

mon definition. They are all of them subjects that lie beyond the sphere of emotion. If, however, we put these subjects aside, the domain of poetry is, so far as subjects are concerned, co-extensive with that of prose; and it will be seen that men have recourse to this exceptional form of language, not in order that they may deal with exceptional subjects, but with ordinary subjects regarded in an exceptional way. The language of prose, then, and the language of poetry, defined in terms of their uses, differ from each other thus: Prose is the language men use when expressing themselves without emotion, or with emotion which is slight or intermittent; poetry is the language they use under emotion which is exceptional and sustained. Poetry, in short, is in its essence this: it is the successful representation of life, as regarded with sustained emotion.

The more we consider this definition, the more complete and universal shall we see its application to be, and certain objections which will no doubt at once suggest themselves will really be found to illustrate and prove its soundness. The objections I refer to are these: it may be said with perfect truth, and with considerable force, that in any long poem there are sure to be many parts where no more emotion is discernible than might easily be expressed in prose; and with far more force, and with equal truth it may be said, that there are certain parts of many prose compositions—great novels, for instance—in which life is exhibited to us through the medium of an emotion as intense as any that is discoverable in poetry. This does not, however, show that the line between prose and poetry is not to be drawn in the way I have just drawn it. It shows—what is a very different thing—that, distinct in themselves as the two are, yet they are in practice constantly mixed to-

gether, so that if we estimate various passages separately, great prose works will comprise parts which are essentially poetry, and great poems, parts which are essentially prose.

Between different types of men, and between their different moods, faculties and dispositions, the differences, however great, are never sharp. They melt into each other at their confines as night melts into day or cold into heat; and when we define them, the limits which we draw in words can never rightly be sharper than the limits which exist in fact. Now there is nothing to which these remarks apply more obviously than they do to emotion; and I have said that poetry essentially differs from prose, on account of the emotion with regard to the subjects treated of, which is expressed by the one and not expressed by the other. If, however, we examine the characters of actual men and women, we shall find that emotion is completely wanting in none. The most prosaic of them, in contemplating human life never do so with continued and complete apathy. The spectacle constantly affects them to some slight degree, and sometimes, even if rarely, it is sure to affect them deeply. And again, on the other hand, those whose natures are most emotional find it much that does not affect them at all. Their critical faculties may be excited, but their emotions are untouched. In fact, if we use the words without reference to literary expression, poetry, just like prose, enters into the composition of every one. We call some natures poetical, and some natures not poetical; but the difference between them is one of degree only. It is not that the prosaic man has no poetry in him, or the poetic man no prose. It is merely a question of which element predominates; and in many cases it is difficult to tell which.—*Fortnightly Review.*