He had only a very plain education—no literary training. He went to California about 1854 and worked there in a number of capacities—gold-miner, government clerk, printer. There was then in California what was called “the Gold Fever.” Men of energetic and often desperate character flocked to the gold region from all parts of the world, willing to risk their lives for the sake of fortune, and fearing nothing in the way of human or divine law. Of

¹ James Russell Lowell (1819-1891).

² Francis Bret Harte (1829-1902).

human law there had been since 1845 very little outside of the great Pacific city—absolutely none in the gold region. Every man was armed; and while gambling or drinking, weapons were used freely. Men killed each other for a word; and the chances of life were best for the man who could shoot the quickest. It was a rude and terrible existence; but it had its heroisms and its romances. Bret Harte saw it, suffered with it, and found his inspiration in it. He wrote down what he had seen at the mines in the form of little stories and poems, afterwards contributed to various Californian periodicals. These immediately delighted the American people, were quickly reprinted in book form, obtained great success in England, and introduced quite a new phase of literature. The short story had never been popular before in England or America,—although, under the title of *Conte* or *Nouvelle*, it had been very popular in France. I think we may say that Bret Harte first made it successful, in the business sense. A publisher in Boston immediately offered him ten thousand dollars for one year's work—a good proof of the popularity of his books. The stories were extremely well written. The poems were good in respect to literary feeling, but were failures in regard to workmanship. He is worth considering only as a prose writer; and here he is great. The general value of his stories lies not so much in the faithful portrayal of a wild condition of society that has ceased to exist, as in their showing that even the roughest and most terrible class of men and women may have noble qualities and may be capable of noble actions. Some of Bret Harte's characters are gamblers; some are thieves; some are prostitutes;—others are simply half-savage children of civilized periods. Children may be half-savages by being unnaturally separated from civilization, but retaining through inheritance many fine moral qualities. They are very queer stories; and some of them are very touching. Of late years Bret Harte's work has not been very good. He has exhausted the subject which made him famous. But his early work deserves to live, and will probably for a long time. The best of it is to be found in the two volumes respectively entitled *The Luck of Roaring*

Camp,¹ and *Mrs. Skagg's Husbands*.² Rough work, but very strong—that is the shortest criticism possible.

On the other side of the American Continent two writers were rising into fame about the same time that Bret Harte was living in San Francisco. William Howells,³ an Ohio printer; and Henry James (Jr.),⁴ son of a man of letters. These two have already become celebrated throughout the English-speaking world; both belong to one literary school; but the two have been working in very different ways. Both Howells and James attempted to do in English something resembling what the realistic school has been doing in France. They forswore the improbable and the romantic, and attempted to paint life exactly as they saw it. Howells took for his subject the most ordinary happenings of American life in the Eastern States. He has written a great number of novels which are equally well known in England and in America. He has made both a reputation and a fortune. Nevertheless it is the opinion of some excellent critics that the success of Howells is only temporary,—that his books have become popular because they appeal to the great mediocrity,—to the great mass of readers possessing very small culture. This is not to say that the style of Howells is a mediocre style. It is simple and strong, highly polished, and of the first class. But the characters and the scenes of the novels are invariably commonplace; the people are tiresome; the incidents are uninteresting. There is perfect realism; but it is not the kind of realism in which a man of culture cares to live. His first great novel remains, I think, the best—*The Rise of Silas Lapham*.⁵ It is a simplest story of an ignorant but energetic American manufacturer. James, on the other hand, is never commonplace; and although always realistic he is always extraordinary. In my opinion Henry James is by far the greatest of living American writers,—although his greatness is not to be measured by his popularity. He is too refined in his art to be popular. He describes only

¹ *The Luck of Roaring Camp and other Sketches*. Boston, 1870. 1872.

² *Mrs. Skagg's Husbands and Other Sketches*. Boston, 1873, London, 1873.

³ William Dean Howells (1837-1920).

⁴ Henry James (1843-1916).

⁵ Boston, 1884.

the most complex society of England, America and Italy. He has lived in England during a great part of his life; and has written much more wonderful things there than he could have written in America. He is, indeed, the only writer of English novels possessing the same kind of psychological art as distinguishes the great modern novelists of France—such as Daudet or Bourget. And he is capable of an astonishing variety of work. At one time he gives us a picture of the vagaries of spiritualism in America, as in the *Bostonians*;¹ again he takes us to Italy, and paints for us the highest forms of æsthetic enthusiasm; again we are in London, studying the psychology of aristocratic circles; or we are taken to Paris, or taken—as sometimes happens—out of the known world of fact into the unknown world of psychological fact—for James is very great, too, as a moral fabulist. Almost anything that he has written is worthy of study; but I must warn you that he is very difficult, perhaps the most difficult of all novelists of the time, for Japanese students.

The realistic school has not had otherwise any very great success in America. Howells and James are its only fine representatives—unless we except a few remarkable female writers, whose place in literature it is still difficult to determine. Marion Crawford,² whose novels, mostly laid in Italy, are so successful, cannot very well be called a realist. Aldrich,³ the poet, who has written a charming volume of stories *Marjorie Daw*; Cable⁴ who, in his *Old Creole Days*, pictured the Creole life in Louisiana now disappearing; Craddock (Miss Murfree)⁵ with her portraits of the Kentucky mountains;—Miss Woolson,⁶ with her stories of the American Civil War,—all these have a delicate flavour of romance. Among men of letters, not story-tellers, we find another sort of romance of a very high order—sometimes in philosophical studies, sometimes in essays of a peculiarly emo-

¹ *The Bostonians. A Novel.* 3 vols. London, 1886. Originally appeared in *Century*, Feb. 1885—Feb. 1886.

² Francis Marion Crawford (1854-1909).

³ Thomas Bailey Aldrich (1836-1907).

⁴ George Washington Cable (1844-1925).

⁵ Mary Noailles Murfree (*pseudonym* Charles Egbert Craddock, 1850-1922).

⁶ Constance Fenimore Woolson (1839-1894).

tional kind. There are a number of these; I will mention the very best.

Perhaps the most remarkable of the essayists—in point of literary beauty—is Donald Mitchel,¹ a former graduate of Yale, author of *Reveries of a Bachelor* and *Dream Life*. The first mentioned of these books is simply a collection of thoughts—the thoughts of a young man about marriage, with memories of an old woman that he would have liked to marry and could not marry. Mitchel is now an old man, but his books are still much loved by those who know them. They represent a very refined and tender art. I do not know of any other writer who has attempted work in exactly the same line; but we find very similar beauties, in the form of emotional reverie, in a few books of American travellers. Such are Charles Warren Stoddard's² Polynesian sketches *South Sea Idyls*, and Curtis'³ *How-adjj in Syria*.

Enough has been said, considering the time at our disposal, of prose writers of the lighter American order; but I shall be sorry to leave you with the impression that American writers of the more serious order have no great emotional value. This is far from the truth. It is especially far from the truth in relation to the historians. The American historians are especially distinguished by literary qualities, which lend them a value independent of their work. The histories of Prescott,⁴ although partly superseded by later research, will always charm by reason of their fascinating style; and the literary quality of Motley⁵ is quite extraordinary—no novel treating of the struggle between Spain and the Netherlands even approaches the interest of Motley's accurate but impassioned recital. A third figure, who lately passed away, Francis Parkman,⁶ historian of the struggle between France and England in North America, and of the attempt of the Jesuits to found a Catholic power with the help of the North American Indians, ought to interest not only be-

¹ Donald Grant Mitchel (*pseud.* "Jk Marvel," 1822-1908).

² Charles Warren Stoddard (1843-1909).

³ George William Curtis (1824-1892).

⁴ William Hickling Prescott (1796-1859).

⁵ John Lothrop Motley (1814-1877).

⁶ (1823-1893).

cause of his style, but because of the wonderful romance of his life. He lived with the Indians in order that he might obtain sufficient knowledge of their nature to explain certain facts of their history — such as the inability of the Jesuits to master them. A fourth historian yet living, John Fiske¹ is also a great stylist; and his philosophy (he is a great representative of the Spencerian philosophy in America) is marked by the same fine qualities of expression as his history. The best work of history which he has written is *The Discovery of America* (2 vols.), — which supersedes a great deal of Prescott's work; and the best examples of his style as an essayist are perhaps to be found in the two little volumes respectively entitled *The Idea of God* and *The Destiny of Men*.

I have not spoken to you much about Emerson—although one of the greatest figures in the history of American thought. But I beg you to remember the limitations of this essay. Great as are the qualities of Emerson, both in the strange flashes of his philosophical poetry, and the occasionally strange splendours of his emotional style, I could not recommend Emerson to you as a model either of prose or verse. Both—from the artistic point of view—leave much to be desired. The only thing which Emerson might teach you in regard to literary construction is, I think, this—the value and the strength of very short sentences. But you could not imitate his style. No man could do that. Emerson's style was himself: it was not something carefully studied and elaborated, but a natural eloquence in which a great deal of ore remains crude.

THE END

¹ (1842-1901).