

On the  
Study and Discipline  
of  
Literature

AN INAUGURAL LECTURE

delivered before the University College of the  
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By

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OF THE STUDY AND DISCIPLINE OF LITERATURE

CORRIGENDA.

- Page 3. line 3. read "pretend"  
para 2 line 5. after "Icelandic" insert "Hamlet",  
footnotes line 5. for "or" read "v"
- Page 4. para 2 line 13. for "efficiency" read "efficacy"
- Page 6. para 2 line 20. after "controlled" insert "exêrcise"  
last ~~full~~ line insert a comma after "qualities".
- Page 7. last para. line 6. read "sensibilities"
- Page 8. para 1 line 4. for "affect" read "effect"
- Page 9. para 2 line 12. read "aware"
- Page 11. bottom para read "pass"
- Page 12. line 8 from end of para for "in" read "of".

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## ON THE STUDY AND DISCIPLINE OF LITERATURE

A professor, faced with the problem of ushering in a new régime, as he settles himself in the chair vacated by an honoured predecessor, would usually open his first public address by praising the work of the retired scholar. But though, in this new University College, there are no professorial triumphs of scholarship to acknowledge, there is, nevertheless, a debt to be remembered. Consequently, I wish to acknowledge gratefully the work that has been done in promoting the study of English in the Gold Coast by numerous schoolmasters and other educationists, in elementary no less than in secondary schools, in mission and in government service. And it is my privilege to pay tribute to the care and thought and energy that they have put into it; for without their work I should not be standing here today in this role, for no Chair of English could have been instituted.

Instead of dealing with the results of research, it seems best, in an inaugural lecture in a new university college, to deal with certain points concerning the purpose and value of English studies, and to lay before you some proposals for an English school in this College. Any aspects of this programme that I am able to deal with here cannot however be new, for the teaching of English in universities has now been going on for so long a time, and so many chairs of English have been instituted that the ground has been well covered. Moreover a whole programme and its problems are too complex to be examined properly in the space and time now available. I propose therefore to concentrate largely on the purpose of literary studies and their disciplinary values.

Doubtless the young undergraduate will come up for his university course believing that the purpose of his English studies is to fill him full of knowledge concerning English and English literature—writers, their works, dates, influences, tendencies, histories of poetic forms, plots, characters, and, of course, what other people have said about these things. Even if we add to this load, a first hand acquaintance with the major

works in prose, poetry and dramatic form, we must ask ourselves : is all this worth anything ? Are we to measure knowledge and scholarship by bulk ? And is our conception of a well-read, or of an educated man, he who has read all, and can remember what he has read ? And if we accept these views, are we not in danger of producing what Pope in his *Essay on Criticism*, has condemned :—

“ The bookful blockhead, ignorantly read  
With loads of learned lumber in his head.”

It is a danger, for there *are* indeed loads of necessary learning for the young student to shoulder or, as we might put it here in Africa to carry *on* and in his head. This danger is one that many thinkers have pointed out ; from Plato onwards. In 1867, for instance, James Mill touched on the point in his inaugural address as Rector of St. Andrews University (which by the way, lasted three hours) ; he said : “ Mere knowledge is not enough : a mere magazine of remembered facts is a useless treasure ”\* In 1852 Cardinal Newman, in his Discourses before taking up the office of Rector of a University, had condemned in a similar vein “ Commentators on the classics . . . and on Holy Scripture ” whom he calls “ repertoires of miscellaneous and officious learning,” and continues “ that knowledge of theirs is unworthy of the name, knowledge which they have not thought through, and thought out.”†

In this valuable distinction : knowledge that is “ thought through and thought out ” we have what we are seeking—the first essential for a scholar to aim at, and a university to promote. It is not *sufficient*, then, to read and remember ; as Newman also pointed out : “ knowledge is something more than a sort of passive reception of scraps and details.” We have to bring our minds to bear on what we have read, and to meditate on it. We have, for instance, to study Shakespeare in the way that Pope advised Homer should be read :

“ Be Homer’s works your study and delight,  
Read them by day, and meditate by night.”§

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\* *On Education.*

† *On the Scope and Nature of University Education.*

§ *Essay on Criticism.* 1711

Our aim here then will not be to encourage students to read all English literature, even if they could. Indeed, we do not pretend that we ourselves have read all, or anything like all. We set our faces against omnivorous and indiscriminate reading. Instead, we prescribe constant work, day and night. This was what Chekhov, the Russian novelist, advocated in a letter to one of his brothers: "In order to be cultured," he said, "it is not enough to have read 'The Pickwick Papers', and memorised a monologue from 'Faust'. What is needed is constant work, day and night, constant reading, study." (He goes on—not quite so happily: "Come to us; smash the vodka bottle; lie down and read").\*

Now this constant work and meditation by night must deal primarily with the text itself, its meaning, intention, value, and with problems arising directly from the work. It is true, of course, that a reading and study of Saxo Grammaticus' story of Amleth, the Icelandic in his *History of the Danes*,† will help us to understand and appreciate Shakespeare's skill and greatness as a dramatist; and a reading of Holinshed's *Chronicle of Scottish History* will help us to estimate Shakespeare's greatness as an artist and poet; just as a reading of the medieval romances will enable us more precisely to estimate Chaucer's achievements as a story-teller; yet we must keep ever in mind that the value of any great work of literature or drama must always elude any account in terms of plot, characterization, sources, construction. Its value can be appreciated only through the actual words written by the author. In his essay on Dante, Mr. T. S. Eliot tells us of his own procedure, he says: "In my own experience of the appreciation of poetry I have always found that the less I knew about the poet and his work, before I began to read it, the better . . . an elaborate preparation of historical and biographical knowledge has always been to me a barrier."§ Our task then is

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\* Anton Chekhov. *Letters on Literature*. ed. L. S. Friedland. Geoffrey Bles., London 1924.

† 13th Century, printed 1514. Translated into French by Belleforest; English Translation of the French 1608 is entitled: *The Historie of Hamblet; or The Arden Shakespeare*, ed. E. Dowden.

§ *Selected Essays*. Faber 1932. And "But fact cannot corrupt taste; it can at worst gratify one taste—a taste for history, let us say, or antiquities, or biography—under the illusion that it is assisting another." *The Function of Criticism*.

strictly a literary one : we are concerned with words, and therefore also with the thoughts, conceptions and creations—in words—of great minds, with books that “do preserve as in a vial the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them.”

The first part of our programme for this university college, therefore, is a simple one : English studies are to provide a training in reading, understanding and thinking. But these terms are too general ; we have yet to show how we shall proceed. We could, for instance, concentrate students' attention on important passages in the works of different writers, comparing the ways that similar thoughts have been expressed, in order to estimate the quality of the mind behind each passage.

We might take an example here : let us observe first Bacon and then other writers at work on one of Aristotle's illuminating statements. Bacon says, in his *The Advancement of Learning* in 1636 :\* “For, as Aristotle well observed, words are the marks of thought,” and then, later in the same chapter, gives his own conception of the same theory : “Words are the traces or impressions of reason ; and impressions afford some indication of the body that made them.”† Then we might turn to Milton and see what a famous poet, eight years later, made of the same theory : “Books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life in them to be as active as that soul was whose progeny they are, nay, they do preserve, as in a vial, the purest efficiency and extraction of that living intellect that bred them. I know they are as lively, and as vigorously productive, as those fabulous Dragon's teeth ; and being sown up and down, may chance to spring up armed men. And yet on the other hand unless wariness be used as good almost kill a man as kill a good book : who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God's image ; but he who destroys a good book, kills reason itself, kills the image of God, as it were in the eye. Many a man lives a burden to the earth ; but a good book is the precious life-blood of a master-spirit, imbalm'd and treasur'd up on purpose to a life beyond life.”‡

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\* Book VI. Chapter 1.

† Though in Book I, he had written, with less accuracy :  
“Words are but the images of matter.”

‡ *Areopagitica*. 1644.



But turning back to Bacon we find that, after all, he had forestalled Milton with his idea of the timelessness and the renovating power of great knowledge and fine thought, for in Book I of *The Advancement of Learning* he has : “ the images of men’s wit and knowledge remain in books, exempted from the wrong of time, and capable of perpetual renovation.” We might then trace the course of this theory first to Locke, who in 1689 says in his *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* : “ All words . . . signify nothing immediately but the ideas in the mind of the speaker.”\* And then through the eighteenth century to Coleridge, who in 1817 wrote : “ For language is the armoury of the human mind ; and at once contains the trophies of the past, and the weapons of its future conquests.”† And then to Keats, who in 1818 wrote in a letter to J. H. Reynolds : “ We read fine things, but never feel them to the full until we have gone the same steps as the author ;” and finally to the Italian philosopher, Benedetto Croce, who in 1901 developed this into his famous aesthetic theory.‡

But though all this may be of great interest to some of us, and though it may be of value in the history of thought, it is not the kind of reading and study that we advocate for undergraduates. It is not the right kind for three reasons : first it does not help the reader to consider and value the complete work ; second, it does not turn him into a trained reader ; and third, it gives a bias to the intellectual side of his reading, and so fails to give him that exercise and discipline of feeling and emotion that is an essential experience in the appreciation of all art. Consequently, if we are to give an adequate training in reading, understanding and thinking, we must look elsewhere for our procedure. Let us consider the advice that Mr. Bernard Shaw gave for the understanding of paintings. He said : “ Now the right way to go to work—strange as it may appear—is to look at pictures until you have acquired the power of seeing them.” Adapting this for our own purpose, we see that the right way for us to go to work—strange as it may appear—is to go on reading books until we have acquired the power of understanding them, and of responding to the potency and virtue that is in them.

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\* Book III. Chapter 4.

† *Biographia Literaria*.

‡ *Aesthetic*. 1901. Trans. Douglas Ainslie.

To go on reading books until we have acquired the power of understanding them—that is the secret. For the all-important point at this stage of a student's career is for him to develop and increase his capacity for intensive reading; and this must be done by reading and re-reading, for at each re-reading there are new advances in clarification, in penetration and in comprehensiveness.\* Not only that, but the effect of these new advances is to *accustom* the reader to be ready for and aware of assumptions, overtones, subtle ironies and other fine shades of meaning.

This study of the text of the great works of literature will then give our students stiff training, so that their minds will be "sharply exercised," as Ben Jonson describes the effect of good reading when he says: "The mind and memory are more sharply exercised in comprehending another man's things than our own."† Now this training must call into play abilities of reasoning, imagination and judgment, as well as a generous but discriminating appreciation of the formal qualities of works of art, and an apprehension of the quality of their conceptions. The intellect has to be "sharply exercised" so that it will acquire the habit of focussing on meanings, ideas, complex issues with such certainty and precision that at the same time imagination is free actively to build up the contextual situation. In the novel, for instance, this contextual situation will usually be the background in which the lives of the characters move, but we need to be aware that it is the characters that act as the formal vehicles for the expression of attitudes, states of mind, conceptions and philosophies, and also that these are in the *process of formation*. And complementary to this exercising of the intellect there will be controlled and firm discipline of feeling and emotion. While this complex act of re-creation is going on, a trained reader allows his judgment to play on all that his mind is conscious of, and is not beguiled if the expression is unconvincing; but if otherwise appreciates appropriateness and other qualities and forms judgments of value on the whole experience.

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\* Cf. T. S. Eliot: "But the next step after reading Dante again and again should be to read some of the books he read, rather than modern books about his work and life and times, however good." (Dante. *Selected Essays*).

† *Timber; or Discoveries made upon Men and Matter*. 1640-41

We shall not expect, of course, all these powers to be exerted by the untrained student at the beginning of his course. He has to grapple with a text ; he has *first* to find out what a writer is saying to him.\* We must stress this ; but we need perhaps to stress still more that the training will be efficacious only if the student struggles *by himself* to find out what the living intellect of a master-spirit has treasured up for him.† He may be helped only when he fails to discover what is said, and then only by brief Socratic questioning and some sharp-pointed discussion. Always the danger here is to think that one is filling empty buckets, passive receptacles, forgetting what Locke said in his *Essay concerning the Human Understanding* : “ In the sciences, everyone has so much as he really knows and comprehends ; what he believes only, and takes upon trust, are but shreds, which however well in the whole piece, make no considerable addition to his stock who gathers them.”§

Of the moderns, Mr. E. M. Forster has commented on this necessity for textual study ; he says in his *Aspects of the Novel* : “ the reader must sit down alone and struggle with the writer, and this the pseudo-scholar will not do. He would rather relate a book to the history of its time, to events in the life of its author, to the events it describes, above all to some tendency. As soon as he can use the word ‘ tendency ’ his spirits rise ; and though those of his audience may sink, they often pull out their pencils at this point and make a note.”

It is true that there is a large body of prose and poetry that can be read easily enough, but we are to consider here only those greater works of art which demand reading and re-reading, and are a permanent enrichment of a country’s cultural wealth. These make demands not only on our intelligence, understanding and sensibilities, but on the whole mind, and on all that we have gained and suffered in our experience of life. We assign them to the category of classics for the very reason that they call

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\* Cf. E. M. Forster : “ Books have to be read (worse luck, for it takes a long time) ; it is the only way of discovering what they contain.” *Aspects of the Novel*. 1945.

† Every professor of English and teacher of long experience is likely to forget how much can be got from the text itself, without the aid of any help imported from outside.

§ 1690. Also “ The floating of other men’s opinions in our brains make us not one jot the more knowing, though they happen to be true.” Book I. Ch. 4.

for the exercise and interplay of all our abilities, knowledge and experience, and provide what Ben Jonson called : " the true tillage of the mind."\*

This " struggle with the writer," this " intolerable wrestle with words and meanings," as Mr. T. S. Eliot has expressed it in *East Coker*,† if carried out with obstinacy and courage (the two are not unrelated) will affect that severe discipline that Matthew Arnold said is " necessary for all real culture."§

Now there is no need for me to place before you arguments for the necessity and value of a literary discipline ; it has long been accepted.‡ Its precise nature is well understood by those who have benefited from it ; but it seems advisable in a country without a long tradition of academic studies, that an attempt should be made to examine in more exact detail in what ways this discipline of letters is effective, and why literature, so much of which is for our enjoyment and recreation, can be a subject for academic studies and a university training.

But the discipline of letters cannot be described in a word or two, for it is concerned with both outer and inner complexities, that is to say both Form *and* Content. The outer form, which supplies the objective facet of a work of art, exerts its exact and unique pressure on the inner and subjective powers of the reader, stirring his mind to mould itself in response to these pressures, and so to re-create and shape a new experience. We see then that the outer form of words and verse form both actuate *and* determine the inner experience, and that the inner, played upon by the outer, is both controlled by it, while responding strongly and precisely to it. This interaction of these two facets of the literary experience is subjected to the control of a third ; the critical appreciation, which has been nourished by past experience (especially past literary experience) ; this gives to consciousness a subtle realization of the quality and exactness of the inner experience which has resulted from a fine choice of formal symbols, and the efficacy of their arrangement.

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\* *Discoveries.*

† *The Four Quartets.*

§ *The Literary Influence of Academies.* Cornhill 1864. Aug.

‡ Nash, for instance, in 1589, quotes Erasmus saying :  
" Erasmus very wittily terms Poetry a dainty dish seasoned with delights of every kind of discipline." *The Anatomie of Absurditie.* (*Elizabethan Critical Essays.* Vol. I. G. Gregory Smith 1904).

This then is the literary experience : the event described as a total experience in general terms. Let us now examine this outer form exerting a pressure on the active mind of the reader to see more exactly how a discipline is imposed.

A literary discipline consists, first, of a sharpened perception of the precise meanings of every word and phrase with the mind leaping intuitively to seize the core of the thought as the meanings in the subordinate parts of each sentence coagulate into a unity. The mind is then aware of the full import of the whole, as well as the exact quota of meaning contributed by each word, in the proportions determined by the structural pattern of the sentence. Next comes attention to the sequence, the following of a coherent train of thought, or of a more or less closely knit chain of reasoning, according to the degree of succinctness or of simplicity of the passage. So that the reader becomes sware of the development of the thought, its proportions and the relevance of its subordinate ideas to the main theme, and how gradually the whole story or argument is being built up ; the result is the structure or architectural lines of the complete work which have guided the reader are grasped by him as a formal design or pattern.

The importance of the structural pattern has been underestimated. It determines the general lines on which the literary discipline shall be exerted. By keeping strictly to the architectural design, or " composition " as it is called in painting, we are guided by the " weave " or complication of the plot, so that our understandings and imaginings are controlled and directed, and our feelings are curbed and guided, according to the way in which the writer has manipulated and ordered his material. If this were of little importance we might drag out the delays of *Hamlet* by a scene or two more, give *The Ancient Mariner* a shipwreck in the Polar regions, or add another line to give more amplitude to Wordsworth's *Westminster Bridge* sonnet : all of which are unthinkable.

The general lines of the design, the organization and arrangement of the major parts of a work of art (for instance, the structure of a novel) are of greater importance in the presentation of a carefully directed experience, such as any really great work of art presents, than the step by step progression of sentence

and clause ; though De Quincey, in describing the business of composition, stresses the importance of the relations between sentences and clauses, rather than the major lines of the plot or argument ; he says : “ it is in the relation of sentences . . . that the true life of composition resides. The mode of their nexus, the way in which one sentence is made to arise out of another, and to prepare the opening of a third : this is the great loom in which the textile process of the moving intellect reveals itself and prospers . . . Here the separate clauses of a period become architectural parts, aiding, relieving, supporting each other . . . the parts cohering and conspiring to a common result.”\*

This however gives us the clue to the syntactical aspect of a literary discipline, though we have yet to see what effect this may have on the structure and quality of the *thought* and feeling. We note first that it is easy to perceive how the expression of thought must obey the laws of syntax, and how valuable it is for our thinking to be subjected to the syntactical structures that governed the habitual cast of thought of the great writers and creative thinkers.† Of course this of itself would not fully guarantee any special excellence in the quality of our mental activities ; but it would give us some disciplinary training that would enable us to wrestle with the great masterpieces, and the essential equipment for the better management and marshalling of our own ideas, and of the results of our more valuable meditations. Whatever we were capable of, our thinking would be the better for this willing subjection to those syntactical structures which are the most efficient and appropriate vehicles of significance of high import.

And what is the effect of this close attention to the detailed structure in the great writings ? The mind learns to be aware of the changing relations of each turn of thought by exact

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\* *Letters to a Young Man*. 1823.

† Cf. Coleridge : “ The construction of Shakespeare’s sentences, whether in verse or prose, is the necessary and homogeneous vehicle of his peculiar manner of thinking.”  
*Table Talk*. March 15th 1834.

noting of the connecting links\* and the logical transitions and the sequence of the thought, sentence by sentence, and clause by clause.† It acquires facility in perceiving each modification or amplification of every assertion, and it becomes capable of responding to the cumulative effect of the subordinated details. All this acquired skill and sensitiveness enables the reader to arrive at a greater *precision* in comprehension and imagination, and a closer approach to the writer's finest concepts, than he could achieve without this training. The syntactical pattern—that continuous weave of related clauses and sentences with their attendant meanings—not only helps the mind to achieve completeness and precision of concept, but it compels and enforces this—provided we seize with quick and subtle apprehension the full content of the words. For the syntactical structures of sentences represent faithfully a pattern of meanings, and these meanings for the trained reader come imperceptibly and spontaneously into intelligible relation with one another, forming a developing pattern of thought. If therefore we give the fullest attention to meanings and to their transitions from one sentence to another the grammatical structures will play their part in ordering and directing our thought and feeling,‡ without our having to give *direct* and conscious attention to them. This strict obedience to Form, that is to say both to the ordering of sentences and to the general design of the work of art (but without ever allowing perception of Form to intrude on attention to Content) is the second main element in literary discipline.

We pass now to a closer examination of the inner aspect of the literary experience. But first we have to admit, I think, that most of our normal mental life, what we are habitually conscious of, is matter-of-fact; it is necessarily so, for it must deal somehow with the undirected and unco-ordinated exigencies

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\* Cf. Coleridge: "A close reasoner and a good writer in general may be known by his pertinent use of connectives. Read that page by Johnson; you cannot alter one conjunction without spoiling the sense." *Table Talk*, May 15, 1833.

† Ben Jonson: "For the consequence of sentences, you must be sure that every clause do give the cue to the other, and be bespoken ere it come." *Discoveries*.

‡ Stout. "The importance of grammatical form consists in the pervasive and persistent control which it exercises on the course of thought." *Analytical Psychology*. Vol. II.

of the moment. Indeed, it is impossible in a workaday world for the mind to operate at its highest potentialities with any frequency. The normal mind has not the creative power of the master-spirit to shape its activities in the formal patterns of literary expression and purposeful significance. Not only that, but our mental lives are all too frequently ragged and disorderly affairs with indistinct ideas and vague impressions continually flashing in and out, or appearing in consciousness without perceived purpose or meaning: all is fragmentary and fleeting. And on the emotional side of our lives, it is even worse. T. S. Eliot describes this† as “the general mass of imprecision of feeling, undisciplined squads of emotion”, and many writers have drawn attention to the low level of intellectual life that we subsist at normally—without the aid of literature, music, the arts and philosophy. George Moore, for instance, wrote: “The original taste of man is always for the commonplace, and it is only by great labour and care that he learns to understand as beautiful that which the uneducated considers ugly.” Matthew Arnold in his essay on *The Influence of Academies* goes even further and affirms that we actually like to live in an atmosphere of the commonplace, he writes: “We all of us like to go our own way, and not to be forced out of the atmosphere of the commonplace habitual to most of us . . . We like to be suffered to lie comfortably in the old straw of our habits, especially in our intellectual habits, even though this straw may not be very clean and fine.” Plato, of course said the same thing a long time ago in his *Republic*: “If he holds no converse with the Muses, does not even that intelligence which there may be in him, having no taste of any sort of learning or enquiry or thought or culture, grow feeble and dull and blind, his mind never waking up or receiving nourishment, and his senses not being purged of their mists.”\*

So, in order to avoid intellectual and spiritual stagnation and blindness, and to shake ourselves out of the unclean straw of our intellectual habits, we must take Plato's advice (in spite of what he said about the poets), we must hold converse with the Muses, and “Take pains the genuine meaning to explore”,

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† *The Four Quartets*.

\* Jowett's Translation.



which was advice given to translators.\*

But have the arts the power to arouse and shake us? As hitherto, we may let the writers themselves speak. Sir Philip Sidney said: "So is that kind (lyric) most capable and most fit to awake the thoughts from the sleep of idleness to embrace honourable enterprise."† Swift surprisingly prescribed romance: "A little grain of romance is no ill ingredient to preserve and exalt the dignity of human nature, without which it is apt to degenerate into everything that is sordid, vicious and low."§

What Keats wrote in a letter to Taylor is quoted almost too often: "I think poetry should surprise by a fine excess and not by singularity."‡

And De Quincey said that when reading King Lear where "the height, and depth, and breadth of human passion is revealed to us . . . I am thus suddenly startled into a feeling of the infinity of the world within me."|| And in 1879 Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote to Robert Bridges, saying: "One of two kinds of clearness one should have—either the meaning to be felt without effort as fast as one reads or else if dark at first reading, when once made out to explode."¶

We see that these writers describe more precisely what Milton referred to as "the potency of life . . . as active as that soul was whose progeny they are." Ruskin, however, goes further in making a claim that this power of arousing the mind is a main *function* of art, he wrote: "one of the main functions

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\* Earl of Roscommon. *An Essay on Translated Verse*. 1684 (*Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*. Ed. Spingard. 1908)

† *An Apologie for Poetrie*. 1595.

§ *Essay on Conversation*.

‡ Keats' *Letters*. Feb. 1818. Though three weeks earlier he had written, with perhaps less penetration: "Poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul, and does not startle or amaze it with itself—but with its subject."

Mid. Feb. 3rd 1818 in a letter to J. H. Reynolds.

|| *Letters to a Young Man*. 1823.

¶ Oct. 8. *The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges* 1935.

of art . . . to rouse the imagination from its palsy.”\* We cannot deal here with the more fundamental problem of the function or purpose of art, but a quotation from the philosopher, Croce, will explain more precisely what happens when the imagination has been awakened; he says: “The little dose of inventive imagination I possess requires the aid of Shakespeare to intensify it to the point of forming within itself the whole tragedy of Othello’s passion,” thus “the greatness of Shakespeare is that he enables me to rise to higher and more extensive ranges of invention than I could hope to reach without his assistance.”† This is true, of course, for all great art. This alone can serve as a justification for the study of literature in a university. It also describes one aspect of what is commonly called “the inspiration of literature”, and of all the arts.¶ It is, however, the aesthetic aspect, and does not say anything at all concerning the ethical aspect of the value of literature; there the ground is less sure, and the effect less direct and therefore weaker, and perhaps of less importance than the effect and value of a literary discipline, and so we may leave it. But we should not, however, conclude without drawing attention to three salient points. The first, as Croce pointed out, is that the mind has to be intensely active; it must be active to the degree of intensity demanded by the complexity of the story, the penetration and range of the thought, the force and depth of the emotion, and the quality and vitality of the personages of the play, novel or poem. This intensifying of the creative imagination and intellect to the point of being able to attain to the heights and to encompass the extensions required by the conceptions and complexities of the work, is that aspect of a literary discipline which acts as a spurring and vitalizing demand on our powers.‡

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\* *The Stones of Venice*. 1831.

† *Aesthetic*.

¶ E.g. D.H. Lawrence: “If a picture is to hit deep into the senses, which is its business, it must hit down to the soul and up into the mind—that is, it has to mean something to the co-ordinating soul and the co-ordinating spirit which are central in man’s consciousness: and the meaning has to come through direct sense impression.” *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. A. Huxley, 1932.

‡ Van Gogh. “G. Eliot is masterly in execution, but also has something else that goes deeper; it is something peculiar to genius. One is a better man after reading those books; they have an awakening power in them.” *Letters to an Artist*. Constable, 1936.

And a further aesthetic discipline that literature exerts upon us increases our power and disposition to appreciate, to value what is good, and to wonder, "which (Bacon said) is the seed of knowledge." Literature and all the arts have the effect of pre-disposing us towards this attitude and frame of mind: "our degenerate souls made worse by their clayey lodgings," as Sidney describes them, do continually need the renewing of this power to recognise and acknowledge what is of supreme value in life.

Thirdly we may touch on the illuminating power of literature. Matthew Arnold refers to the Homers, the Shakespeares, describing them as "The great abounding fountains of truth, whose criticism of life is a source of illumination and joy to the whole human race for ever."\*

And so finally we come to that debatable problem of truth, and the poet as a fountain of truth. We may leave all that to Sidney and Shelley but with the inevitable recall of Keats' "Beauty is truth, truth Beauty" we shall be reminded of an identification.● A little light is thrown on this by my second point: what we are disposed to admire and to value is felt by us to be beautiful; we admire truth and that, too, may therefore be felt to be beautiful. It is no doubt a matter of feeling rather than of reasoning.

A hundred years before Keats wrote his famous line, this identification was suggested by the Earl of Shaftesbury, the third earl (not Achitophel) in his philosophic essay *on the Freedom of Wit and Humour*.† He wrote: "And thus, after all, the most natural Beauty in the world is Honesty, and Moral Truth. For all *Beauty* is TRUTH . . . In Poetry, which is all Fable, *Truth* still is the Perfection." And in recent times, though less explicitly, we have G. M. Trevelyan's comment on truth and poetry; he says: "Truth is the criterion of historical study; but its impelling *motive* is poetic. Its poetry consists in its being true."‡ Any work of literature, therefore, that we *feel* is good and true adds to our store of riches. These

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\* *The Function of Criticism*. 1865.

† Part 4. Sect. III. 1st printed 1709.

‡ *English Social History*.

are of no use for practical everyday purposes, but that is not the whole of life. They give us an assurance in a world whose ends are not always evident, that perfection is not a useless ideal, that greatness is something of infinite worth, and that beauty is a precious and rare addition to the value and purpose of life; and in literature the profounder significances of life are revealed to us, for our contemplation and understanding, in the characters and personages of drama, poetic narrative and novel, and in the way these face their own problems and difficulties. And these problems and difficulties are our problems; they are problems of life.

And let there be no mistake about it: that in spite of all the material benefits that science and technology have brought to mankind, and all the power they have given man over the material world, and in spite of their predominant position at the moment, and of the unhappy but deep seated faith that the 19th and 20th centuries have had in their power to bring to the world not only health, but happiness; not only prosperity, but security, not only progress, but peace, in spite of all the magnificent achievements of science, the problem still is "how to live". Our problem to find a way of life confronts us all, private individuals, public servants, and those engaged in the business of learning and the advancement of knowledge. Indeed many of the advances of science and technology have made the task infinitely *more* difficult for us and more obscure. But Humane Studies point the way towards a solution, and the way lies in the valuing and preserving the things of the spirit, towards a faith in practical and intellectual honesty, in human understanding and affection, in trustworthiness and above all in courage—courage to endure.

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