The Historical Novel in Literature.

Lucy Manchester
It is our purpose to study the historical novel as a product of modern times, simply touching facts relating to the early traces which have appeared in various forms.

Unless we have read a truly historic novel, we can scarcely conceive what it is, or what relation it bears to what we ordinarily think of as history. Certainly we cannot appreciate its importance as a means of stimulating and inspiring love and sympathy for the past lives and scenes of which we are a continuation. History proper begins before we the facts of the past; but it is to the historical novel that we turn if we would become a part of those historic facts, for there we have history "touched with emotion," life that belongs to some past age or some far-away country is portrayed, and in that life we seem to enter. Life is given to character from whom we feel as living inspiration. Indeed the true historic novel would have us respond to the nature and to the surroundings to which it has given this.
new life. Such is our conception of what the historic novel should mean, and we have many novels which describe and portray leading characters and important circumstances which really existed, bringing before us the customs, conditions, and surroundings of past centuries in a manner which excite our affections and give us a knowledge unattainable from the dry facts and statements all history would give them.

The modern historical novel seems to have evolved before history was much appreciated, and no doubt this form of novel helped to develop that taste. There are various reasons why the historic novel received so little attention before Sir Walter Scott's time. In the early Greek and Roman literature we are told that they apparently had no conception of this as shown in their use of mythological characters in the absence of any historical ones. In the early romances there were probably some actual events mixed with the fictitious ones, but
we must have more history before this novel can be written. Coming down to the time of Elizabeth we find a period in which the drama predominated, and in which the minds of the people were occupied with religious and political liberty; so there was no time to think of history, but material was being made which was later interwoven with fiction by a master-mind.

From our study we learn that the people up to the middle of the last century had formed no taste for history in any form, so that when our great historians began their work of putting together their country's history, it gave the people something to think about. With this new field of thought we should expect literature to show some phase of it, so we are not as surprised that there appeared that great series of historical novels by Sir Walter Scott—the Waverley, which distinguished the historic novel, and gave it a place in literature.

If we would know something
of the great emotion we must go back to the childhood of the orignator, and then we see at work the forces which in later years produced such a great result. Living among the country folk as Scott did, and having a natural love for the stories and legends of Scottish life which they told him, he reared such a knowledge of his country's history that in later years he had a inexhaustible treasury of that from which to draw. Not only did he gain a knowledge of history, but mingling as he did with all classes of people he also learned to know human nature and to love mankind deeply.

Having these necessary features is not all, however. There must be the imaginative genius who can combine them, and Sir Walter Scott showed himself just such a genius in his Waverley novels. These portray Scottish life and character with a vividness which only one who had studied and loved it as Scott had could do. The fact that he had as mingled and entered
into the lives of all classes made it possible for him to attain this splendid achievement; but it is not only Scottish history that this great mind had intercourse with fiction. He saw no better in one study of English history during the Middle Ages than to supplement it with 'Arabie,' one of Scott's most delightful novels. From it one gets a very good idea of life under the Feudal system and custom of the 12th century. For a later period during the reign of Elizabeth in the 16th century he has given us 'Kenilworth,' which brings us close to Elizabeth by interesting us in the people and custom of which she was a part; and as he has written of many different periods, he has authoritatively set forth alike the lives of the Crusaders and of the Stuarts before us. He has perfumed the land of Palestine, and the hills of Scotland, the forest of England, and the borders of the Rhine; Paladin, and peasant, earl and yeoman; kings and their justice; buffoons at abuse, and gentle ladies married all
spring into life again at the touch
of the Great Enchantress.

With this achievement a new
field was open to the writer, for then
began to develop a taste for history
and for higher ideals, and in almost
every country there were attempts to
write the historic novel, and some very
excellent ones have been produced, but
as in the case of Scott has written
extensively along this line, altered new
features and different styles have
been introduced. His greatest success
was said to be Dumas who is a French
writer. His novels are ranked superior
to Scott's in their power of holding
the reader's attention or the reader;
but his portrayal of character is in-
superior. Another French writer who took
up this form of the novel, and it is
worth while to read his masterpiece,
"Les Misérables", if only to get his famous
description of the Battle of Waterloo.
The novels of the English writer,
Charles Kingsley are valued very highly
for their historic value and characters.
sketches. In "Hypatia" we find many horrible things pictured, but if we only realize what life meant in the largest aspect of the 5th century A.D. we must see some very dark pictures. Again in "Alla Luce" Engelsley takes me to the Sweet-sea dens and the dangerous where as many of England's poor exist.

Thackeray, another English novelist, has given us "Henry Esmond" which is ranked as the greatest English historical novel. It is representative of English life in the 17th century, when Queen Anne was on the throne. He also wrote "The Virginian," in which Braddock and Washington figure. "The Last Days of Pompeii" deserve mention. We know according to history that in 79 A.D. Pompeii and Herculaneum were buried beneath lava and scoria from Vesuvius. But we cannot realize its terribleness unless we can enter somewhat into Roman life, as it was in this early period and feel something of the hopes and aspirations of these people. "A Tale of Two Cities" by Charles
Dickens takes us into the French Revolution, when the horrors of the guillotine are tit before us. Les Chois, to, has produced one historical novel which, by many, is considered a masterly work. It is a story of France in the days of Saranella.

Coming across to our own America, we have had produced some historical novels which, no doubt, have aided largely in determining questions upon which we have lived as people liberty, and this we can say of "Uncle Tom's Cabin." For in it, the slave had vividly portrayed "Man's inhumanity to man." No facts, as to the conditions of the Negro, could have touched the chords of sympathy we did this pathetic story.

The greatest historical novels in American literature are the work of James Fenimore Cooper. As the Negro figures in "Uncle Tom's Cabin" as in many of Cooper's novels we have the American Indian characterized, "Pawnee."
by Helen Hunt Jackson is a most pathetic appeal to human hearts for sympathy for the Indian and his rights.

Miss Austin has written some very delightful novels of Colonial life. "But Her" written in recent years by Bess Lew Wallace, is one that people like to read and re-read. The life of the Roman and of the Jew, and the feelings between them during the time of Christ, are very interestingly told. The descriptions are all impressive.

A Polish writer, Henryk Sienkiewicz, has distinguished himself in recent years by writing historical novels of Poland, Russia, and Sweden, chiefly, and one, the most popular, in America, at least, is written of Roman life. The title is "Quo Vadis." It is recommended to readers of history as being a most vivid description of the time of Nero and of the cruelties of his Roman rule, and it is said of Sienkiewicz that he "wrote of things Roman as any Roman of them all in the first century might have written." The historical novel certainly be
established itself in our literature, as something which the mind demands if it would know, as something which history demands if it would teach.

It has, of course, been criticized, and for a few years, about the middle of this century, it was somewhat on the decline. The writer says of this that those who are old enough to remember can recall how the Review greeted the advent of a historical novel, not with a note of contempt, but with the sort of surprise which new grief something out of the way or old fashioned. However, the last twenty years have seen it grow in favor. We have much reverence for the one who can bring before us the past so vividly; amusing with those critics who say that it is "mere laziness on the part of authors who ravish history for their plots."

The novelist who takes up this writing has not perhaps the room to exercise his imagination that the themes of other novels allow for he must have his characters do what is natural...
and do that which as human life has done, and not just what the writer would have them do; but that is where in the beauty of the historical novel lies. As man is developing, he cares more for the study of life as it really is, and has been, and it is to the historical novel that he turns for this study and help.