

# ART IN LITERATURE.

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THE philosopher, it has been said, needs precision in language, not rhythm. In other words, he must aim at absolute truth of statement, not elegance of diction. His road to the intelligence is a straight and prosaic track. He must not ramble with the framers of lighter themes in the bowery lanes of mere ornamental prose. Accuracy, untrammelled by conventionalities, unadorned by fashion, unbiased by the taste of the visionary, the dilettante or the æsthete, must be attained inviolate and irrefragable, as the outcome of patient, unprejudiced investigation and rational conviction, formulated not to dazzle but to instruct, not simply to amuse, but in its turn to convince. Goldsmith, despite his sometimes inimitable style, is valueless as an authentic recorder of past events. His prose may be unimpeachable, but his history as certainly halts. And Macaulay, brilliant as a composer, is worthless as a philosopher; for with him facts are too often subservient to trap-pings, biographical verities to personal prejudices. His favourites are not seldom tinted in Olympian hues, his pet aversions dashed in with pigments, sad coloured and forbidding as the inky Styx. The nude majesty of historical outline is thus marred and obscured, sometimes travestied in unbecoming draperies, fashioned from the mental or political idiosyncrasy of the author.

As with history, so with other departments—theology, biography and criticism. We find that the prejudice of taste, or the conceit of diction, has not seldom served to warp or cloak the truth, thus tending to defeat its own object. Yet is our literature not without names of writers who, with unimpeachable accuracy of statement,

combine in the highest degree the fascinations of grace and style. Of these Huxley may be quoted as a worthy example, nor are Harrison, Spencer, Tyndal, Proctor, Emerson, and Carlyle, without some claim at least to the name of artist, with their undoubted right to the title of scientist or philosopher. I say Carlyle, and I say so advisedly; for rugged as his diction frequently is, confused and involved as are many of his constructions, yet are his clauses not inartistically grouped. They resemble the rocks of the sage's native Caledonia, and bear about them the hardy self-assertiveness and wild aroma of the thistle and the heather. They certainly do not deserve the scathing satire of W. Stewart Ross, of Glasgow University, who stigmatizes Carlyle's English as "simply an execrable mongrel, although it is marvellously wide-mouthed, blatant, and ferocious as mongrels not unfrequently are." There is something more than adverse criticism here. There is personal rancour and ill-concealed chagrin. At what? "Ay, there's the rub." Why do we make enemies in this world? Simply, I suppose, because we are more successful, and, because more successful, worthier than these same enemies.

But with writers of Carlyle's stamp, rhetorical graces, as a rule, are but accessories; sometimes, mere accidents, not wanted for the sense; and, as before observed, liable to abuse, thus tending to mar the utility of the accomplished work. It is not at all times easy to make philosophical or scientific discussion attractive to the masses, so he who can render what are usually considered dry and occult subjects popular, not merely with the