

led from the world beyond down the remote Sierras, along a river turbid with golden sands, and converted *Poker Flat*, *Cherokee Sal*, *Tennessee's Pardner*, into a permanent joy for his own and succeeding generations. The public that had been demanding readable fiction was not instantly satisfied with such a lively response. It wanted something readable but also proper to be read, something that did not too rudely shock a not yet disintegrated taste for respectability. But the entering wedge was driven in hard, and by a score of sketches of a community of thieves, gamblers, and prostitutes, the traditions imposed by dethroned lady-novelists were scattered to the winds; fiction was brought into relation with life. Bret Harte's brilliant achievement in the short story probably helped to decide the form in which the best fiction should be written for a quarter of a century. It is not possible to say anything about the American novel without saying more about the short story. Though Bret Harte's matter was romantic, indeed revolutionary, his form was classical. He aimed at an effect of the whole. His initiatory apprehension or view had a vital unity, to the elucidation of which each paragraph, almost every phrase, contributed. There is reason to believe that he arrived at his form instinctively, and that he did not consciously try to conform with known æsthetic law. The great number of excellent short stories written during the seventies and eighties, suggests a very general national apprehension of laws by which that form must be governed to be effective. As English literature was then barren of models of the art, and as many of the American writers of a period rather prior to instruction were unfamiliar with French methods, the theory of studied imitation may be discarded, and it may easily be supposed (by chance correctly) that there was an abundance of talent lying dormant in the stricken South, in prim Massachusetts towns, in mountain passes, and prairie shacks, that, hearing a signal gun, woke up suddenly and went to work.

A blessedly ready wit, probably Abraham Lincoln, said to Mrs. Stowe promptly on being introduced to her, "Oh, you are