

is ambiguous in its use and susceptible of a wider or of a narrower meaning. If we take it in its widest sense, in the sense sanctioned by its etymology, Literature is written thought. Anything written, provided it is not a mere jumble of words or letters, but represents some idea, belongs to the domain of literature. Of the infinite ideas which have swept in ceaseless streams through the numberless minds of successive generations, a few were recorded, and of these again a few are still preserved in written language. This is our material, be the nature of the ideas and the form of the expression what they may. Not merely the stately epic, the elaborate philosophical treatise, but the familiar letter, the monumental inscription, the scribbled sentences on Pompeian walls form part of the literature of the world. So that we may find ourselves concerned, not only with such works as "The Iliad," or "Lear," but with others like Euclid's Elements, or Darwin's "Origin of Species," whose claim to the title of literature would be less generally admitted. In periods fertile of books, it is true, the purely literary student gives such works but scant attention, but in more barren times he is glad enough to accept them. The historian of Early English Literature readily admits the baldest statements of facts and does not scruple to dignify the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the Laws of Ine with the name of Literature.

Since, then, literature includes all sorts of books—philosophical, historical, scientific, and so on—we must next ask, how is our work as students of literature differentiated from that of the philosopher or historian? It is evident we are concerned with books only in so far as they are literature, *i.e.*, only so far as they are the expression of thought. One book may be intended to enlarge the bounds of philosophical knowledge,

another to teach political economy, and, in so far the aim of one book and one writer differs from that of another. But thus much they all have in common—they are all representative of certain phases of thought and feeling in the mind of the writer, and it is his intention to reproduce these phases in the minds of others. It is the business of the student of literature to realize that intention. The written symbols are before him; it is for him to reproduce within himself the mental condition to which these symbols correspond. His work is simply that of interpretation. The scientific man reads the "Origin of Species" mainly to get at the truth which it may contain or suggest. The literary student, as such, stops short of that; it is his peculiar business to determine what exactly Darwin meant. So it is that we students of literature are interested in all departments of thought, and yet stand apart from and outside of all. Let us suppose, for example, that we are sceptical of the utility of philosophic discussion as such—think metaphysics a fruitless wrangle. Yet that does not prevent us, in the course of our study of the literature of England in the 18th Century from being deeply interested in the works of Locke, Berkeley and Hume. We set ourselves to determine just what these treatises of theirs contain and mean, not necessarily because we suppose they will afford any substantial result, but because we want to know what men have thought, because of the insight we gain into the character of these writers, and of the age and nation in which they lived.

It must not, however, be granted that because the work of the student of Literature is thus limited to interpretation, it is thereby to be adjudged unsatisfactory or superficial. Interpretation, in its fullest sense, gives, as I hope to show before I close, abund-