

these unfold themselves, step by step, we need only give our attention and study.

We have the texts at hand from which Shakespeare derived his pieces, Holinshed's chronicles, Italian novels, a poem by Chaucer, the romances, tales and legends of the epoch, Plutarch's Lives, as, for example, that of Coriolanus. We have the translation he read, and we can obtain the same old edition—then new—of which he turned the leaves. Such is his canvas; he changes nothing; he retains the personages, their actions, their debates, the events of the Senate, of the street, and of the battlefield, the historical *dénouement*, and the moral impression.

But he divides the narrative into scenes, and makes the figures live; in his hands, the dull, incomplete, gray sketch becomes a picture of incomparable colouring, modelling and freshness, and, between the first and second stages, we can note every stroke of the brush. Compare the corresponding passages in his and Plutarch's work, the apologue which Menenius relates to the crowd, the speech of Coriolanus in the Senate, that to the people and that to Aufidius, and the interview of Coriolanus with his mother. The artist is at work; he gives precision to indefinite lineaments, he fills up the empty outline; in certain groups, which were merely sketched indistinctly, he brings out a physiognomy into strong relief; he defines the attitudes—a gesture, and we comprehend his reasons for it, detect his processes.

With modern historians, who are exact and conscientious, the reference is given at the foot of the page. Go to the original documents drawn upon by Macaulay in his narrative of the Irish rebellion, of the siege of Londonderry, of the massacre of Glencoe, or of the recoinage question, the dispute of the jurors and non-jurors, and the Darien expedition. We are again in the workshop, not merely of a *savant*, but likewise of an artist. We see him moving around, and turning over heaps of old papers, dwelling on significant passages, gleaning them out one by one, gathering them into a sheaf, selecting scraps of conversation that have a point, pictorial details of dress and housekeeping, glimpses of landscape forming the back ground of the picture, and the traits of public or private character which will change the vague, solemn history into a romance of manners and customs.

All this, at one time, becomes a narration; at another, a debate; at another, an exposition. It is impossible to substract, add to, or transpose, a paragraph in the composition, a sentence in the paragraph, a word in the sentence. Try it and you will recognize that you have deranged or diminished the final and total effect, which is the attention, interest, vision, emotion and conviction of the reader.

#### IMPRESSION.

At the end of each passage you glide into the next one; you have done it without being aware of it; the end of a sentence, an adjective, has transported us from Ireland to Scotland, from the cabinet of William III. to the Court of St. Germain, from Hampton Court to Versailles, to the Escurial, to the Hague and to the Vatican. Macaulay himself gives us to understand that this sort of transition was for him the most delicate and most difficult part of his task; it was in his mind at the outset, when he wrote the first lines of his chapter; it remained in the background, permanently and latent throughout the long defile of successive ideas. We thus make the acquaintance of all the figures which occupied his brain; not alone with those before the footlights and on the stage, but those behind the scenes and in the distance beyond.

In other cases, when original documents are wanting, and we are unable to compare the completed canvas with the blank one, we can still appreciate the art and talent of

the writer; for that purpose, if we have a little experience and the habit of it, the work itself suffices.

Take the speeches of Macaulay on the "Ten Hours' Bill," and on "The Government of India." Without consulting official documents and the journals of the day, you at once detect the aim of the orator, and you feel his eloquence. After that, try to account for the impression he makes on you, page by page, and you readily perceive the means Macaulay employs, the applications of principles and the rigor of his deductions, the breadth and clearness of general ideas, the skilful array of proofs, the copious development of each argument, the abundance and choice of familiar examples and circumstances, the constant appeal to daily and evident experiences, the exactness of his comparison, the wealth of his imagery, the precision of his summing-up, and the communicative earnestness, generosity and warmth of his convictions.

Take, in Tennyson, the "Lotos-Eaters," or the "Morte d'Arthur." Without turning to the verses of Homer or to the legends of the Round Table, you know what emotions the poet aimed to excite, and what landscapes he wishes to evoke before your eyes; for, during the perusal of it, you feel this emotion, and behold the landscape.

How is this brought about? What special ideas and imagery, what rhythms and what cadences, have had this strange power over you? Take up the poem and read it again piece by piece, and then line by line; each word, through its derivation and affinities, through its position and timbre, through the vapory and luminous souvenirs it arouses, through the grandiose and delicious images it suggests, contributes to build up within us a world different from our own, of a completely aerial and ideal architecture, much more supple and harmonious than the one we live in—in short, an enchanted world, a world of sweet, pure and noble dreams.

We now possess Macaulay's biography; we shall soon have that of Tennyson, and, probably, the latter, like the former, will add much to our knowledge of the man; but it will add little to what we know of the author. The most perfect of contemporary English poets, like the most perfect of English prose-writers, is already fully before us in his books.

In early youth, every man who reads comes across two or three volumes which he prefers to all others; he keeps them at his bedside; he carries them with him on his journeys; when alone, and in a reflective or dreamy mood, he involuntarily stretches out his hand for them, and opens them at some page which he has read over and over again.

At the various turning-points of his life, at each new stratum of ideas which experience has deposited in his soul, he returns to them; phrases which had left him cold now touch him to the quick; there, where he has seen only printed words, he finds the accents of a living voice; a selection or arrangement of words, an expression which he had not remarked, is found significant; a truth which had struck him as commonplace or without import becomes a penetrating trait; a certain story was at first simply entertaining or odd, or grotesque, merely amusing, good to while away an hour; now that the reader has gained knowledge through years, the curtain suddenly rises and discloses an infinity of perspective views, many of which are strange, vast and even terrible, as in "Robinson Crusoe," "Tristram Shandy," "Gulliver," and the "Tale of a Tub."

At this moment, if the reader is disposed to advance one step more, here is the key, which, in my opinion, opens the last door. All the judgments, expressed, disguised or implied, which the author may bring to bear on men and things, all his beliefs and opinions hold together, and a common bond keeps up the connection; try to ascertain