THE APPRECIATION OF LITERATURE

GEORGE E. WOODBERRY

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G. E. Woodberry

July 1922

THE APPRECIATION OF LITERATURE

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BY

GEORGE E. WOODBERRY

Author of "Heart of Man," "The Torch," "The Roamer," etc.

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PREFACE

This little book is not an attempt to introduce a college student to the *knowledge* of literature, but only to assist any young man in the *formation* of a taste for the best that has been written in the past in each of the great divisions of literature and especially of creative literature; it is an attempt to form a taste for standard literature. It was not in the original plan to exhaust the subject, i. e. to make any "survey," either limited or comprehensive of the field; but only to open the subject, and by a few elementary principles, a few of the most famous works and authors in each division, and a little advice, to make the reader's way easier.

"*The teaching is only of whither and how to go, the vision itself is the work of him who hath willed to see.*"

G. E. W.

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THE APPRECIATION OF LITERATURE

The Appreciation of Literature

CHAPTER I

FIRST PRINCIPLES

LITERATURE is an art of expression. The material which it employs is experience; or, in other words, literature is the expression of life. Action, emotion and thought are the three great divisions of life, and constitute experience. Literature undertakes to represent such experience through the medium of language, and to bring it home to the understanding of the reader. It is obvious that literature makes its appeal to the individual mind and is intelligible only in so far as the individual is able to comprehend its language and interpret the experience there embedded. A good reader is an author's best fortune, for the writer strives in vain unless he be understood. The reader's own experience is the key to literature. It may be direct experience, events and passions personal to himself; or it

may be indirect, events and passions observed in the career of others, or at least learned by report; but in any case the power to understand indirect experience, that is, experience not one's own, depends on the existence of a common human nature and on the share of it which the reader has already realized in his own life and self-consciousness. It is by sympathy and imagination that one enters into the lives and fortunes of others; and these two faculties, which are the great interpretative powers of literature, have richness, strength and scope in proportion to the quality and quantity of individual experience, to the depth and range of one's own life. Sympathy and imagination are the faculties which literature most cultivates by exercise, and the enlightenment which literature brings is in the main achieved through them. It is plain that the appreciation of literature is a continuing process, and depends on increase of experience in the personal life and on growth of the imaginative and sympathetic powers; hence it is changeable in taste and standard, and varies from one stage of life to another. It is a measure of growth because it proceeds from growth; to love the

poets is a certificate of manhood, a proof that one has put forth the powers and appropriated the means of life, that one is on the way at least to be humanized. Literature is the foremost of the humanities, of those instrumentalities by which man becomes more completely human; and in the individual this end is furthered in proportion as he understands human nature in others under its various modes and brings forth from it in himself the richest experience of its capacities. Openness to experience, or sensibility, is the prime quality of the good reader; and to this the writer adds, on the active or creative side, the power of expression through language. These two faculties are the essential constituents of literary genius. The appropriation of a work of genius is, in a certain sense, a repetition of the act of creation under different circumstances, and the good reader must share in the genius of his author in however pale a form and on however low a scale. It has long been recognized that this likeness exists between the two; for the act of reading is a blending of two souls, nor is it seldom that the reader brings the best part, vivifying his author with his own memory and aspiration and im-

parting a flame to the words from his own soul. The appreciation of literature is thus by no means a simple matter; it is not the ability to read, nor even a canon of criticism and rules of admiration and censure that are required; but a live soul, full of curiosity and interest in life, sensitive to impressions, acute and subtle in reception, prompt to complete a suggestion, and always ready with the light of its own life to serve as a lamp unto its feet. Appreciation of literature, too, is neither rapid nor final; it moves with no swifter step than life itself, and it opens, like life, always on larger horizons and other labors.

Experience, such as has been indicated, is usually found in literature in a complex form. It may be usefully discriminated as either personal, national or universal, and in authors individually some one of these kinds is generally predominant. Byron is the type of the personal writer, interested in his own moods and fortunes, egotistic in all his life forces, creating his heroes in his own image and repeating in them his qualities, his ambitions and disillusions, giving his confession through their lips. Virgil is the most distinguished example of the national

writer; one always thinks of Rome in the same breath, — "Roman Virgil," as Tennyson begins his noble tribute. Virgil set forth the specific and peculiar experience of the Roman state, giving expression to common traits and interests, the tradition and ideals and manners of the empire that had come to be out of the toil of the fathers and was then the glory of the earth. Universal experience is that which is the same for all men, whatever their race, country or age, and is exemplified most plainly by the stories of Scripture which have had greatest currency, and in a single author most purely by Shakespeare. The scale of experience with which literature deals, in other words, begins with the narrow circle of the writer's own life and widens out through his city, people, nation, his age, until it includes humanity as such; and in the final and simplest form this experience is of interest, not because it was one man's or one nation's, but because it may be the experience of any man put in such circumstances. Every man has this threefold ply in his life; he has that human nature which is common to the race with its unchanging passions, needs and vicissitude of human events, and he adds to

this the special traits of his age and country, which he also has in common with his fellows; and besides he possesses peculiarities of character and temperament and fortune in life in which his individuality lies. Literature corresponds to this arrangement by presenting its work similarly woven of individual, national and universal strands, and it has more breadth of significance in proportion as it embodies experience most purely in the Shakespearian or Scriptural type. The appreciation of literature in this type is most ready, in the greatest number of cases, because a certain preparation in history or biography is necessary to the comprehension of the national and personal types. The direct appeal to experience, in other words, without the intervention of study, is made on the ground of universal life; and to this kind, by virtue of the universal element in it, the most enduring literature belongs.

To approach the matter in another way, life is infinite in the number of its phenomena, which taken together make up experience; but there is great sameness in the phenomena. The monotony of human life is one of the final and persistent impressions made upon the reader

as upon the traveler. It is natural, therefore, that a love song that was merely a personal effusion of feeling sung in Persia centuries ago should seem to pour forth the genuine emotion of some lover of to-day in a far-off land and should serve him as the verbal channel of his joy or grief. Emotion has thus prepared for it in lyric poetry of all lands a ritual already written and established. Action, likewise, whose poetic form is epic and dramatic poetry, has a literature of war and passion that passes current everywhere; and thought, the third great form of experience, which is set forth in philosophy or science, sums up its formulas of knowledge and wisdom which serve equally in all languages. The common element is so great, the limits of human experience in all its forms are so restricted, that there results this easy communication and interchange between races and ages. Literature, so built up and disseminated, while it always offers a wealth of expression for the normal and mediocre experience of life, the commonplace, nevertheless tends to prefer, in its high examples, that which is surpassing in emotion, action and thought, and to conserve this, however far beyond reality, as the mode

of overflow of the human soul in its aspiration and its dream of what is possible to itself. Man is a dreamer even more than he is an actor; his actions indeed are hardly more than fragments and relics of his dreams. This is the realm of the ideal, and literature treasures there its greatest works, those which are especially regarded as its works of high genius in creative imagination. The material is still experience, and the expression sought is still the expression of life, but it is experience transformed by being newly arranged and it is life expressed rather in its function of power than in its operation of reality. This change which passes upon experience and gives scope to the soul's power is brought about by the intervention of art; for literature is not a record of experience primarily and simply, but it is an art using experience for ulterior ends.

Experience, things as they occur, the mere material of expression, is raw material, a crude agglomeration, life just as it comes to pass. If a newspaper were the complete history of a day, as a journalist once defined it, this would be an example of the expression in language of such experience; but it would not be litera-

ture, because there would have been no intervention of art in the case. The primary step in art is selection from the crude mass of material of such parts as will serve the purpose of the writer; these parts are then combined so as to make a whole, that is, they are put in necessary relations one with another such that if any part were to be taken away the whole would fall to pieces through lack of support; a whole so constructed is said to have organic unity, the unity of an organism. This unity is the end of art, and the steps to it are selection and logical combination. This is true of the arts in general, and gave rise to Michael Angelo's well-known definition, — "art is the purgation of superfluities." In literature such construction is illustrated by the general nature of plot, which is a connection of events in the relation of cause and effect such that each is necessary to the course and issue of the action as a whole, and none superfluous. Hardly inferior to the use of plot in the field of action as an artistic resource in literature is the employment of type in the field of character; here a similar process of selection takes place in consequence of which the person, or type, possesses all the qualities

common to a class of individuals and no quality peculiar to any one individual; this is ideal character. Thus Romeo is all a lover, Achilles all a hero, Iago all a villain. Ideal character, or type, and ideal action, or plot, are the two great modes of creative art in imaginative literature; but there are besides many other artistic means employed by literature in its representation of life. These two serve sufficiently to illustrate the use of art made by literature, which is to clarify the experience which is its material; thus plot rationalizes events under the law of cause and effect, and type simplifies character by presenting it under a single and immutable aspect, or by restricting attention to a few phases of it within a narrow range. Without entering on the mazes of æsthetic theory, where there is little certainty, it is enough to observe that art in general seeks order in life and obtains it by a process of segregation and recombination, whether the order so found be something plucked from the chaos of nature and revealed as an inner harmony of the universe, or be merely the grace flowing from man upon the world and the illusion of his limiting intelligence. The presence of

this order in art is plain; and also the principle of clarification, of simplification, of economy in the interest of an intelligible and comprehensive conception of experience, operating to disclose this order, is likewise to be observed. Whatever may be the validity of art, in the philosophic sense, what is essential here is the simple fact of its presence as the mode by which literature deals with experience in order to draw from life its use and meaning for men. The conclusion is that literature represents life in certain formal ways; a degree of formalism is indeed inseparable from literature, as from all the other arts, and some acquaintance with its traditionary forms is indispensable to the appreciation of its contents, while, besides, the pleasure of the forms themselves is a part of its real value. The importance of the formal side of literature is not lessened by the fact that the perception of form and delight in it are not English traits in a high degree; in this respect the southern nations excel the northern peoples by far; it is probable, indeed, that for the English generally, in approaching their literature, there is a sense of artificiality in the mere form of verse greater than they feel in the case of a

picture or a statue. The external form, which is generally described as technique, is really no more artificial than the internal form, which consists in the development of the theme independently of its melodic investiture; neither is truly artificial, but both belong under artistic formalism, which is the method whereby great imaginative literature takes body and acquires its intense and enduring life.

In correspondence with the three kinds of experience, personal, national and universal, each recreated in artistic form, there are three modes of critical approach to literature in order to interpret and understand its contents. The first and simplest is the purely æsthetic, and is especially applicable to universal literature; it looks only at the work, which is freed from conditions of time and place and origin, analyzes its qualities, compares it with others, classifies, and so judges it under formal criteria by itself alone and for its own sake as an incarnation of that human life, an expression of that human spirit, which is the same yesterday, to-day and forever, at least within the range of the arc which art has thus far measured; it is this sameness in the soul, as interpreted by art, which

justifies the absolute nature of this mode of criticism. The second is the purely historical mode of approach, and is appropriate to the national element in experience and the works which most embody it in whatever form; it looks at the environment, examines race, country and epoch, and seeks to understand the work as merely the result of general social forces and broad conditions and as the necessary and, as it were, fatal expression of these, and allows the least possible part to individual choice or influence. The third mode, which is more proper to the personal element, is the psychological; it looks at the personality of the writer and seeks to interpret his work as the result and expression of his peculiar temperament and faculty under the personal conditions of his birth, education and opportunities. All three are useful methods and are alike indispensable; and as literature normally presents the three kinds of experience blended, and seldom singly in a pure form, it is generally necessary to employ the three kinds of criticism, without giving undue advantage to any one of them, in order to grasp any great work fully in its personality, its historical significance and its universal and

imperishable æsthetic value. It is nevertheless true that mere biography and mere history are not, properly speaking, literary elements, when literature is regarded as a fine art; they are adjuncts to the interpretation of the work just as grammar may be, or archæology, or any other subsidiary aid; but the characteristic value of any literary work, that which makes it literature, is independent of these and is a more vital and enduring thing. This value lies in its being a work of art.

The critical approach to literature by whatever mode implies study, an acquired knowledge of biography or history or of artistic forms. The direct aim of all art, however, is to please, and to please immediately; study may be a part of the necessary preparation for appreciation, but it does not enter into the appreciation itself. It is useful to recognize at once the fact that literature is not an object of study, but a mode of pleasure; it is not a thing to be known merely like science, but to be lived. If a book does not yield immediate pleasure to the reader, as direct and intimate as sensation or emotion, it fails with that particular person to discharge the proper function of literature. The typical

example of the operation of literature is found in the company of warriors listening to the old minstrel who relates the heroic deeds and tragic histories that make up the tradition of the tribe, or in the groups in the mediæval market-place who hung on the lips of the traveler telling tales, the poet chanting lays, or the players representing in rude scenes the comedy of human life. This is not to say that the hearer is without some preparation, but not that of study. Even the simplest books, such as those about nature, require that there should have been in the reader some previous life, some training of the eye, some curiosity about birds and beasts and the treasure-trove of the sea-beach. The having lived is the essential condition of any appreciation; or, in other words, the appeal to experience, lies back of all literary pleasure. The more direct this is, the better; and literature rises in the scale of value in proportion as the appeal is made to broader and wider experience, to more and more of life already realized in the reader himself. His life with nature must be wide and deep before he can appreciate normally and easily the greater works of poetic imagination in which

nature is employed as the channel of high passion, as the symbol of philosophic truth, or even as the harmonious and enhancing environment of scenes of love or tragedy. That reader does best who in his use of literature insists on the presence of this immediate appeal to himself in the books he reads. If the book does not have this effect with him, if it does not coöperate with his own taste and interest, it may be the best of books for others, but it is not for him, — at least it is not yet for him. Study, the conscious preparation to understand, begins when the difficulty of appreciation becomes insurmountable by private and personal experience. The obstacle is, in the main, merely a defect in experience such as to impair his powers of imagination and sympathy which interpret other lives and experience not his own to himself. This obstacle rises especially in past literature and it increases in proportion to the antiquity or foreignness of the literature, in general, in the degree to which the literature involves different conditions of life from those which are contemporary. It is here that scholarship of all sorts has its function in the endeavor to make contemporary in thought the past phases of life.

The soul is essentially the same in all men; yet its temperament, its consciousness of the world and of itself, its faith and the modes of its ambition and consolation are widely different in the various races and civilizations. It is extremely difficult even for a trained and instructed imagination to realize the world of a mediæval saint or of a Greek sophist or of a Jewish enthusiast of the age of the prophets. If one attempts to reconstruct the physical aspect of such a man's thought of the heavens and the earth, and then adds, as best he can, the intellectual and moral contents of such a mind and heart, he seems moving in a world of mistake and ignorance so different from our own as to seem a mad world. It is curious how often the past world of our own blood, its scheme of knowledge and scope of meditation and passion, take on this form of apparent madness in the eyes of a modern reader who stops to think. Still more, if one attempts to reconstruct the world of the Arab, the Hindoo, the Chinese, the task grows hopeless; looking into the faces of the orientals, eye to eye, is a blanker thing than gazing at the Sphinx; the mystery of personality seems unfathomable in men by whom funda-

mental ideas are so differently held and conceived as often to be unintelligible to us and hardly recognizable; and we conclude briefly, — "the oriental is inscrutable." The attempt to fathom a foreign literature is like that of acquiring the language; at first it seems easy, but with progress it becomes hard; and it is the same, but in an infinitely greater degree, with the task of acquiring an Italian or an Arab or a Hindoo soul. The defect of experience in our case allows the imagination to work only imperfectly in constructing, and the sympathies to flow inadequately in interpreting, the scenes, passions and moods of other lands and peoples; and literature loses its power in proportion as its necessary appeal to ourselves diminishes. We read Greek books, but not as the Greeks read them; and one of the strange qualities of immortal books is that they permit themselves to be so read and yet to give forth an intelligible and supreme meaning. The reader takes so much of the book as has affinity with him, and it is as if the book were re-written in his mind; indeed, it often happens that the book which was written is not the book which is read, so great is the reader's share in that blending of

two souls which is the act of reading; it was certainly thus, for example, that Emerson read Hafiz. The reader's mind enters into every book, but especially into works of imagination; there is something private in his understanding of his author, and this is a greater element in proportion to the vitality and richness of his mind; what he makes of an ancient or a foreign book is often, it must be suspected, something that departs widely from the original author's design. The function of scholarship, in appreciation, is so to inform the reader with respect to the material and environment of the book that he may have the truest possible operation of imagination and the freest possible play of sympathy in appropriating the book; but, in comparison with contemporary and native appreciation, it is usually a limited success which is thus gained.

As the study of biography, history, archæology and other lights on past conditions or alien civilizations are aids to the reader in understanding and appropriating unfamiliar experience, so some study of artistic forms of expression assists him in appreciating literature, particularly in its higher and more refined phases.

In poetry, especially, a modest acquaintance with the melodic modes of languages is indispensable; but it need not exceed the limits which would similarly be set for an elementary appreciation of music. It is not a knowledge of prosody, of the different varieties of meter and their combinations, of the technique of verse as taught in books that is necessary; such study is, for the most part, wearisome and fruitless. The essential thing is to be able to read verse, and to read it intelligently so that it declares itself to be verse and not prose by the mere fall of the syllables. It is extraordinary how rare this power has become. It is true that in older modes of education, such as the Greek, the melodic modes of the language were defined and held by the concurrence of the instrument and the dance with the choral movement of the words; but verse, even when not so sustained, has a clear movement of its own. The ear should be trained by the oral repetition of verse, if it is to be true; but this is seldom done in any effective way. It is not only the keen sense of the melody of verse which has been lost; the significance of the line and the phrase as units of composition is also seldom

known. It is not possible to appreciate verse unless it is correctly read, nor to realize its beauty without some sense of its structure, that is, of the unitary value of phrase, line, and stanza, and of the mode of their combination to build up the whole into one poem. To perceive melodic time in verse with its subtle modulation of cadence and rhythm, and to be aware of the interlacing and close junction of phrase and line in which much of the grace and felicity of poetry resides, are labors neither difficult nor long; a little intelligent attention suffices to acquire this power and with it the formal pleasure of literature begins. The way once entered on may lead so far as to the appreciation of a Greek ode or even to pleasure in the intricacies of a Persian song. It is not, however, necessary to go to such lengths. The forms of poetry have their effect, like the forms of other arts, without elaborate study or developed knowledge of technique. Oratory is a mode of address full of artifice, but it is artifice grounded upon nature, so that it sways the "fierce democratic" by itself; and the forms of poetry are similarly grounded upon nature, and its music plays upon the heart and mind of men

by a necessity of their constitution. A scientific and technical knowledge is by no means required of the reader; but an elementary acquaintance with melody and structure, such as to allow correct reading and the perception of the harmonious confinement of thought within the limits of the musical beats of phrase and line, is hardly to be dispensed with. It is questionable, on the other hand, whether much is gained by study of the artistic field in larger matters, such as, for example, dramatic construction. In that direction the reader turns his attention from the work to the workmanship, and may embarrass himself with theory, or preconceptions not universally applicable. But without setting limits to study of whatever sort, for all modes of study have possible uses, it is to be laid down in general that all study of literature in the way of preparation to grasp and understand, whether it be linguistic, historical or æsthetic, exists to be forgotten and laid off as soon as it is completed; its end is to withdraw one by one the veils, and leave the reader alone with the spirit of the book, which then speaks to him face to face. All the rest was but preliminary; it is only then that he begins to read.

The uses of study in all its kinds being thus subsidiary and a means of remedying defects in the power of imagination, sympathy and perception of form, the reader is at last thrown fairly back upon his own experience, or the kind and quality of the life he has lived, for his appreciation of literature; he is left to himself. If the light is not in him, he cannot see; and, in general, large parts of literature remain dark and, even in authors whom he comprehends in the main portions, continue obscure. This is especially true of the greatest works of genius. For the reader the measure of his understanding of the author is the measure of the author; and from this there is no appeal. It results from these conditions that literature is slowly appropriated and is a thing of growth. The reader cannot transcend at the moment his own season; as a child he reads as a child, and as a man as a man. A boy of ten may read Homer, but he reads him with the power of a boy of ten. It is a child's Homer. The dependence of the book on the reader being so strict, it is always advisable to keep literary study on a near level with life as it is in the individual case. The natural introduction to

literature for the very young is by means of that universal sort which is selected from all ages and requires no study, such as the stories of Scripture, short legendary tales of history, beast and bird fables, fairy tales and the like. They have, besides their intelligibility, the advantage of accustoming the mind to a make-believe world, natural to childish fancy, and so laying the foundation for that principle of convention which is fundamental in art and indispensable in its practise, and also of making the contemplation of imaginary experience habitual so that there is no shock between it and truth. The transposition by which human experience is placed in the bird and beast world is a literary fiction; as an element in early education it helps to give that plasticity to the world of fact which is essential to the artistic interpretation of life and the imaginary habit of mind. The serious study of one's own literature is most fruitfully begun by acquaintance with those authors who are in vogue and nearly contemporary, the literature of the century preceding, on the well-worn principle of proceeding in knowledge from the better-known to less well-known, and because there is the

minimum of necessary study intervening between author and reader. To approach and have practise in the literature that requires study there is nothing better for the beginner than Greek literature, and it has the peculiar advantage for broadening the mind of being a pagan literature and yet closely kindred to our own, presenting human experience under very different conditions from the present, and yet easily realizable in wise and beautiful forms. In Greek literature, too, the universal element is greater than in any other, and this facilitates its comprehension while the mind becomes accustomed to the mixture with the universal of the past, the temporal, the racial, the obscure, the dead. It is advisable, also, in these early choices and initial steps to consider the season of the reader, to begin with books in which action has a large share and postpone those in which thought is dominant, to favor those of simple rather than of refined emotion, to keep in all things near to the time of life and to that experience especially which is nascent if not already arrived in the reader. And what is true of the beginner is true for every later period. It is best to be honest with oneself,

and to respect one's own tastes and predilections; not to read books because they are classics, if they yield no true pleasure, not to force a tame liking, not to feign to oneself, or in other ways to confuse what it is said one ought to like with what one does like sincerely. It is always to be borne in mind that appreciation is a thing of growth. A great book does not give itself all at once, nor perhaps quickly, but the maxim holds good, — slow love is long love. Books naturally fall into three classes: those that are outlived, because the experience they contain and address is shallow or transitory; those that are arrived at late because the experience involved is mature; and those, the greatest, which give something to the youngest and have something left to give to the oldest, which keep pace with life itself and like life disclose themselves more profoundly, intimately and in expanding values with familiarity. The secret of appreciation is to share the passion for life that literature itself exemplifies and contains; out of real experience, the best that one can have, to possess oneself of that imaginary experience which is the stuff of larger life and the place of the ideal expansion of the soul, the gateway

to which is art in all forms and primarily literature; to avail oneself of that for pleasure and wisdom and fulness of life. It is those minds which are thus experienced that alone come to be on the level of the greatest works and to absorb their life; but the way is by a gradual ascent, by natural growth, by maintaining a vital relation with what is read. So long as the bond between author and reader is a living bond, appreciation is secure.

CHAPTER II

LYRICAL POETRY

THE lyric is primarily the expression of emotion. In the beginning emotion was expressed by inarticulate cries, of which the developed artistic form in civilization is pure music. It was originally accompanied by the dance, and the literary element appears to have entered first as a short chanted phrase in monotonous repetition. In the evolution of civilization these several elements have given rise to different arts, and the lyric now stands by itself as the expression of emotion by words, apart from the dance or music in the strict sense. It remains true, however, that the substance of the lyric, the essential experience which it contains, is the emotion, and not the image set forth in words which indeed exists only to suggest or discharge the emotion. This is a fundamental consideration. The emotion is seen throbbing as it were in the image, as you may

see a bird's throat throb with its song; what you see is the outward color and movement; what you hear is the song, that emotion which in itself is imageless, a thing felt, not beheld. The substance of meaning in the poem is the emotion roused by the suggestion of the image; and however personal the lyric may be, it is universalized and made good for all men by the emotion which is the same in human nature. Lyrics, strictly speaking, are symbols of universal emotion which is conveyed or roused by the imagery.

Emotion is constant in life. It is a thing of unrest; it rises, grows, and passes away; but it comes again and again. Life is full of these vague waves; and perhaps one reason why lyric poetry holds so leading a place in literature, and is the quickest and surest appeal of the poets, is because it furnishes definite form, in these symbols of universal emotion, for the concentration and expression, under the intellectual form of an image, of that vague feeling that finds its emotional form most surely in music. The lyric defines and releases this vague emotion which is forever arising in experience; this is its function, its ground of being in art, its use to the world. It gives feeling a career in life,

and finds for it temporary assuagement and repose. It belongs to the universality of emotion that the imagery of lyric poetry has such elements of permanence. It is sometimes made a reproach to poets that they use this ancient and conventional imagery; but the nightingale and the rose, the serenade, the enclosed garden, the Eden-isle are images and situations charged with the associations of long use; they are, in fact, a ritual of love-service, and possess a ceremonial beauty and solemnity; they are parts of ancient poetic worship. They are like a fixed musical scale on which the emotion, which is the imageless burden of song, rises and falls.

If the reader be somewhat mature and accustomed to poetry, the best general view of the nature and the use of lyric verse, its range and power, is to be found in the *Greek Anthology* which is open for English readers most profitably in MacKail's volume of selections and there accompanied by a remarkable essay, interpreting the verse and bringing it home as the music of Greek life and of the universal heart at one and the same time. To be familiar with the *Greek Anthology* is to know well-nigh the whole compass of human emotion with regard to earthly

things in forms of expression unrivaled for clarity, grace, beauty, and for the wisdom of life. This book is the great monument of the lyric, and stands sole and apart. But to appreciate a work so foreign to our contemporary culture requires a high degree of cultivation; on the principles already laid down, the beginning of appreciation of lyric verse is rather to be made in one's own language and in poets nigh to our own times. Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* is still the book preferred as a collection of English lyrics; but even in that, indispensable as it is to the daily lover of English verse, the beginner is forced to pick and choose and to reject. It is best to begin with Scott's lyrics of gallant romance with their warmth of color and out-of-door freshness, or war lyrics like Campbell's with their quick flash, their humble and plain pathos, and the thunderous sound of battle gone into the verse; or, perhaps best of all with Burns, because there are so many of his poems, and the spirit of the lyric is there the master of many revels. Burns has the advantage for beginners, who find it hard to free their minds from the suspicion of effeminacy in poetry, of always making a profoundly masculine impres-

sion. Like Scott and Byron he is distinctly a man's poet, and he is more accessible, more various and especially more intimate than they are in the appeal he makes to the nascent passion, thoughts and affections of life; and the experience he brings, though set to melody and rhymes, is untransformed and genuine, and keeps near to earth, to things common and obvious, and to the comrade side of life both for wisdom and abandon. Wordsworth is in important ways a companion spirit to Burns, and Coleridge on certain sides neighbors Scott, though with profound differences. Keats and Shelley each require a certain likeness of temperament in the reader, while Byron makes a less subtle appeal. The personal, national and universal elements in these poets are easily discriminated, and their works may readily be related, by the reader who is intent on study and a knowledge of the historic course of literature, to the democratic movement of the time, to the ballad revival and the Hellenic renascence, to the Revolution, and in general to all the literary and social phenomena of that age of romanticism. But this belongs to the history of literature and is a secondary matter. It may

be accepted without hesitation that a reader who has familiarized himself with and truly appropriated this group of poets is well prepared to appreciate lyric poetry in any field.

How to read the poets is, nevertheless, an art to be learned, and into it much tact enters if there be not in the reader a native and self-discovered susceptibility to literary pleasure. In the initial steps the end should be to make this discovery, to experiment with various authors in search of those to whose books the temperament and experience of the reader respond with spontaneity. There should consequently be great latitude of neglect and a free exercise of it, and the field of literature is so large and various that there is no reason to fear any essential loss. All books are not for all minds; it is a question of the right minds finding the right books by a process of natural affinity. In early years there is, however, a counterbalancing truth. A large proportion of patience is also necessary in order that a book may have a fair chance to win a hearing; and in serious study the various phases of interest in an author should be closely regarded. As in trained observation the eye is taught to see by having its attention directed

to many points of the object and acquires modes and habits of seeing, the mind must be led to look in various directions and acquire habits of conduct in reading. Often the young reader does not know what to look for in a book, as he would not know what to look for in a stone or a flower without some geological or botanical hint. It is at this stage that patience is most needed and the habit of expectant and discursive interest. This is the time of experiment when the mind is finding itself, and is often surprised into self-discovery by accident. It is thus that the chance encounter with a book has frequently marked the awakening of a life. It is therefore desirable to open the phases of an author fully, and to relate his work in divers ways to the intelligence and sympathy in search of some response, and in general to proceed from the simpler to the more complex and subtle, from reality and action to imagination and passion, and so on to thought and wisdom that are grounded on the experience depicted.

Perhaps an example may be useful, given with some degree of detail. Let the case be Wordsworth. His work is uneven in interest, and only about one-eighth of it is commonly thought to

be of lasting value. This is contained in Arnold's "Poems of Wordsworth," in the Golden Treasury series, to which the following references are made. A condensed guide for reading his verse would run somewhat as follows. He often first attracts interest of a living kind—interest that is more than intellectual curiosity—by his unusual perception of and meditation upon the common scenes and incidents of nature, such as are about everybody, but especially in the country. A beginner in reading poetry is always interested in Wordsworth's account of his own initiation into and growth in the appreciation of nature. Note first the physical enjoyment of the boy, with the first touches of the birth of feeling in the presence of nature, as in the skating scene in "Influence of Natural Objects," in "Nutting," and "There was a Boy"; and, secondly, the emotional and intellectual excitement at the beginning of "Tintern Abbey" leading, in the latter part, to a more deeply meditative and truly spiritual development. Note further his belief in and description of the educating or forming power of nature, as in "Educating Nature" particularly. Wordsworth thought of nature doubly; first, as vital

and exercising influence in shaping the tastes and habits of men; and, secondly as spiritual, a mode of divine revelation. He expressed adoration of nature thus, religiously, as an approach to divine power and beauty. He also moralized nature, finding lessons in natural objects, inherent in them, not merely put upon them by fancy. This aspect of nature, however, as giving moral lessons to men should be carefully distinguished from the direct formative power of nature, her "education" by mere contact with her beauty, power and majesty as it is felt, not simply by individuals of special sensibility, but by whole classes of men, like mountaineers, shepherds, seamen, plainsmen, and especially his dalesmen, who are formed by their physical conditions unconsciously. The influence of nature is thus seen to be, in his poetry as a whole, a many-sided as well as intimate relation, of which the variety and fertility will be realized only by study and reflection upon these poems. They will train the mind to observe more closely nature in its mere phenomena, to respond to them emotionally, as one perceives more adequately their loveliness, grandeur and mystery, and to reflect upon their meaning.

The main interest of poetry is not nature, but man. Wordsworth chose common humanity for his subject. Even in his nature poems it is really man as affected by nature that he contemplates. He was a preacher, and illustrates the great moral ideas to which literature especially attends. He held to one controlling thought—that every man should do his duty. His primary conception was moral and intellectual truth illustrated by life in anecdotes, episodes, typical situations. Note, as showing this abstract quality in his verse, the attitude in the "Ode to Duty," first toward those who live by impulse through joy; and, second, toward those who live by principle through thought; and observe the idealization of physical law as "duty" at the end. His conception of character in detail is found in "The Happy Warrior." Note its style, full of eloquent climax in thought, remarkable for condensation and speed in didactic expression, and very noble: it contains the best English tradition of public and private character blended, and the relation of one to the other. The "healing power" of Wordsworth, to use Arnold's phrase, is shown in "The Leech-Gatherer," "Laodamia," and "Peele Castle";

they tell how sorrow is to be met, and its paralyzing effects overcome. Wordsworth's "Ode on the Intimations of Immortality" is the cornerstone of his fame as a lyric poet, often called the highwater mark of lyric poetry in his time. It is remarkable for elevation, flow, variety and the power to give poetic truth through any philosophy, however fanciful. It is the glorification of that "childhood" motive, which constantly recurs in his verse, and makes his ideas of nature, morals and spirit flower out of that, giving most completely, variously and passionately his entire apprehension of our life.

Wordsworth is a type of English solidity, sense, temperate stoicism; he is the poet of domestic affections, rather than of love, but he had moral passion; his commonplaces mean more to himself than to others, and he is consciously a reformer, and has the natural defects incident to that kind of man,—a lack of the sense of proportion and a fault in emphasis, and a misconception that what is of interest to him is equally so to others. To contrast him with Byron and Shelley: Byron is interested mainly in life as action, Shelley in ideas, Wordsworth in the working of the idea in action,—

the application of the idea to life. Wordsworth is a serious and philosophic poet, with the fruits of profound meditation and contemplation of an original genius, and an interpreter of nature and man in the light of theories and ideas not at once to be fully understood. The beginner must get what he can out of the poems, and let the rest go; but he may be sure that experience of life itself, as years go on, will constantly illuminate these poems from within, so that he will ever find more meaning and pleasure in them. Wordsworth's influence in England over the following generation was profound, especially upon serious and solid minds, not themselves of a poetical cast.

Wordsworth is often regarded as a dull poet for youth; and he certainly ripens with the age of his reader. He should be read first in a volume of selections, such as Arnold's. If his work is taken so, his poetic appeal to the average mind is more facile and directly fruitful in developing appreciation of the power and charm of expression in poetry than the appeal made by poets of his time who must be acknowledged more brilliant in genius and more passionate in feeling. Byron, Shelley and Keats require

special susceptibilities and qualities of mind in the reader,—a certain preparedness of the spirit with some peculiarity of its own; Wordsworth appeals to the normal English youth, with a taste for out-of-doors, with some light on it from another world, and with an ear to recognize great truths greatly said,—an ear for noble language. But, if he find Wordsworth tedious, let him try Shelley or Keats, or Scott, the most martial of these poets, or Coleridge, the most magical. Whomever he chooses, let him seek to ascertain his variety, his range of ideas and feelings, and especially to identify the points when he feels himself most in contact with his author, and to get always a better and fuller connection with the author's whole personality, just as one likes to get better acquainted, more in touch, with a new friend.

It is with some such counsel as this, however obtained, that the reader who is beginning acquaintance with English lyric poetry in the group named should be attended; or, if this be lacking, it is by such attention to many sides of his author that he should endeavor to open his eyes and to multiply his points of contact. A connection is to be made between life in the

author and life in himself; the points of power in the one and the points of sensitiveness in the other must mutually find each other. It is only then that appreciation begins.

One of the liveliest pleasures of literary study in its inception is this rapid multiplication of the interest of life; to become aware of the variety of the surface of life, to enter beneath the surfaces, to penetrate them and realize their significance. Among these new interests some special attention should be given to the artistic forms of the expression, to its modes of handling the theme, even so far as to make a slight analysis, if only to bring them more fully into clear consciousness. The forms of art are then seen to be not something arbitrary, but replicas of life itself. The play of emotion in the poet is not something artificial, nor idiosyncratic and peculiar to himself; in him as in others it follows the ordinary process of experience; but by his art he exhibits this play in forms of greater clarity, brilliance and beauty. For the purposes of brief illustration it will be sufficient to refer to well-known lyrics and to confine attention to those in which nature gives the base of the imagery by means of which the emotion is

rendered. In Shelley's lines *The Recollection* there is a clear-cut example of the way in which a natural scene is handled to develop the climax of an emotional moment. In the first movement of the poem the landscape fills the entire field of interest as mere description, and is so rendered as to build up an atmosphere of solitude, silence and quiet peace with increasing effect, but without human suggestion, until the scene becomes intense and magnetic, and the mood reaches its height:

> "There seemed, from the remotest seat
> Of the white mountain waste
> To the soft flower beneath our feet,
> A magic circle traced,
> A spirit interfused around,
> A thrilling, silent life,—
> To momentary peace it bound
> Our mortal nature's strife;
> And still I felt the center of
> The magic circle there
> Was one fair form that filled with love
> The lifeless atmosphere."

The mood arising out of these natural surroundings has so moved as to concentrate the whole living world on the figure of the lady suddenly disclosed, and to center the emotion of the scene in her presence so that she seems the

source of all life that lives there. The climax of the natural scene in the feminine form is complete; the scene, in fact, radiates from her. In Shelley's verse of this kind the emotion which rises out of nature often returns to nature to find there its cessation and repose, and the cycle is then complete and parallels normal experience. In the *Stanzas Written in Dejection near Naples* the example is very perfect, and it should be observed how definitely the successive stages of the mood, as it disengages itself from the scene and becomes purely personal and human, are held each within the limits of the stanza, and how the orderly development of the mood as it rises and falls away is accomplished by means of the stanzaic structure. The variations of the artistic process are infinite. In Keats' *Ode to a Nightingale* the more common order is reversed; the poem begins with emotion already present and seeks union with nature as an end in itself; the soul, being already in a certain mood, seeks expression by union with the nightingale's song, seeks self-expression there, and when the song ceases the soul returns to itself and awakes from its dream. The contrast with the *Stanzas near Naples* is complete. Whereas in Shelley's

poem nature is real and the emotion is the emerging dream from which the soul awakes returning to nature, in Keats' ode the emotion is real, and nature the dream from which the soul awakes returning to itself. Another interesting example, artistically, is Shelley's *Indian Serenade.* Here the poem has a prelude in the dream world itself from which the lover awakes into a natural world that has all the characteristics of a dream, and thence beginning its emotional career, drops the night-scene and nature completely out of sight and lives only in the world of its own passionate desire.

Such are some of the examples of the nature lyric of the most poetic type. Less unified, but not less interesting, are those forms that employ the method of parallelism instead of evolution and set the natural scene beside the mind's thought, without losing it from view in the intense oblivion of emotion. Wordsworth's *Lines Written in Early Spring* follows this method, and Tennyson's *Break, break, break,* is perhaps the finest example of it, setting forth the opposition of life continuing in all its activities in antithesis to the fact of death and personal loss. The same method and situation,

but with a closer union of the scene with the sense of lost love, are in Burns' *Bonnie Doon.* Still another variety of the type, and one widely used, is the method of expanding the emotion by a rising enlargement of the imagery, seen in Burns' *My luve's like a red, red rose;* the passage from the symbol of the fresh-sprung rose and the simple tune to the vast imagery of the seas, and the earth's destruction, and distance to the world's end, is simply made, and by this speed with its splendid abandon the immensity of the poet's love is rendered. A curious instance of mingled parallelism between the natural scene and the emotional mood, with expansion through the imagery, is found in Tennyson's *Tears, idle tears*; there is in this poem a reverberation of emotion, as in instrumental music, and this reverberation is really the poem, as may be known by the use of the refrain. The function of the refrain in verse is precisely to secure this reverberation of one chord of the mood continually rising up and dying, and rising again and dying away, so that the emotion rather than any particular image of the emotion shall fill the mind; for such poems, in which, moreover, the mere monotony of repetition

deadens and hypnotizes the intellectual consciousness, are like music, — though floating images may attend the emotion they are subordinate to it; emotion, imageless emotion, is the end sought.

It will be observed that in the larger number of these examples the effect is one of sadness, and it must be acknowledged that sadness prevails in the lyric and in the lyrical temperament. Victorious emotion is sometimes the subject; but emotion is more often fruitless, as it is fleeting, and the sadness of the lyric mood results largely from the habitual experience in life of such unfulfilled or thwarted emotion, tending to repeat itself. All art requires repose as its end; and the principle of repose is as necessary in the lyric as elsewhere; but it is found usually in the exhaustion rather than the satisfaction of the emotion. On the scale of longer poetry, this repose is obtained by a prophetic touch. Thus in the great case of English elegy, Milton finds repose at the close of his lament for Lycidas in the imaging of the Saints' paradise, and Tennyson in *In Memoriam* finds it in a pantheistic faith of the eternity of love in union with the living divine will, and Shelley finds it

in *Adonais* in the hoped-for escape and near flight of his own soul into that world whither Adonais has gone and from which the soul of Keats "beacons" to him like a star out of eternity; or, in a different field, Shelley finds repose for the passion of humanity in that millennium which he invents and sings in the fourth act of *Prometheus Unbound.* In short lyrics, however, the repose is often a mere katharsis or relief, an exhaustion with peace following on the subsidence of the emotion, and theoretically in a complete lyric this point should be reached. It is reached in Burns' *Highland Mary* in the thought of her eternal presence in his memory; it is reached in Keats' *Nightingale* and in Shelley's Naples' poem; on the other hand it is often not reached, as in Shelley's *Indian Serenade,* where the poem ends on a note of climbing passion, though the picture is of the exhausted and fainting lover. The type of the lyric that finds no repose — the type of desire in the broad sense, of all desire as such, is in the lines —

> "The desire of the moth for the star,
> Of the night for the morrow —
> The devotion to something afar
> From the sphere of our sorrow!"

These are the last lines of the poem to which they belong — a poem ending on the climbing note. The mystery of human desire has found no purer expression than in these lines. Lyric poetry in general tells the fate of that desire through the wide range of its many forms, brief or extended, the love-song, the elegy, the choral ode, and if sometimes it sings songs of triumph like Miriam and epithalamiums of happy consummation like Spenser, yet more often its burden is of failure, of the thwarted life and the unfulfilled dream; and even in the grander forms of the drama and the epic, poetry, using the lyrical note and embodying the passion of man, sets forth the same lesson of the resurrection of that which springs eternally futile in the human breast, — the double lesson of love's infinite despair and life's infinite hope.

This deep note of intense lyrical passion will be felt by the reader only in proportion to the richness and profundity of his own life and his capacity to be so moved. Such poetry gives itself, if at all, unsought, by virtue of its inner intimacy with the experience of the reader; appreciation of it is not arrived at by study, though study in the sense of attentive con-

templation, of dwelling on the poem, may assist in finer appreciation of it. The larger part of brief verse, however, makes no such demand upon the reader; much of it, and much that is most useful, lies in the realm of the affections, of incident and action. The lyric naturally lends itself to the representation of dramatic moments and to the interpretation of character in vivid ways. It is thus that Browning habitually employs it. The lyric is limited in length according to the intensity of its feeling; the more intense, the more brief. This does not involve denying that a long poem may be essentially lyrical. Passion in life is, at times, a prolonged and varied experience, but in such a case it proceeds by moments of high feeling separated by periods of repose. It is for this reason that such experience is rendered by a succession of lyrics which in their sequence compose a complete poem. Tennyson's *In Memoriam* is thus built up of "swallow-flights of song"; his *Maud* is similarly constructed; Shakespeare's *Sonnets* afford another passionate example. It remains true that these poems and others like them make their impression rather by their detail than as a whole, and are remembered and

enjoyed by their fragmentary parts, by special passages and units of the series; they are to be read in rather than to be read through, or if perused consecutively they are seldom to be finished at one sitting. Only the hardened scholar can read an Elizabethan sonnet sequence without taking breath, and then with little pleasure. The lyric, however, lengthens naturally in the elegy such as *Adonais*, in the tale such as *Marmion*, and in a poem of meditation such as *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*; and it takes on a high organic form in the dramatic sphere, though with aid from non-lyrical elements, of which the great example in English is Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound.* It is by familiarity with its brief forms and a thorough appreciation of these that the rather exceptional power of enjoying and appropriating a long lyrical poem is gained. The better way of approach to lyrical poetry is by the use of anthologies, but preferably by anthologies of a single poet than by those which contain selections from many authors. It is seldom useful to read all the works of a poet at the start; the best writings of each have already been sifted out by consent, and are easily obtained by themselves; but in

anthologies confined to one poet personality still binds the poems together, they reflect light one upon another, and by their inward similarities they enforce the peculiar traits of the poet, deepen the impression, and give an increasing power of appreciation along the lines of his special powers and sensibilities. If the poet is to be a favorite and to make an engrossing and almost private appeal to the reader, the acquaintance with the complete works will become a necessity and be self-enforced by the taste that has been formed; until then it can well wait. It is seldom that an anthology including many writers possesses any such unity. Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* is exceptional in this regard; it has the felicity of being an expression of the English genius in poetry, and of so containing an individuality, with powers of mutual reflection of part to part and of an increment of significance to the whole, similar to that in one man's works. The *Greek Anthology* is likewise unified by racial genius. The criticism offered by Palgrave in his notes, which are usually neglected, is also singularly admirable, compact, clear, penetrating and governed by a just taste. It contains indeed in its small limits almost an

education in poetic taste. A similarly remarkable aid for the lighter forms of verse, including guiding criticism and a characterization of the artistic form, is given by Frederick Lockyer in a final note to his own poems; it suffices of itself to direct the reader through the whole field. Such criticism as is afforded by these two writers, so modestly put forth as to be almost hidden, is very rare, and the reader should avail himself of it for cultivation and information. To apprehend the spirit of lyrical poetry Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* should be read; to understand some of its ends and means in practise Wordsworth's *Prefaces* are still the most useful declaration of its principles.

To these hints and suggestions as to the nature of lyrical poetry and the modes of approach to it a final counsel may be added. It unlocks emotion, and pours it in free and eloquent forms in an imaginary world; it teaches the wise and beautiful behavior of the soul in its emotional life. The scene is imaginary, but the emotion is real; and it may be more than a sympathetic emotion; it may so repeat the reader's experience and express his actual self as to be personal and his own as if he had

written the poem. This is the test of success with the reader, that he shall seem to have written the book. If, however, the emotion remains only sympathetic, it opens to the reader the large passion of the world's life, the hopes and fears of his kind and the modes of man's consolation. It is thus that he becomes humanized, and adds to his own life the life which is that of man. Emotion so felt may not necessarily result directly in action; but it results in character; it softens, refines and ennobles the soul, and it illuminates life for the intellect. In that self-development which every live spirit seeks, the power of emotion is a main part of the capacity to live and know and understand. In the private experience of a cultivated man the imaginary life, lived in art and dream and the stirring of the thousand susceptibilities of his nature that never pass from his consciousness outward but are shut in his own silent world, is a large part of reality to him, in the strict sense, — it is his larger life, the life of the soul. Lyrical poetry holds its high place by virtue of its power to nourish such a life.

CHAPTER III

NARRATIVE POETRY

THE second great division of experience is action; it is rendered in the ideal forms of literary art most purely by the epic and the drama; in the first the action is related, in the second it is represented. It is not necessary for the beginner to enter upon the æsthetic theory of these two modes of literature; his business is rather to make an acquaintance with the books, to have a first view of their contents, than to analyze their philosophic structure. Epic and drama, too, are only the highest forms of the literature of action; narrative poetry includes much that can hardly be characterized as epic, and it is convenient to treat under this head poetry which is not strictly a narration of action, but which describes or sets forth experience at length, such as Virgil's *Georgics*, Lucretius, or the long poems of Wordsworth. The most easy introduction to narra-

tive poetry in English is by means of Scott's tales in verse, romantic in atmosphere, gallant in action and swift in movement; their objective realism, similar to that of man's earliest poetry, is a point of great advantage, and assists immediate appreciation by simple and untrained minds. Byron's *Tales* which naturally follow are more full of adventure and passion, melodramatic, and as they in their time outrivaled and silenced Scott's saner genius, they still in the reading are more effective in rousing and exciting the mind; but Scott's tales have shown the more enduring quality, possibly, after all, and are more widely popular. If there be in the reader any capacity to be stirred by romantic narrative, these two poets will bring it forth without fail; and the entrance on the path once being made, the way onward has an open career by many issues. Concurrently with the tale of adventure the romantic life of nature may well be approached as it is set forth, for example, in Longfellow's *Hiawatha*, which appeals to simple poetic tastes requiring a high degree of objective reality in a poem. It is a poem in which nature is so romantically presented as to become almost a fresh creation of the wilderness

and a renewal of primitive life; it gives great pleasure to the young and is an admirable approach to the poetical view of nature which in modern English verse is so fundamental, engrossing and various in its results.

Though it is not commonly thought to be the case, it is likely that the longer poems of Wordsworth, *The Prelude* and *The Excursion*, are more available in developing this point of view and habit of mind than is supposed. Wordsworth is usually a favorite poet with young students, and he especially appeals to the quieter and self-commanded temperaments, to whom the abandon of intenser masters is unnatural; his moods are more even with life, his message is plain, and in all ways he is a most accessible poet to those less poetically inclined. *The Prelude* and *The Excursion* are regarded as tedious poems, and to have read them is commonly considered a victorious trial of the spirit. I frankly confess to wishing that they were longer than they are. The two poems together present the poetic history of an extraordinarily sensitive and masculine mind, and such an autobiography of a poet's introduction to life may well be full of useful lights on the things

of the poetic life, especially for the reader who is himself just entering on that life and who realizes that it is indeed a life and not merely a study that he is entering on. These poems contain a fund of great truths relating to that life nowhere else so well coördinated and set forth in coherency with life's whole.

Preëminent among these traits is that of the function of nature in giving a scale to life, some sort of perspective in which man may take a relative measure of himself and of his mortal career. In the mere massiveness of nature, in the comparative eternity of her life in the elements of air, earth and ocean, in the impressive tumult and the no less impressive peace of her changing moods from day to day, in the vast power and certainty of her life-processes in sunlight, the succession of the seasons and the phenomena of the death and birth of things in multitude of being, — in all this there is the sense of that infinite in opposition to which man recognizes his own finitude. One who lives in comparative solitude, like the dalesmen whom Wordsworth knew, always in the presence of nature, has close at hand an unceasing correction of that egotism that grows up in cities, —

in the sphere, that is, where human energies seem to occupy the scene, and the ambitions and worldly aims of men seem to be all in all. Napoleon, absorbed in the spectacle and mastery of merely human things, there where human qualities of intelligence, force and strategy count for most, may seem even to himself a kind of demigod whom life obeys; but the dalesman, constantly in the sight of the hills and streams and their tempests, constantly aware of the conditioning might of nature in harvest and herds, constantly open to the inflowing on his soul of the mysterious agencies of cloud and sunshine, of darkness and peril, and of the various beneficence as well as of the hard rebuffs of nature, retains the true sane sense of humanity as a creature. So Wordsworth presents the case, in describing the advantage of the countryman over the dweller in cities, and of a life led in alliance with nature over the life of the market and the court. The idea is not unlike that belonging to Greek tragedy. The spectacle of tragedy in the lives of kings and princes and favorites of the gods, which was the sort that the Greek stage habitually presented, was believed to be wholesome

for the ordinary body of spectators, because they thereby found a scale of misfortune so much exceeding anything in their own lives that their mishaps appeared not only more bearable but really of slight importance. In comparison with the woes of Agamemnon or Œdipus, their own lives were felicity. In the same way, if one has the scale of nature in continual sight, he lives with the infinite of power and the infinite of repose close to him, and he is thereby kept humble in thought, and an anodyne of peace steals into his soul to quiet, to console and heal. Nature thus first dilates the mind with her own spectacle, gives to it touches of her own infinitude, and yet preserves the mind's humility at the very moment that it adds to the mind's majesty in living; and next it tranquilizes the soul in mortal grief. In its most common form, then, and for all, even unlettered men, nature is the familiar presence of the infinite; and those who live in its presence truly find at once and without effort, find in boyhood and youth in an unconscious process, that scale of the infinite for their lives, which the soul needs in order to be truly born. This is the doctrine which is elaborated in the *Prelude* and illus-

trated in the *Excursion*, permeating both poems; and it is presented both externally in the lives of the dalesmen, and personally as the life of Wordsworth's dawning mind. If the doctrine be well apprehended, it is of itself a large preparation for the poetic life which lies in the appreciation of modern poetry, so far as the description and interpretation of nature enter into it; and in all its narrative poetry this is a large element.

Narrative poetry, such as that of Scott, Byron and Wordsworth, is found in great profusion in literature and is of every degree of merit. It does not differ in its kind of interest from the record of similar experience or reflection upon experience in prose, and much of it indeed is a survival in a late age of the habits of that early period when, prose not having been developed, poetry was the normal mode of all literary composition. That is one reason why so large a part of narrative poetry is quickly dead. The poetic form gives condensation, speed and brilliancy to narrative, but in general the narrative succeeds in proportion to its brevity. It requires a master of narrative like Chaucer to maintain interest in poetic fiction; and as a rule, narrative poems, owing to the difficulty

of sustaining emotional interest for a prolonged time, are remembered by their glowing, picturesque and romantic passages. The breaking up of long poems into books and cantos, or into single adventures separately treated as by Tennyson, is a device to avoid this difficulty. In prose the telling of a story as such is more facile and generally more effective; if a modern narrative in verse succeeds, it is by virtue of something besides the story. The literature of all nations is strewn with the stranded wrecks of poetic narratives, from the times of Greece through the interminable garrulity of the middle ages and the spawning epics of the south of Europe down to the days of Southey. In its rivalry with prose, poetic narrative succeeds only by emotional intensity, as in Keats, or by some romance in the tale favored by grace in the telling.

The truth is that poetic narrative in its great examples, those that are supreme works of the race, is much more than simple narration of an action, description of a scene, or meditation upon a theme. The epic exceeds these lesser poems by virtue of being a summary of times past, of civilizations entire, of phases of man's

long abiding moods of contemplating life; the epic contains the genius of the race that produces it, and is the attempt of that race to realize its dream of what it has been, is and shall be, not in any practical achievement in the real world but in its own consciousness of its ideals. They belong to the most impersonal of man's works; they are social poems, condensations of broad human life into which centuries are compressed, landmarks of the progress of the race through change. If the poet individually writes them, they are no less the combination of ages of tradition, its product and embodiment. In the earlier examples the tradition is national; in Homer and Virgil, it is Greek and Roman genius that are treasured up; but in later writers it is rather the tradition of the civilization to which they belong than the pure national tradition that is expressed. In English the great examples are three, Spenser's *Faëry Queene*, Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Tennyson's *Idyls of the King.* The first and second are poems of the Renaissance spirit, and involve, one the tradition of chivalry and the middle age, the other that of Christian story and antiquity, while Tennyson resumes the Arthurian

legend. It is obvious that such poems require in the reader much preparation by study before they can be intelligently read; for such reading there must be a knowledge of Scripture, mythology and chivalry in particular, but also much besides. These poems are, in truth, the most fascinating form of history, and perhaps its most efficient form; and as the English kings are most humanly known in Shakespeare, past history in general is most alive in the epics that sum it up imaginatively and interpret it in terms of the immortal spirit of man. Actual history, life as it was, is to this reincarnation of it in poetry merely dead annals; like the excavated ruins of Troy, in comparison with the Iliad, — a desolation, debris, a thing of the gray annihilation of time. The power of historical imagination is, therefore, indispensable to the reader, whose assimilation of the poem will be proportionate to his exercise of it. For each of the great epics there is a stock of interpretative and illustrative criticism easily accessible and admirably ordered; but after all aids have done their utmost, the reader is still keenly aware of the dividing power of time which corrodes and effaces the material of the poem, impairs

sympathy and not seldom transforms its original charm into charm of another sort which, however attractive, he knows to be different. This difficulty of complete comprehension is greater as he approaches foreign epics and those of antiquity. Tasso is, perhaps, most nigh with his *Jerusalem Delivered;* for Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* a special culture is necessary; and Camöens, in his *Lusiads*, is perhaps the most unseizable of the moderns. Dante's *Divine Comedy* requires prolonged study; Lowell said, somewhat hyperbolically, that the thirteenth century existed to annotate this poem, but by the phrase he conveyed a truth and indicated the immense significance of the poem. Notwithstanding their distance in time, Virgil and Homer still remain near to the classically educated reader, one by virtue of his temperament, the other by his reality; both, besides their powerful historical interpretation of race, engage human interest deeply in romantic forms. The epics, in their true significance, are only for strong minds. They afford, however, the best introduction to a foreign literature or to that of a past stage of culture. They involve such an illumination of the period and yield such an

insight into the racial qualities and career of the peoples whose ideals they summarize that the entire literature of those nations in other forms becomes intelligible, capable of appreciation, provocative of sympathy to as high a degree as it is possible to reach. It is seldom that a foreigner ever appreciates literature as a native, owing to the barriers of language and the difference in heredity, education and race genius; but it is in the epics, which have indeed a more cosmopolitan character than other forms of literature through the community of their literary tradition, that the genius of a nation or the spirit of a long age is most thoroughly and deeply felt and perceived. No literary study is on the whole more fruitful in broadening the mind and sympathies by forcing them to range widely in the history of the human spirit and to observe its modes in distant times and contrasted ages and in nations of high achievement. It is through them that the conception of world-literature, as opposed to special literatures, most readily begins to form.

The epic even in its greatest examples does not escape from the general difficulty of narrative poetry in sustaining interest for a long time.

Homer nods, and his successors inherited the weakness with the art. Every device has, nevertheless, been availed of to avoid such defects of tediousness or of waning interest. The art of narrative is carried to its highest point in the manner of presenting the story, of displaying the characters, of interweaving episodes, of varying the matter, contrasting it, heightening it; and one result is that the epics are remembered by their eloquent passages, their dramatic moments, their episodes and their highly finished parts rather than as wholes; it is, perhaps, only by the scholar that the effect of the work as a whole is felt and its unities recognized. In writing it each new poet has availed himself of all that has gone before, and has freely imitated, incorporated and rewritten the work of his predecessors, so that the art gained cumulative power in a remarkable measure, and this not only by the use of old modes and resources but by an appropriation of the substance itself by means of translation or imitation that was equivalent to direct copy though often accompanied by improvement. The epics have a family resemblance, and show their descent by their features. It is instructive

to notice also, in their succession, how they reflect the growth of civilization by their increasing social complexity, the softening of their manners, the development of the element of love in contrast to war, the changes in their divine scheme, the refinement in moral ideals, and, in general, the inwardness of the life they set forth in proportion as the world ripens in time at the season of their coming. No part of literature reflects so clearly and continuously the gradual spiritualization of human life in the evolution of our Western civilization. It is not, however, its narrative art, its brilliant passages, its record of social and spiritual progress, and still less is it the mere tale of love and war in their individual accidents, that have gained for the epics the high esteem, and indeed veneration, in which they are held. This proceeds from the fact that the epic poets knew how to set forth the tale so that it should be a tissue of that symbolical truth which is the stuff of all great literature, and so to present the story of a great design, like the siege of Troy or the founding of Rome, or of a great event like the fall of man, or of a great adventure like that of Spenser's knights or Camöens' sailors, in such

a way that while true in its individual traits it should also represent and express the fates of human life in general as they were seen and known; they told a tale, not of men's lives, but of man's life, and of man's life at its highest energy, luster and endurance, its utmost power of life. Achilles was such a man as every Greek would wish to be in action, and the tale was of what was possible to such a man, for triumph and for sorrow, in life as the Greek knew it. The breadth of interpretation achieved, such that the poem was the expression of a race, an age, a great mood of life acting and suffering, was the measure of its catholic power to express life, to define its fortunes, to unload its burdens, to declare its meaning. This is ideal truth, as poetic art knows it, written large.

One does not go far in literature in any direction without coming into deep waters, — a fact that the study of the epic quickly reveals. Without entering upon æsthetic theory in detail or developing the philosophical interest of the epic fully, it is of use to glance at the moral significance of epic poetry in which so much of its power lies. The epic is a high organic form of art, and this form is realized with different

degrees of fulness and clearness in different examples. It is grounded on the operation of the will, which is the source of action; and in the epic form it is the social will that is contemplated, organized in the life of nations. The epic centers about a collision which takes place in the social sphere rather than in that of personal life, and it has an historical basis or one that is accepted as historical. The conflict is between opposed nations or races, in which different ideals of civilization challenge each other to deadly encounter. It is sometimes stated that these are opposed, as a higher to a lower civilization, a higher to a lower will; and as the will of the social group is always interpreted by the members of that group as being the will of its ruling and providential gods, it is often represented that in the epic the divine will is involved, and adds its power of victory to the winning arms, overthrowing the lower will of a barbarous and profane foe. Thus the conflict of Greece with Troy, of the fates of Rome with the Carthaginian and the Italian, of the arms of the Crusaders with the Saracen, of the genius of Portugal with the Moslem, of the soul with sense in Spenser's and in Tennyson's

knights, of Satan with the Omnipotent in Milton's legend of creation, — all these involve the divine will in one or another mode of its manifestation through human fortunes. In the *Iliad* it is natural to think of the Greeks as the embodiment of the higher civilization and the defenders of the better cause; in the *Æneid*, as the mind looks back on the vast beneficence of Rome as the unifier and legislator of the Mediterranean world and the civilizer of the barbarous North, it is likewise natural to regard the fortunes of Æneas as the fates of the future, and the triumph of Rome over all people as the victory of that Providence which was then known as the divine will of Jupiter, the Olympian; in the Christian epics a like view is less a preconception of our minds than a part of our idea of the world. Optimism, the final victory of the best, would seem to belong to the epic and to be contained in its very idea.

Yet, as in lyrical poetry the prevailing tone is of sadness, so in the epic the story is one of the sorrows of mankind. Tragedy stamps them from the first line of the Iliad to the farewell of the dying Arthur. It is obvious at once that in all epics the side that loses finds its career

one of pure tragedy, and in its fall bears always deeply graved the tragic mark of fatality. The defeat of the Trojans, the defeat of Turnus, the defeat of any beaten cause has this trait in a marked form, and this is the more clearly felt in proportion as the fatality embodied in the new power of the victors is also represented as the working of the divine will adding its supreme might to that power. The issue for the conquered is not merely defeat, but the tragic issue of death, complete extinction, the funeral pyre of Hector, the ashes of Troy. The principle of repose invoked to complete the work of art is that of tragic repose, death. The tragic mark also appears in the apparent injustice done to a noble nature, for it is not felt that Hector deserves his fate; he is a victim of the adverse gods, the same that Turnus feared in his last mortal struggle. Nor is the tragic note confined to the beaten cause. In the victorious cause tragedy has a large field all its own. The price of the victory of the divine will, or of the higher civilization, is in all these great poems a tragic price, and is the more plainly and openly so in proportion to the height of the poem. In this impression the epic faithfully repeats that

historic experience which it records and idealizes; it is grounded, as all poetry is, in life; and, still, as we mark the doomed nations and races going into extinction, see them pressed westward to the seas and decimated and engulfed, it is little joy to the mind to contemplate the victory of the will of civilization thus enforced by battle-axe and cannon over the weaker and less fortunate tribes of men. Sacrifice is a word writ large in the epical life, — sacrifice of both victor and vanquished. It is obvious that the optimism of the epic lies in the efficacy of the sacrifice, that is, in the validity of the idea of social progress.

As the epic enters the religious sphere, it develops its central conceptions of human life most remarkably. Here it unfolds the most tragic situation that it has been given to man to conceive. It is nothing less than the notion that in the confused field of human action there is a supreme and fatal collision between the human will as such and the divine will in omnipotence. At all times, even in the barbaric past, there have been what men thought of as collisions between men and the gods, — there have been blasphemy and sacrilege; but the

reason, which finds its career in generalization, has here, if anywhere, carried its generalizing power to the madness of extremes, and evolved the theory that not men, but man, not individuals of exceptional wickedness but the race, is in opposition to God by virtue of the human will in its essence being in conflict with the divine will, and this doctrine is summed up in the notion of original sin. In this idea the tragic element is present in all its phases; tragedy is complete. Fate, or necessity, constrains the victim by his own nature which is already born into this collision and finds the struggle predetermined; overwhelming defeat accompanies the struggle; and the end, the tragic repose, comes, not only in mortal death, but in that extinction of the will itself which is involved in the conception of damnation. This is the essential, the spiritual tragedy of mankind, looked at from the darker side. On the other hand the principle of sacrifice is invoked in order to secure alleviation of this situation; but the sacrifice is the highest conceivable, consisting in the suffering and temporary defeat of the Divine itself, in the scheme of salvation; and even under the operation of this sacrifice there

remains, as in all epic, the tragic destruction of the beaten cause and its adherents in hell. These ideas are set forth in poetry in two great examples. In Milton the fable is fully constructed; on the side of the history of the human will it is fully developed in *Paradise Lost*, and on the side of the Divine will partially developed in the *Paradise Regained*. In Dante's *Divine Comedy*, though the matter is not there presented in the form of action but in a symbolical picture of the results in the after world of Hell, Purgatory and Paradise, the substance of the situation is the same; here is the fifth act of the spiritual tragedy in which the moment of repose must come, and it is found in two forms, the death of the wicked, which is a tragic issue without relief, and the salvation of the blessed, which is the victory of the higher will through sacrifice, manifested in the direction of longer and fuller life, — a strictly epic issue. It is plainly only a tempered optimism that the epic permits to the reflective man.

Such are some of the directions in which the mind makes out, if it would grasp the profounder significance of epical poetry; it may rest in the pleasure of contemplating the march

of great events, the display of great character in action, the play of individual adventure and the many forms of imaginative delight that the epic utilizes to enrich and relieve its graver matter, but the greater the mental power of the reader the more he will endeavor to comprehend the profounder contents of the epic in its meditation on human fate, on the operation of the will, not in individuals merely but in society, or the view of history which it inculcates. History, indeed, holds the same relation to it that biography does to lyrical verse. The reader of the lyric comes to love the author, to desire to know his life and to become, in a sense, his comrade, because he feels that the poems are, after all, only fragments of the man and that they, or the spirit they express, are integrated in the poet's own nature, the poet's soul. In the heart of the poet he finds at last the song. In a like way life on the large social scale, history, lies back of epical verse, but not history in any narrow sense of politics, institutions, manners; it is life as it has been broadly lived in the past, inclusive of all that entered into it, Greek life, Roman life, the life of the Renaissance, that must be more fully resuscitated in the mind before the

epics give up their treasure. Such study belongs to the enthusiast, perhaps, to the reader who finds in literature the greater part of his mental life; in general he must content himself with something far short of this, and be confined to the immediate pleasure of the obvious part of the poem, its events, characters, and situations. Epic poetry is rich in such pleasure because it is seldom attempted except by great masters of the poetic art who are accustomed to give such high finish to their work as lesser men can afford only to short attempts. Virgil, Tennyson and Milton exhausted art in giving beauty to every line and phrase, to every incident, episode, picture by itself. The surface of their poetry is perfect and brilliant as with a mosaic incrustation of color, scene, and divine glow of art like that of the builders of Italy. In the contemplation of this resides the pure poetic pleasure undisturbed by philosophy and unshadowed by remoter thought. It is thus that the epics should be first known and appropriated by their direct objective beauty in detail, as a vision of human experience in the large; the rest will come later, if at all, and unless the philosophic interest is roused in the reader

so as to become a commanding need, it may be spared, for above all things poetic appreciation should have spontaneity.

Other forms of narrative poetry are best read in the same way with a preliminary attention to beauty of detail, to simple scenes and passages that of themselves attract and hold the reader. The poetic value of the *Georgics* or of Lucretius is thus most readily found, and the way opened to the appreciation of the poems in their entirety. Into the perception of the wholeness of a great poem, even of moderate length, so many elements enter, and for the most part the habit of the mind in artistic appreciation is so imperfect and unfamiliar, that it is not to be expected that the reader should arrive at facility in such understanding except slowly and by much practise. The idyl, of which the great English masters are Milton and Tennyson, perhaps best trains the mind in the appreciation of beauty in detail and the understanding of that glowing surface of color and picture which is the poetic method of the greatest masters, those who have had most patience with their art. These exquisite scenes of the idyls, each wrought out with the fineness

of a cameo and linked one with another so subtly that the passing of the eye from one to the next is hardly marked, are triumphs of expression; if the reader has the sense of beauty, they educate it with great rapidity, and they accustom him to that slow reading which is necessary in poetry in order to give time for the contemplation of the scene to have its effect on the mind. Tennyson's idyls were the principal education of his generation in the sense of beauty in life, and the vogue of his method and melody through the English world indicates the lack, almost the void, that it supplied, though Landor and Keats were before him and Milton survived as the best English master of the method. It is essentially the classic method, the Greek tradition. The reader once brought to true delight in the idyl finds the way to pastoral poetry open and soon adapts himself to the conventions of that world, so remote from actuality, where the dream of life as it might be fills the scene and human experience is freed from its discordant elements and poetry becomes more like picture and statue and music than in any other part of its domain. This Arcadian world, which is the most insubstan-

tial part of poetry to the English reader, is by its spirit rather a division of lyrical than of narrative poetry; but it presents a vision of life and is descriptive of a realm of imagination, and it is characteristically a telling of life, though by a singing voice, as in Theocritus, Virgil and the Italians. Pastoral poetry is a highly refined form of the art, and the taste for it indicates that the education of the reader approaches completion in so far as his induction into its forms is concerned. But the nature of narrative poetry in its various phases has been sufficiently opened; in general, as lyrical poetry develops personality through emotion, narrative verse displays the various scene of the world, society in action, the breadth of experience, and develops social power, knowledge and a many-sided touch with life. It is the vision of life, and presents experience extensively rather than intensively, with objective reality; it provokes thought and initiates the individual into the world life of man both historically and ideally.

CHAPTER IV

DRAMATIC POETRY

THE drama has many claims to be regarded as the highest form of literary art. It deals with the material of human experience immediately, giving bodily form to life; even all that is invisible, belonging in the unseen world of inward experience, and all that is ineffable in passion, is presented at least as plainly as in the life itself by the intervention of speech, gesture and the visible presence of the event. The form of art, too, employed by the drama is highly organic; reason enters into it with stern insistence, and intellectualizes the life set forth, relating one part to another with a rational end in view. Dramatic theory may be best illustrated by the example of tragedy. The essence of tragedy is a collision in the sphere of the will; the will strives to realize itself in action, and in the attempt collides with some obstacle. The action thus entered upon

is fatally controlled, both as to its occasion and issue; in no part of literary art is the rule laid down so rigorously as here that the action shall be made up of a chain of events linked together by causal necessity. To uncover this chain and show its connection is the province of the reason. Every extraneous and unrelated element is cut away; all is simplified to the point that the spectator must be convinced that the result obtained in the issue was inevitable and could not possibly have been otherwise than it was. The power which is invoked is fate; it is a power that clings to, weighs upon and drags down its prey, be he never so strong and noble; it is a manifestation of the unsearchable law of human destiny. This is tragedy as it was first conceived and practised by the Greek genius, and it remains unchanged in its essential conception. The discords that arise in life are infinite in variety, and the kinds of tragic conflict as various as the combinations of the will with life. The simplest collision is with external circumstance; the most complex is that when the will is internally divided against itself by some fact of character; and the two forms may be combined in the same play. The

working of fate in the play may be attended with all degrees of interpretation from clearness to mystery; it is most clear when it is ethical, it is most mysterious when it transcends any scheme of justice known to men. Fate into which a retributory element enters, pursuing a sin-stricken house like that of Atreus, is intelligible to the conscience; but tragedy is not restrained within these limits in art any more than in life, and fate in proportion as it sinks into facts of circumstance, such as heredity, and blends with a generous nature such as Hamlet or Othello, becomes mysterious, a part of the unsolved spectacle of life. In its progress as an art tragedy seems to leave ethics behind and to become insoluble.

The Greek drama is the best introduction to the study of tragedy. It presents several points of advantage in inducting the reader into the nature of what is attempted, the point of view, the modes of evolving the action, the resources of the theatrical representation. In the first place, it is extraordinarily simple in its statement of the tragic problem, using plain elements in the tale, few characters and well defined situations. The simplicity of Greek

tragedies, indeed, strikes the modern reader as paucity; the action, the thought, the mental and moral substance of the play are almost skeletonized in their obviousness; and for the æsthetic effect, it is evident, reliance was largely placed on the presentation with its open-air atmosphere, its sculpturesque grouping and its choral accompaniments. In the second place, the prepossession of the play with ethics is marked. The Greek genius undertook by a natural inclination to impose an ethical meaning on life as known in the legend of the race; it would find moral harmony in the dealings of the divine with mankind, and beginning with Æschylus it exalted the conception of righteousness as an element in fatality, and ending with Euripides it was still concerned with the moral aspect of human affairs. Aristotle reduced the practise of the dramatists to a theory, and simply excluded from the art all such representation as could not be rationalized for the conscience, on the ground that such representations would be impiety to the gods. The ethical school of criticism of the drama still rests substantially on these prepossessions, inherited from the Greeks, which presumed a law of righteousness

manifest in the tragedies that befall mankind. The Greek drama is also convenient for study because it exemplifies with great lucidity and speed in development the evolution of the art, not only in its emergence from its early state as a choral act of religion into a more theatrical representation of individuals and their relations, but also in its movement from a rough and broad typical treatment, as in Æschylus, through the perfect balance of Sophocles to the extreme individualization of Euripides; in these dramatists the normal evolution of every fine art is illustrated by the example of tragedy passing from a lofty and abstract idealism to the various forms of realism and romanticism. Besides these three marked traits of simplicity, ethical quality, and artistic development, the Greek drama is also distinguished by great interest inherent in itself. The subjects were narrowly limited by tradition to the group of legends and tales that contained the religious and historic imagination of the race already embodied in great events and surpassing characters; the action is consequently always one that has distinction in itself, and the playing of the dramatist's thought about the action was the

point of novelty in each new representation; the drama is thus a great text freshly commented upon and interpreted by the contemporary spirit of Greece in the person of her best masters of poetic genius. It is true that the external part of life, the action, holds the first place in interest, and this is a part of the native simplicity of Greek drama; it is primarily events that are to be set forth; the purpose of the poet is to draw forth their law as intelligible to the conscience. The character interest is different from that of modern tragedy, and seldom admits of that special trait of internal development which belongs predominantly to later art. But the characters, though fixed, are equal to the events in which their fortunes are engaged, worthy of them, and surpassing in human interest. Their mere names have served for ages as types both of human nature and of tragic destiny. Agamemnon and Clytemnestra. Antigone, Orestes, Medea, Hippolytus, and a score of others make a list that, if Shakespeare be excepted, no other literature is able to approach in definite and powerful impressiveness; they are for the imagination what Plutarch's men are for history, a gallery without a rival.

It is also true that Greek tragedy, if it be thoroughly read, presents a greater variety of interest for romantic pleasure as well as for intellectual activity than is commonly thought; its poetic riches, as Milton well knew, are untold; there is, indeed, no single body of literature comparable to it even when read, as there was never its equal for blended æsthetic pleasures when acted under the pure skies of Athens.

For the English reader, nevertheless, the natural way to appreciate dramatic poetry is to read Shakespeare. He is one of those authors so greatly assimilative, so like to life itself, that no preparation is needed to read him beyond mere living from the time that boyhood awakes to life. It is always wise to approach literature by reading one author much rather than many authors a little; and to read Shakespeare thoroughly so shapes and informs the mind that no part of imaginative literature will thereafter be dark to it. If it be impossible to assign him such a place in English education as Homer filled in Greece, his works are nevertheless a sort of secular Bible for English-speaking peoples, and express the English apprehension of life in the large both in the way of ideal

types of character, of romantic or profound courses of events and of practical wisdom formulated in pregnant phrase. To know Shakespeare well is to have sufficient depth in literary education though not sufficient range, since he was of his age as well as for all time. Such an education requires to be supplemented; yet in the English drama it is well-nigh exhaustive. At the first glance it is apparent that with Shakespeare the Greek drama has been left far behind. It is not characteristic of Shakespeare to be either simple or ethical. He had, back of his dramas, for subject-matter English and Roman history and the romance tales of the continent; this body of tradition was not comparable to Greek legend in having been subjected to the rationalizing power of the imagination through long time, and it consequently was more miscellaneous, inchoate and undigested, mixed of heterogeneous and incompatible elements, less pure as material for the creative reason that genius exercises. Shakespeare, too, was himself less penetrated with the Greek instinct for ethical order, for harmony, in life; he was of a northern stock, and what to a Greek would have seemed barbaric habits of mind were

still implicit in his nature, in his thought and feeling. The world, besides, had long broken old molds of ethical theory, and in expanding had included new experience of manifold variety. Life as it came to Shakespeare's knowledge was a greater and subtler thing than it had been in antiquity; it was full of new and unmeasured elements; it did not suggest harmony, it did not enforce on the mind any ethical law controlling its phenomena, it offered rather at the best an opportunity for moral exploration and mental experiment. These are some of the reasons why Shakespeare's plays cannot be described as ethical in the old and severe sense; they display ethical meaning only partially and often ignore that side of life; they are supremely concerned only with the representation of life, however confused and mysterious a phase it may wear to the moral judgment.

The reader must therefore be prepared to abandon that strict idea of tragedy as the rationalization of life under an ethical conception, and often to accept it here as the spectacle of mere fate, the law of human destiny manifest in examples, but seen rather than understood. The laxer hold of any informing

rational principle in the play, this free movement of life in it, this grasp of the problem without eliminating insoluble elements belongs to Shakespeare, and is a part of the breadth and comprehensiveness of his method. It is because of this, together with other cognate qualities, that critics often speak of his genius as being half-barbaric. He includes much more than art would include, nor is he careful to attend to the necessities of art; he created with his whole power of man rather than by any special faculty in a piecemeal way, and hence his work departs from art but it always departs in the direction of more life. To familiarize the mind with his habits, it is best to follow him in his growth from play to play, and so to grow with him into his practise, moods, and changes of interest, style and meditation; it is a richly developing life that will be so led. The histories, even those in which his hand is doubtful or partial, have the good of introducing one to the Elizabethan theater and accustoming the reader to its conventions, its kinds of interest, its atmosphere; and with *Richard II*, *Richard III*, *Henry V*, *King John*, Shakespeare already begins to be greatly known; the other plays

follow in their order, the romantic comedies, the tragedies and Roman plays, the romances, as they were chronologically written; and as each one is mastered and understood, so far as the reader at the time can appropriate it, the nature of Shakespeare's art and the power of his genius will open, and the wide meaning of the plays, which are a blended product of both art and genius, will be more fully comprehended. One should read the plays, and not indulge too fondly in the comment. If one is led on to further study and meditation, the Variorum edition of Furness offers every needed facility and is library enough; with Shakespeare, never forget, "*the play's the thing*." The question of periods, the Elizabethan vocabulary, stage history, may take care of themselves for the time being; so may the sources of the plots and analysis of the characters; so may the symbolical interpretation of both; life is not long enough to read Shakespeare in that way, if one has other business; but a man, even much occupied with many affairs, may read all Shakespeare's plays thoroughly and intelligently with true appreciation, and acquire an excellent literary education thereby.

Shakespeare suffices singly so much more than other authors because he includes within the work of one personality so extraordinary a range of dramatic art. The Greek drama in comparison with the Shakespearian is as the beautiful but confined Mediterranean world to the world of the world navigators. He adds to tragedy the province of comedy, but the expansion of the field is much more than that; he so treats the story that is the nucleus of the play as to make it a theme of life as various as it is universal. He presents many kinds of life, environments, atmospheres, without ceasing to be great in the treatment of them; in reading him one is not confined to history or tragedy or comedy or pastoral or any mode of life or art, but may pass from one to the other and still remain under the sway of one power; in other words, life here retains its individuality, its being one life, without losing its diversity of scene, business, and function. Humanity is, in a sense, harmonized by being thus held within the limits of his temperament. In no dramatist is there so large a geography of the world of the mind. It is true that his Athens is not the city of Theseus nor his Rome the city of Coriolanus

or of Cæsar, nor England the England of Lear nor Scotland the Scotland of Macbeth; yet each is in turn really Athenian, Roman, British, and Scotch, and gives a true illusion of historic phases of life each at one with itself; and, besides, there are the fairy world, the witches, the dream world of *The Tempest*, the world of Arden, of Venice and Verona, each yielding a true illusion of imaginative phases of life similarly at harmony within its own domain. The expansion given to life by the revelation of each new play comes with the effect of mental and imaginative discovery; it is an invigorating shock and adds new horizons to the reader's consciousness of life. If it is a chief end of literary study to reveal new interests in life, to multiply the points of contact between the mind and human experience, to open out new ways of thought and feeling, Shakespeare serves this end with a stimulation, an abundance and surprise, and with a perfection in surrendering the new world into the hands and comprehension of the reader, entirely beyond comparison with others. It is, however, not so much by the extent, variety and freshness of the worlds of life which he evokes that he informs and shapes the mind

and gives it great horizons, as it is by the free play of life in its element which he uncovers in the action and the characters, whether it be tragic or mirthful, in the lofty or the low persons of the drama, flushed with passion, crossed with melancholy or salt with cynicism, — whatever it be, it is life in its own element and unconfined. Fate rules in it, and most plainly in the greatest dramatic moments, but it is Shakespeare's fate, the unsearchable law of human destiny that escapes moral statement and is more largely if more blindly conceived than in old days. In *Lear* and its attendant great tragedies, pity and terror, the tragic motives, are at their height partly because of the paralysis of the reason in view of the spectacle; the moral order has vanished and gone forever, and no power of art can bring it back by skill in the solution of the action. Fate such as this makes the greatness of the passionate plays, and in lesser forms it is present in all as the spirit abiding in life that has its will in the end, the genius of the play. Shakespeare never loses touch with this mystic element in life, and he is fond of putting it forth as an enchantment, especially in the happier phases of his art; the

ways in which life escapes understanding are in no author so large a part of the substance, the charm, one may almost say the meaning. It is thus that his art transcends Greek art, and incarnates the modern spirit. Though his art would be described by its traits as belonging to the Renaissance, the modern spirit was born there like Athene from the head of Zeus. No other author gives forth that spirit with like power and light, illuminating the self-consciousness of humanity, its realization of human nature and human life. To read Shakespeare is not, as is sometimes said, to feudalize the imagination and befool the mind with aristocratic and dead ideals; but to be myriad-minded, like Shakespeare, is to be modern-minded, ever to comprehend and interpret more of life with an increasing sense of its insoluble elements, to live in a world of new discovery, of information, of revelation with suspense of judgment, to become more tolerant, more humane, with a serener view of the blended terror and enchantment of the scene, the golden days and doubtful fates of life, nowhere so romantically, passionately and wisely bodied forth as on Shakespeare's page. The way to read Shakes-

peare is to take the dramas which most attract and interest the reader and become thoroughly familiar with those, neglecting the others until their time shall come.

All other drama pales beside Shakespeare's. The revival of the Elizabethan drama that was an element in the romantic movement of the last century in England brought back into view the entire stage of that era and also its historic forerunners in English dramatic life. The pre-Shakespearians, nevertheless, have little intrinsic interest except of an historical kind; they live, even his great contemporaries live, largely by the reflected light of Shakespeare in the penumbra of his fame. Each has qualities of distinction, vigor, grace, charm, wit, picturesqueness, intellectual power, dramatic skill; some have one, some another of these traits; but in no one of them is the combination so happy or the work so excellent as to give their plays the quality that makes literature enduringly powerful as an expression of life in the ideal. Marlowe alone of the predecessors and Jonson alone of the contemporaries arouse other than a scholar's interest; such writers as Greene and Peele and Lodge are negligible; and the whole

mass of moralities and miracle plays, though historically valuable, and often touched by a happy strain of human truth or picturesqueness, is as literature a thing of naught. The post-Shakespearians have greater literary skill, but they had lost in the wholeness of their grasp on life and present the traits of a decadence, even in Beaumont and Fletcher and more markedly in Webster and Ford. It is possible to become greatly interested in some one or other of the more famous plays, even to reach a degree of enthusiasm, but these are special experiences of the reader and depend much on temperament and accident. In general, Lamb's *Specimens* and what he said of them are sufficient to satisfy curiosity or open the way to experiment, and Lowell's lectures on these dramatists give all needful information and show at the same time a diminishing interest in the writers which is the sign of a wise literary choice. The later history of English drama is comparatively barren ground. The Restoration drama is essentially prosaic and an expression of English genius the least admirable either for sound taste or fine feeling in English literary annals; it is only for the curious. The prose comedy of

Congreve, and later of Goldsmith and Sheridan, is the best in the language, and should be read, as novels or essays are read, upon a lower level of interest than dramatic poetry. The choral dramas of Milton and Shelley open a new source and outflow of English genius in its noblest forms, but they are rather lyrical than dramatic. The nineteenth century produced no great drama in English, though occasionally, as in *Manfred*, it gave forth a work of dramatic intensity, or as in some of Browning's poems it produced drama in a fragmentary form of romance and passion. On great lines, and for the reader who is not limited to dramatic interests, it remains true that Shakespeare, supplemented by a play here and there, suffices for dramatic reading, and after him Milton and Shelley, in their choral dramas, are the great masters in English of the truth that drama can put forth by poetic imagination.

The approach to foreign drama, except the Greek, is best made by the way of comedy, especially by Molière and Goldoni. Foreign tragedy, whether French, German, or Italian, is very remote from the reader. Spanish drama, a form intrinsically as interesting in many ways

as the Greek and the Shakespearian and making with them a third definite form of this art in its supreme practise, is still more remote from the English reader and requires for its appreciation great cultural preparation and much plasticity in the literary habits of the mind. Such reading as Calderon or the classic French drama or even Goethe and Schiller is for scholars. Foreign drama may now be more profitably approached by the contemporary forms, Scandinavian, German, French and Italian, than by its older historic examples. These plays are filled with a modern spirit that is becoming more and more cosmopolitan and pervasive, even among English-speaking people; the substance of them is not narrowly national, but universal in interest and in presentation; and the needful critical aids to assist the reader are plentiful and accessible.

The drama, as an artistic form, is of course much more complex than has been indicated; other things besides literature enter into it in its theatrical representation, and the appreciation of it as a spectacle involves other preparation and rests on other principles in addition to what belongs to it as literature. How great

a part the scenic and choral arrangement played in the Greek drama has been already pointed out, and in the modern drama the importance of the theatrical elements is often such that as an art of the stage the play need not be literature at all. The scant resources of the Elizabethan stage threw a heavier burden on the literature of the text and brought the purely mental reproduction of life to the fore; and the power of Shakespeare as a writer is due to the genius he had for this mental representation of life without much aid from material conditions. It follows from this that his drama when read merely and not enacted yields a vision and a realization of life beyond that of theatrical writers or playwrights generally, so vivid and intense as to set the plays apart, not as closet dramas so-called to be read in the study, but as literature which gives up its full contents to the eye of the mind unaided by the scene. Many, indeed, believe, as Lamb did, that such private reading is more satisfactory than any public representation, inasmuch as the presentation on the stage falls short of the scene and also of the actors that the imagination of the reader supplies. The stage craft of Shakespeare

was of great assistance to him in casting the action, in handling its development and in suggesting modes of arrangement and display; but his poetic genius, achieving a vivid representation of life by purely mental means, made the plays great literature. The function of dramatic poetry, in comparison with epic poetry which presents life socially and by a method of extension, is to set life forth individually and by a method of intension; the drama is an intensive rendering of life by individual examples of human fortune which compress the truth of life into a brief abstract. Poetic dramatic genius by its powers of ideality condenses such general truth — the law of life — whether in action or character, and the greater the condensation the more brilliant and intense is the effect. Dramatic poetry involves the presentation of life in its supreme moments, its surpassing characters and its greatest problems, because it is in these that the intensity it seeks resides and the truth it would express is most vividly condensed. In tragedy, especially, the most obstinate evil, the most mysterious dispensations, the darkest moral problems, are set forth; what life contains of pessimism and

ignorance is here heaped up; the theme indeed is often such an outbreak of passion, such crime or sacrilege, such violation as is seldom treated except in tragedy, and dramatic poetry has a certain peculiar power to treat such tales and characters as phenomena of life and passion still within the pale of understanding, and even of sympathy, because human. The tragic imagination, when morbid and exclusive, seeks such themes; and if, as in Greece, they exist in the great tradition of the race, they are deeply meditated, as in the stories of Œdipus, Phædra and the Orestean trilogy. In modern tragedy one sups on horrors quite as much as in the palace of the Atridæ, though with a difference; yet it is the same presence of the terrible in human fate, of the issue of evil in sacrifice, expiation, suffering for the innocent and tragic death for the guilty, it is the pity of it even in lives of wrongful passion, that loads the theme in the great English plays as in the old Greek examples. If the great English themes as symbols of life seem nearer to reality in the deepest consciousness of modern times, the Greek themes in their own age were nearer to that consciousness in the antique; the supreme

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crises of action and passion, of man doing and suffering, do not change in substance but in the kind of interest taken in them and the interpretation given. Tragic themes are not instances of crime but instances of nature; it is because they are so regarded that they are tolerated by the contemplating mind; the will and responsibility of the spectator are not roused because there is no possibility of his interference, and he is not called on to give judgment or to correct, but only to observe, to know. This detachment from the practical sphere is a condition of tragic pleasure, which lies largely in the illumination of life given, in mere knowledge; in the antique world it was predominantly moral and religious knowledge; in the modern world it is perhaps mainly psychological and philosophic knowledge. Philosophy, therefore, in a special way belongs to dramatic poetry and is its natural ally in deepening appreciation of it, as biography is of lyrical and history of narrative poetry. The drama addresses the reason, and endeavors to enlighten the understanding with regard to the law of human destiny; it is essentially philosophical, disclosing the abstract of truth, the constitution

of the human world, the law of character and event. It wears this aspect the more plainly in proportion as it is great, more simply representative, more profoundly interpretative; and tragedy holds the first place in it because the problems there probed engage philosophical interest most deeply.

Tragedy, however, does not monopolize the philosophical meaning of dramatic poetry. In Shelley's choral drama, such as the *Prometheus Unbound*, the intellectual abstraction is the fundamental substance of the poem; the characters are themselves allegorical and in their mythical personality stand for principles of life, while the action itself is a symbol of human progress. The play is merely a pictorial woof of music and light, a fleeting vision of lovely scenes, unless its intellectual element of ethical thought be clearly grasped to give it meaning; and it is in this significance to the mind, a philosophical significance, that the play becomes great, the only great play of the English genius in poetry in modern times. It is a reconciliation play, conceived in Shakespeare's last manner and as such is cognate to *The Tempest* as well as by its lyricism. The division of the

thought from the characters is, perhaps, too much felt, the philosophy is too explicit and separable; but the theme, transforming the Revolution into the Millennium, is a great argument set forth dramatically and addressed to the reason. The most interesting drama, however, apart from tragedy, is that in which life is set forth with the effect of a dream, of a life that might be, of which the best examples in English are the plays of Shakespeare's middle period and his last romances. They are characterized by a predominant lyricism in the treatment. The lyrical and epical elements in his genius were the first to come to maturity; in the English and Roman plays the epical element is plain, and the lyrical element appears in the early comedies, reaching its greatest purity and height in *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* The dream atmosphere of this play gives, perhaps, the type; but something of the same quality is in *Love's Labour's Lost,* at the beginning of his career, and is the source of the profound fascination of such ripe comedies as *Twelfth Night, As You Like It* and *The Merchant of Venice.* The dramatic method is the same here as always, — an intensive representation of life by indi-

vidual examples; but here it is the romance of life in its felicities that is set forth, with only such saddening as more endears it. In the three last romances, *Cymbeline*, *A Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*, the dream is still the atmosphere of the play, but the felicity is enhanced by the darker elements that enter into the themes, and the hand that wrote these dramas is one that had been dipped deep in tragedy. They are the climax of dramatic art in England as an art that gives pleasure to the mind and also renders up wisdom. In other authors, too, it is the lyrical treatment of life in this dreamful way that most attracts the reader; in Jonson, in Beaumont and Fletcher, in Milton's *Comus*, the pastoral and masque elements are those on which the memory most dwells. After tragedy this lyrical drama of Shelley, Shakespeare and Milton must be reckoned the greatest achievement in English, and the human philosophy which it gives out in forms of beauty is a high-water mark of the wisdom that literature reaches.

Poetry in its main forms, lyrical, narrative and dramatic, has now been touched upon with a view to suggest its nature, the way of approach

to it, and the spirit that should attend the reader. It is obvious that the divisional marks are terms of convenience; there are lyrical and epical elements in drama, dramatic elements in lyric and epic; poetry treats life as a whole, and its power is integral, one power, whether put forth lyrically, epically, or dramatically. Yet it is true that lyrical poetry mainly exercises the emotions; the epic discloses life in its extension in the social sphere; the drama embodies life intensively; and in each case severally, biography, or the love of the author, history, or a sense of the life of the race, and philosophy, or an interpretation of human nature, are the natural aids to appreciation in each kind. The end of poetry is to illuminate life from within the consciousness of the reader, to realize there his own emotions, the scene of life in the world, the constitution of passion and fate in man and his circumstances, to make him acquainted with the nature of man in him. Progress in this knowledge is usually more rapid in poetry than in prose, because of the condensation of life achieved by poetry, the use of the economies of art and the methods of reason in statement, and the emotional vividness that belongs to all

poetic modes. In a field so immense as poetic literature presents, much must necessarily be neglected; the safest guide is the reader's instinct, the choice made by his own temperament and powers. The degree of appreciation will necessarily vary from the least to the most complete; but it need not be complete in order to be useful. The greatest books are those in which one grows the most and the longest. The end being to know human life, what man in his essence is, what he has been, what he is capable of, there is no goal to the study; and the further one proceeds in it, the more, perhaps, he is burdened with the knowledge; but surely the destiny of the mind, if man has any destiny, is to lay this burden upon itself.

CHAPTER V

FICTION

THE art of literature, when it works in prose, does not change its method from that employed in poetry nor is its material different. Prose makes a less rigorous demand upon the reader's attention and ability; but the action of the mind involved is the same as in verse, the aims of study are the same and the modes of appreciation are identical. Art, or the universal form into which reason casts experience by means of the imagination, controls great works of prose as it rules great poems; fiction stands at the head of prose because it is the sphere in which such art works most freely and effectively; and in proportion to the presence of such art is fiction great and enduring. Poetry achieves the extreme of condensation of life and truth, and hence the appreciation of it requires a mind naturally rapid and strong in apprehension; a high-strung nature

finds poetry fitted to it; but the reader generally, less intense in mental application and concentration, prefers prose as more adapted to the normal movement of his mind. This choice continues to operate even in prose, and the effort of the mind is relaxed in proportion as formative art is less present in the work and what is told is set forth in its natural and raw state of facts as they occur. Every nation has tales, and primitive people possess a store of folk-lore, but fiction as a special mode of literature develops somewhat late in civilization. It has a literary ancestry, an historic evolution, which can readily be studied, and in its origins it is much mixed with poetry. In our own time it has come to fill so large a portion of the literary field as to be engrossing; it is in a peculiar sense the people's literature in our democracies, characterized by popular education, by home leisure, and by an extraordinary awakening of curiosity in large masses. It is a powerful means for the spread of information of all kinds and for the propagation of ideas; all knowledge is most interesting when given out in the form of imagination, and the demand for knowledge was never so great as now; it is alto-

gether natural that the novel, the most flexible form of writing for imaginative propaganda, should be the preferred modern form of literature.

If one searches for the occasion of fiction and considers its wide range of topic and interest, it would seem that no more satisfactory answer can be given than mere human curiosity. In response to this, all that is knowable now takes on the form of the novel. In approaching the field choice seems almost impossible, so varied are the interests involved and all with many claims to regard. The young mind, however, has a native instinct of its own grounded in human nature. The first interest of men is in action, in the event, the thing which is done. This is the interest of the boy, of the practical man, of the man whose meditative and fuller spiritual life is only begun. The type of fiction of this sort is *Robinson Crusoe.* It is a tale of the facts of life in a wonderfully interesting form, and the literary life of thousands has begun with it. The more exalted type is the novels of Dumas, where in a romantic form the life of action is set forth with the interest of vividness, surprise and the fascination of adventure.

Nothing can be better than Dumas to arouse in a boy the sense of the power of life, the ambition of doing, the wonder of the things that can be done, — the whole charm and marvel of the world of the deed. Romance is at its highest in this field, and the awakening influence of romance on the mind cannot be overvalued; it opens out the roads of all the earth and the seas, and gives the career of a gallant will in meeting the unknown and finding the hidden treasure of a man's destiny. Herodotus was in history the very type of such spirit as this, and it made his history one of the great books of the world. Travelers often show and breed the spirit of their tales, and the heroes are made of it from the voyage of the Argo to the days of the search for the Pole. In imaginative literature Dumas is the great example, and in the many volumes that bear his name there is endless store of the most inspiriting kind of such action.

The first advance is made when the mind is no longer content with the action in itself, but meditates it, and finds its true interest to lie in what the act reveals of the character of the man who performs it. In other words, character

is a higher interest than action, and supplants it as the object of attention in a maturing mind. Character is, in fact, a summary of action and contains both the effect of past and the promise of future acts; it is, as it were, a brief abstract of action, its potentiality. Man here comes into his rights as the leading interest in the scene, independent of the events. Character is necessarily ideal in literature; it is set forth by its ruling passion, and in the beginning is simple rather than complex, since its presentation is limited to that class of action in which its distinction resides; one reason of the effectiveness of character in its more antique or primitive embodiments is this simplicity flowing from the extreme ideality or abstractness of the type. The Greek heroes share somewhat in the trait of being by virtue of which the gods are ideal, each having a function of his own, being an Ajax, Patroclus, Orestes, Jason Heracles, and hence marked out for his work. Character is thus in its early forms action viewed in one mode, as it were, and compacted into human power, unified, individualized, personified. The act is of interest in itself still, but it is of more interest as being the act

of Achilles or Ulysses and as declaring what manner of men they were. Character is more profound than action, and hence to a mature mind is more engaging. This is especially noticeable in those persons who are named *characters* in our common speech, — the usually eccentric personalities who are peculiarly specimens of human nature out of the ordinary, and by their words or actions give a fresh, piquant, or humorous impression. Without regard to such exceptions, however, character awakes a profound interest because in its types are stored ideals of what men are, the forms cast by the moral habits and the aspirations and experiences of the race, the qualities consonantly to be found within the limits of one personality, the discords possible within the same range; character is thus a compend of the results of life, of its possibilities in the individual, of its fusion in a single mold. In this stage character is not divorced from action, but both are present; the character is seen acting; the actions however various are resumed in the character. The type of such interest, of balance between action and character such that nevertheless the character rather than the action impresses

the mind and memory, is given in Sir Walter Scott's novels, and the unique place that Scott holds in English fiction is due to this firm grasp of life in the form of character which is still kept close to action. This is the trait by which his art as a creator is so supreme, though the power with which he seizes the reader also owes much to the intrinsic nature of the character displayed, to its being national in type whether Scotch or English and showing that nationality strongly and finely in essential traits, to its being doubly presented as of the peasant and the noble classes, and in each exemplified with truth to the life of the one and the ideal of the other, and also to its being inclusive in its eccentric or abnormal instances of so much that is plain human nature, so that one may say indeed that no types are so universally true as those which seem most peculiar in his pages, such as the old antiquary, Norna or the saints of the Covenant. Scott is the great master of character; not that other English novelists have not equaled him in such portrayal, but none have created character upon such a scale, in such profusion, with such social comprehensiveness, and at the same time with such unfailing

human reality. In his works one always finds the substance is not the stream of events, however romantic and involved in mystery, but man acting and suffering; not the plot, but the character. There is a perennial attraction in character that does not pertain to mere story; and this mastery of character is the trait which makes Scott to be so often re-read and to be a favorite in later as well as in youthful years.

Character develops a new kind of interest when attention is fastened, not on what it is, but on how it came to be what it is. The internal life here comes to the fore; the evolution of personality, a train of inward phenomena, is substituted for a course of external events as the subject of interest, however much events may be mixed with the story. This study of motivation and internal reaction marks the final stage of the development of the novel in its presentation of life and completes the circuit of its sphere. Psychology, analysis, introspection, characterize it, and it requires in the reader an intellectual interest perhaps stronger than the imaginative interest. The history of a soul, rather as a phase of inward experience than of action, is the focus of attention. The intro-

spective novel in the emotional sphere, the novel of sentiment, is an early form of such analysis and is illustrated in Richardson, but in its higher and more complex examples the psychological novel full-grown naturally allies itself to some theory of morals, some abstract element in religion or ethics, and sets forth life as an education of the character in such a view. The type, perhaps, in which the various constituents are the most clear and at the same time noble, is George Eliot's *Romola*, in which great and conflicting ideals of life are presented through the medium of the leading characters by a psychological and largely introspective treatment. Her interest in life was that of a philosophical moralist, and her fiction showed increasingly the analytical habit. The simpler blends of character and action in her earlier tales give place in her fully ripened work to a wide and complex exposition of the nature of her persons in which the element of thought finally overweights the narrative. Just as dramatic poetry issues in a philosophical interest, so the novel, as it develops power and grasps life more profoundly and naturally, appeals with greater directness to the intellect in its

effort to understand human life. It may develop this intellectual quality in either of the three forms of pure action, of synthetic or of analytic character, but the quality is most pronounced, pervasive and engrossing in the last. In such writers as Henry James and George Meredith it reaches a climax. Literature, moreover, must always be viewed historically as obeying the general law of evolution in society; its movement is constantly toward a representation of the inward nature of life, to bring out man's self-consciousness, to reveal personality. The problems of personality are those which finally engage the mature mind in a highly developed literature, and the psychological novel is the center where this study is most active. This line of development is not peculiar to fiction, but belongs to literature in general, which tends more and more to become a confessional of the soul's experience, a dissection of life, a pursuit of the motives and reactions of the inner world, of the moods and methods of thought and passion in their intimate cells, of all the secrets, in one word, of personality.

The interest of the novel being thus distributed in these three general modes of action, charac-

ter in action, and personality for its own sake, the story itself may be unfolded in any one of many ways or by a blend of several, the chief elements being plot, character, situation, dialogue, sentiment, and the like, variously compounded according to the talent and purpose of the writer. A greater emphasis on any one of these elements gives a special quality to the work and makes a particular appeal to some one class of readers whose taste is for that element. Whatever methods be employed, the enduring worth of the novel in its English examples depends much on the success of the writer in giving the scene of life as a whole, in securing the illusion of a full world, or one that at least is complete for the characters inhabiting it. The perfection of this environing of the characters with a world is seen in Shakespeare's plays; and in proportion as the novelists achieve this effect, and at the same time obtain human reality, they show the highest imaginative power, true creative faculty. There is no surer sign of greatness in a novel than this large grasp of general life, the crowded stage, the throng of affairs, the sense of a world of men. It was thus that Dickens began to dis-

play his remarkable faculty in *Pickwick Papers,* rendering the various face of English life and manners in a series of loosely connected sketches. Character and manners, seconded by genial good nature and humorousness, make the perennial attraction of that marvelous piece of entertainment, which was the precursor of great novels conceived on more rigorous lines of construction and with more breadth and poignancy of interest, but all alike in this power to render life as a miscellaneous scene of human activity. Scott similarly in his greatest tales never fails to give largeness to his world and to fill it with currents of social life, with events of high interest and with a multitude of persons. Thackeray in a narrower sphere of society follows the same method in *Vanity Fair*, and Fielding in *Tom Jones.* In all these authors the hero counts for little; the particular tale of individuals involved, the plot, the mere personal story, however well constructed and interesting that part of the work may be, is yet represented as a portion of the world only, a world that embraces them in its larger being. In *David Copperfield* the tale of Emily and that of Agnes divide the interest, but they seem

episodes; it is the picture of life as a whole that dwells in the memory. In this larger world it may be character and manners or the interplay of events, it may be superficial movement, as in the picaresque novel generally, or it may be profound social movement, as in the greater historical novels, that holds the front place; but whatever the method, the substance is of the world of men.

The highest degree of universality and inclusiveness is reached in Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, which while remaining a tale of individuals sums up the national scene, the elements of Spain, its genius, its history, and also gives through this the sense of human life in the broad, the truth of human nature as it is everywhere. *Don Quixote* is the greatest of all novels because singly it contains so large a world. In lesser novels of similar type the world set forth does not lose unity, it does not seem partial, but yet it comprehends only some portion of the scene, as in the provincial novel generally, or some strip of time, as in the historical novel. The breadth of the theme makes a large part of the intrinsic value of such novels, which offer an embodiment, for example, of

present life, or a panorama of an epoch, or a rehabilitation of an antique age. Irish tales are good in proportion as they give the Irish spirit and environment. Reade's *The Cloister and the Hearth* is a great historical novel because of its breadth of treatment, and Kingsley's *Hypatia* excels because of its comprehensiveness, its being a summary of one moment of ancient life intensely imagined. In all these novels there is a theme, which in a certain sense exceeds and contains the personal theme, a theme of time, — of Alexandria, of the Middle Ages, of Ireland. It is not at all essential that this outer theme should be rendered with historical accuracy or be true in its details in the sense of fact. What is necessary is that an illusion of truth should be arrived at by fidelity to the general traits of the city, the age, or the land, so that the world of the story shall be representative of what was. One reason of the facility with which the historical novel is written and received is because this outer theme, Rome or Italy or France, is in itself great, and an undying interest of powerful fascination belongs to it independent of the particular tale that may be narrated as a personal history within

its limits. Such a theme naturally induces a series, the Jacobite novels of Scott, the Indian and sea-tales of Cooper; each particular story is but one product of it, and no author exhausts it though he may exhaust his own power of dealing with it. The theme, the world of men involved, diminishes in importance in proportion as the particular tale makes head and absorbs attention; but, in general, great novelists give the scene of the world, the picture of life, whether in a contemporary or historical range, the first place in their representation. This is true without reference to the scale of that world; it is, for example, the method of Goldsmith in *The Vicar of Wakefield.* The novel is indeed the form of literary art best adapted to representing man as a social being and to setting forth in imagination social phenomena; this is one reason, also, why its evolution is so late in the history of literature.

The art of literature in passing into the novel does not lose its function of presenting general truth. That is still its main aim. The necessity of doing so, in fact, underlies all that has been said of the part taken in the novel by the scene of life, the illusion that it must give of a

world, whether in the sphere of manners or history, not actual but containing the general reality of human events in a particular time or country and of human nature in its essential traits. There is an epical element, as is plain, in the description which fiction of the sort that has been treated gives of life. When the social theme is less prominently brought forward and the particular story of a few individuals enlists attention for its own sake, then the novel avails itself of the same resources used in dramatic art. It represents the general law of life and the constitution of human nature by means of examples, and the worth of the novel depends, just as in a play, on the simplicity, clearness and profundity with which it accomplishes the task. There is no material difference between the novel and the drama so far as the handling of plot, situation and dialogue are concerned, except that in a novel the writer has a free hand and can use more means of displaying his characters and their career. In George Eliot's *Adam Bede*, for example, there is, it is true, a background of country and clerical life and of religious agitation; but the story is mainly conducted in the

fortunes of a few individuals placed in the foreground. It is a tragic history that is related. Its profound interest is its life interest, the illustration it gives of human events, the light it throws on principles of conduct, belief, the operation of wrong, facts of passion, theories of sin and salvation and the like. The story exists and was written for the sake of its teaching power; and this is more manifest than in the drama because in the medium of prose the teaching can be more plainly brought out and emphasized. Such novels are dramatic in their interest; they cover the same tracts of life as the drama, whether in comedy or tragedy, and the mode of mental approach to them is the same, except that the novelist makes understanding of his theme more easy for the reader by the greater fulness of the presentation and by the comment that, whether explicit or implicit, is always to be found in the text. It may be said, indeed, that there is no form of poetic truth that the novel in one way or another may not present, usually but not always with less intensity; the analysis of the novel discloses the same substance as poetry, the same fundamental human life which is the matter of all

literature. Symbolical truth is that which is, perhaps, thought of as most characteristic of poetry; but it exists in the novel quite as plainly and in its most apparent forms. Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* is a work of fiction which has all its meaning in the spiritual truth which is there set forth in allegory, and it is one of the most widely distributed of English books. The type of the method, is, however, rather to be found in Hawthorne. In his short romantic tales it is commonly used, as, for example, in *Rappaccini's Daughter* and *The Artist of the Beautiful*, where the reader who does not interpret the symbols misses the meaning. *The Scarlet Letter* is a still more striking example of the symbolic representation of life; the background of the Puritan world is but slightly indicated by the romancer, but he blazes forth its essence by a series of picturesque scenes that are like a sign language of the imagination. The same author's *Marble Faun* pursues the same method; the world involved is but lamely made out, and so inadequately that even Donatello seems an alien in it, like the rest, but none the less a theory of sin is symbolized by means of it with a refinement and intimacy such that

one seems rather to be looking at pictures and statues than listening to a tale of events. To render life by symbols of landscape and idyllic situations belongs peculiarly to poetry, but in the Greek novel it is found as charmingly set forth as in verse, and the pastoral enters as an element into much prose fiction in various forms. In Watts-Dunton's *Aylwin* characteristically poetic modes are prevailingly employed to render gypsy nature. So near is romance to poetry that it often makes the distinct poetic appeal, as, to take a great instance, in Blackmore's *Lorna Doone*. The lyric, dramatic and epic elements, being fundamental in literature, are all to be found in prose fiction, and the art employed is the same creative imagination constructing an illusory world in order to set forth the general truth of human life.

Fiction, therefore, in its great examples approaches poetry because it uses the same material to the same ends and proceeds by the same method of art, universalizing life and formulating it; but it differs from poetry because it is less delicate in the selection of its material, less exacting of a high degree of art in dealing with it, and directed to utilities that poetry

ignores. The art of fiction is two-faced; it is both a fine and a useful art; and if on the one hand in works of great genius it comes nigh to the supreme masters of the drama, on the other extreme it neighbors that universal human service of which the modern name is journalism, — the literature of information, propagandism, world-wide curiosity, discussion, speculation, of which it may be said more truly than of any other form of writing that nothing human is alien to it. Journalism is the most catholic form of the written word. The novel is the next most embracing, and its flexibility as a social instrument under present conditions has given it the commanding practical place which it holds among readers. It is by the novel that the life-knowledge of modern peoples is most fully realized to themselves, in every degree of the scale of society, in popular apprehension. This great change was largely effected by the advent of democracy. In the old literature the national tradition and morality were concentrated in the history, real or imaginary, of the aristocratic class with but slight popular elements, and this was handed down in poetry and chronicle and tale; but with the coming of modern democracy

the popular life itself came into the field of interest, and literature giving more and more attention to the citizen life ended by assigning to the common lot of men the place which has formerly been held by the aristocracy. The democratizing of literature which began with Richardson and Fielding, in the novel, and with Burns and Wordsworth, in poetry, resulted in the last century in England in a representation of life in all its classes, provinces, and interests, such as no civilization had ever before placed on record about itself. The reading class was democratic, and men like to read about themselves, to see their own lives reflected, their opinions expressed, and their ideals defined; they also desire information about the way other men live whose modes of behavior and thought, though they may be members of the same society, are not well or intimately known; a public thus came into existence for which the minute and detailed portrayal of all sorts and conditions of Englishmen, and of every nook of English ground, was interesting. The field of human life covered by the novel became immense in variety and comprehensiveness. There were certain preferred tastes inherent in

English society, and the English novel showed these preferences; the writers, too, could deal individually only with such phases of life as they knew; the novel remained socially aristocratic and middle-class, with an episodic attention to the lower state of society, but it faithfully reflected the consciousness of the English people, and the growth of the democracy is shown in the ever increasing emergence of the literature of the least favored, the stricken and abandoned class. Dickens was the leader and marks the powerful entrance of philanthropy into the novel, and the portraiture of the lower class by him and others perhaps made up in genius what it lacked in quantity. The English, however, are not a frank race, and various as their picture of life is in the novel, it is still discreet and controlled. France, in the representation of life given by her novelists, exceeded the English in the comprehensive fulness of the portrayal; both Balzac and Zola attempted a survey of life more systematic and complete than any single English author conceived, and the French novel surpasses the English as an ample expression of human nature in all social degrees and conditions.

There was an advantage in the concentration of the national tradition and morality in the old literature which was especially favorable to poetry; on the other hand the dispersion of interest by the democracy through all classes of society and in all parts of the national body creates a stronger social bond, develops humanitarianism and is vastly more informing to the mind. The exposure of human conditions accomplished by the novel is a powerful element in social progress.

The expansion of the historical consciousness of modern society was an element hardly less important than the democratization of fiction as an influence on the development of the novel. What is loosely termed the Gothic revival with its resuscitation of the mediæval age and its discovery of the primitive poetry of the North, and the Hellenic revival with its reinvigoration of Latin studies and its discovery of archæology in the South, opened between them the whole past of Europe through its entire extent, while the developing contact of England with the East brought with it the fiction of the Orient as well as its poetry. History in many forms was pursued in order to unveil the past and the

distant, and it laid open new material for the novelist; as soon as Scott had so brilliantly shown that history was most fascinating in the form of imaginative romance, the novel entered upon its career of recreating the past with extraordinary vigor, and it has found in this field a scope and diversity that make the historical novel perhaps the preferred form of the art. The history of the world has been re-written in the last century as fiction; even what is most recondite and obscure, and belongs to the world of the learned, has been clothed with color and vitality as if contemporary, in the tales of Roman Africa, Egypt and Byzantium in which the French especially excel. In the more barbarous parts of history, such as the East of Europe, native writers have reconstructed the past and made it available for other nations. The reader of the historical novel, in fact, without effort commands an intelligent knowledge of the history of the European world and its antecedent classical sources such as would not have been possible even to a scholar in the last age.

The novel thus contains a vast fund of information which it diffuses. It is a teaching

power of immense efficiency, and still more useful for the spread of ideas than for the diffusion of facts. It has developed a power of propagandism which has previously been found mainly in eloquent discourse. The type of such use of the novel is Mrs. Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* In a lower form it is constantly employed as an instrument of discussion. A good example is Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, in which a moral situation is presented in conflict with human law. Every cause finds in the novel a mode of presenting the facts, and advocating the ideas, which it is especially concerned to make known. One of the most precious of human rights, the right to be heard, is practically secured by the wide-spread and habitual employment of fiction as a public forum. All knowledge gains by being put into the form of a tale; it travels faster, it enters the mind more vividly, it enlists the emotions more powerfully. The power of propaganda is one of the chief traits of the novel as a social force. The novel, moreover, vivifies intellectual interest of all kinds. It follows, for example, in the wake of scientific discovery, of exploration, of mere speculation, and forthwith builds a tale on the

new ground. The most recent knowledge of foreign lands, wars, industrial adventure, commercial progress, social experiment, is immediately popularized in this form. Every community, every employment of men, every idea is gathered in this drag-net of the time; the novel has become the epitome of the modern world.

In the case of a form of literature so variously characterized, so miscellaneously reproductive of experience and in its mass hardly to be divided from life itself, the reader finds himself bewildered and choice is difficult. The literary principle of worth is plain, but other values enter in, and disturb and deflect the decision of the mind. The utilities of reading are so many, and in some cases so attractive, that the confinement of choice by the principle of art is often felt to be a hardship and to result in substantial loss. To state the principle broadly, fiction as an art has worth in proportion to the fulness of its representation, to the arc of life it includes within a single work, where the treatment is extensive in method, or to the intensity of its representation, to the power of life it includes, when the treatment is intensive. The more of life, in extension or intension,

that any book has, the greater is the book. This is the general principle, true of all literature, because the literary art has for its end to concentrate life and truth by the use of the imagination in examples that are finally interpreted by the mind, consciously or unconsciously, as universal symbols. Those novels are highest in literary interest which accomplish this purpose with most fulness. *Don Quixote* has already been cited as the type of such greatness and rank; and, in general, the sign of fulness of meaning in the extensive sense is, as has been said, the presence in the novel of the great scene of life. Ideal literature, greatly inclusive of life and character, holds the first place in fiction as in poetry.

The English novel of itself yields some guidance. It is, perhaps the purest growth of English literary genius, that in which native power is most unmixed with foreign elements. English poetic genius is largely indebted to foreign grafts, to the continental mediums of the old tradition and to that tradition in its antique sources. English poetry cannot be very intelligently understood except by a classically educated mind, and its creators directly or in-

directly were bred of the South of Europe and heirs of the Mediterranean. With English fiction the case is different. Character has always held a favored place in the minds of the English; whether in the form of practical action or of moral precept a prime value has been placed upon it; the English mind is prepossessed with the moral meaning of life, with its practical issues, with its ethical reality. Reality, too, in its obvious forms of fact, event, fixed trait, is a large ingredient in the interest the English take in life; they are attached to the soil and to the characters that grow out of it, to human nature as modified and modeled by it, to the strength of life that thrives there. English life, in the home-bred, high-flavored, obvious form was the subject of the English novel from the first moment of its greatness, and a predominant interest in character controlled it. The tradition of Fielding was never lost; the handling of genuine human events for the display of character, and both in close neighborhood with the soil, is characteristic of the English novel in the great line of its development. It followed from this that the novel entered easily into national literature. What makes literature

national is its embodiment of the national tradition and the national morality; it is plain at a glance that Fielding and Scott accomplished this with great power, and Dickens and Thackeray likewise in their turn; in these four writers their countrymen are presented with extraordinary fidelity in the scene of their life and with reality. It is the life of England and of Englishmen, of Scotland and of Scotchmen, that is read in these books; and the minor novelists, Goldsmith, Smollett, Sterne, Austen, Bronté, supplement the great masters with a picture of life similarly English-bred. The work of George Eliot and Kingsley is most interesting, and is either great or approaches greatness, in proportion as it adds to the stream of national tradition, in the scene of English life, and of national morality, in the display of manners and ideals of plain English mold. The reader who is seeking the substance of life in the novel should keep close to this great tradition of English life in the books where it is most vividly put forth and is felt to be most national. A national literature is always great, because it contains the ideal form of the nation reminiscently beheld. Those English novels

have the most worth in which life and character are most nationally portrayed with breadth, reality, and affection; they are found in the line of the standard tradition.

What makes literature standard is that it permanently embodies the national consciousness in its historic forms as each ceases to be contemporary and passes into memory. Standard literature is consequently always partially out-of-date and falls to the scholar or to the reader who desires to realize the past. It often happens, however, that standard literature long retains a living relation to successive generations by virtue of its containing some element that does not grow out of date, and literature is great in proportion as it contains this principle of life. Achilles and Ulysses, for example, continued through ages to be real and nigh to the Greek consciousness of life. The novel, inasmuch as it is more mixed with contemporary and transitory elements than poetry, passes more quickly into the past; but the standard English novel still retains many characters and much action that are as contemporary to our minds as when the story was originally written. A man, nevertheless, must live and die with his

own generation, and the literature that is really out of date need not greatly concern him, except so far as he desires to be informed about the past of his people and their writers.

A second guiding principle in the field of the novel may be found in the power it has to expand the mind and interests of the reader. The office of the novel in expanding knowledge, in making the world known to itself in all parts, has been touched on; in the individual case the reader may be guided in his choice in proportion as he finds the material and power of the writer working this effect in himself. This expansion of the mind is most valuable when it takes place in the world of humanity at large so that the reader becomes better informed with regard to the common lot of mankind and is thereby made more humane, more fully man, more sympathetically at one with his fellows. Perhaps the greatest humanitarian novel is Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, both by the scope of its scene and action and by the ideas that shape and create the story. In a broader way the Russian novel, taken in its whole career, gives a revelation of the lot of mankind which is to the reader like the discovery of a new land,

and in connection with it stand humanitarian ideas closely joined; the expansion both of knowledge and of sympathy is most serviceable and the literary type of the Russian novel is itself high both for plot, character and passion. The power of expansion, however, does not reside only in foreign novels or depend on a new and distant scene or a strange mode of life. Any great experience expands the mind; and, in a secondary way, to read of a great experience has the same effect. The experience of a great love is the most transforming power in life, and hence no type of story is so constant, so sure of interest, or so valuable. This is the fascination of *Lorna Doone*, and of many another tale. The experience of a great repentance makes the attraction of *The Scarlet Letter*. The great novels of tragedy and passion have their power over the reader in the sense of this experience, which he lives through in imagination and takes partially at least to himself. If the mind expands either in information and sympathy, leading to a fuller comprehension of the common lot, or in realizing the great experiences of life, the reader may well be assured that he is in a right path.

A third working principle, and one of the widest application, is recreation. Fiction is the home of mental leisure; and nowhere is the fundamental aim of literature, the will to please, pursued so purely and with such unrestricted freedom. Men take their recreation variously, and no rule can be laid down. Some enjoy reading about themselves and their neighbors and seeing life as they know it, in a book. The more common way is to desire a change of scene, a new environment and a tale that shall take us out of ourselves. The presence of excitement in the story is the surest means of causing absorption of interest and securing that release from the every-day world which is sought, a break in the monotony of life and affairs, or rest from its overtaxing business; and in the present time often the wish is to escape from the world of thought. The great hold of the novel of adventure on the public is due to such desires; it is action that is wanted, or character which puts all of itself into deeds and is scarcely known except as it acts. This is the simplest form of fiction and makes the least demand upon the reader, while it allows him to lead in fancy and sympathy a life which is stirring and

at the same time irresponsible. The novel of adventure holds the first place in the literature of recreation and is to be found wherever tales are told. It has the advantage of always having a story to tell; it blends with the great events and famous personages of history and also with the unknown on sea and land, with lonely peril, with villainy of every kind; it taxes human energy and resource to the utmost, and appeals to that love of the heroic which is the most deep-seated of the noble instincts of man. It is not surprising that it should always have been the prime element in fiction as it was in poetry, the literature of the deed done in danger, whether for war or love or in the contest with the elements, the story of man's gallantry, trial and rescue in every race and under every sky. To read it is to return to the youth of the world and of life, to dip in action and to forget, for the dream of action is the most complete of dreams; it "covers one all over, thoughts and all," like Sancho's sleep. Such romance, too, recreates the vigor and cheerfulness of life, as it stimulates youthful energy; it is refreshing, not merely by change, but by its electrical charging of the original instincts of man and the excite-

ment it imparts to them. Romance believes in man and in life, as youth does, and develops positive power, assertion and daring in the temperament that it imbues; it repairs the waste of faith and hope and resolution, as poetry does, and gives back to instinct what thought has taken from its power. The war sagas of old, the minstrel's tale in the baron's hall, the episodes and cycles of chivalry were such a reinvigoration in primitive days, and modern romance in its infinitely varied forms, from peril by sea and land to peril for a faith, a crown or a cause, is the lineal descendant of these and serves in modern life a like need. It is that part of literature where impulse has the largest play; and it gives freedom of movement and a life in the imagination to impulses that life confines; it enlarges life and provides that supplement to reality which human nature requires for its wholeness. The inexhaustible demand for it shows that it is grounded on a real need.

The tale of adventure, in every period of literature, has been thus highly prized as a form of recreation. It blends naturally with the tale of mystery, or the wonder-tale, which

perhaps holds the second place in general favor. In its form of pure marvel the treasure-house of this sort of literature is *The Arabian Nights.* They suggest childhood to us, and the childhood of a race also, but the experience of a mature and old race is curiously mixed with the picture of life they represent. English literature is rich in translations, adaptations and imitations of this oriental play of fancy, actual manners and wisdom; they make an interesting episode in the history of the English genius so eagerly assimilative of every foreign strain and closely in contact with the Oriental people. Pure marvel, however, is too baseless a fabric for the English temperament, and the tale of mystery in the history of the English novel has preferred the form in which the mystery is solved. The episode of what is called the Gothic romance, Walpole's *Castle of Otranto,* with its successors by Mrs. Radcliffe and Monk Lewis, introduced the wonder-story that is solved, the supernatural there being explained by mechanical means; it was followed by the mystery tales of Poe, in the next generation, and the detective tale, but the explanation involved in these is a weakness in interest.

The tales are discredited by the completeness of the explanation, and it is only by the subtlety of the reasoning involved and something abnormal in the circumstances, as in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, that they maintain a lasting life in literature. Mystery, as an enduring theme, prefers its old lairs; in the cruder form it requires the Rosicrucians, the secret orders and problems, the theosophists of India, and leaves something still doubtful and inscrutable at the end; or it contents itself with the interest of a well-concealed plot which finally discloses its secret to the relief of the mind. Science and the scientific spirit killed the wonder-story in its supernatural and merely marvelous form, its fairy and spirit play; nor has scientific marvel in becoming itself the subject of imagination at all filled the old place which it emptied of meaning. The sea is the natural abode of mystery, but the sea-novel has not been especially successful in retaining that element from the days before the oceans were known and charted. Mystery is, however, so inherent in life, and it is so fascinating to men, that its older forms will long retain imaginative power, and in the greatest novels in which it takes

on a moral form, the mystery of man's life and fates, it will remain imbedded, not merely as an artifice of the plot, but as the substance of the meaning.

Mystery and romance do not exhaust the interest of the novel of recreation, which has infinite variety; but they sufficiently illustrate its nature. A third sort should, perhaps, be noticed; the tale which by its representation of quiet life and humble folks, like the pastoral idyl of old days, acts rather as an anodyne. Such stories of simplicity are numerous in literature; they are, indeed, a perennial product in all lands and times and often are wrought with high and enduring art. The old country life of England and America affords them as a product of the native soil, and in the fiction of the south of Europe they make one of the purest elements of charm, as in the Sicilian and Sardinian novel of the day. The life of people near the soil, truly told in its human interests, secures almost without effort some of the best results of art by virtue of what it excludes and the simplicity and truth of what remains. Reality, such as this, mystery and romance are, perhaps, the most important forms of recreation

afforded by the novel; they are, at least, characteristic forms. A long catalogue would not exhaust the varieties of interest here to be found; the novel, as was said, is the epitome of modern life. At last the question of approach to the novel is one of individual liking, temperament, experience, inclination and necessities; seriously read, the novel is a study of life; practically it is a mode of recreation, entertainment, amusement. Desultory reading is one of the most useful as well as pleasurable of literary pursuits; and nowhere is it more in place or more fruitful than in the novel.

CHAPTER VI

OTHER PROSE FORMS

THE principal supports of imaginative literature, as has been indicated, are biography, history and philosophy. In pure imagination ideality is the characteristic product of the art, and measures its power and success; next to it in literary interest is personality. Those books, of whatever sort, that contain personality in interesting forms best illustrate life and are most attractive and enduring in minor literature. Biography succeeds best when the subject of it and the circumstances of his life and the events of his career are described with the closest approximation to imaginative methods, so that he lives and is seen with the clear vitality of characters in a novel. It was Boswell's power to render character by dialogue and anecdote that made his life of Johnson a classic biography. There are few lives that even approach that work as a truthful

picture of a man in his peculiar individuality. Autobiography is generally a surer way to vivid personality, and the great autobiographies are sincere or unconscious confessions; of the first type Franklin gave a memorable example, and of the second Pepys' *Diary* is the immortal instance. Letters are an autobiographic form essentially, but they usually give a picture of the society of the writer, and are often as interesting for what they contain of the age as for what they reveal of the person. Walpole's letters are such a view of a period of English culture; and the letters of Gray, Cowper and Fitzgerald, each in his own social group, have such a double value, social and personal. The letters of Byron and of Shelley both contain more of the personality of those poets than has ever passed into any of the many lives of each of them. In biography, generally, which avails itself of letters, as one element of the story, the reader is content with a diluted personality, and finds the subject set forth, not directly, but by narrative and criticism, with reflected lights from the environment and social group of the subject; but whatever is human, if it be sincerely described, is so surely interesting that

biography has long been a large part of secondary literature. It has the advantage to some minds, less capable of seizing truth abstractly in ideal persons, of bringing to them something that is known to be real. It has the felicity also of illustrating the richness of life in refined or capable natures, and of the excellence of men and women in careers perhaps not of remarkable distinction, but of great usefulness and noble in service. That biography which is rather a portion of history and sets forth surpassing character, such as Plutarch's *Lives*, is not far below heroic poetry in its power of ideal type; and the far larger portion which relates the lives of men notable for their experience, for individual talent or social service or for romance in their fortunes, is not far removed from character in fiction. Choice in biography is commonly a matter of accident, an affair of private preference or interest; but its chief use is to enrich the reader's sense of character and the value he places on human qualities, on personality. Biography, too, unlocks the sympathies, and often exercises an intimate and direct awakening influence, especially upon practical natures less open to ideal enthusiasm.

Those sporadic books which obtain the place of classics in literature often seem to owe their vogue to a biographical element in them, in so far as they are representative of the peculiar mind and tastes of their authors. The type is Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Walton's *Complete Angler* or Browne's *Religio Medici*, or the writings of the modern American "Autocrat," Dr. Holmes. They contain a miscellany of matters, interesting in themselves, but which have passed through the individuality of their authors and acquired a certain human unity and new significance from a living contact, even when the matter itself is antiquarian or remote, or merely singular in a humoristic sense. They give the mind of the man, and are distinguished by originality such as has its only source in character. Enjoyment of them depends on some special aptitude of the reader for appreciating the kind of mind involved, and some intellectual sympathy with the matter which takes its stamp. To give the mind of the man is a distinction for any book. It is of more interest when the mind is typical, as Wellington's letters give the mind of the soldier. When the mind takes on great ideal breadth,

the book becomes a classic of the world, as in Thomas à Kempis' *Imitatio Christi* or St. Francis' *Fioretti* which yield the mind of the Christian and of the saint. It often happens that biography, without being widely inclusive of a human type, nevertheless reflects human experience in narrower bands and gives the spectrum of special moods of human nature. The lives of the saints, and religious biography in general, owe much of their interest to this reflection of private experience, and more brilliant or pure expression of moods already partially known or latent in the reader; as heroic lives appeal to instinctive ambition and desire for adventure, these appeal to the instinctive piety of men. To give the life in a person is the quality in these books which makes them commanding. Wherever the subject is taken up, it is personality that is the secret of all such literature. It is sometimes represented that personality, especially in the autobiographic sense, is modern in literature, and specifically that it was a discovery of Petrarch; but, though the principle has had a great career in modern writing, so broad a statement must be doubtfully regarded. Lives were

a favorite form of ancient literature. The *Commentaries* of Cæsar are not so different from Wellington's Correspondence, the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius from the *Imitation of Christ*, the *Confessions* of St. Augustine from those of Rousseau; Pythagoras and Epicurus were men who made an immense personal impression, and the power of a personality as well as of a doctrine made the victory of Christianity over the third part of the world. In the centuries of Roman greatness just before and after Christ personality was a main object of literary attention, and probably interest in it did not vary much from that felt in the Renaissance, though the record of it was seldom put forth autobiographically. It is probably an error to think that any form of individualism was unknown to the Roman world, and our biographic records of antiquity are on the whole rich. We know nearly as much, for example, of Sophocles as of Shakespeare.

Travel, which is popularly so fascinating a branch of literature, is a near neighbor to biography. The character of the traveler and the human interest of his journey make a large part of the charm of what he tells. Everything is

seen through his eyes, his curiosity controls the view, his pursuits confine the attention. Herodotus was one of the best of travelers, as eager to know men and manners as Ulysses, full of the romance of things freshly known; a more interesting book was hardly handed down by antiquity. Travel attracts the reader mainly by the unknown, and perhaps the best of travel is now historic; for the story of travel has always attended the story of national greatness. The mass of it is that which was written in the years of the discovery of the world beyond Europe on all its horizons, and for English readers is to be found in the great collections of Hakluyt and others. In a later time the story of exploration in Africa and Asia and about the Pole contains its most vivid chapters and blends the pleasure of new knowledge with individual adventure. A finer literary quality, however, belongs to writers who are not explorers, but who in romantic lands or strange environments feel and render the local color and incident and novelty of what is before them, and, in a literary sense, are masters of atmosphere. The French are good travelers, and none are more expert in modern days in

giving atmosphere. The literary treatment of travel is more a French than an English art. Kinglake's long famous *Eöthen* was an excellent narrative, strong and vivid in rendering the eastern scene and its figures, but he had neither the subtilty nor the sympathy of the southern temperament, and none of the imaginativeness of the French masters such as Loti. Irving is, perhaps, the best of our travelers of the literary habit, who use their material with an eye to its effect as an intimate imaginative portrayal. His writings on special topics realize the romance of the land, the figures of knight and Moor the life of an historically enchanted soil; and even in England he is still the best of American travelers for the sentiment of the scene. Literary travel is, however, hardly a considerable portion of the field. It is rather in simpler narratives, that detail the truth of the country districts of Europe or the adventure of some long ride in the East or the South, that most pleasure is to be found; and though past voyages were the novel of travel, and their literature was immense, it is seldom now that any voyage is interesting except it be scientific. Anthropology and archæology, in their attempt

to realize primitive life and past epochal civilization, embody a large element of travel in very interesting forms. The reader who pursues any of these lines, scientific, literary or adventurous, enlarges his horizon materially, and few kinds of reading are more useful. To know ourselves better through literature is not difficult, but to know what is not ourselves is an exceedingly hard task. It is safer to distrust one's impression of the foreign, the distant and the long past, however exact it may appear; but though the result may be imperfect, there is no better means than by intelligent and sympathetic books of travel to free the mind from the intolerance that belongs to it by nature and to lessen the narrowness inherent in race, faith and habit.

History is a province by itself, and it has been much contested whether it should be regarded more as science or more as literature. A large part of history, as it has been written in the past, nevertheless, is of literary quality, and many historians would have been tenacious of its literary rights. It is clear from the discussion that history with a literary intention has certain traits of its own. The question

here is only what history should be preferred by readers whose primary interest is in literature. It is not a matter merely of rhetorical style or the mode of presentation, but of the ends sought and the methods of construction followed by the historian. He endeavors to reproduce the past; but as the story is passed through his personality, it suffers the modification due to that medium and is recreated in certain lines of choice, insight and judgment belonging to the historian; it wears the colors of his mind. Thucydides, who first undertook to write history philosophically, presented it in a highly imaginative form, by persons and events, dramatically. Macaulay, the most absorbing modern narrator, makes of his work an impassioned plea with the conscious resources of an ancient orator, picturing the scene, making the persons alive, appealing to the sympathies of the reader. In Robertson, Prescott and Motley, history is a stately procession. The works of the more recent historians of the scientific school, however more useful they may be in the field of knowledge, do not enter popularly into literature; they may clarify the past with which they deal, but they do

not permanently embody national tradition and morality ideally to anything like the same degree or in the same way as the older histories; they lack the imaginative power, and are hence ineffective in literature. The reader who makes a literary demand desires primarily the human truth of history, its course of great events shown through famous characters, or its picture of the life of cities and of the common lot given in their human phenomena; he asks for the old spectacle of men, or masses of men, doing and suffering; history has a literary interest for him in proportion as it becomes epical. Other kinds of history may be more exact and detailed, and enter upon parts of the field that dramatic and picturesque history ignores; but they have less human truth, or present truth in a less human form. Thucydides, Livy and Tacitus present this truth in an enduring form, and no literature is more imperishable in interest; the chroniclers of the Crusades, such as Froissart, composed vivid pictures of events which they witnessed that are incomparable portrayals of character, scene and the pageantry of stirring life in their day; and the historians who have been famous in English follow this

literary tradition. Gibbon was, perhaps, the greatest of them by virtue of the magnitude of his work, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.* It is a great history, and though it may be corrected and supplemented by the researches of scholarship, all such labor is of the nature of a comment on the text; the work itself will never be supplanted. In proportion as the literary tradition is departed from, history relegates itself to the field of scholarship and becomes a department of scientific knowledge rather than of literature.

Philosophy in the sense of metaphysics plays but a small part in literary education, though in the comprehension of the final thought of Wordsworth, Shelley and Tennyson some tincture of philosophy, such as these poets themselves had, is required, and it is convenient in other minor parts of English poetry. Some acquaintance with Platonic conceptions is especially to be desired, because they are a part of the tradition of English poetry. But the philosophy which most supports imaginative literature is rather what is sometimes called wisdom-literature, proverbial sentences and, in general, ethical thought, playing about

the nature of action, conscience, responsibility, the frailties of human nature, the issues of right and wrong, the morality of life. Such knowledge in English has mainly flowed from the Bible and passes current in the general mind without much distinction of literary stamp. Franklin and Emerson, however, are illustrious American names in this field, and in English the type is found in Bacon's *Essays.* Greater books than these are the *Imitation of Christ* and Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations,* already mentioned, and on a lower plane Montaigne's *Essays.* The French, unlike the English, are peculiarly rich in books of maxims, *pensées* and characters, and can show a long series of brilliant and talented masters in worldly and moral *dicta* which make a unique and characteristic part of their classic literature. The sense of the weight of meaning in the phrase, such as Burke was a master of, and of the salt of truth, is one of the last fruits of literary study and requires maturity both of mind and of experience. Such literature in an express form is consequently rarely sought by the reader for its own sake and is commonly forced on him by its fame rather than by his original liking

in the first instance. Ethical knowledge is generally implicit in the reader's character and prejudices, in his instinctive judgment, and plays its part in literary appreciation involuntarily and without his being aware of it except in its results.

The essay opens a province of literature almost as broad and varied as that of the novel. It may have any subject and treat it to any end. The familiar essay in particular offers the most free play to the personality of the author, who shows his own tastes in it with naturalness and brings forward whatever of interest he has found. It also corresponds to the greatest disengagement of the reader's mind. One tires of long and serious pursuit and studious zeal in any subject; here is the opportunity for wandering, for the avocations of literature, for diversion. In the essay the author gives his companionship to the reader on a footing of friendly mutual interest in some passing matters as in conversation. The familiar essay is best when it approaches this form of talk with the reader, and solicits him without emphasis or resistance to a brief partnership in social pleasure. The master of the mode, it would be commonly

allowed, is Charles Lamb. In *Elia* there is the first requisite, a richly human personality. Lamb was a poet and a humorist, and thus yoked two elements of the most delightful play of life, sentiment and fun, in a companionable nature. He was fond of humanity and saw the spectacle of its daily affairs and its ordinary guises with sympathy that passes from laughter to pathos almost without knowing the change, so absorbing and real is the human aspect of it all; he is full of reminiscences, of life lived in his own neighborhood, even in his own home, and gives his reflections and anecdotes with intimacy; he takes the reader into his life and gives him his confidence. Even in the purely literary parts of his work he never loses the sense that the poets and the old writers of golden prose are a part of himself, and to the reader they become phases of Lamb's personality and are more valued for showing his likings than for their private worth. In every essay of *Elia*, whatever the topic, it is the company of Lamb that makes the pleasure. He escapes the formality of autobiography and the fragmentariness of letters, but keeps the intimate charm of the one and the discursive happiness of the other;

as one reads, it seems the talk of a man that is not quite soliloquy nor yet is it conversation, and it gives more than thought and anecdote, — it gives the presence of the man, his idiosyncrasy; the tones of his voice are felt in the cadences of the style, and the moods of his eyes in the sly humors and pathetic stops of the page. It is not strange that Lamb is so much beloved since he has this power of silent familiarity in so penetrating and agreeable a way, and his nature was itself so refined and touched with human friendliness. It is the prime quality of the familiar essayist to be able to give himself to the reader thus and to be received. In no other author is the trait so clear.

De Quincey illustrates better the miscellaneous power of the essay and its capacity to turn itself to many uses both of instruction and entertainment. His personality is hardly less felt through the living matter and vivid style of his work than is Lamb's in his more kindly way. Here, too, the most engaging part is autobiographical; and though much of this is contained in the larger works, in particular *The Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, yet this book is really a group of essays, and

written in the manner of the essayist. Indeed De Quincey knew no other mode of writing, and whether his subject was metaphysics or antiquity or a tale, he made an essay of it. His recollection, mingled here and there with the text, are of the same quality as Lamb's pictures of his school days, and the theme of revery, the dream touched with sentiment, is common to both. De Quincey excels by his pictorial power, and especially in that fantasy which paints the void, and in the imaginative symbolism which belongs more properly to visible art; even when it is the mind that acts, it is the eye that dreams, as, to take the great instance, in the almost hieratic figures of *The Three Ladies of Sorrow.* He excels also by his marvelous verbal eloquence, with its exquisite sonorous and melodic effects, its march of climax and question, its vivid images of figures and situations, while sound and color seem as much a part of the work as in music or painting. Such passages as are to be found in *The Cæsars* or in *Joan of Arc* are hardly to be matched elsewhere for rich stylistic effects, and for the full flow and powerful molding of language to the uses of the voice which makes

eloquence. In the miscellaneous works of De Quincey it is such passages found at random, and also the dozen pieces of various kinds of interest in which picturesqueness is sustained throughout, that stand prominently forth; but the subtlety of others, the extraordinary mental activity displayed, afford an interest hardly less absorbing to the intelligence than the better known pieces are to the imagination. De Quincey is becoming, perhaps, a somewhat neglected author, as it is quite natural that he should be; but no author better shows the versatility of the essay, its adaptability to a variously stored and widely curious mind, its supple response to a flexible hand; and in the modes of thought, color and sound he was a master of intellectual and imaginative style, while the substance of his work retains great literary power. At the end, however, he leaves, as the best essayists always do, a personal impression and the sense of intellectual companionship.

The essayists pass quickly away, because their service is for the most part a contemporary matter, engaged in observation and comment on the ideas, interests and things of the day.

Carlyle, like De Quincey, begins to be disregarded. Though he wrote history, the more characteristic expression of his genius was in his earlier life in the form of the essay and of *Sartor Resartus*, which is substantially and in manner the work of an essayist. He illustrates the essay of the Quarterlies that is now out of date, with its long Presbyterian wind, its omniscience, dogmatism and belligerency, but also with its high intellectual quality and sound moral fiber. In Carlyle the type had most literary power. He made it, after the way of the essayist, the channel of his personality, and showed increasingly the eccentric and repellant traits of his temperament, to which the Teutonism of his style and matter gave at first a grotesque quality. It is likely that this trait, which hindered his acceptance by the public at the start, already proves a disqualification in the end as well, and is one reason for the lessening of his vogue. His personality is not attractive, and the dress in which it is put forth is still less so; but it is a powerful personality, and its effect is the greater because, in the main part of his characteristic work, it is through the praise and apotheosis of personality in sur-

passing men that it is put forth and reflected. He wrote of the hero in every part of the field, and made hero-worship a kind of initiation into his later more abstract doctrines of the divine right of force, the aristocracy of genius, the incompetency of masses, and all the rest of the reactionary gospel he preached in his violent denunciations of modern democracy. The reader need not accompany him to the end; but in the earlier great essays, such as those on Burns, Goethe, Voltaire, and the like, and more particularly in *Sartor Resartus*, which is always an illuminating and invigorating book, he finds views of life and its workings in which philosophy takes more effective possession of the essay than in any other writer. It is, too, philosophy in a highly imaginative form, whether stated in a system, if one can give that name to what is hardly more than one huge metaphor, in *Sartor Resartus*, or introduced as a comment in the critical biographical essays and the chapters on heroism. The interest is, of course, predominantly moral or social, but it finds literary expression, is blended with great figures and great events, with epical elements, with surpassing characters, with human truth, and

it never fails to be picturesque, fervid, glowing with conviction. The genius of Carlyle was, like De Quincey's, primarily one for expression; it is by its literary quality that his work continues to make its appeal; among the essayists he is the moralist, the social philosopher, whose material is rather human life doing and suffering than any abstract principle, and who sees it through the imagination.

Lamb, De Quincey and Carlyle illustrate the essay in the three fields of sympathy, imagination and morality, and they are excellent types of the English handling of the form which is very free. The varieties of it cannot be exhausted in a list. The tradition, perhaps, still is that the early essayists of the Queen Anne age are the classical exemplars of it, especially Addison and Steele; in both the reader feels the personality of the writer, as he also does in Goldsmith, somewhat with the intimate touch that Lamb gives, and when these three writers have human character for their subject, their charm lasts; but what really survives of them can be included in a small volume. The English scholar will be acquainted with the essay of the eighteenth century and appreciate it,

but the reader will commonly spare it and turn to the quite different essayists of a later time, to the measured literary talk of Arnold or the exquisite portraits of Pater, who are the two last well-established names in England, and to Lowell and Emerson among Americans, both of whom in different ways were masters of the form. The essay keeps pace with the novel as the kind of writing that seems best suited to the uses of our public, and like that varies from instruction to mere entertainment and takes every color from the artistic to the humorous, reflecting the entire range of literary tastes and pursuits.

There are other forms of prose, but these are the main forms in which a literary value is found and sufficiently illustrate the nature of literature, the objects of its attention and the modes of its appeal in its lesser phases. In the mass of miscellaneous books there is often the characteristic material of literature and a literary treatment which make the author's work interesting, though it may not reach any high degree of distinction and may remain practically unknown. It is a common experience of the reader, especially if he have desultory

habits, to find such volumes and to profit by them. It is well to read books that have an established place and authors of reputation; but an open welcome and a broad tolerance also have their advantages, and there is often a freshness in the unknown writer, a sense of discovery and a heightened interest that are lacking in the books that all men read. In books of character and observation, especially, one finds this treasure-trove, which wins the reader more frequently by the wealth of its material than by the literary treatment, for a writer has often genuine matter who lacks the skill to adorn it in the telling. A plain tale, if it be originally interesting, always holds its interest. When so much is written as in our day, a great portion must have only a restricted vogue, but its excellence for those who find it is the same. In these humbler walks of literature there is much more of actual entertainment and profit than is commonly acknowledged. The interest is the same as that of a classic, though it may not be so finely embodied, and the vitalizing power is the same, though it may not be so rich. The better way is to give a hearing to every promising book, without too

proud a scanning of its source and stamp, and to have familiar acquaintance with many books outside the sacred presence of standard literature. One acquires thus a truer sense of the value of the classic, and at the same time keeps in current touch with his contemporaries; nor is he really assured of his own discrimination until he finds books for himself and knows that they are sound. The power to appreciate literature does not involve its constant exercise upon the highest examples. The essential thing is to know what makes literary quality, what are the ends and means of the art, what are the modes of intimacy with its works; when this is known — and it is best known through standard authors — the best use of the knowledge is, perhaps, not to master a past literature in its great compass and detail, but to apply it to the contemporary world in the natural course of reading what attracts our tastes and draws out our sympathies in our own time. It is natural for a book to die; few books that are old have a vital connection with life as it now is, but these if they appeal to us are favorites, the books to which one returns and that we regard as silent friends of life,

comrades of our fortunes and our moods; they are strong in our affection because they are a part of our past. Such books stand apart on a shelf of their own, and are mainly classics with some humble companions; not to know literature through its length and breadth and to be wise judges in its presence, but to gather this little shelf-ful, is the best fruit of literary appreciation.

CHAPTER VII

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

LITERARY counsel is not far to seek. The apparatus for literary study is plentiful; manuals, histories, commentaries and guides to the choice of books exist in profusion. There is an embarrassment of such riches. The objection to these is that, of the two traditional ends of literature, to please and to instruct, they take note too exclusively of the second. The two ends should not be made to neutralize each other; yet this is often the case. Excess of instruction leads to one's being bored; excess of pleasure leads to frivolity. It is, perhaps, better to consider the process rather than the ends. Literature is a key to one's own heart; it is also a key to the lives of others; there are other ways of learning one's own nature and human nature in general, but outside of direct experience and observation literature is the principal means of obtaining knowledge of

human life. The most efficient form of the knowledge is that which art gives, storing it in typical examples in imaginative literature; but it also is found where art is imperfectly applied, as in the subsidiary forms of literature, or even where art is absent and truth is set forth barely and abstractly. Imaginative art condenses and recreates experience in order to clarify it for the reason and magnetize it for the affections and sympathies. It seeks to include all of life and know it in its essentials. Instruction proceeds from the matter, pleasure from the form. The definition is somewhat narrow, however, and too antithetical, taking too exclusive note of merely æsthetic pleasure, whereas the pleasure arising from literature springs also from other than formal sources and is mixed of many kinds. The knowledge of human life is antecedent to the pleasure flowing from such knowledge in any form, and is the condition without which there can be no pleasure. The acquisition and interpretation of experience is the core of the process, which looks to a broad comprehension and penetration of the nature of humanity and its career in the past and the present. The starting point, however, is the individual,

the reader himself. It is this fact that makes it difficult to lay down a definite rule in literary study. The personality of the reader is never to be lost sight of. He has special aptitudes and tastes which make one book rather than another, one kind of literature rather than another, one epoch rather than another, a better mode of access to experience, a stronger stimulus to the imagination, a more vitalizing power to his whole being. Literature unlocks power of life in the individual as well as gives knowledge of life; it is best, in any instance, when the two are one act and the knowledge is given by the unlocking of power and as a consequence of it. The personality of the individual is the prime element in determining what is best for his growth in order that there may always be the greatest vital connection in his study of life between himself and his instruments; they should be, as it were, extensions of his own power, outgrowths of himself. It is wise for the reader, therefore, to have a large share of self-respect, to prefer his own natural choices, to give latitude to his own wandering tastes, to indulge his own character. He will give a fair trial to poetry and prose, to this or that

author, especially when recommended by long reputation and the judgment of generations, but, in the end, he will read or not read according as he finds his own account in it. The good reader is one who never abdicates; with him rests the decision in his own case. Though appearances may be against him, though he may remain long or even always in a lower range of taste and a narrower sphere of knowledge, it is better so than that he should default to himself. He cannot profitably get ahead, in his reading, of the man he is; he cannot out-race his own shadow on life; he must build knowledge, experience, feeling, his world, in his own image, interpreting what is new by his own past and passing from the man he is to the man he may become by successive and natural stages of self-development. Self-reliance, to trust one's own nature, is as radical a necessity in literary study as in other parts of life; it is the best way of man-making.

It has already been remarked that the simplest approach to literature is by means of the books nearest to the reader, which are in the main those of his own time and of the next preceding age. He is thus introduced to the living ideas

and most vivid interests of humanity in the world in which he has to live. An exception should be made of the greatest books of world literature, but the exception is often more apparent than real. In their universal appeal these books are contemporary with every age. *Don Quixote*, the *Iliad*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, for example, should be read in early life; such books are landmarks of the intellectual life and give proportion to all later reading; others, like Plutarch's *Lives* and Gibbon's *History*, should also be read in youth, and they have the advantage of giving a vast amount of human history at a single stroke, expanding and storing the mind wonderfully with a sense of the extent and majestic movement of man's historic career. To read these works, whether of fiction, poetry, or history, is, at the time, an intellectual feat, and as conducive to confidence and vigor in the intellectual part of youth as winning a cup or turning the tide of a game in its physical part. It is immaterial to what degree the works be comprehended in their fulness and power; the reader takes what he can of them, and though he were a mature man he can do no more, for no one exhausts their richness; it is

sufficient that in his youth he be in touch with life in its greatness, and there is besides a power in the years of boyhood to give charm to such literature that is missed if it be read too late. The youth reads everything as romance, such is his mental freshness and the warmth of life in him and the fascination of the discovery of the scene of life and its doings. In the biography of the boyhood of genius such books continually crop out as the great events and revealing moments of the boy's life, those from which he dates his emergence into the world of men, his consciousness of the powers within and about him, his awakening; and what takes place in the boyhood of genius measurably occurs in ordinary youth placed in the same circumstances. The great books of the world should be put into the hands of youth at the earliest possible time.

In the case of works of less eminence the natural way is to read English books, and, in particular, those of the last century. A so-called course of reading of any sort is seldom a very good mode of procedure. It is better to read single authors that attract the reader, to read a good deal of one author at a time,

to become familiar with him and his interests in life, as shown in his books, and with his ideas. If one has appropriated a few books thus with vivacity of interest and vigor of mind, if one has made friends with a few authors so as to know and love them and prize them, he has learned the first secret, however unconsciously, and mastered the power of appreciation. The rest is only a repetition of the process as new authors come into the field of attention and new tastes and interests develop within and the old grow and fructify. In such a way of reading enthusiasm should be an increasing trait, and enjoyment also. The value of a few authors well known and liked is greater to the mind than that of many authors imperfectly mastered; it is what friendship is to mere acquaintance in society. A course of reading in the ordinary sense, as of the nineteenth-century poets, for example, has its principal convenience in the ample opportunity it gives the reader for such a private selection, but he should consign his fortunes to his own choices or seek only such guidance as may serve to direct him to new lines of attention, to open ideas to him, to exercise his reflection in fresh ways and to give

him the sense of sympathy in his pleasures and support in them. It is the reader who reads the book, and what he puts into it is unknown to any one else except by an intuitive sympathy; the reaction of his own past on the book is often the most living part of its value to him; he should be left much to himself, or if not so left he should keep much to himself. The best readers in colleges are those who take their own way somewhat carelessly but obstinately like Calverley and Emerson. After a while the spheres of the favorite authors who are known and prized will begin to grow more inclusive; the authors will gather into groups, the Lake School, the brotherhood of Keats and Shelley, the neo-pagans, as the case may be, and the groups will begin to coalesce into the romantic movement as a whole. When this stage is reached, the time has come for such aid as literary histories can give in tracing the connections of the age, drawing out the general traits, the historic position, the antecedents of the whole; such information, though it belongs to history, is an aid to the fuller and especially the more intelligent appreciation of the authors. It is, however, the authors that should be in

the foreground of early literary study, and not the period or the movement which embraces them, so far at least as the characteristic literary power plays a part in self-education.

It is by no means necessary to restrict one's choice of books within nearly contemporary literature until the whole is grasped as a historical period. It is better to take the great authors first, who give scale to their contemporaries and to time; to know Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton, Pope, Gray, among the poets, and Bacon, Swift, Fielding, Goldsmith, Burke among the prose writers. The rule is to know first the greatest of all and to be familiar with them. In English it is of little utility to ascend higher than the Elizabethan age. Chaucer is a great writer, but to all intents and purposes his language is a past dialect of English, and to the general reader is unintelligible; outside of Chaucer early English literature has only a scholastic interest. It is agreeable, even if one should never command justly a whole period of English, to make acquaintance with some minor period, or rather group, and to know it with thoroughness. The Lake School, or the Queen Anne essayists, or the religious writers

of the seventeenth century, or the cavalier poets, or Dr. Johnson's circle, are examples; intimate knowledge of such a group, with which the reader has a natural sympathy, discloses attractiveness and significance in literature in quite a different way from its appreciation in single authors, and to have such an acquaintance with a group is a mental satisfaction. The minor literature of both prose and poetry in English can be easily controlled in books of selections, either confined to a single author, as in the case of Swift, or in anthologies, as in the case of the Elizabethan lyric. In general, it is undesirable to confine one's choice either to prose or poetry, or to any one kind of literature; fiction should alternate with drama, and the essay with the lyric, since the complexion of life is thus better preserved and wholeness of literary taste secured. Neither should one read the classics always, and think time wasted if bestowed on less imposing books; it is as if one were to make the week one eternal Sabbath. One cannot in literature any more than in life live at the top of his forces; and whether it be "the difficult air of the iced mountain's top" or the breath of Arcady that the reader inhales, he must be

content with a less refined mental diet and common books. Humbler literature has also its place, practically, in life, and discharges the function of literature, to enlighten and console, with wide effectiveness.

The manner of reading which has been indicated might not make a man a scholar in English literature; but it is assumed that what the reader desires is the power of literature and not knowledge of it in itself. If one desires the knowledge of it, he approaches it scholastically through dictionaries, manuals, histories, the hundred varieties of comment. A certain degree of knowledge is serviceable; but if much is required to make a book intelligible, it is practically a dead book for the general reader. Literary history is the most untrustworthy form of history, and is to be read with much dubiousness; the subject is complex and involves many intangible elements. The shorter it is and the more confined to a tabulation of external fact and well made out general traits, the more useful it is to the reader. The other illumination that he may desire is better found in the essays of appreciative critics like Lamb or acute commentators like Coleridge, in biographies

strongly personal in their narrative, and in the history of social manners, the fund of reminiscence and other side-lights which make us acquainted with such a group as that of Pope or of Johnson. The reading of memoirs, generally, is a great aid to literary study since they present the facts in a strongly human form. It is human truth that is the great subject of literature; it is the scene and play and fortune of life itself; and to substitute literary history for it, as a matter of lives, dates, periods, movements, and styles, and social and political phenomena and the like, is as if in art one were to read manuals and catalogues and theories of perception instead of looking at pictures and statues. It is true that the education of the eye and heart by contemplation of visible beauty is a subtle thing; so is the education of the soul by literature; but it is a very real thing, well-nigh omnipresent in life; and it issues not in information, however detailed and well-ordered, about the thing, but in insight into life and fate, in sympathy with whatever is human, in apprehension of what seems the divine, — issues, that is, in the greater power to live. This, and not mere instruction, is the end of literature; and

this, and not mere information, is the end of literary study.

The approach to foreign literature, outside of the universal works already mentioned, is a more difficult matter; yet to know English literature alone is like knowing English history without the history of the continent, and it is the more defective because foreign elements enter strongly into English literature which has displayed great assimilative and sympathetic power with regard to the literature of other lands. The question of translations is to be met at the threshold. Greatly as opinions differ on the subject, it is useless for the reader to suppose that even in the best translations he gets either the original work, or its equivalent as a form of art, or in its native meaning to its own people. In poetry, more particularly, he gets only a diminished glory; to read a great poet in a translation is like seeing the sun through smoked glass. There is a double obstacle; the form itself is untranslatable, the melodic mold of life in language; and, in addition, the native temperament, mixed of race, circumstances and long tradition, is assumed in the poem to be in alliance with it,

to respond to and support it and assist in its understanding, and the more national the work the greater is its reliance on this suggestiveness, which is only completed in meaning and reach by the power of the race, its intuition, its ideals, its associations, all that is unspoken in it passing into the poem and becoming a silent but potent language there. To understand a *canzone* of Dante or of Leopardi one must feel as an Italian feels; to appreciate its form he must know the music of the form as only the Italian language can hold and eternize it. Translation is impotent to overcome either of these difficulties; at the best it yields an imperfect rendering of both form and meaning, making an indifferent appeal by inferior means; generally in the translation of a great classic the uninstructed mind naïvely wonders why it was ever thought great. Prose suffers less than poetry, it is true, but the case of *Don Quixote*, perhaps the most untranslatable of prose works though many times attempted, shows the presence there of the same difficulty.

The natural approach to foreign literature is through those portions of it which have a near tie to English. The fundamental tradition of

English poetry, on its foreign side, is classical in its sources and is continued by the medium of the South mainly by Italian literature. Greece and Italy have contributed most to English poetry; familiarity with their literature and the Latin, which naturally binds them and is intermediary, is most useful to the reader in his study of English, and also most easy in the expansion of his interest beyond the domain of English. Greek is so fundamental in our culture that it is hardly possible to overestimate its importance. Whenever the reader finds anything about Greece that he has not read, it is a safe rule to read it; he is sure to find it useful. Whether in the form of direct translations or of those scholarly interpretations of the Greek genius, literary, artistic, and social, in which English is uncommonly rich, the study of the Greek is a means of growth in literary power and in command of literary methods and points of view, more valuable by far than is the case with any single literature of the later world. Its usefulness in the drama has already been mentioned; but it illustrates every poetic form with brilliant examples and is hardly less universal in prose. The novel,

in its perfection, was a later product; other kinds of narrative, however, were practised with unsurpassed skill; and, speaking generally, Greek prose is unrivaled in beauty, while in matter it is full of wisdom that grows not old. The Greek is full of ideas and deeply engaged with them, and in intellectual interest is on a parity with modern literatures. The more the reader enters into these writings, the more he wonders at the intelligence of that people and at the amount of their literature which is still modern in interest, whether as a picture of life or as a discussion of truth or for simply æsthetic qualities. Greece is the most interesting country of all in a human way, and excelled all in the art of literature, which is the most human of the arts. The more familiar the reader becomes with Greek books, and with the ideals of the people that produced them, and the more he is able to take the intellectual and æsthetic mold of the Greek into his own mind and have Greek habits of perception, the better is he fitted for literary appreciation of any kind; he has the criteria of judgment planted in himself and carries them about implicit in his mind. It is for this reason that in literature

classical education was so efficient in the past; it developed much that underlies literature and makes it instinctive. The reader, though not classically educated, can still regain for himself a certain part of this lost benefit, by attention to Greek; the literature is in itself of the highest interest, and mastery of it gives also an understanding and command of the literatures that grew out of it in later days, which nothing else can replace.

Next to Greek the Italian is most important, both in connection with English poetry, which has often been in close touch with it, and for its own poetic value; but Italian literature need not be so thoroughly known as the Greek. In general, English acquaintance with it is confined to the few famous poets and one or two prose writers. Italian literature is very extensive and is of a high degree of culture, but it is not easily appreciated unless the reader has an acquaintance with the country itself and a love of the people that comes from personal contact. The Latin literature, also, is to be known rather by a few great writers than in its broad extent. It is best approached through French critics, who present it with more intelligence

than other scholars and with the comprehension of minds native to it. Finally, French literature is the most useful in the modern field, both for the abundance and vigor of its ideas and for entertainment, for the scope of its view of life and the world and its skill in the literary interpretation of life through imagination and reflection. Paris is still the intellectual center of Europe, of ideas and the pleasures of a refined culture of every sort, and in French is found the best practise of the literary art in the modern world. Though sporadic writers of genius are scattered here and there through Europe, it is in France that the art is most surely sustained, most variously illustrated, and fills the largest sphere. Its literature in the past, too, is one of the most splendid in the world; for centuries it has not failed in greatness in any age. It is nearer in temperament and substance to the English than is the Italian, and therefore more accessible, and a comprehensive study of it is the most substantially fruitful of all foreign study, though it is less formative than the Greek. The German literature has had but slight contact with English, and that not important; though kindred in

language and to a less extent in race, the English is by its culture nearer to the southern and Latin peoples, and much that is characteristically German finds scant welcome in English tastes. Carlyle illustrates what disqualifications a native writer may acquire by being Teutonized in matter and style. German literature has but few great works, and though it had one flourishing period during which it gave world-currency to its ideas, it is rather by its philosophy than by its imagination that the German genius has affected other nations and found expression for itself. The English reader naturally looks toward France, Italy, and Greece, and is more sympathetic with Spain and the Orient than with the north and east of Europe. It is only by the novel, which in a sense has become independent of nationality, that foreign literatures outside those mentioned are practically known.

In conclusion, to summarize most briefly what has been said, the prime consideration in the whole field of literary appreciation is to avoid making literary study a study of something else. Nothing is more common in practise than to do this. All knowledge that exercises

the mind is useful in its own way; but culture and not learning is the true end of literary study. It is a power of life that is sought, "more life and fuller that we want." Imaginative literature is a great resource for such growth; to live over again the vivid moments of life, as they are set forth by the poets, the dramatists and the novelists, to see the procession of historic life in its great events and the constitution of man in its surpassing characters and its crises of fate and passion, to know the human truth of life in whatever form, is the end in view. It is, therefore, a fatal diversion of interest to attend to the facts of literary history, to biographical and social detail, to discussion of the problems involved, and in general to substitute the comment for the text. Such study should be kept strictly subsidiary to the elucidation of the matter, and so far as possible should be dispensed with. The question is not how much the reader can know about the work, the author and the age, but whether he truly responds to the poem, romance, or essay, and finds there an expansion of his consciousness of life, a stimulation of his own powers, an inner light for his own soul. He should avoid

the comment in all its forms, so far as is possible, and give himself to the work.

Secondly, he should take the greatest masters first, in the order in which interest in them naturally arises in his mind. Some reasons for this have already been given. The main reason, however, is that in their works the great and commanding features of life, its contour both as romance, fate and character, its moral geography, are to be found. One who has read the Hebrew prophets, the Greek dramatists and Shakespeare has a view of the essentials of life in its greatness that requires little supplementing; his reading thereafter is for definition and detail, for the temporal modeling of life in different periods and races and nations, for the illumination of it in exceptional men and women and in high types of character or romantic circumstances; it is, in general, rather verification of old truth than anything more that he finds. In this sense the great writers suffice of themselves, if they be thoroughly known, without the need of reading many books; this is often to be observed in life, for it is not needful to read much but to read well; yet it is only in maturity that the depth and power of

life in the great writers is realized, and the way in which they summarize and contain the lesser multitudinous books of their time, and become lasting memorials of man's life in their age, is understood. If these writers are early known a longer time is given for the development of this richer meaning that only familiarity and the passage of time can bring out of the page.

Lastly, as was said at the beginning, literature is a means of extending and interpreting experience so that the reader by mental growth may become more truly man by including in his view the compass of man's life and developing in himself the powers of response to it that he possesses; it exists for the use of the individual in self-development. This is the point of view that has been maintained with perhaps wearisome iteration in these chapters. It is the personal appeal of literature that has been dwelt on as being its characteristic value in culture. Personality is the genius of life. It is natural, therefore, that those books should be preferred in which the personal appeal is strongest, and this has been indicated as being the right choice of the reader; and also those

books should be preferred in which the matter is put forth in the most personal form, whether by the creative power of the imagination in the greater kinds of literature or by the power of narrative and criticism in its lesser forms. In this way life is seen most vividly, picturesquely and with human excitement; life yields itself most richly in the forms of romance, whether in imagination or in fact. Personality in the presentation does not involve any diminution of the truth. It is mental truth, not material fact, that literature gives; literature is careless of fact as such, it is nothing whether the thing was actual; the reader must learn to live in the mind and not in the senses, in principles and not in facts, in ideal reality as it is to the shaping mind and the dreaming heart of the writer; and even when the traveler relates an adventure or describes a landscape before his eyes, it is by an ideal element in it that he makes the true appeal. Ideal truth has its best embodiment in a person and the human events that happen to him. Life is then at its high tide. Study has great deadening power over life; and when the reader finds this deadening influence in his pursuit of literature, when personality begins to

fade from the page, and the abstract, the parasitical, the fact encroach, and literature becomes rather a form of knowledge than of life, then he is losing the proper good of literature; and he should seek again in himself and his authors the vitality of a personal touch, the connection of life, the power of human truth. The great thing is to remain alive, in one's reading, and nowhere should the principle of life be more sacredly guarded than in its most immortal presence,— imaginative literature and those other forms that take their color from its human methods.

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