

Expression is a necessary and universal characteristic of nature. This is observed in the study of organic life, for as the leaves of the tree express the life of the tree, and as the song of the bird is the expression of its inner life, so all external forms in nature are the manifestations of her inner life and are produced spontaneously and not deliberately. Nature's action in dealing with matter is seen to be from mystic forces to manifest forms and all true noble expression should be in accord to this universal law.

Now what has thus been found to be true of nature's action bears application in the sphere of literature. It was this inner impulse in the mind of the artist, due to the material to be moulded, which at different times gave rise to the epic, the drama, the lyric and the novel.

Thus form and life at the beginning were one. Back of the earliest forms of literature was widespread literary impulse expressing itself in a variety of forms. A wide, rich, varied knowledge of life, secured by the experience of a countless multitude of people, was the fund from which all artists had to draw. It was life in an unorganized condition, nor did it become literature, till keen, sensitive poetic minds began to reflect upon this knowledge, to organize it and at last to give it form. Its chief characteristic, therefore, is life, and every work that holds its place as literature must have some kind of vitality and some faithfulness to the reality or dreams of life.

In Greek literature, which is one of the most complete and harmonious literary expressions of a race, every principal phase of art can be traced directly back to the life of the people. It grew out of the popular experience and was an expression of popular life. The natural rhythmic tendency of this artistic race is sufficient reason to account for its taking the form of poetry rather than prose.

Literature finds its first impulse in experience and its chief forms are deeply interesting and significant of its work in the development of humanity.

The epic is the oldest of the great literary forms and remains the foremost in interest and importance. It is distinguished from the lyric, by representing action rather than emotion and from the drama by presenting events through narrative, rather than imitative action. The history of national or mythological events of momentous interest; the views of life which deal with the masses of men animated by the same political or religious idea and which show the character and problem of the nation find expression in the epic. Thus