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Brander Matthews

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Excerpt from The Historical Novel and Other Essays

When Robert Louis Stevenson wrote his 'Note on Realism,' and declared that "the historical novel is dead," he did not think he would live to be the author of the 'Master of Ballantrae.' 'But when Prosper Merimee expressed to a correspondent his belief that the historical novel was a "bastard form," he could look back without reproach upon his own 'Chronique de Charles IX' - one of the finest examples of the kind of fiction he chose to despise. 'Whether or not most readers of English fiction at the end of the nineteenth century approve Merimee's opinion that the historical novel is illegitimate by birth, few of them will agree with Stevenson in deeming it defunct. 'If we can judge by the welcome it receives from the writers of newspaper notices, it is not moribund even; and if we are influenced by the immense sale of 'Ben-Hur' and by the broadening vogue of 'Quo Vadis,' we may go so far as to believe that it was never stronger or fuller of life.

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