

that of fact by its effects. They feel that it does more than instruct or edify, more than record observations of a scene, a situation, or a character. They understand that it makes, through innumerable diverse channels for a mysterious indefinable ideal of beauty; that it brings joy to the sorrowful, solaces the weary, and humanizes the wicked. What it does for the happy and good one does not so clearly see; whether it is as much appreciated by them as by the less blessed one may seriously doubt.

The defects of quality complained of by foreigners may perhaps be attributed to the fact that, until recently, American fiction has been most prolifically produced by the good, consciously addressing their peers. Hawthorne and Irving were pure of heart, and Poe's frailties might not have seemed so censurable in another *milieu*. Hawthorne treated sin superbly as Milton did, removing it from mundane evil, almost exalting it above good. His constant theme was the tormented spirit of man, the horror of sin concealed, and the anguish of sin confessed. The *Scarlet Letter* is as nearly perfect as a romance can be, and is America's supreme gift to the wealth of the world. Poe's domain was the fantastic, the weird, the marvellous; his reason flits about the borderland of unreason. His genius was exotic, unrelated to time or country. Irving was an 18th. Century essayist gone astray in the wilderness, a circumstance that gives a charm of piquant incongruity to his gentle tales. These famous writers of the Republic's infancy had one advantage over their successors, at least what seems to be an advantage for writing imaginative prose. The English language had not then lost beauty and distinction in a transatlantic atmosphere, or it may be better to say that there still existed a remnant that conceived these qualities to be rather essential to literature. Few of the moderns who consecrate their talent to representations of their own people living at home attach the slightest importance to beauty and distinction, though they often let themselves go in astonishing bursts of grandiloquence, and strange interludes of sound without sense. But, as I was