the necessity of dwelling even at some length upon this primary conception of good reading as fundamentally a direct contact between mind and mind, and of insisting that all other aspects of literary study are supplemental to, and not substitutes for, it.

With this conception before us, we can realise from yet another point of view, the vital relations of literature and life. What George Eliot said of art in general is specially true of the art of literature: it "is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot." Thus literature makes us partakers in a life larger, richer, and more varied than we ourselves can ever know of our own individual knowledge; and it does this, not only because it opens up new fields of experience and new lines of thought and speculation, but also, and even more notably, because it carries us beyond the pinched and meagre humanity of our everyday round of existence into contact with those fresh, strong, and magnetic personalities who have embodied themselves in the world's great books.

III

Reading and Study.

Taking this as our point of departure, we must next seek to make our reading at once broader and more systematic. Between the mere reader of books and the student of literature the essential difference is not to be sought, as I am afraid it is very often sought, in the supposed fact that the one enjoys his reading and the other does not. The true difference is this, that the one reads in a haphazard

and desultory way, while the other's reading is organised according to some regular order or plan. So long as we simply take a book here and a book there, as chance or the whim of the hour may dictate, we are merely readers. It is only when we introduce method into our reading that we become students.

The Reading of Books and the Study of Authors

Obviously, our most natural course is to pass directly from the reading of books to the study of authors. Our first aim being, as we have said, to establish personal relations with a man in his work, we begin by devoting ourselves to some one or other of his writings which may have a special kind of interest for us. But as students we cannot rest here. We want to realise the man's genius, so far as this is possible, in its wholeness and variety; and to this end we have to consider his works, not separately, but in their relations with one another, and thus with the man himself, the growth of his mind, the changes of his temper and thought, the influence upon him of his experiences in the world. Those records of himself which he has left us in his books are now no longer to be regarded as detached and independent expressions of his personality—isolated productions forming a mere miscellaneous aggregate of unconnected units, to be read without any sense of their affiliations one with another. They are rather to be taken as a *corpus*, or organic whole—not simply as his works, but as his work. A telling illustration lies ready to hand in the case of Shakespeare. We may read, and we often do read, Shakespeare's plays without the slightest idea of sequence or method, jumping, let us say, from the *Comedy of Errors* to *King Lear*,

and from the *Tempest* back to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; and no one will deny that the keenest delight and a great deal of profit may be found in such random reading of them. But though in this way we may get to know much of Shakespeare, there is much that we cannot get to know. We have still to study these plays together as diverse expressions of one and the same genius; to compare and contrast them in matter and spirit, in method and style; to conceive them, alike in their similarities and in their differences, as products of a single individual power revealing itself, in different periods and in curiously varying artistic moods, now in one and now in another of them. Hence, manifestly the need of systematising our reading.

The Chronological Method of Studying an Author.

If, recognising this need, we raise the question of the course to be pursued, the answer is not far to seek. Clearly, the most natural and the most profitable of all plans of study that might be suggested is the chronological—the study of a writer's works in the order of their production. Taken in this way such works become for us the luminous record of his inner life and of his craftsmanship; and we thus follow in them the various phases of his experience, the stages of his mental and moral growth, the changes undergone by his art. "In order to know Balzac, and to judge him," writes a French critic of that great novelist, "we must arrange his works in the order in which they were produced." It is now almost universally recognised that the true, in fact the only way, in which to study Shakespeare, if we would properly know and judge him, is

similarly to arrange his works, so far as we can do so, in the order in which they were produced, since in this way we can obtain, as we can obtain by no other method, a substantial sense of those works as a progressive revelation of his genius and power. And what is thus now taken as a principle of practice in the study of Balzac and Shakespeare will be found to hold equally good in the study of every other writer who is worth systematic study at all.

To prevent misapprehension, it should, however, be added that when we speak in this way of a writer's work as a whole, it is generally with a certain amount of qualification. We may not always or usually mean literally everything that he produced, but simply everything that is really vital and important as an expression of his genius. To-day there is something very much like a mania for the collection and preservation of every miscellaneous scrap which any great author allowed to remain unpublished, or perhaps threw aside as unworthy of publication; but the outcome of such indiscriminate enthusiasm has seldom any solid value. Even apart from these gleanings from the note-book and the waste-paper-basket (which here can hardly concern us), most writers, even the greatest, leave behind them a considerable body of published work, which is either tentative and experimental, or in which they are merely echoes of themselves, repeating less effectively what they have already said in other forms, and adding nothing to the sum-total of their real contribution to the world's literature. Such secondary kind of work will always have its value for the special

student intent upon the exhaustive investigation of a given author; but to begin with we may, in the vast majority of cases, safely disregard it.

The Comparative Method.

In following the chronological method we shall find ourselves, it is evident, continually comparing and contrasting a man with himself. Our next step will be to sharpen our impression of his personality by comparing and contrasting him with others—with men who worked in the same field, took up the same subjects, dealt with the same problems, wrote under similar conditions, or who, for any other reason, naturally associate themselves with him in our minds. The student of Shakespeare almost inevitably turns to Shakespeare's greater contemporaries—to men like Marlowe, Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, Webster—and rightly feels that by marking the points at which the master resembled these other dramatists, and the points in which he differed from them, he gains immeasurably in his realisation of the essential qualities of Shakespeare's genius and art. We throw a flood of fresh light upon Tennyson and Browning alike when we read them side by side. The fundamental features of the art of Sophocles and Euripides are brought into relief when we pass backward and forward from one to the other. Thackeray furnishes us with an illuminating commentary on Dickens, and Dickens does the same service for Thackeray. We have laid down the principle that in studying literature our first business is to enter into the spirit of our author, to penetrate into the vital forces of his personality. We need add no further illustrations to show how the comparative method will help us to do this. The doctrine that "all higher knowledge is

gained by comparison, and rests on comparison," [1] is as true and important in the study of literature as in the study of science.

IV

In our study of the personal life in literature we shall of course be greatly helped by the judicious use of good biography. Our interest in the writings of any great author being once aroused, the desire will inevitably be stimulated to learn something of the man himself, as a man, beyond that which his work reveals to us. We shall be curious to see him in the social surroundings in which he lived, and in his daily converse with his fellows; to know the chief facts of his outward history—his ambitions, struggles, successes, failures—and the connection of his books with these; the way in which and the conditions under which such books were written; his intellectual habits and methods of work. Curiosity on such and similar points is entirely natural and legitimate, and we need not scruple to gratify it. We may well be grateful, therefore, for such massive and detailed narratives as we possess, for instance, of the lives of Milton, Johnson, Goethe, Scott, Tennyson; apart altogether from their interest simply as human documents (which is really a different matter), their direct literary value is inestimable, since we rightly feel that we can understand and enjoy the works of these men so much the better for the information they afford. And for every good piece of biographical writing, small or great, we shall be similarly thankful, and for the same reason. Side

Biography.

[1] Max Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Religion*, p. 12.

by side on our shelf with the books of any author we really care for, a place should thus certainly be made for some well-chosen account of his life.

Its Abuse.

It is necessary, however, to lay stress upon the two-fold qualification which I have suggested; it is good biography which alone can be of service to us, and this must be used judiciously and kept in its proper place. There is a great deal to-day which passes under the name of literary biography which yields little more than trivial gossip about those details of the private life of famous men with which the public has really no concern, and which the student is not in the least helped by knowing. "Petrarch's house in Arqua, Tasso's supposed prison in Ferrara, Shakespeare's house in Stratford, Goethe's house in Weimar, with its furniture, Kant's old hat, the autographs of great men—these things," as Schopenhauer rightly remarked, "are gaped at with interest and awe by many who have never read their works." Since Schopenhauer's time, the craze for mere personal detail, at once fostered and fed by a newspaper press which, in these matters, has lost all sense of reticence and decency, has developed to an extent which may fairly be described as alarming, as the puerile chatter with which even our so-called literary and critical periodicals frequently fill their pages only too eloquently proves. We must not mistake our interest in the external facts of literary biography—which is generally an idle, often a vulgar interest—for an interest in literature itself; our knowledge of these things, however wide and accurate, for literary culture. This warning is opportune, for the danger lest we do so is real and urgent, and may beset us at times when

we are least on our guard against it. The student of Carlyle, for instance—I take an example which at once suggests itself, and than which it would be difficult to select one more immediately to the point—will find much to his purpose in Froude's four volumes of biography; yet through the perusal of those volumes he may easily get himself entangled in the whole problem of Carlyle's home-life and domestic relationships, and in the mass of controversial literature which within recent years has unfortunately grown up about this. But the fact is that with this problem he, as a student of the great preacher and artist, has nothing whatever to do, and that thus all the hundreds of pages which have been written about it are for him little more than so much rubbish. Hence, as they add nothing of real significance to our knowledge of the essential personality and character of the author of *Sartor Resartus* and *Past and Present*, and as the mastery of them would at best involve an expenditure of time which could be much more profitably devoted to *Sartor Resartus* and *Past and Present* themselves, we shall do well, it is clear, to leave them severely alone. I am not one of those who believe that we are really better off for knowing no more than we are ever likely to know about the man William Shakespeare, actor, manager, playwright, frequenter of the Mermaid Tavern, citizen of Stratford; on the contrary, I quite frankly admit that I should be glad to have the greatest amount of detailed information about him in all these capacities. Yet I am bound to add that this feeling is more than half due to curiosity only; and if I were asked whether I think it probable that we should gain in the least in our insight into the essential

Shakespeare—the Shakespeare of the plays—if we had as many particulars concerning his relations with Anne Hathaway as we have of Carlyle's relations with Jane Welsh, and were able to read the personal riddle, if personal riddle there be, of the *Sonnets*, I should answer with an unhesitating negative. And it is with Shakespeare the poet and dramatist, as it is with Carlyle the great prophet and consummate literary artist, that we ought rather, after all, to be concerned.

But because we are fully alive to the danger lest biography may too easily degenerate into idle and impertinent gossip about unimportant things, we need not therefore go with some critics to the other extreme of maintaining that biography is valueless, and that the student of a man's work should confine himself to that work, and has no proper interest in the man outside it. Distinguishing as we must between the reading of a biography simply as a piece of literature, which is one thing, and the reading of it in connection with and as a commentary upon an author's writings, which is another, we shall in the latter case welcome and utilise everything that really brings us into more intimate relationships with the genius and essential character of the man with whom we have to deal; all else may go. And in good biography—as in Carlyle's own admirable essays—it will be found that a line is commonly drawn between the important, intrinsic, and fundamental aspects of experience and character and those which are merely trivial, superficial, and accidental. Of course it will often be difficult, in any given instance, to say exactly up to what point the personal material will be useful to us, and where it will cease to be so.

And use.

Sometimes a seemingly insignificant fact will prove to be unexpectedly illuminating and suggestive; sometimes, on the other hand, phases of a man's career, important and interesting in themselves, will turn out on examination to have had so little to do with his work that on the literary side they will mean nothing. Hence we must exercise our own tact and discretion. Much will depend upon the special objects we may for the moment have in view; a good deal also on the nature of the particular case. Thus, for instance, biographical detail will always occupy a prominent place in the study of Dante, whose writings can hardly be understood when detached from his life, and of Goethe whose works, according to his own often-quoted description of them, were but fragments of a great personal confession; while with Johnson, as every reader knows, the usual relations between production and biography are actually reversed, and instead of the life being read as a commentary upon the writings, the writings are read almost entirely in connection with the life. We can therefore lay down no hard and fast rule for the use of biography in literary study, nor is it necessary that we should try to do so. It will be well for us, however, to be on our guard against the rather widespread error of confusing means employed with end to be attained. Biography in itself is nearly always interesting and generally profitable. But the study of biography is not the study of literature, and should never be made a substitute for it.

The Need of Sympathy.

In closing this section let me insist that it is beyond all things necessary that we should cultivate a spirit of sympathy—at least of provisional sympathy—with our author. We cannot of course

expect that our personal relations with all the great writers we may from time to time take up will be uniformly intimate and agreeable. Our own temperaments have to be reckoned with. Literature contains the revelation of many different personalities, and we ourselves have our well-marked leanings and antipathies. It is to no purpose then that the dogmatic critic tells us that we must perforce enjoy this or that author, admire this or that book, on pain of instant condemnation as hopelessly lacking in taste. No one has a right thus to impose his own judgment upon us; and honest likes and dislikes are never to be despised. We cannot force our temperaments; in literature as in life there are people whose greatness we may indeed recognise, but with whom we should find good-fellowship altogether impossible; others, towards whom our feelings will be of positive repugnance. It is right to recognise this fact, and wise to accept its implications, if only that we may be saved thereby from the too common habit of indiscriminate or merely conventional admiration. Yet recognition of it should be accompanied by certain reserves. We must remember that many authors should prove interesting even when, and occasionally because, they are intellectual and moral aliens to us. We must remember, too, that it is precisely as it brings us into contact with many different kinds of personality, which often challenge our own, and thus increases our flexibility of mind, breadth of outlook, catholicity of taste and judgment, that the value of literature as a means of culture becomes so great. A certain amount of patience and persistency in our dealings with writers who at first rather repel than attract is therefore to be recom-

mended. The fault may lie entirely with us—in prejudices which we ought to overcome; in mere inability to place ourselves at once at their point of view, or even to rise to the level of their thought and power. In any event, we may rest assured that without some amount of initial sympathy, we shall never understand an author's real character. To reach the best in literature, as in life, sympathy is a preliminary condition. Only through sympathy can we ever get into living touch with another soul.

V

Style as an Index of Personality.

It is while we are still dealing with literature on the personal side that style or expression first becomes important for us. It is very commonly supposed, indeed, that the formal element in literature is a matter for the specialist only. This is a serious mistake. Leaving the more technical and recondite aspects of the subject for the moment out of consideration, we have therefore to insist that the study of style is itself full of broad interest for every reader who seeks to enter into the human life in literature.

It is probable that we have all at some time or other had the experience of chancing upon a passage quoted without indication of authorship, and of exclaiming—"So and so must have written that." In such a case, it is often not the thought that strikes us as familiar so much as the way in which the thought is expressed. The passage has somehow —we might be at a loss to say exactly how—a characteristic ring, like that of a well-known voice.

However commonplace the idea, we feel sure that no one else would have put it just in that way. The choice of the words, the turn of the phrases, the structure of the sentences, their peculiar rhythm and cadence—these are all curiously instinct with the individuality of the writer. The thing said may have little to distinguish it, but the man has put himself into it none the less

This is enough to show that style—I am using the word in its broadest sense—is fundamentally a personal quality: that, as Buffon's oft-quoted dictum has it, *le style est de l'homme même.* When Pope called it "the dress of thought," he failed entirely to recognise its essentially organic character, for he evidently conceived it as something apart from the man, which he could put on or take off at will. Style, as Carlyle says in one of his *Journals,* is not the coat of a writer, but his skin. There are authors, of course, who have deliberately shaped their utterance on the speech of stronger men, and set themselves to reproduce their very gestures and mannerisms; the tyro in letters is often, indeed, advised by teachers who know no better to take this or that master as his model. Moreover, the strongest and most original men are frequently deeply influenced by others, and carry traces of such influence in their style. But as sincerity is the foundation-principle of all true literature, so is it the foundation-principle of all true style. A man who has something really personal to say will seldom fail to find a really personal way in which to say it. Thought which is his own will hardly permit itself to be shaped into the fashion of

The Personal Interest of Style.

some one else's expression. Imitation will always be significant as revealing the sources from which a writer who deals with life mainly at second-hand derives his inspiration; but it takes us in reality but a short distance beneath the surface even of his work. Imitate as he may, the native qualities of a man—his inherent strength and weakness—will ultimately show through, and he will of necessity write himself down for what he is. So profound a truth is it that "every spirit builds its own house."[1]

"Literature," says one who was himself a great master of style, "is the personal use or exercise of language. That this is so is . . . proved from the fact that one author uses it so differently from another. . . . While the many use language as they find it, the man of genius uses it indeed, but subjects it withal to his own purposes, and moulds it according to his own peculiarities. The throng and succession of ideas, thoughts, feelings, imaginations, speculations, which pass within him, the abstractions, the juxtapositions, the comparisons, the discriminations, the conceptions,

[1] The following extract from one of our earliest English critics will be read with interest, because it shows that men were impressed by the personal quality of style as soon as they began to think about literature at all. "Style is a constant and continual phrase or tenour of speaking and writing. . . . So we say that Cicero's style and Sallust's were not one, nor Cæsar's and Livy's, nor Homer's and Hesiodus', nor Herodotus' and Thucydides', nor Euripides' and Aristophanes', nor Erasmus' and Budeus' styles. And because this continual course and manner of writing or speech sheweth the matter and disposition of the writer's mind more than one or two instances can show, therefore there be that have called style the image of man (*mentis character*). For man is but his mind, and as his mind is tempered and qualified, so are his speeches and language at large; and his inward conceits be the metal of his mind, and his manner of utterance the very warp and woof of his conceits" (Puttenham, *The Arte of Englishe Poesie*, 1589).

which are so original in him, his views of external things, his judgments upon life, manners, and history, the exercises of his wit, of his humour, of his depth, of his sagacity, all these innumerable and incessant creations, the very production and throbbing of his intellect, does he image forth . . . in a corresponding language, which is as multiform as this inward mental action itself, and analogous to it, the faithful expression of his intense personality, attending on his inward world of thought as its very shadow; so that we might as well say that one man's shadow is another's as that the style of a really gifted mind can belong to any but himself. It follows him about *as* a shadow. His thought and feeling are personal, and so his language is personal."[1]

I have made this long quotation chiefly with the view of further elucidating the principle I am trying to make clear by putting it in language other than my own. One point touched upon by Newman is, however, worthy of special attention. He notes, it will be observed, that while the majority of men use the language of their time "as they find it," the man of genius subjects such language "to his own purposes, and moulds it according to his own peculiarities." This means that language always receives a certain fresh impress from the hands of every writer of strongly marked personality. As Dr Rutherford, Headmaster of Westminster, in speaking of the style of Thucydides, has well said: "Just in proportion to the measure of individuality with which a man is gifted, does his use of the language of his race"—and we may add, of his period—"differ from the common

[1] Newman, *Lectures on Literature*, in *The Idea of a University*, § 3.

or normal use"; and this difference is sometimes so great that "we may know a language very well in an ordinary way, and yet be unable to enjoy perfectly some of the greatest writers in it." In this fact we have another illustration of the intimate and inevitable relation of personality and style.

As even an uncritical reader, then, must recognise the individual quality in style, and as this is something which we are bound to feel with ever increasing distinctness the more we think about it, the student will naturally be led to consider wherein, in any given case, this individual quality consists, and to look closely into the connection between the character of a writer's genius and thought and the form of expression which he has fashioned for himself. To approach style in this way is to find in it not only the living product of an author's personality, but also a transparent record of his intellectual, spiritual, and artistic growth. Carefully examined, it will tell us much of his education; of the influences which went to shape and mould his nature; of the masters at whose feet he sat, and who helped him to find himself; of the books he lived with; of his intercourse with men; of the development and consolidation of his thought; of his changing outlook upon the world and its problems; of the modifications of his temper and of the principles by which he governed his art in the successive stages of his career. All the factors which combine in the making of a man will subtly play their parts in giving to his style its well-defined individuality of form and colour; all the phases of his outer and inner experience will register themselves in it. In the chronological study of his writings, therefore, it will become interesting to

correlate the changes undergone by his style with contemporaneous changes in his matter and thought.[1] Even his defects of utterance, his limitations, his mannerisms, will thus have their value. Matter and expression being no longer thought of apart, as things which have no connection or at most only an accidental one, style will become for us a real index of personality, and the way in which a writer expresses himself a commentary upon what he says.

[1] The extraordinary changes which came over Shakespeare's style during the twenty years of his dramatic activity are familiar to all students of the plays. "In the earliest plays the language is sometimes as it were a dress put upon the thought—a dress ornamented with superfluous care; the idea is at times hardly sufficient to fill out the language in which it is put; in the middle plays (*Julius Cæsar* serves as an example) there seems a perfect balance and equality between the thought and its expression. In the latest plays this balance is disturbed by the preponderance or excess of ideas over the means of giving them utterance. The sentences are close-packed; there are 'rapid and abrupt turnings of thought, so quick that language can hardly follow fast enough; impatient activity of intellect and fancy, which, having once disclosed an idea, cannot wait to work it orderly out'" (Dowden, *Primer of Shakspere*, p. 37). It is evident that these changes are simply the external expression of changes in thought and feeling. Shakespeare could no more have written *Cymbeline* in the style of *Love's Labour's Lost* than Carlyle could have written *Sartor Resartus* in the style of Washington Irving.