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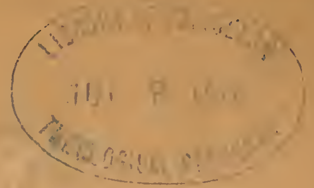

THE STUDY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE: ITS SCOPE AND METHOD.

AN ADDRESS

BEFORE THE

ALUMNI OF BROWN UNIVERSITY,

June 15, 1886,

BY

JAMES O. MURRAY, D. D., LL. D.,

Professor of English Literature in Princeton College.

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PROVIDENCE PRESS COMPANY, PRINTERS.
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ADDRESS.

THE occasion prescribes the theme. We meet as alumni of our college, proud and grateful for her history, loyal to her interests, and confident for her future. We meet also as college men, members of that larger and growing brotherhood of scholars, with the cause of good learning at heart, and scanning eagerly every auspicious sign or boding portent of the literary horizon. Political or social topics, however strenuously they may challenge our attention as citizens or men, have their own occasions. Nor is it enough to meet the demands of this hour that the topic of discussion should be one of a merely general literary importance. The air is full of debate on college matters specifically. The discussion has taken on a wide range: — whether students shall be a self-governing body; whether compulsory attendance on religious exercises shall be maintained; how far his own election shall determine for the student his course of study; how far the old-time general training shall give place to special; how much or how little knowledge of Greek a student may have and yet be in some true and vital sense a liberally educated man. Let us be thankful that these, or similar questions, have roused so persistent inquiry. It is an altogether hopeful sign when the public mind is willing to occupy itself with such themes, rather than surrender itself so completely to

petty political issues, or the crass materialism of the market-place.

I cannot help, however, congratulating myself that while the theme of discussion is in close harmony with the occasion, and is also responsive to the general interest in educational matters, it is one on which no vehement controversy is likely to arise; one which appeals to friends of classical and friends of scientific training; one which touches the higher intellectual life at many points. The expansion of English studies in all our colleges is matter of familiar observation. The growth of interest in them is a plainly marked feature of our times. Forty years ago, in all our colleges, they were confined almost wholly to studies in Rhetoric. English Philology, or English Literature, was only an incident in English training. To-day they have a place more or less full in every well-ordered college curriculum. When Professor Palgrave, in his recent address on assuming the chair of Poetry in Oxford, says "the thorough study of English literature as an art,— indeed, the finest of all arts,— is hopeless unless based on equally thorough study of the literatures of Greece and Rome," he gives a true account of its genesis and method. And when, still further, he adds that "English literature calls loudly for full and free recognition as one of the studies of an English University," he states what is unquestionably a demand of all friends of liberal culture. I propose, then, to discuss *The Study of English Literature: its Scope and Method.*

The study of any literature, properly pursued, must involve to a greater or less extent a corresponding knowledge of history. Eminently this is true of our English literature. For the men who created it have not dwelt apart in a world of their own; have not been anchorites in caves, nor monks in cloisters. They have been part of the life surrounding them in Church and in State. Their souls drank in the

subtler spirit of the ages they lived in. Sometimes, alas! succumbed basely to it, but again, rose above it, combated it, purified and exalted it. It is true, doubtless, that Spenser's Fairy Queen was written in the dreary isolation of Kilcolman Castle, in the south of Ireland, far away from the court of Elizabeth and the stirring life of the England of that day. But in this, an accident of its production, the great poem stands alone, and no English heart of his time beat more high with interest in the fortunes of England than Edmund Spenser's, as every page of his poem shows. What the great civic life of England was to William Shakespeare let the splendid patriotism of all his English plays — most of all his Henry V.— testify. The world waited twenty years for John Milton's Paradise Lost, while he laid, as he says, "his singing robes" aside and wrote his tracts on liberty. Even Wordsworth, as numbers of his poems show, living aloof from men among the lakes and fells of his Grasmere and Rydal Mount, never forgot that he was a citizen of England as well as her poet laureate.

When, therefore, ten years ago, Green published his short history of the English people, and in his preface announced his purpose of treating literature as a part of the organic life of the English people, he was not only constructing history on new lines, he was taking account of a factor in English civilization which had been forgotten or little noticed by those who had preceded him. "I have preferred," he says, "to pass lightly or briefly over the details of foreign wars and diplomacies, the personal adventures of kings and nobles, the pomp of courts or the intrigues of favorites, and to dwell at length on the incidents of the constitutional, intellectual and social advance in which we read the history of the nation itself." He finds places, therefore, conspicuous and impressive, for "the figures of the missionary, the poet, the printer, the merchant and the philosopher." This view of history and

his balanced, finely-wrought estimate of the great literary names and their works seem to not a few of our ripest scholars amply to have justified him in "devoting more space to Chaucer than to Cressy, to Caxton than to the petty strife of Yorkish and Lancastrian, in restoring to their place among the achievements of Englishmen the Fairy Queen and the Novum Organum." It is quite possible that he may have failed at times in giving due importance to the stock characters and events which have asserted a prescriptive right to the historical field. But he has not erred in claiming for literary men and their works a place high and distinct in any history which claims to be a history of the English people. And in the "Outlines of Universal History" by a distinguished alumnus of this college, Professor Fisher, of Yale College,—a work, the marvel as well as the admiration and delight of scholars,—the same recognition has been given to all literatures as part of universal history, which Mr. Green has given to English literature as part of the history of the English people. But Professor Seeley, equally eminent as a historical scholar, and whose critical estimates in his essays on Goethe and Milton show him the master of a profound literary criticism, has taken pains in his work on the "Expansion of England" to say: "I consider that history has to do with the State, that it investigates the growth and changes of a certain corporate society, which acts through certain functionaries and assemblies. . . . That history is not concerned with individuals except in the capacity of members of a State. That a man in England makes a scientific discovery, or paints a picture, is not in itself an event. Individuals are important in history in proportion not to their intrinsic merit, but to their relation to the State. . . . Newton was a greater man than Harley, yet it is Harley, not Newton, who fixes the attention of the historian of the reign of Queen Anne."

But such a view of the scope of English history is far too narrow — presents but one side or phase of that complex life which makes up history, omits what may be its nobler part. There is certainly wanting the higher, grander element of national life, where great captains or statesmen alone make the history of the people. In 1605 occurred the Gunpowder Plot, and Guy Fawkes passed from obscurity into the history of the English nation. In 1605 appeared Bacon's "Advancement of Learning," heralding, like the morning star, the dawn of the new philosophy in the Novum Organum, and which carried the seeds of a progress broader and richer than the fleets of Frobisher and Drake. Can that be a true view of history which dwells on the Gunpowder Plot and omits notice of the Baconian philosophy on the ground that the latter is not an "event in the history of England"? It is far nearer the truth to say that the importance of the history of any nation is in direct ratio to the worth of its literature. The story of any people is scarcely worth writing except it have one. Compare the history of Germany since Martin Luther laid the foundations of her noble literature in his translation of the Bible, with all preceding. The result of such a comparison is deeply suggestive. What has the history of Spain been worth since her great authors have vanished? If there is one factor more than any other which can indicate the growth or decay of the national life, and measure the worth of that life as an element of human progress, that factor is literature. "Classical history," said Mr. Huxley in one of his lay sermons, "is a great section of the palæontology of man; and I have the same respect for it as for other kinds of palæontology; that is to say, a respect for the facts which it establishes as for all facts, and a still further respect for it as a preparation for the discovery of a law of progress." If, indeed, classical literature be shut out of recognition in classical history,

Mr. Huxley may be right in denominating classical history as a part of the palæontology of man. But so long as historians like Grote or Mommsen make the great classical literature a vital part of their histories, this never can be classified as palæontology. If scientific nomenclature must be used, the great classics will group themselves as part of the *biology* of nations, since they are *living* and not dead things. If classical literature be dead, then the world is ready for some new definition of what life and death are.

The student of English literature must know English history in order to appreciate that literature, as he must know the literature in order to estimate the history. Determined by historic causes outside itself, this naturally divides into historic periods. Its great divisions into Elizabethan, Restoration, Queen Anne and Victorian periods, like the continents, are marked by peculiar configurations and differing characteristics. The England of Chaucer and Langland is a totally different England from that of Spenser and Shakespeare. The England of the seventeenth and that of the nineteenth century have contrasts which are more powerful than their resemblances. No man to-day can appreciate the marvellous portraitures in the Prologue to the Canterbury Tales who is ignorant of the times in which such characters as Chaucer's Knight, and Pricress, and Monk, and Clerk of Oxenford, and Wife of Bath, and Pardoner, and Sergeant of Lawe, had their actual being. Let no one think he has taken in the fulness of poetic meaning in Spenser's Fairy Queen who has not sought to penetrate the allegoric veil which covers historical personages and events then coloring and shaping English history. There were a false Duessa and an Archimago, an Ignaro and a Blatant Beast in England then, and the reader of the Fairy Queen should know who and what they were.

Shakespeare, we say, is universal. So he is. But the

universal involves the particular, and if the student of Shakespeare does not know the great currents of English history which swept along in so magnificent volume and rushing celerity, bearing on them a great national and social and religious life, there are hundreds of pregnant allusions in his dramas the force of which will never be felt. Until the folk-lore of his time, as that embodies the popular belief in a fairy-like or ghost-like supernaturalism is known, Shakespeare's dramatic use of the supernatural cannot be appreciated. The Pucks and Ariels, the witches in Macbeth, the ghosts that rise so awfully in Richard III. and Hamlet, will move across the stage with far more dramatic power when once we have learned from a study of the Elizabethan demonology how real they all were to the Englishmen of that day.

If possible, the case is still stronger in regard to the literature of Queen Anne's reign. Take its greatest names — Swift, Pope, Addison. These were all men who lived with what are called the great historical actors of the time. The social life of the period is almost photographed in the delicious essays of the "Spectator," so easy and graceful with their high-bred tone, so pure and sincere in their quality, so matchless in that art of saying wise and witty things in the best way. It looms up dark and grim in the satires of Swift; it snarls and bites in the satires of Pope. But no literary period more needs the side-lights of history. We must know what the actual stage of Jeremy Collier's day had become (and we can read it in histories of the time) before we can understand the justifying reasons for his bold and unanswerable attack upon the theatre. We shall be too bitter censors of Dean Swift's terrible misanthropy till we see in the pamphlets which mirror the times how much cause he had to despise the essential littleness and meanness to which society

was dwarfing itself, making out of a great and heroic age what was a very Liliput, if not a despicable Yahoo.

The true scope of study for any literature, and eminently for that of the English-speaking race, will include, of necessity, its study historically. The stream of authorship flows in unbroken current ever since it started in the sweet, clear fount of Chaucer's poetry, save only as it sank out of sight, like fabled Arethusa, in the dreary century and a half after his death. Its course varies, its currents deepen, it visits different regions, it bears on its broadening bosom a larger freightage of thought, it reflects more the beams of a westering sun than the hot glow of an Orient, but the flow is continuous. Hence it must be so studied alike to completeness as to thoroughness of view. One period affects another period; new elements come in and are absorbed; the changing phases of society, of learning, of religion, are all there, but it is still English to the core all its way through.

The renaissance in Italy, sending its new learning and new life across the Alps over the channel, brings up literature from what seemed a sad and premature decay. Colet and Erasmus are the twin predecessors of Edmund Spenser and William Shakespeare. There is reaction as well as action, as when the classical school of Pope succeeds the romantic school of the Elizabethans, to be soon and gloriously supplanted by the more vital, deeper school of Burns and Wordsworth. Nothing is more interesting and nothing is more stimulating than this comparative study of literature when it supplements and rounds out study of the distinctive excellence each author and each age presents. Indeed, what the study needs more than anything else at present is the application to it of the comparative method. It will gain in breadth; it will lose nothing in specific and critical results. No more inviting field opens to the student of English literature than consideration of it in relation to other great literatures. To

trace in turn what elements the great classic authors have contributed to it, is literary work of the highest order. "Greece has crossed the Alps," cried a Grecian scholar in exile, on hearing a translation of Thucydides by the German Reuchlin. But Greece has invaded Britain as well as Rome. She came not as in mailed legions with her Cæsars, but in her Homer and Plato and Æschylus. For they are to be traced in Spenser and Milton. Nay, do we not see the faces of the Greek poets as we read some of the choicest strains of Tennyson and Arnold? How in turn Italian, French and German literature have moulded the character of differing ages in the history of our letters not always to their better growth, but sometimes enriching a native genius which has seldom stooped to servile imitation—all this shows how truly literature has its own history, how necessary is its historic study. Lessing wrote his Laocoon in 1765. It woke no response in England then. Sir Joshua Reynolds never seems to have heard of it. But at last it moulds a new and ample criticism, not only of art, but also of letters, and England boasts to-day instead of that wretched, destructive criticism of the Quarterlies with which this century began, that noble and accomplished school of English critics with which the century ends.

Two things are certainly secured where literature is thus studied historically. First, what are called minor authors have at least some recognition. There are minor poets as there are minor prophets. But he would have after all a meagre and partial view of the real greatness of the old Hebrew prophet's office and work, who only knew the lofty poetry of Isaiah, the glowing visions of Ezekiel, and the boding lamentations of Jeremiah. There is surely that in Amos, the herdsman of Tekoa, and in the burden of Habakkuk, and in the stirring outcry of Joel, which adds to ancient prophecy much of its undying grandeur. To these, too, the

word of the Lord came. And so have sung minor poets, like Herbert and Herrick and Waller and Collins and Gray and Cowper. So have written minor essayists, like the quaint, delightful Sir Thomas Brown, and the equally quaint and witty Lamb. He knows not much of the choicest in our literature who knows them not. For if we have our eye only for the grandeurs of nature, mountains, cataracts and oceans, or firmaments, we lose the very standard by which their real greatness can be compared.

But, secondly, thus is secured that cardinal virtue of literary judgment — catholicity of spirit. The temptation to partisanship in literature, as in life generally, is strong. Literary partisanship, like religious or political, is apt to be bitter and unjust. From the day the young Athenian in Aristophanes beat his father for preferring Æschylus to Euripides, or when Ben Jonson fought his literary battles in his Poetaster and Cynthia's revels, to our own, when Mr. Swinburne and Mr. Furnivall bring down literary controversy to the level of the hustings, this spirit has been rife. There are too many minds still who can see everything in Shakespeare and Goethe, and nothing in Milton and Schiller; too many who refuse any just estimate to Pope, who heap unstinted praise on Cowper. There is no higher figure in our literature than that of William Wordsworth, so derided by the writers of the Edinburgh Review, enduring in calm confidence the fire of their unscrupulous raillery, and trusting his work and his fame to the larger and better judgment of the English public. In his late scholarly work on the literary period between Shakespeare and Pope, Mr. Edmund Gosse has said, with great pertinence and force: "At the present day it is a great temptation to those who have made special periods and segments of the poetic produce of a nation their peculiar care, to exaggerate the value of what they have unearthed. It is human to see exotic beauties in the weed we

ourselves have discovered. But this tendency is one to be avoided, since it is commonly accompanied by an inability to enjoy what is really great in other schools than that in which the education of the taste has been conducted." From all this injurious partisanship, with its narrowness and provincialism, the study pursued historically will be a shield and buckler. As we see the great structure of our literature rise before us from foundation to spire, it will not only be the massive colonnade, or the high altar, or the vaulted roof, which will arrest our attention and challenge our admiration, but now and again we shall catch sight of some graceful frieze, some bit of delicate but modest carving, some rich tracery of far less imposing outline, which we shall be glad to recognize as not only full of beauty in itself, but lending its efficient aid to the one grand sentiment of beauty or grandeur which the whole building inspires. We shall do all the greater homage to great dramatists when we have learned to prize the humbler lyrists. When we have been just to the Wordsworths and the Brownings, we shall be all the better fitted to estimate at their full value the Shelleys and the Byrons.

The scope, however, of such a study as English literature can only be discerned by advancing from its merely historical bearings to a consideration of principles underlying its growth. For it is no chance product, springing up here and there along the tracts of history at random, blossoming into poetry in great epic or dramatic forms, ripening into great histories or fictions but obeying no laws and following no lines of normal development. Cause and effect, supply and demand are to be seen as well in the world of literary achievement as in the sphere of revolutions or political economies. No greater service has been rendered the cause of good letters in recent days than the philosophical treatment which has been given to the subject. It has revolutionized the whole method of literary criticism, has made this not a mere

engine of destruction, but the guardian and promoter of good letters — itself, indeed, some of their finer fruit. We owe to it the rise of that cultivated school of English critics, such as Shairp and Arnold, and Dowden and Myers, and Hutton and Gosse, and not the least among them, our own Lowell, as well as that Continental school which boasts such names as St. Beuve, and Taine, and Scherer.

Our danger is in fact now the opposite one — of being too philosophical. When, as in a recent book on "Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist," we are first urged to the view that literary criticism must take its place among the inductive sciences, and then find Shakespeare's plays analyzed and methodized till they remind us painfully of treatises on Geology or Anatomy, we say with Hamlet himself, "Something too much of this." Between this extreme and the earlier, which took little or no note of literature as a growth, our choice would be to accept the simple, charming downright teachings of Sir Philip Sydney in his "Defense of Poesie," which, innocent of philosophy, defines the power of the poet as that which "holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney-corner." Sydney Smith, talking to a group of eager and fascinated listeners, remarked of Wordsworth's poetry that "he could not see anything in it." "That may be," was the quick retort of an accomplished woman; there are some things which are spiritually discerned." This test of a spiritual discernment it is indeed needful to apply in any true philosophy of mental growths. But applying it, such is not only attainable but essential.

It is scarcely a quarter of a century ago that the literary world hailed with great acclaim M. Henri Taine's volumes on the History of English Literature. His work is the lineal descendant of Lessing's Laocoon, so far as the spirit and methods of its criticisms go. And however we may be compelled to dissent from his literary judgments, we give him all

honor for his attempt to enunciate some of the principles which underlie the production of a literature. In his view, literary development is determined chiefly by two factors. The first of these, *nationality*, acts in many ways, but acts steadily and acts powerfully. To understand the poets, or dramatists and historians, the essayists and novelists, we must understand the nation which made them in great part what they are. We must understand the nation not simply in a mere fashion of external history, so many disasters, so many wars, so large or so small territory, but a nation as "having its own character, both mental and moral, which manifests itself at the beginning and develops from epoch to epoch, preserving the same fundamental qualities from its origin to its decline." This element of nationality prescribes limitations as well as ensures types. It would have been, owing to these limitations, as impossible for any Frenchman yet known to history, to write a "Paradise Lost," as for any Englishman to have written "Molière's Tartuffe." But within its own limits, and working on its own lines, nationality is a factor powerfully moulding literature. The mighty growth of letters in the time of Elizabeth is not indirectly, but directly, owing to the consolidation of a true English nationality. Before a Marlowe and Shakespeare, a Hooker and Bacon could appear, it was needful not only that Norman and Saxon elements should be completely fused, but also that the internecine strifes of York and Lancaster should have ended.

And still further, the race-element in national life, which affects so profoundly all the institutions of civilization, has affected all the literary growths. The Trouvére party of the north of France differs from the Troubadour of the south, as North from South. Scandinavian mythology has in it a "form and pressure," which by no possibility could have shown themselves in myths of Aryan or Grecian origin. And our English literature is Anglo-Saxon all the way through. It has,

indeed, absorbed nutriment and borrowed suggestions from all sources in turn. But this has been assimilated and digested so thoroughly that the nationality of England as Anglo-Saxon appears as brilliantly and as prominently in her men of letters as in her laws, her constitution and her Parliament.

The other factor which, according to M. Taine, shapes literature, is the physical condition belonging to soil, climate, scenery. He begins his history with a sentence which is the index to his discussions through the hundred following pages as to the source of that literature. The powerful influence of this factor is seen not only in reflecting the life of the surrounding nations, but far more deeply as nature moulds the men under her skies, on her soil, beaten by her tempests, or tranquillized by her beauties. The study of literature thus becomes a study of national as well as political or religious environment.

Attention has of late been called to Geography as a true constituent of historical study. It has an equal place in literary. If our poetry and prose only reach their highest art as man — his hopes and plans, his passions and sorrows, his life here brooded over by so solemn mysteries — is the subject, still when *nature* is their theme, it is the nature amid which her disciples have been reared which is reflected from their pages. Or if, as in the case of Byron and Shelley, it is the nature of an adopted land sung by them in strains of so bewitching beauty, it is still true that nature has moulded the poet with her plastic hand.

All this, however, is but the vestibule to the philosophy of literature. It pertains more to form than to the soul. We pass on through it to behold more vital and more precious elements. Pausing here, we could not possibly explain the noblest work of our men of letters. The inner shrine is only reached when we approach the moral element. Here, indeed,

is the *questio vexata* of all art. How does it stand related to morals? Is it wholly independent of all relation to the moral? If connected, how are the two connected? Is the relation one of outward form merely, or is it inner and vital? What does the dictum mean, "Art for art's sake"? Is Heinrich Heine's cry for a "rehabilitation of the flesh," the demand for true or false art? Must a "fleshly school of poetry" be given the same legitimacy of position accorded to the spiritual?

The voices are confused which come to us in reply. "Religion," said Goethe, "stands in the same relation to art as any other of the higher interests in life. It is merely to be looked upon as a material with similar claims to any other vital material. Faith and want of faith are not the organs with which a work of art is to be apprehended." "Art," says Professor Seeley, "is the minister to joy; all art is play, or, in short, exists for pleasure." "All works of art which have a practical purpose are not properly works of art." While Sir Philip Sidney claims that the poet is the true *vates* or seer, defining him as the "passionate lover of that unspeakable and everlasting beauty, to be seen by the eyes of the mind, only cleared by faith." There is a truth and also an error in every one of these statements of the relation of art to morals. Goethe is right in saying that "faith and unfaith are not the organs with which a work of art is apprehended," but when he makes of religion only so much material for artistic use, he circumscribes the province of art and shuts out its main relation. Professor Seeley is right in saying that "art is the minister to joy," but when he adds that "all works of art which have a practical purpose are not properly works of art," he tears a jewel from its crown. If ever a literary artist wrought with a high purpose in view, it was George Eliot. We may not accept her altruistic theories of

life, but to deny to her fictions their claim as works of art is denial which stultifies itself. And when Professor Seeley says that "art is the minister to joy," we must in turn ask what is meant here by joy? Can the highest joy ever be secured by a work of art which violates the fundamental principles of morals? Can the religious, the moral nature be counted out, in the estimate of what most truly begets joy? Can joy be reduced to the mere satisfaction of æsthetic sensibilities, the eye for form and color, the ear for harmonious cadence, the intellect pure and simple, in its demand for grandeur or beauty?

It has been the fashion in certain quarters to praise Byron's Don Juan as containing the noblest strains of poetry, as marking the highest reach of his poetic genius. We must protest against such a judgment not only as unjust to Byron's true fame, but as a violation of any true canon regarding the relation of art to morals. This poem stabs in open or secret thrusts with such an air of cool and haughty scorn every principle of honor, every source of moral purity, every sweet and wholesome view of life, that we do not hesitate to say the best and purest souls not only can have no joy in it, but must fling it away with a scorn as indignant as his was bitter and cynical. "What is it to us," Mr. Swinburne asks, "whether Turner had coarse orgies with the trulls of Wapping"? And in the same way, "What are the stories of Byron's libertinism to us"? We answer: When Byron flaunts his libertinism in our faces, writes it out in verse on which he has lavished prodigally his genius, he has defied the laws of all true art; first, as he has made his poetry a loathing and not a joy to all the pure in heart; and secondly, because he has overlooked that which is the secret of all the highest work in literary art, viz.: that which conforms to and does not shock the delight of the best in eternal purity. The accusation of immorality is sometimes unjust. It has

been well said that an author's "*dominant* influence on character may be potent for good, but on certain side issues he may be ethically unsound." The view of Coleridge, that Fielding, in his novels, by depicting the evil consequences of immorality, is a moral writer, is thoroughly defensible.

We do not say it is the business of the poet or moralist or essayist to turn preacher, and make his poetry or his novel or essay a sermon. He need not even have it as his distinct aim to set forth principles in morals or religion. He may do so and be a great artist. So has Victor Hugo written; so have Charles Dickens, and Thackeray, and George Eliot; so, above all, has Wordsworth. But this we do claim, and make an appeal to all the greatest works of literature to justify us. Literature never strikes a true note in art when, judged in the largest sweep of its tendency, morality is sacrificed. Literature never strikes her deepest notes except as the great eternal laws of righteousness, which give human life its deepest significance, which make man so noble in the scale of being, and invest all his relations with so undying pathos, form the basis of the thought or feeling, or at least harmonize with them. No man believes that Dante wrote his Inferno to teach eschatology; that Shakespeare wrote his Macbeth to unfold the awful retributions of the human conscience, or that Goethe wrote his Faust to give us a view of the plan of redemption. This was not the aim. It need not have been. But the greatest poems always must embody this material; not strictly because it is such material as *may* be used, but such as must be used if the deepest æsthetic chords in the human soul are to be touched. There may be a religion of beauty, but that must be the beauty of holiness. When Jeremy Collier laid bare the hideous immoralities of the drama of the Restoration, it was undoubtedly Puritanism rallying to the defense of moral purity. But Puritanism in this was no less the friend of true art than of true morals.

Wycherly and Congreve had done their worst to drag down the stage not only into an abyss of sensuality, but into a degradation of dramatic art from which in more than two centuries it has not rallied.

The world of art and letters owes a great debt to John Ruskin for his long and eloquent advocacy of truth as the basis of all high art,— truth in its deepest senses. In his very suggestive essay on the "Deteriorative Power of Conventional Art," he has written out his creed: "And thus great art is nothing else than the type of strong and noble life."

It is only when a true philosophy of literature is held by its teachers that it can become fruitful of the highest culture. Just so long as the shallow notions of literary art hold their sway, just so long shall we be open to the charge that the literary spirit is essentially effeminate, lacks that breadth and depth which every disciplinary study should have in itself. It must be confessed that literary men have given the world too much occasion for cavil. The literary life has bred too much the spirit of dilettanteism. To how many does it stand as only a pretty sort of occupation, making pretty minds, and blossoming into modern æsthetes. If literature cannot make souls strong as well as beautiful, it fails in high degree, and must hold a small place in wise education. But if once its scope be grasped in a true philosophy, the reproach is swept away. Once place literary studies on this broad and true foundation, and you have given room and verge for teaching which shall take hold of souls at points which will affect them deeply and strongly. If history broadens the mind, and philosophy deepens it, the study of our English literature in its true scope will broaden, deepen, and also enrich culture.

The most important question, however, as to the scope of English literature in academic culture pertains, of course, to its value as a mental discipline. What training does it give? What faculties of mind does it touch and invigorate? In

general, it may be said that its value in mental training is closely analogous to that secured by classical study. Not classical study in its entire range, as a study of grammar as well as literature, but classical study in its wider and richer bearings, as a study of the highest models in literary spheres. Certain it is that if the classics are to hold their lawful place, they must be more and more studied as literature. Far be it from me to depreciate classical philology as a discipline. It is a curious mental perverseness which, while magnifying the importance of fact-studies (and these are confessedly great), belittles the importance of classical philology. The dative case is a fact — as much a fact as that there was a Miocene period or a glacial period, or that the optic nerves are smallest in the moles, largest in the giraffe, or that in the rhinoceros the fasciculi of the choanoid muscles have coalesced into two masses, or that the gills of the *Tubicolous Annelides* are placed on or near the head, generally in two lateral tufts —*facts*, all of them, and important to scientific students. But as a fact, the dative case is of equal importance, to say the least. Homer and Plato would not be Homer and Plato without it. It has life and power in their hands, and is as much an object of knowledge as anything in biology or geology. But while demanding all this for classical philology, still it is true that classical study only reaches its true and full proportions when it passes onward and upward from the regions of philology into those of literature. The moment this is done, then Classical literature and English literature occupy a common ground as discipline. The student of Æschlyus and Euripides and Theocritus will be all the better prepared for the study of Macbeth and Samson Agonistes and the poetry of Tennyson.

It is an interesting fact in the history of Oxford that when its professorship of poetry was founded, it was stated in the statutes founding it, that "the study of poetry tended to the

improvement of the chief sciences there." This view would make the study of English literature an auxiliary force to other discipline, having no distinct value of its own. We need not, however, discount the study on this ground. Auxiliaries are no mean agents. Without these, principals would sometimes be at sore disadvantage in the struggle of life. In mental discipline some studies are by turns each auxiliary and principal. Algebra doubtless has great value as independent discipline. To be able to solve quadratics of two unknown quantities may help a man in the solution of life's great equation, in which, alas ! more than two unknown quantities are to be found. But when Algebra contributes its indispensable services to the study of Physics or Astronomy, it becomes an auxiliary, possibly of more moment than as principal. So with English literature. It is by turns auxiliary and principal. It has related and it has individual value as mental discipline.

Goldwin Smith has called attention to an important distinction between the "intrinsic value of studies and their educational value." The study of Sanscrit, or Romance Philology, has intrinsic value. All knowledge is of worth. But to insist that the educational value of Sanscrit, or Romance Philology, has equal disciplinary value with other branches, shows ignorance of the human mind and of an educational experience which centuries have contributed to form. The difference between intrinsic and educational value for any study is palpable and essential. That alone has educational value which in the shortest time and by the most direct operation can arouse and discipline the mental faculties. "I hate by-roads in education," said Dr. Johnson ; and we are only making by-roads in education when we put studies of distinctively, if not exclusively intrinsic value, side by side with those which have distinctively *educational* value, and perforce also the *intrinsic*. What is claimed for English literature as a study is, that while having an intrinsic value, it has an influential and

distinct educational value. If "to be available for the higher education," as Goldwin Smith claims, "a subject must be traversed by principles and capable of method; . . . must be either a science or a philosophy, not a mere mass of facts, without principle or law," it has been already shown that the study of English literature is "traversed by principles and capable of method."

We cannot rest the case, however, on mere generalities. Pushing the inquiry into more detail, let us ascertain just what elements of a liberal education will be secured by this study of our literature — a true scope and method being assumed for it. But what is a liberal education? John Milton, in his tract on Education, gives answer two centuries ago: "I call, therefore, a complete and generous education, that which fits a man to perform justly, skillfully and magnanimously all the offices, both private and public, of peace and war." This noble answer is, however, somewhat too general for the purposes of the present discussion. Mr. Huxley has given a definition of liberal education which is more specific: "That man, I think, has had a liberal education who has been so trained in youth that his body is the ready servant of his will, and does with ease and pleasure all the work that as a mechanism it is capable of; whose intellect is a clear, cold logic engine with all its parts of equal strength and in smooth working order, ready like a steam engine to be turned to any kind of work, and spin the gossamers as well as forge the anchors of the mind; whose mind is stored with a knowledge of the great and fundamental truths of nature and of the laws of her operations; one who, no stunted ascetic, is full of life and of fire, but whose passions are trained to come to heel by a vigorous will, the servant of a tender conscience; who has learned to love all beauty, whether of nature or of art, to hate all vileness, and to respect others as himself."

Mr. Huxley's definition of a liberal education, containing as it does the saving clause that its possessor must "have learned to love all beauty, whether of nature or of art," is such as to make literary study imperative on all liberally educated men. The intellect will be more than a "clear, cold logic engine," of course, for any man who has "learned to love *all beauty.*" That it may be more, is the object in studying our literature. There is, in fact, a general knowledge of what our great writers are, which must be pre-supposed in anything which lays claim to the august title of a liberal education. We may not call him liberally educated who is ignorant wholly of the general principles of geological, or biological, or astronomical science. To do so is an educational heresy. No men insist on such knowledge more than the friends of literary studies. But in turn they ask, Does not educational orthodoxy demand that the liberally educated man know something of Chaucer as well as of the plesiosaurus and megalosaurus ; something of Addison and Swift as well as of protoplasm ; of Shakespeare as well as of the nebular hypothesis ? Yea, verily, is the response ; but the knowledge of these authors is what students may pick up for themselves, whereas they must have teachers and training in geology, and biology, and astronomy.

But literary training is not a thing which a man can pick up for himself, if he is to know it in any deep and truthful way. He can pick up geology or biology just as well by himself. The fact that the literature is in his vernacular does not by any means put him in possession of what the study can do for him. It may facilitate, but it cannot supersede, the necessity for some higher training. What makes Coleridge one of the best guides to the study of Shakespeare is the fact that he had, along with a thorough knowledge of Greek tragedy, a knowledge of philosophy as well. Literary training must consist in that interpretation of authors such

as Hudson gives to Shakespeare, or Myers to Wordsworth, or Lowell to Chaucer and Spenser, and trained in which the student is equipped for true and full appreciation of all forms of literary work. Furthermore it may be said that when, in the course of education, the pursuit of any branch of learning, be it classics, or mathematics, or science, wakes up or stimulates the powers, it has very high educational value. Educational processes are barren if reduced to mere class-room drill. Drill is good. But if all the results of teaching are drill, then there is failure in the higher spheres of training, even if the teacher does not incur justly the reproach of John Milton, as making his efforts at instruction an "asinine feast of sow, thistles and brambles." Now there is no study more directly fitted to wake up the mind of a pupil, give it enthusiasm and push, than the study of our great authors. To come in contact with their minds, to be led under their mighty spell, is to have the mental faculties so directly called to and called upon, that mental awaking, if it have not already come, is apt to come; and it may be said that until some study has accomplished this mental wakening, education has hardly begun its work.

In that lecture of Mr. Matthew Arnold on Literature and Science, which he gave a few years since, he made the claim for literature that it alone satisfies the "end of relating what we have learned and known, to the sense we have in us for conduct, to the sense which we have in us for beauty," and that "education lays hold upon us, in fact, by satisfying this demand." Mr. Huxley's definition of a liberal education includes in it what will minister to this education of character. His liberally educated man must be one "whose passions are trained to come to heel by a vigorous will, the servant of a tender conscience; who has learned to love all

beauty, whether of nature or of art, to hate all vileness, and to respect others as himself." Of course in reaching so broad a moral education as this, a distinctly moral, if not Christian, teaching must be supplied. But what a minister to this high end the study of literature may become! Lowell has said of Spenser: "No man can read the Fairy Queen and be anything but the better for it." It palpitates from its beginning with the Red Cross Knight to its close with Sir Calidore with so singular and inspiring loftiness of spiritual aim. To know John Milton in his prose or his poetry is to know a great soul who appeals in us to whatever is capable of heroic mould or lofty emotion. I believe that Thackeray has accomplished unmeasured good for the young, by his just and noble scorn for all that is false and factitious in high places; that he has educated powerfully the sense of right and wrong conduct in his multiplying readers. And the time has hardly yet come for estimating what Wordsworth has done for those who have learned to love him, in the nobler ideals to which he has lifted life. And the same is true of Robert Browning. These, and such as these, cannot be studied without having bright, fresh young minds influenced by them and their teachings. "The sense in us for conduct," to borrow Mr. Arnold's phrase, responds to their many-toned call, and the soul rises to loftier and truer conceptions of life and duty.

But there are special results accomplished by this study of our literature of hardly less moment. Is imagination a faculty worth cultivating? It would seem sometimes as if educators who speak of intellect as a "clear, cold logic engine," did not think so. But when that chapter in the biography of Louis Agassiz is read which describes that marvellous reconstruction of a past glacial period so that you can almost see Europe under the mighty frozen mass, we are tempted to ask, Is not this brilliant scientific imagination, giving body to the strenuous scientific reasoning and untiring scientific research,

a great possession? Do we read the pages of Macaulay, or our own Motley, and their pictures of a Massacre of Glencoe, or a Siege of Leyden, without feeling that there is a historic imagination which can record the past movements of men, as Agassiz has of nature? And what writers can so educate this imaginative power as our great poets? Is this not the function of great poets, aye, of all the literature of imagination?

There is an education of the taste which comes from this study, and gained nowhere else. I dislike the term "good taste" as applied to that fine appreciation of the best in art. It seems weak, almost inane, as designating a quality so high. It is associated with an effeminate quality in the minds of some. Strength is too often confounded with coarseness and vulgarity. But the evils of this are deplorable. Bad taste has vulgarized religion. In preaching it has degraded the high office of the Christian Teacher into shrieking dervishes, who beat the air with new sensational devices every Sunday. It is a low and vulgar taste which prefers a cheap stump oratory to calm and well-considered discourse. The Blatant Beast is not dead yet. I fear he has somewhat free range in America, going about Sundays as well as week-days, seeking whom he may devour. How much will the taste of the public have to be educated before a noble simplicity, a severe truthfulness of style, can have its own due recognition? It is more than a mere question of taste. It trenches on moral relations. And there is an immoral element in the sneers at good taste. If our public men had more of this, if the people wanted more of this, we should have better politics, as well as better speeches. This study of literature is also imperatively needed in order to faithful discipline of students in the high and essential art of expression. The lack in masters of English style deserves serious thought at the hands of our educators. That the art of writ-

ing English prose in its racy, idiomatic diction, almost justifying Coleridge's view that it is a more wonderful thing than poetry, is not yet a lost art, the prose of Newman and Martineau abroad, of Hawthorne at home, makes sufficiently clear. And yet how few attain their felicity and power! How shall the want be met?

When Dr. Johnson said, "Whoever wishes to attain an English style familiar but not coarse, elegant but not ostentatious, must give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison," he only illustrated a principle fundamental in the art of style. The study of models here is as essential as the study of models in the sister arts of sculpture or painting. The geniuses who are independent of models are few and far between, exceptions or anomalies who only prove the rule. An argument for our old-time classical training of invincible force is to be drawn from its close relation to all mastery of the best English style. Any teacher who is accustomed to supervise the writing of students can distinguish at a glance those who have been classically trained and who have caught from ancient models something of their matchless art, from those whose training has been shut up to the style of text-books, or the newspaper, or chance acquaintance with stray English authors. We shall have more masters in the high art of English style when we have learned how to study the great masters — first Homer, and Thucydides and Cicero, and then Shakespeare, and Gibbon and Burke — as models; and this end alone for the study of English literature would vindicate its claims for a front rank in all courses of mental training.

As to method, there is little need for lengthened discussion. The scope determines the method for the study. The too free use of so-called manuals or histories of English literature has had only the effect of retarding the true interests of literary study. A good dictionary is more interesting, and far

more profitable reading. They are not much more help to the study of good letters than a table of logarithms. Cramming a student's memory with facts about an author, the date of his birth and death, the place of his education, the dates of his successive publications, who printed them, and how many editions were sold, the quarrels with his fellow-craftsmen, if he happened to have any, how he was praised by his contemporaries, general estimates of what and how he wrote,—all this, whatever it be, is not properly a study of literature. It is literature skeletonized, and it is only as the student is brought in direct contact with the complex and wonderful life that pervades literature, that its study becomes vital and fruitful. So that the cardinal principle of a true method is that the student be brought into direct contact with the authors themselves.

At this point, however, it is of absolute necessity that the "interpreter" of literature in the teacher should appear. For, as Professor Dowden has lately said, "Every great writer has his secret, and there are some writers who seem to cherish their secret and constantly to elude us, just at the moment of capture, and these perhaps are the most fascinating of all, endlessly to be pursued." The first close and intelligent reading of Hamlet discloses to the student in outline a vast monument of literary art. When for the twentieth time he has traversed the great tragedy, he has gained more full and more distinct impressions of the sources of its power. And if he will only persevere and pursue the secret endlessly, though he can never hope to pluck out the heart of its mystery, he may hope at last to have some approximate conception of what is the "hiding of its power." The same thing is true of John Milton's Paradise Lost. Mr. Stopford Brooke's study of this poem suggests the query whether, after two centuries, Milton's art is yet fully under-

stood or appreciated. And just because the professional interpreters of literature, the critics, have so often been the "police and magistracy" of the literary domain, rather than in any just sense interpreters of its secret, is the interpreter demanded.

Things in this sphere are altogether more hopeful now, but still he who teaches literature must bend all his powers to this great end, and interpret authors to his classes. Here he finds his great function. It will task high powers. He must not only "feel widely, but also feel exquisitely" the subtler elements of all authorship. He must never mistake "fastidiousness" for accuracy, and truth of perception. "He who approaches his author as a whole, bearing upon life as a whole, is himself alive at the greatest possible number of points, will be the best and truest interpreter." And if this great study thus pursued attains its end, the result will be that generous youth will go from these seats of learning with the noblest traits wakened and disciplined, brought under the power of great masters in all fields of literary achievement, with sources of high impulse and ideals of manly life, which no time can destroy, no worldliness chill or dry up, no hard realities in after struggles choke or strangle.

For one I count it a great thing in my life to have been trained in an institution which has always shown fostering care of high literary pursuits. I look back to-day through many years of active life to the old college days, grateful that I was so trained here as to turn to literature for help and stimulus at a thousand turns in life. Brown University has always known that finer literary atmosphere in which a sweet and gracious culture flourishes. Her traditions are all of them strongly charged with this spirit. From the time of Professor Goddard — and I know not how much earlier — but from the time of Professor Goddard, in whom were blended

all the elements of highest English culture, to the present, it has lived and thrived. The mantle of Professor Goddard descended on one who, though for many years retired from active connection with the college, still is present to receive the gratulations of pupils who owe to him the blessing of a true literary culture, and whose distinction, among others, it is to have trained for the service of the college two men of so exceptional a literary grace and power as Professors Dunn and Diman.

Fellow-Alumni:

If to-day I have magnified the claims of literary studies, it has been from the deep conviction that we are in danger of a narrow, one-sided culture, running out into a specialism which can never, from its limitations, meet the highest ideal in education, and also from a conviction equally strong that the full resources in English literature as a branch of culture have not yet been developed. I believe with Professor Dowden, that "if our study does not directly or indirectly enrich the life of man, it is but a drawing of vanity with cart-ropes, a weariness to the flesh, or at best a busy idleness." But just as fully do I believe that more and deeper study of all great authors will "enrich life at many points, morally as well as æsthetically;" will be a recognition of the truth that "man does not live by bread alone;" will be a protest against the inanities, the sensualities, the sordid materialism which rob human life of all its high meanings and possibilities; a protest heard, perhaps, where pulpits are deemed effete, and Bibles classed with hoary superstitions, but a protest which will be the noblest tribute which literary culture can pay to that supreme thing, the human soul. And therefore, in no strained nor formal apostrophe, I may hail the great masters

in the literature of the past as fellow-workmen in the lifting up of humanity to its highest levels.

"Then, in such hour of need
Of your fainting, dispirited race,
Ye like angels appear,
Radiant with ardor divine.
Beacons of hope ye appear!
Languor is not in your heart,
Weakness is not in your word,
Weariness not on your brow.
Ye alight in our van! at your voice
Panic, despair flee away.
Ye move through the ranks, recall
The stragglers, refresh the outworn,
Praise, reinspire the brave.
Order, courage return,
Eyes rekindling and prayers
Follow your steps as ye go.
Ye fill up the gaps in our files,
Strengthen the wavering line,
Stablish, continue our march
On, to the bound of the waste,
On, to the City of God."