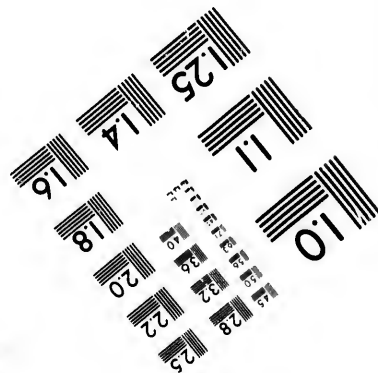
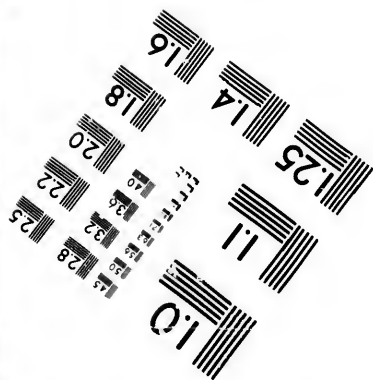
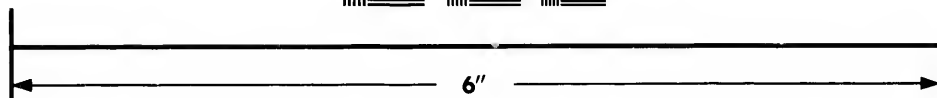
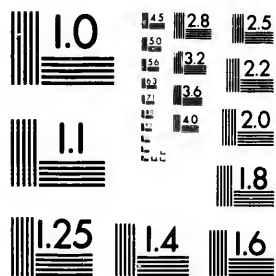


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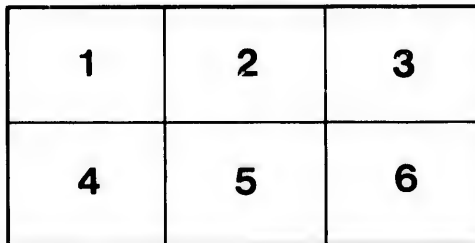
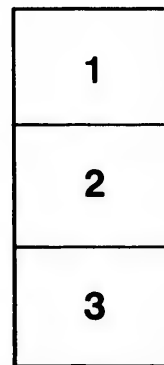
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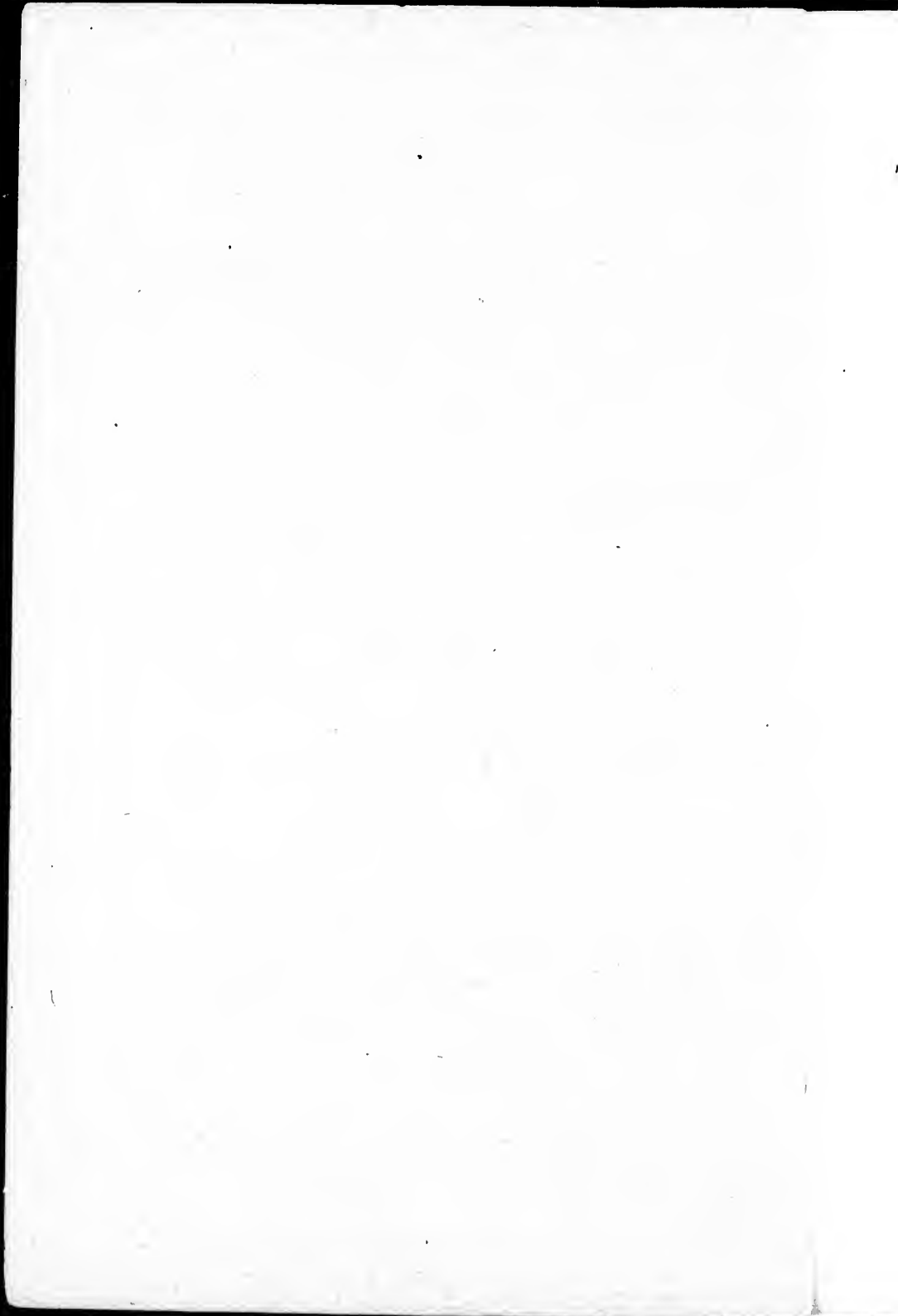
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## THE STUDY OF LITERATURE.

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We of this age, in complacency over our achievements, are very fond of contrasting our own times with those that have preceded. We call our age, by way of distinction, the age of progress, the age of invention, the age of steam; with no less truth we may characterize it as the age of books. It is not merely that we possess the accumulated literature of the past, but new books are produced daily in numbers of which our ancestors never dreamed. And while books are thus multiplying, the readers of them have increased in still more rapid ratio. Not so very long ago the people who read—nay, who could read,—were a select few; now the non-readers are rapidly sinking into an insignificant minority. The nineteenth century is, as distinguished from all its forerunners, a reading century; and we, upon this continent, exhibit in this respect, as in most others, the tendencies of our age in their most exaggerated form. We are the greatest readers that the world has yet seen; although most of our reading is not of a very serious kind, but, in the etymological sense of the word, a “pastime,” a refuge from *ennui* and from vexing thoughts. Even such reading, however, has more than negative results. The man who reads only his newspapers, the lady who reads the lightest novels, gain, as compared

with those who read nothing, some of the advantages of literary culture. Their occupation differs in manner and degree, but not in kind, from the occupation of the most serious literary student. The reading of all of us here is wider in extent than this: so we may, for the moment at least, consider ourselves students of literature, and I may perhaps venture to make an address to this mixed audience without leaving the limits of my own department. Furthermore, the authorities of this university have made the study of English Literature obligatory on every candidate for the arts degree; and, as I feel it is the students here whom I am particularly addressing, and since students, with their eyes fixed on examinations and degrees, are even more prone than other mortals to forget the end in the means, I think it most appropriate to consider for a little this study on which we are about to enter together—what we are to aim at in it, and what results we expect to flow from it.

As every reader may be held to be in a measure a student of literature, so literature includes everything that can be read. Literature, in its widest sense, is written thought, and embraces a vast range of material, from a private letter or an inscription to works of the highest art. Since the results which flow from the study of literature in its highest form, are necessarily much more varied and complex than those which flow from its simplest, I propose to consider literature in three stages of complexity. First, in its most elementary aspect, literature is the simple presentation of thought. But all presentation of thought which has shown permanent vitality, possesses a certain power, fitness, or

beauty of expression ; for, as thought when once expressed becomes common property, mankind naturally cares to preserve the words, not of him who has expressed it first, but of him who has expressed it best. I will consider, therefore, in the second place, literature not merely as expressing thought, but as expressing it powerfully, appropriately and beautifully ; that is, literature in its narrower sense,—written thought which possesses the characteristic of style. Finally, when thought is expressed with the highest beauty, fitness and power, it receives an additional element of form, and becomes poetry. So that, in the third place, I shall consider the perfection of literature as exhibited in poetry.

(1.) In accordance with the definition given, the subject of our study includes, not merely the dramas of Sophocles, but the elements of Euclid ; not merely Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, but Darwin's *Origin of Species*. As the literary student, then, may be employed now on the material of the mathematical, now on that of the historical or scientific student, the differentiation of his study must be sought, not in its material, but in its aim. Euclid has, as a mathematician, one end in view, and Thucydides, as an historian, another ; but, inasmuch as both were writers, they must have had also a common end, and it is in this end we must seek the aim of literary study. Now, every written thought is the representation of a certain mental condition, and its aim is the reproduction of that condition either in the mind of others, or in the writer's own mind at another time ; and, consequently, the aim of the student of literature is simply the reproduction within himself of this mental condition of the writer.

He has attained his end when he has put himself exactly at the point of view of the author in writing the passage under consideration. At times this is a comparatively simple matter. Euclid writes :—" Two straight lines which are parallel to the same straight line are parallel to one another"—and this is a proposition whose terms we have merely to comprehend, in order to be at the point of view at which Euclid was in writing it. But if we turn, let us say, to the works of Herodotus, we find numerous stories whose terms indeed are not less easily comprehended than those of Euclid, but which seem to us, it may be, childish and incredible. In merely understanding their purport, have we reproduced Herodotus' state of mind in writing them? Did the stories seem childish or incredible to him? The question calls for literary investigation. The student must examine the whole work of Herodotus and determine its general scope. He finds that it professes to be a serious history, and comes to the conclusion, perhaps, that Herodotus gives the narratives under consideration in all seriousness and good faith. Yet still he does not understand the author's state of mind in writing the passage. How came a man of evident intellectual power and culture to believe fables whose absurdity is manifest to a school-boy of to-day? To answer this question the student betakes himself to the study of Greek history and Greek modes of thought; and, until he has thrown himself into Greek life of the fifth century and grasped Herodotus' relation to the civilization of his time, he will not have attained the aim of literary study,—the reproduction in one's self of the state of mind of the writer. Again,

the true understanding of the Dialogues of Plato postulates the solution of numerous problems. In the Socrates here represented did Plato intend to give a picture of the historic Socrates? In how far are the opinions put in Socrates' mouth held by the author himself? What is the explanation of the manifest fallacies which occasionally mar the reasoning of these dialogues? In answering the last question the student learns how the intellectual power even of a Plato is subject to the limitations of his time, and unable, without the assistance of a formulated logic, to escape the snare of simple fallacies, and how the study of a language other than the native tongue was needful to enable men to distinguish between the thing and its name. The determination of such questions prepares the works of Herodotus and Thucydides for the use of the historian and philosopher, and gives the positive results of literary investigation.

Results such as these, however, concern us here but little; for from our elementary studies we cannot expect them, and, indeed, though valuable as contributions to the sum of human knowledge, to the individual student they are of merely infinitesimal worth. Liberal culture aims at the improvement of the individual; and that improvement comes, not from the results of investigation, but from the process. We have seen how, in the process of literary investigation, we are sometimes forced to comprehend the spirit of a nation or an age; and so, at times, we must seek explanation in the individual character of the writer. It may be, for example, that, on comparing the character of Thucydides with that of the almost contemporary Herodotus, we should conclude

that the peculiarities in the work of the latter are due, not so much to the age, but to the personal character of the author himself. Thus the study of literature becomes a study of human nature under varying conditions. In short, its fundamental requisite is that the student should escape from himself, his own narrow conceptions and surroundings,—that he should sympathize with, so far as to understand (for understanding postulates sympathy), men of very different character, in times and countries perhaps remote from his, with feelings and modes of thought even more remote. In no other study is he in contact with such a variety of ideas; in no other study has he to make them so thoroughly his own. He has not done with them, as the scientific student, when he ascertains that they are false: he must comprehend their genesis, and how, though false, they once seemed true, whether the explanation lies in the writer, or in his age. He becomes at home and at ease among ideas, as is the man of the world among men. As those qualities which characterize the man of the world are acquired only through intercourse with men of various types, and not through intercourse simply, but through being forced to understand them and to manage them; so the analagous discipline of literature gives the analagous qualities of intellectual openness and flexibility, which in turn beget a tolerance and coolness of judgment especially characteristic of thorough culture. The student of science comes into contact with facts: interrogated nature says that a thing is so, or not so. The student of literature comes into contact with ideas, moulded to the mind which has grasped them, intermixed with error and

modified by emotion. He is under the necessity of comprehending how the form of a conception is the result of character and surroundings. He learns to do this in books of a more or less remote past, treating of questions in which he has no immediate interest, and which he can, therefore, view with coolness and impartiality. Having acquired this habit of mind in a remote sphere, he learns to apply it to the burning questions of the day. Here, too, he analyzes and makes allowance. He comprehends the relativity of truth, the inevitable limitations of the human intellect, and the affliction of whole generations by a common obliquity of mental vision. The novelty or apparent absurdity of an idea does not repel him. He investigates the grounds of an opinion with which he does not agree, and the residuum of truth which forms the basis of most errors, will not improbably serve to render his own conceptions more just. In any case, having attained his opponent's point of view, he is able to attack it more effectively and hold his own more surely. For it is a psychological principle that to know anything thoroughly we must know its opposite; just as we are unconscious of the motion of the earth, because we have never experienced any other sensation. Were we absolutely fixed in relation to all objects, the visible world would appear to us a flat surface. Not less necessary is it that in the intellectual world we should be capable of assuming different points of view. To the uncultured man, however, nothing is more difficult. The presentation of the other side of a question causes him an uneasy feeling of insecurity, and irritates him. He reads his own newspaper, but

is careful to shun that of the opposite party ; and to him it seems that moral obliquity must be the ground of opinions differing from his own. The men in Gay's fable who dispute about the colour of the chameleon, afford a typical example of the state of mind from which literary discipline tends to set us free. We know that, not chameleons alone, but political questions, social questions, religious questions, appear different under different circumstances. From the study of literature, then, in its most elementary form, as a simple presentation of ideas, hence from the study of all literature, we note two great results :—first, openness of mind, that is, a readiness to admit ideas, however strange, and to comprehend and accept whatever truth they contain ; secondly, flexibility of mind, the capacity to seize a point of view not our own, to understand other men and other times—what, in short, we may call intellectual sympathy.

(2.) Let us now proceed to consider literature in its second aspect. You remember that the Elements of Euclid are included in the material of our study, as well as the *Œdipus* of Sophocles, but that in the works of Euclid, as compared with those of Herodotus, we found but little to detain the merely literary student ; because the former is a statement of purely objective fact, while the latter contains also a subjective element. And, in general, it is true that the less purely objective the thought is, and the more the author impresses on it his personality, his emotions,—sets it before us not exactly as it is, but as it appears to him, the more does the student of literature find himself concerned with



it. Of such weight, indeed, is this subjective factor, that, while without doubt all written thought comes theoretically within the domain of literature, yet the term literature is often used to the exclusion of purely objective works, like those of Euclid. Now the subjective factor in literature may usually be brought under the category of form; and its simplest and most usual manifestation is style. Style is that in the written thought which corresponds to the personality of the writer, and is the outcome of that personality. Two narratives may, as you are well aware, affect the reader very differently, although the framework of fact in each case may be the same. The difference in effect cannot result from the matter: it arises from the manner or style: and that, in turn, comes from the attitude of the writer towards the facts, an attitude which he reproduces in his reader. As that attitude may be analyzed into two elements, the permanent element of character and the transient element of mood; so style, reflecting the varying mood of the writer, is pathetic, or humorous, or indignant; and yet, behind all these, there is a constant element of individual characteristics, which serves to distinguish one author from another, and to which we refer in speaking of the style of Demosthenes or of Virgil, of Burke or of Milton. That constant element is, to persons of literary capacity and training, a revelation of the man; as Buffon says, "*Le style, c'est l'homme.*" Of the truth of that adage we have recently had a striking example. We have seen how the loftiness, the impassioned energy, the ruggedness and obscurity of a style with which we have long been familiar, find

their counterpart in the merits and defects of the man Carlyle.

Through style, then, we come in contact with that which is greatest in man—character; for the character of a man is the resultant of his whole being, moral and intellectual. Those who have been fortunate enough to encounter in life a great and noble personality, know that it is the most inspiring and marvellous of spiritual forces. As the chord in one instrument responds to the vibrations of its fellow in another, so the emotions of the human soul vibrate under the influence of a great and ardent character. But in the limitations of time and space and circumstance by which our lives are bound, such encounters must needs be rare, and fortunate it is that through literature we are able to feel the kindling spiritual presence of the mighty dead. It is true that only few can thus transmit themselves through the ages; but these few are among the greatest spirits of our race, for the power of style in a high degree is the prerogative of genius alone. Nor need this surprise us, when we reflect what a marvellous power it is. Style does not merely tell us how the writer felt, but communicates his feeling to us; not how he saw, but makes us see as he did; not what manner of man he was, but dominates us with his presence. In the sphere of studies there is nothing comparable to this. History and biography tells us about men, we see them imaged in a more or less imperfect medium; but here we feel the thrill of their emotions, the power of their presence. So that, not only does literature bring us into contact with ideas, the higher literature brings us into contact with men,

the choice and master spirits of all ages. Here is a society ever open to us, the best and most desirable we can conceive,—the truest aristocracy of the human race in their happiest mood, with their wisest and deepest thoughts on their lips. It is in no figurative sense, but in sober truth, that I call this "society." From what has been said of style, it is manifest that the influence of a great work on a competent literary capacity does not differ in kind from the influence of personal contact. If somewhat is lost in vividness, many of the limitations of personal converse are absent. But if in the best literature we find, in no merely hyperbolical sense, society, it is, like all good society, difficult of access. Not much of worth in this world but is the prize of merit, of toil, of patience. The gardens of the Hesperides stood ever open, but to fetch the golden apples was the labour of a Hercules. The books are waiting on the shelves, but he is far astray indeed who thinks to win the secret of Goethe, of Shakespeare, of him

"Who saw life steadily and saw it whole,  
The mellow glory of the Attic stage."

in the same easy fashion in which he skims through the last popular novel, or an ephemeral essay of the periodical press. To experience the power of literature, to appreciate style in its fulness, to feel not merely the main emotion, but the whole complex of emotions with which a writer regards his subject, is the outcome only of constant and careful study, combined with a large innate susceptibility to literary art. Though the capacity for the highest literary appreciation is not common, in most men a measure of innate

capability is dormant. To rouse this dormant capability, to guide it aright when roused, to teach the proper spirit in which to approach the masterpieces of literature, and to keep the mind in contact with them—this should form a main part of every course in literature; and I claim that, excluding the other benefits of college work, it would be no inadequate return, should the student gain this alone, the appreciation of what is noblest and best in books, and a love for the society of that august company of whom we have spoken.

(3.) Style, I said, is the most universal manifestation of form. We find it present when the literary structure is not otherwise elaborated. Thucydides' history, for example, has the simple mould of a chronicle; events are narrated year after year as they occurred. Its style, however, is very marked; the character of the writer is felt throughout, and with consummate skill he permeates such narratives as those of the plague at Athens or the Sicilian expedition with a certain emotional atmosphere. But an author may not merely impress his character and mood upon his matter, he may shape the matter itself to the production of certain effects. This elaboration may be carried out to a greater or less extent, but reaches its highest form in poetry, which I propose to consider as representative of the third stage of literature. The poet is, in the fullest sense, creative; the subjective factor reaches its maximum; and hence poetry is, in an especial degree, the subject of the student of literature. In Euclid we have, as near as may be, the colourless presentation of fact. In Thucydides the main object is still the presentation of

fact, though it is coloured by emotion. Poetry, on the other hand, is differentiated from these in that the production of emotion is here the main end, in subordination to which the facts themselves are chosen and moulded. As by its form then, so by its aim, poetry is the highest species of literature. For the highest manifestations of human nature, love, reverence, joy, and so on, are emotional. Emotion raises morality to religion. Nay more, the work of Christianity itself was to introduce the reign of emotion, to substitute for the tribunal of a fixed eternal code the arbitrament of an inner and ever progressive state.

Emotion is the main element of poetry, but emotion cannot exist by itself; it is merely the form in which something is grasped by the mind. The material with which, in the case of poetry, emotion co-exists, is truth. That the substance of poetry is truth, may seem a bold assertion: it is certainly not in accord with the prevalent conceptions as to works of the imagination. We often hear it said that history should be read in preference to novels; because history is true, and novels are not true. The advice, no doubt, is often good; but the reason alleged is a bad one. That a large part of existing fiction is false, is undoubted; yet, take all the history written in English, and all the fiction, I venture to assert that the sum-total of truth contained in the latter is much greater than in the former. The greatest English novelist of the last century calls his works histories, and in the introductions which he prefixed to the divisions of one of them, humourously vindicates its claims to truth in comparison with works usually so denominated

—and with justice. In the eighteenth century Fielding attempted to give a picture of English life as it was, Hume of English 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. But that inadequacy lies not in the incompetence of the writers, but in the insufficiency of their data. That an historian should give us an absolutely true, or even an approximately true picture of the actual Brutus, for example, on the data which are left us, is an impossibility; but Shakespeare, like the geometer, makes his own hypotheses. He assigns a certain character to Brutus, and selects certain men and circumstances to act upon it in such a way that the assassination of Cesar is the result. The representation is absolutely true, not as a picture of the historic Brutus,—that the poet does not attempt,—but of how a certain character, under the influence of certain circumstances, would have acted. The truth of the picture comes from the poet's control over his facts, as the truth of geometry comes from the arbitrary nature of its assumptions. In a certain sense, truth may be denied to the results of geometry, inasmuch as they correspond to nothing in reality; while, in another sense, they possess the highest truth, and, applied to the concrete world, as in astronomy, give results the most accurate which science has attained. There is a certain analogy to this in the work of the 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 truths of the historic kind which poetry presents; it presents also truths of the scientific or philosophic kind. 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. 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. You may make the difference clearer perhaps in the familiar sphere of religion, where we find the cold assent of reason contrasted with the warm embrace of faith. Accordingly, the difference between the poetic and scientific presentation of truth, though merely one of manner, is immeasurably great. To give a glimpse of this, allow me to present an example or two of the same facts stated scientifically, and poetically.

In a scientific work you might perhaps find such a statement as this: "The extinction of man and of all that he has produced, is assured by the action of certain forces on the terrestrial globe, which must ultimately result in the destruction of that body and its return to its primitive

nebulous condition." Shakespeare expresses the same idea :

"And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,  
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,  
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve  
And like this insubstantial pageant faded  
Leave not a wrack behind. We are such stuff  
As dreams are made on, and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep."

Again in the closing chapter of the First Book of Samuel, we find an historic statement of certain facts :—

"Now the Philistines fought against Israel ; and the men of Israel fled before the Philistines, and fell down slain in Mount Gilboa. And the Philistines followed hard upon Saul and upon his son ; and the Philistines slew Jonathan, and Abinadab and Melchishua, Saul's sons"—and so forth.

In the following chapter this narrative is fused into form and beauty by the glowing emotion and imagination of the poet David :—

"And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan his son : The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places : how are the mighty fallen ! Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon ; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph. Ye mountains of Gilboa let there be no dew, neither let there be any rain upon you, nor fields of offerings ; for there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away, the shield of Saul, as though he had not been anointed with oil. Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided ; they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle ? O, Jonathan, thou wast slain in thy high places. I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan ; very pleasant has thou been to me ; thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women ! How are the mighty fallen and the weapons of war perished !"

Thus in poetry we do not stand outside the thoughts and characters presented, we enter



into them; not merely the range of our knowledge is widened, but the range of our experience, through that sympathy with noble emotion which it is the essence of poetry to kindle. To us, in the somewhat narrowing conditions of our daily lives, such stimulus and expansion are especially necessary. Our surroundings and education are wont to leave neglected the æsthetic side of our nature, and, except literature, we have scarcely any means for its cultivation. In this land the young and ardent spirit cannot find food for ideal aspiration in the masterpieces of Phidias and of Praxiteles, of Raphael and of Titian. Our college towns are not Oxfords, nor can we enjoy the ennobling influence of the basilicas and towers of Tuscany, nor of the cathedrals of Normandy and England. The more necessary is it that this one source of æsthetic culture, which is fortunately at once the broadest and the most easily appreciated, should not be neglected. Though our æsthetic sensibilities are not the most important part of our nature, they yet form a part which liberal culture cannot afford to overlook. On the individual or nation which neglects or represses them, they exact vengeance in narrowness of intellect or of morals. The world's history has more than once shown that, when the higher emotions are stifled, the lower ones assert themselves, and plunge society into an orgie of sensuality, such as followed the iron rule of Puritanism in England. And not merely for itself is beautiful emotion desirable; its purifying effects have been known in psychology since the days of Aristotle. For to a spirit vibrating in sympathy with noble action or noble character, whether in nature or in art,

all that is mean and degrading is distasteful. And if the study of poetry is an emotional discipline and a moral force, it is no less an intellectual discipline and a practical aid. "The highest poetry," Matthew Arnold says, "is at bottom a criticism of life and the greatness of a poet lies in the beautiful and powerful application of ideas of life to the question,—how to live." It is the business of science to attain truth, of poetry to seize that truth in as far as it is applicable to life, and to give it perfect expression. Hence Wordsworth has called poetry "the impassioned expression which is the countenance of all science," and again, "the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge." It is in virtue of this side of his work that the poet is a philosopher, and comes to the assistance of the thoughtful spirit craving an answer to the great problems of life. Philosophy or metaphysics attempts to solve these, but studies so profound and technical require special intellectual endowments, and must remain the sphere of the few; while any solution to which the unaided individual can attain will inevitably be narrow and eccentric. It must be broadened from every source at command, and not least, in literature is to be found a treasure-house of aid—suggestions the more stimulating that they are but suggestions, partial solutions the more enduring that they are but partial, and sometimes a complete philosophy implicit, where least expected. My predecessor in this chair, in his inaugural address, admirably exhibited the philosophy of life that lies implicit in Shakespeare's plays, and not Shakespeare alone, but all great poets, have been profound critics of life. So that we find in poetry not

only a fountain of beauty, whence we may drain perpetual draughts of joy; but a tower of wisdom, whence we may draw weapons for the battle of life.

I have thus completed my summary survey of literature from its simplest aspect, as a vehicle of ideas, to its most complex, as an embodiment of beauty and vehicle of truth and emotion, and have pointed out some of the chief advantages which flow from the proper study of its various forms. In urging its claims I necessarily point out that in certain respects this study is superior to others,—not as disparaging these, but knowing well that they, in their turn, afford a discipline which literature cannot give. The place I claim for literature among her sister studies is a high one, and one which can be filled by none of them; but culture is broader than literature, and, as the curriculum of this university indicates, a truly liberal culture must be many-sided. Again, I have represented the results of literary study in their highest manifestations, have set up an ideal towards which we must strive. But the laws of the universe are mostly realized in tendencies, and if our studies only *tend* to bring about the results indicated, we must not be discouraged, but strive patiently towards a more perfect realization. In this endeavor to attain fulness of literary culture, it is expedient that the range of material should be as wide as possible. Especially does a proper study of ancient literature seem fitted to produce that openness and flexibility of mind and soundness of judgment of which I have spoken. Valuable above all is the literature of Greece,

whether we regard its variety, its perfection of form, its wealth of ideas, or its unique development. On the other hand, the literatures of modern Europe have, in comparison, the advantage of being much less difficult of access. Among them, in virtue of its nearness to our sympathies, its wealth of modern ideas, and their profound application to life by the greatest poet of later times, the German literature claims us first. But, after all, the wide, varied and splendid literature open to all of us in our mother-tongue is a sufficient instrument of literary culture, and from it, at any rate, we must begin. Literary taste and love of books must first be developed there; for, to close with a very true remark of Professor Huxley—"If an Englishman cannot get literary culture out of his Bible, his Shakespeare, his Milton, neither will the profoundest study of Homer and Sophocles, Virgil and Horace give it to him."



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