

**ASPECTS OF FICTION
AND OTHER VENTURES
IN CRITICISM**

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Aspects of fiction and other ventures in criticism by Brander Matthews

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BRANDER MATTHEWS

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BRANDER MATTHEWS



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AMERICAN LITERATURE

[This address was delivered before the National Educational Association, at Buffalo, July 5, 1896.]

AMERICAN LITERATURE

THE history of mankind is little more than the list of the civilizations that have arisen one on the ruin of the other, the Roman supplanting the Greek, as the Assyrian had been ousted by the Babylonian. The life of each of these successive civilizations was proportioned to the vitality of the ideas by which it was animated; and we cannot estimate it or even understand it except in so far as we are able to grasp these underlying principles. What the ideas were which dominated these vanished civilizations it is for us to discover for ourselves as best we may by a study of all the records they left behind them, and especially by a reverent examination of their laws, their arts, and their writings in so far as these have been preserved to us. Of all these relics of peoples now dead and gone, none is so instructive as literature, and none is so interesting; by its aid we are enabled to reconstruct the past, as we are also helped to understand the present.