

AN INTRODUCTION
TO THE
METHODS AND MATERIALS OF
LITERARY CRITICISM

*THE BASES IN
AESTHETICS AND POETICS*

BY

CHARLES MILLS GAYLEY, A.B.

PROFESSOR OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN THE
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AND

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P R E F A C E.

THE temper and conditions of the age encourage the critical habit. Literature is no longer the affair of patron or coterie, but of the public. The public reads for itself and estimates. It is not the scholar alone but the artisan who judges the latest novel, satire, or barrack-room ballad. He weighs, compares, and pronounces judgment. And from the multitude of men that are critics unto themselves, and out of the confusion of conflicting opinions, arises the demand for system and principle.

What obtains for the disinterested reader obtains *a fortiori* for those who attempt to express public opinion or to form the taste of others. The reviewer, the student and the teacher of literature, the investigator of literary history or of literary theory, all who make of criticism a discipline, an aim, or a trade, are interested in whatever tends to simplify the inquiry.

What the inquirer wants is guidance, not dogmatic formulation of principles, but systematic presentation of the problems that must be solved and of the information available for the process. For literary criticism has not yet reached the scientific, still less the 'cocksure' period of its development. Its present consciousness is dynamic, and its condition transitional. It has outgrown the stage of unquestioning acquiescence in tradition, authority, personal bias or prejudice. But it is not yet fully alive to its possibilities, scope, or aim, — not organized. An appreciative curiosity characterizes the study

to-day; but this confines itself to a few insistent problems, as if unaware of their relativity; and it is vague concerning the processes and materials contributory to the inquiry.

Now this book does not advocate or advance a method, nor does it aim to supply the material necessary for exhaustive investigation of any one department of literary criticism. It seeks to place before those interested a conspectus of the problems to be solved, a review of the methods suggested for their solution, an indication of the materials available with reference to their sources and frequently to their quality.

Such an attempt should be justified in the opinion of those who are unconsciously, as well as of those who are consciously, interested in criticism. For the direct purpose of the study is not to train literary analysts, but rational lovers of literature. And to be a rational lover demands effort; for while the process of literary enjoyment, like that of literary creation, may appear to be unforced and natural, there are degrees of enjoyment, the highest of which is *criticism*; as there are of creation, the highest of which is *art*. Each of these processes has its reason for existence and its law of development. But the principles which find expression in enjoyment, and ultimately in criticism, have their root in those that underlie the processes of creation. A study of the canons of literary judgment becomes a study of the principles of literature. It is for this reason that lovers of the art are bidden to what may look like a barmecide feast of methods and materials.

But as the principles of literary judgment are akin to all aesthetic principles, are, in fact, only the application in a particular field of the general laws of art, so the methods by which these principles shall be applied in the process of critical appraisement are the adaptation to given conditions, and to a given end, of the critical method that characterizes the larger science of Discrimination. The study, therefore, of the methods of literary criticism is a discipline cognate with, and contribu-

tory to, the pursuit of other sciences, at the same time that it is correlated with the scientific study of every art.

The plan of study here outlined has been arranged for convenience and comprehensiveness. The objects more directly aimed at in this volume, and that which will shortly follow it, are, first, to give the reader his orientation by showing the relation of literature to art, criticism, aesthetics, and the contributory sciences, and by displaying the solidarity and scope of literature; second, to consider the main types or forms which literature has assumed in the course of its development; third, to trace the movement and determine the law of literary waves or fashions; and, last, to deduce from these considerations the principles which should guide us in critically estimating given literary products.

When possible, each topic has been considered in a twofold aspect, theoretical and historical. Generally, it will be found that, under each of these subdivisions, the first section presents an *analysis* of the subject under discussion, and a statement of the problems involved, with indication of the authorities most necessary to be consulted; the second section consists of a *bibliography* alphabetically arranged, and frequently accompanied by annotations which aim to give the student or the prospective buyer some idea of the content and value of the work in its bearing upon the subject; and the third section, called, for lack of a better name, *General Note*, is an *omnium gatherum*, a receptacle for such references and suggestions as have failed to find lodgment in the preceding sections.

It will not be for an instant imagined that this course of study need be pursued in the order outlined, or that it should be crowded into six months or a year. To each reader and each class are the conditions thereof. Much will depend upon the previous preparation of the reader. The problems presented in the following chapters require for their solution a running application of rhetorical science and psychology, an

acquaintance with literary masterpieces and the history of literature, some knowledge at first hand of art and its history, and a continual study of aesthetics.

While the introduction to each topic here considered is theoretical, nothing is further from our intent than to encourage *a priori* speculation. The treatment of literary types in the second volume will especially illustrate our conviction concerning this subject. The principles of criticism depend, to a large extent, upon the principles of art. But to institute a vague theorizing about the principles of art is as unprofitable as to pursue a criticism grounded on the uncertain bias or prejudice of individual taste. That music, poetry, and the plastic arts exist implies a reason for their existence. But to arrive at this reason and at the characteristics of its various manifestations the student must advance from the particular to the general. So, in seeking the laws of literature, he should naturally first acquaint himself with the history of literature, with the development of its kinds, and with the peculiarities of the various kinds. He must have material at his command before he speculates upon the ontology of material. Having a fair knowledge of the scope and the evolution of a literary species, he may proceed to an inquiry into the laws that regulate its evolution. For, as we have already said, the forces that impel and the laws that govern literary production are forces and laws that go far to determine the canons by which that production should be judged. To investigate the principles of literary criticism, the student must investigate literature, not by the study of a national literature only, but comparatively. From the study of a specimen he passes to the comparison with others of the same type; he proceeds to the comparison of type with type in characteristics and in growth, of national literature with national literature, and finally arrives at the comparison of literary art with other forms of art. But conjointly with this inductive study of literary art there should be acquired an acquaintance

with the critical judgment of the ages concerning art in general, with principles philosophically deduced, as well as with those taught by experience. So also with the best opinion concerning the laws and the development of mind. Hence the necessity of aesthetics and psychology to the student of literary criticism. The results contributed by these studies widen the horizon and intensify the gaze of the literary investigator. They teach him to correlate literature with other arts, and all with the other phenomena by which mind is expressed.

And from this point of view it may appear that this introduction to the *Methods and Materials of Literary Criticism* is an introduction to aesthetics on the one hand, and on the other to the comparative study of literature.

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