

know not if the sum total of truth contained in English fiction be not greater than the sum total of truth contained in English history. The greatest English novelist of the last century mockingly calls his works histories, and in the introduction which he prefixed to the divisions of one of them, humorously vindicates their claim to truth in comparison with works usually so denominated. And the claim is not without justification. In the Eighteenth Century Fielding attempted to give a picture of English social life as it was; Hume, of English political life as it had been. Beyond question, Fielding's is the truer work, as time has shown it to be the more enduring. Each generation of Englishmen finds it necessary to re-write the history of England; each generation of scholars the histories of Greece and Rome, for each sees the inadequacy of its predecessors' attempts; that inadequacy lies not in the incompetence of the writers, but in the complexity of their subject and in the insufficiency of their data. That on existing data an historian should give us in detail an absolutely true picture of the actual Brutus, for example, is an impossibility. But Shakespeare, like the geometrician, makes his own hypothesis. He ascribes a certain character to Brutus, and represents him as influenced by certain men and certain circumstances, so that the assassination of Cæsar is the natural and inevitable outcome. The representation is absolutely true, not as a picture of the historic Brutus—that, it is not the business of the poet to give—but of universal human nature, of how certain characters would have acted under the influence of certain surroundings. The truth of the picture comes from the poet's control over his facts, as the unvarying exactness of geometrical deductions comes from the arbitrary nature of the fundamental

assumptions. In a certain sense, truth may be denied to the results of geometry, inasmuch as they have no exact correlatives in the real world; while in another sense they possess the highest truth, and when applied to the concrete universe, as in astronomy, give results the most accurate attained by science. There is a certain analogy to this in the work of a poet. The truths of history and biography are at best particular; to apply them to life we must generalize them. The representations of poetry on the other hand have an element of universality. Shakespeare's men and women are, as Coleridge says, embodiments of the universal, individualizations of the type, and consequently possess validity everywhere, and for all time.

But it is not merely truth of the historic type—pictures of human action and character that poetry presents. It presents also truths of a scientific, or philosophic nature. Unlike science and philosophy, however, poetry, aiming mainly at emotion, confines itself to a certain range of truths fitted to kindle this, and is more concerned with the manner in which they are expressed than with their novelty. Indeed, they are the old fundamental truths, the patrimony of the race, intertwined with all our instincts, that poetry treats by preference; for these are most deeply rooted in our emotional nature. Novel truths, on the other hand, it rather shuns; the intellectual effort in grasping them, and the lack of unquestioned certainty which attends them are fatal to emotional absorption. The novelty of poetry, therefore, lies in its form, rather than in its material. Poetry owes its power to its manner, in virtue of which it transmutes dead terms apprehended by the intellect only, into living convictions grasped by the whole moral nature, which vibrates responsive to them. The difference