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# What Is Literature?: An Attempt At a Philosophical Definition

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WHAT IS LITERATURE?  
AN ATTEMPT AT A PHILOSOPHICAL DEFINITION

BY

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN  
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### VITA AUCTORIS

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## CHAPTER I

The statement made recently by Professor W. Giese of the University of Wisconsin that "contemporary literature can be classified under three headings - the neurotic, the erotic, and the tommy-rotic"<sup>1</sup> is so dishearteningly close to the truth that the serious minded student of literature finds it difficult to appreciate its humorous play on words.

A casual perusal of contemporary novels, plays, and even, during the past few years, autobiographies will bring home to the reader the astonishing amount of pessimism, vulgarity, and bad taste which pervades so much of our modern writing. The smart futilities of Aldous Huxley, the obscene incoherencies of James Joyce, the inordinate interest in sex for its own sake which is the meat and drink of D. H. Lawrence and so many others, the vulgar cynicism of Sinclair Lewis, the disgusting frankness of men like Nagle Farson and Edgar Lee Masters, are all only a small part of the rather discouraging picture which present day literature has to offer.

If we ask ourselves why it is that men of such obvious talent have produced so little that is not sicklied with one or the other of the unnatural diseases just alluded to, the answer is not hard to find. Paul Elmer More once wrote, "as we live,<sup>2</sup> so shall we paint and write." No deep knowledge of history is needed to formulate a second dictum: "as we philosophize, so

shall we live." Nor does one have to be an accomplished logician to draw the conclusion; what our philosophy is, our literature will be. To quote More again, "The question ( of literature and literary criticism) ultimately is one of philosophy or psychology."<sup>3</sup> Not a few of the writers of the day, to say nothing of the critics and the general reading public, have drifted away from the safe moorings which are the fundamental laws governing the art of literature.

It would be a truism to say that the intelligent worker in any field of human endeavor must begin his labors in that field with the study and the thorough mastery of its fundamentals. And yet, in the case of literature at least, as had been seen and as shall be more fully demonstrated later, no truth could have borne more decided and more insistent repetition.

The world judges the mathematician, the philosopher, the historian, the physician, the plumber, and the athletic coach on his knowledge of these fundamentals of his profession or trade and on his skill in applying them. And it so judges with perfect justice. For the man who is ignorant of the essence, the foundations, the scope, and the purpose of his chosen work is a positive menace to his fellow men. Inevitably he makes serious mistakes; invariably he steps beyond the boundaries set by nature for that particular work, and in so doing harms others, makes a fool of himself, and brings dis-

credit on his profession. No matter how clever he may become in the technique of the work, unless he knows the fundamentals, he will always be a dilettante or a quack.

In this regard the student of literature, whether he intends to be an active contributor to that field, a critic, or merely an intelligent reader, is most certainly no exception. Literature, although it is one of the fine arts and perhaps the noblest of them, is nevertheless but another field of human endeavor, a purposeful activity of rational beings. As such, it has its fundamental principles, its essence, its scope, and its own particular end and methods which must be grasped by the student before he can do any work worthy of the art.

All the talk of "Art for art's sake," "Beauty, an end in itself," which is the stock and trade of many men of letters, does not change the objective character of the case one jot or tittle. As a human activity, literature can never be an end in itself but ever a means to that Final End which is the attainment of man's eternal destiny, a means with laws subordinate to higher laws, a part of that grand scheme of relationships which is "the natural order of things" placed in the world by God. If we have a clear understanding of the meaning of life, a solid grasp on the Catholic principles concerning art and morality (which common sense tells us are the only true ones), and a realization of the teleology of things as they are, we cannot fail to perceive the sophistry

of any and all contrary arguments. Whether the student wishes to admit it or not, the fact remains that literature has its own fundamental laws, as constant and sacred as those of science or of any art. Its subject matter is limited, and its limits, although they are as broad as the universe and as deep as the soul of man, are in no sense relative or a mere matter of custom, taste, or caprice. There are standards and there is a norm for literature as universal and unchanging as the natural law which governs the actions of men as moral agents. If greater knowledge and skill is required in proportion to the dignity of the work, as can be clearly seen by a comparison of the professions and the trades, then how great should be the knowledge and the skill of literature which, as a medium of intercourse between hearts and minds, is one of the strongest natural influences for the elevation of human souls.

These facts have been recognized by the truly great scholars and writers of all ages. At times in the past they have been overlooked or ignored by the vicious or the superficial. It seems, however, to have been left to our age, that is, roughly, from the time of Rousseau till the present, either to deny outright the existence of any ultimates or fundamentals or to set up false principles and build whole schools of literary thought upon them.

The results of this revolt are evident enough, as has been seen, in the literature of the day. A direct outcome of it,



too, were the emotional excesses of the romanticists of the early 19th century, the sad pessimism of the decadents at its close, and all the sordid half-truths of the so-called realists which has despoiled of literary value much that was written in the first quarter of our own century. Literary criticism has fallen a victim to these errors also. Works which have no claim whatsoever to the title of literature are lauded as masterpieces of the art by those who should know better. Writers like Hemingway, Dreiser, and O'Neil often flout essential canons of literature and are accorded the highest encomium - and this, not for what is of real literary value in their writings (and there is much), but for those very things in which they offend not only against the established ultimates but even against sound and wholesome taste. Other writers of less talent and more "daring" are defended in our universities and their works cited as examples of great literature. Novels and plays, which as often as not are nothing more than clever pieces of craftsmanship and technique, hold the center of literary attention. The very text-books used in our colleges and high schools are full of every sort of 'literary' heresy and 'literary' sophistry.

During the past two decades, however, there has been a gradual awakening among more serious scholars to the existing condition of literature and literary study. With its revolt against naturalism and the excesses of romanticism, Humanism

has made the proper turn - back toward a more thorough understanding of the true nature and function of the art of letters. But it is to be feared that unless the Humanists are able to grasp more thoroughly the idea of the complete nature of man as including all its manifold and many-sided relations, particularly those which have to do with its spiritual aspects, they will most certainly stop short of the desired goal. Paul Elmer More, one of the leaders of the movement, seems to realize this himself when he asks, "Will not the Humanist, unless he adds to his creed the faith and the hope of religion, find himself at the last, despite his protests, dragged back into the camp of the naturalist?"<sup>4</sup>

Fortunately for the world and for literature, there is a strong and serious Christian humanistic movement in progress. The Catholic literary revival, which began with Newman and has been gaining force ever since is a factor worth reckoning with in this return to essentials and to a sound philosophical understanding of literary theory and criticism. It is a movement which augurs order and new strength and beauty in a field, where till now, much turmoil and confusion seem to have been the dominant characteristics.

It is only natural that the Catholic thinker should lead the way in this work. Almost alone he is the possessor of a system of philosophy suitable for the task of fully comprehending a subject like literature, which is based on a

concept of the complete nature of man in all his relations to God, to his fellow men, and to the world about him. Without the Scholastic concept of the dualism of man's nature; without its realism, which is the basis of Catholic epistemology; and, in fact without the whole of the true philosophy of life and of the universe, one can hardly hope to re-discover and re-establish a correct literary theory. For literature, which is a reflection and an interpretation of life, must be guided by the science of life, which is philosophy. And, quite evidently, if the philosophy is false the literature and the theory of literature built on that philosophy will be equally false.

History makes it clear, if proof is needed of this fact, that those who have lost their grasp of the fundamentals of Christian philosophy have simultaneously gone astray in the field of letters. Rousseau, with his false concept of the nature of man, fathered a school of literature which was corrupt in its very essence. It attempted to reflect the thought and the lives of men who were what man never could be - angels. Much that might have been really great literature came from the pens of the romanticists vitiated and often debased because it had its roots in the minds of men poisoned by romantic vagaries.

Speaking of these vagaries, Blanche Mary Kelly says:

"The most important single factor in the Romantic revival was Rousseau's doctrine of the natural goodness of man, whence it

followed that primitive barbaric man was regarded as having been noble and upright, but corrupted by the artificialities of civilization. It is of at least minor importance to the understanding of the issue that such a doctrine contradicts the Christian doctrine of original sin, not to mention most of the facts of experience, but it was attractive to those who were sickened by the insincerities amid which they lived, who were conscious of the flaw at the very core of life, and longed to believe that they could repair that flaw and find health and healing in nature.

"Hence their eagerness to throw off the restraints of society and get back to a primitive, even a savage environment and code. Out of tune with their own time, they dreamed of another age in which life was delightfully crude and untrammelled and therefore sound, and to many of them it seemed that the so-called Dark or Gothic ages were the ideal time. It must be remembered that although the medievalism of the Romantic Movement became proverbial, it was as a matter of fact based on a complete misconception of the medieval mind."5

An age of materialistic and evolutionary science likewise had its deleterious effect upon literature, for it taught a philosophy of blind chance and unmitigated naturalism. The direct antithesis of the idealistic outlook of the Rousseauists, this philosophy looked upon human nature "with the inflamed vision of a monocular Cyclops, seeing man only as the slave of his temperament, or as a mechanism propelled by complexes and reactions, or as a vortex of sensations, with no will to govern himself, no center of stability within the flux, no direction of purpose to rise above the influences

which carry him hither and thither." <sup>6</sup> Man in this vision, was cold, soulless, unhuman.

Then came the psycho-analyst with his fear of repression, his uncontrollable bibido, and his mad sex mania. The post-war philosophers added their contribution of pessimism and fatalism to the already confused thought of the world. The naturalist, who seems to admit reality only in what derives from the dust and sees nothing as real except that which is sordid and degrading, threw in his bit and the whole thing found immediate acceptance and astonishing reflection in the literature of the day.

It goes without saying that such criticism cannot be leveled at the whole school of modern writers. Certainly the noteworthy achievements of Booth Tarkington, Hamlin Garland, Edna Ferbert, Willa Cather, Edith Wharton, (to confine ourselves even to the comparatively narrow field of American letters) are excellent examples of honest literary craftsmanship. But weighing heavily in the balance on the other side are men like Mencken, who "rails at all respected traditions and <sup>7</sup> customs"; Carl Sandburg, who summarizes the present insurrectional attitude as "the marvelous rebellion of man at all signs <sup>8</sup> reading 'Keep Off'"; and James Branch Cabell, who denies that <sup>9</sup> virtue has any "potent value aesthetically." Sherwood Anderson hunts for realism in the recesses of the sub-conscious and in the depths of fancies which only a diseased imagination could

evoke. Theodore Dreiser tells us that man "weaves among the mysteries a floss-like and wholly meaningless course, if course it be,"<sup>10</sup> while for Sinclair Lewis "There is," as a certain critic has put it, "no such thing as a divine dimension beyond space and time and error, no unifying force to lend splendor to the innumerable works of God."<sup>11</sup>

Paul Shorey says of these men, they resent "the slightest hint of restriction on the caprices of their inspiration, or the right to paint the world as they see it, to propagate whatever their mood holds for truth, without regard to any consequences to their readers or society."<sup>12</sup>

James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, and Edgar Lee Masters (already mentioned in this study) along with countless other writers of prose or poetry or drama who were possessed of equal or less talent, may be added to this sad list of pessimists, naturalists and pseudo-realists.

It is the purpose of this study, therefore, to investigate the fundamentals of the art of literature in the light of true philosophy and to draw them out as clearly as possible so that they will be intelligible both to the man of letters and to the ordinary reader. A strictly mathematical demonstration of what literature is cannot be given; for literature is not made up solely of reasoning. Imagination and emotional sensibility play as large a part in the living expression of the whole man as does his intellect.

Yet certitude, at least moral certitude, may be had concerning those fundamentals upon which true literature and a correct literary theory must be built. And that is certainly far more satisfying to any intelligent man than mere emotional apperception.

To this end, therefore, it will be necessary to search out according to the logical method of the philosopher, the essence of true literature and to show from a philosophical analysis of the nature of the art how the only correct and dependable standards of literary theory can be established and maintained. The subject matter of literature - the created universe; the human soul with its faculties, its cravings, its powers and limitations; and the system of relationships which bind man to God, to his fellow men, and to the world of irrational things about him - must be studied; for, as Father Longhaye rightly contends, "literature flows, as from a spring, from exact psychology and sane ethics; the beautiful in literature is closely bound up with the true in nature, with the good in the soul and in reality, and especially with the good for which both things and the soul were made by God." <sup>13</sup> Further, some elementary questions must be asked. What is literature? What are its essential parts? What are its properties? What are its limits, its foundations, its elements? What are the intimate connections between the true philosophy of life and the true theory of literature?

Since these questions are fundamental, the most direct and simple answer to them is to be found in the most direct and simple statement concerning the subject - an adequate definition. Such a definition must be clear, complete, brief and exclusive. While the formulation of an essential working definition of a subject so broad, so complex, and so difficult as literature is not an easy task, yet, by a consideration of the elements of the art and with the help of various definitions offered in the past by eminent students of literature, it can be done. Difficult as the task may be and unsatisfactory as the result will probably be to many, it must certainly be accomplished if any beginning is to be made in this inquiry into the essence of the art of letters.

Such a definition would be of great value, not only to the student and the professor of literature as a starting point of inquiry, and to the prospective writer as a guide in his work, but also to the cultured gentleman who, in the selection of books, is seeking for a norm and a standard of good judgment.

For the Catholic layman, the possession of an adequate working definition of literature and an understanding of its meaning and implications is almost a necessity today. As a weapon of defense against the pagan influence that is attacking the very life of his soul through books, periodicals, and newspapers, it should be invaluable. He will find it a handy gauge by which he can measure, judge, choose, and reject, with



conviction based on rational grounds; he will find it a clear and safe guide in the midst of vague generalizations and misty half-truths; and a scientifically and philosophically sound groundwork for his whole attitude toward the subject of art and morality. The Catholic who knows the essence and scope, the foundations and the elements of true literature will make no snap judgments in his choice and estimate of books. He will not betray his faith or his moral principles or his Catholic culture with rash statements about the divorce of morality from art. He will not be tricked into sympathy with destructive principles nor will he permit those entrusted to his charge to be guided by norms and standards in direct opposition to their Christian faith and training. A man with a grasp of the fundamentals of literature will find himself better equipped to appreciate the truest and the best in every branch of art.

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER I

1. The Reader's Digest, March, 1936, p. 76.
2. "A Revival of Humanism", The Bookman, March, 1930, p. 936.
3. ibid., p. 937.
4. ibid., p. 936
5. Well of English, p. 147.
6. The Bookman, op. cit., p. 936
7. "The Trend of American Literature",  
Catholic World, April, 1930, p. 30.
8. ibid., p. 30.
9. ibid., p. 30.
10. ibid., p. 30.
11. ibid., p. 30.
12. ibid., p. 31.
13. Theorie des Belles-Lettres, p. xi.

## CHAPTER II

Man's innate desire for clarity of understanding and his natural tendency to organize and simplify his knowledge has led practically every student of literature to formulate some sort of definition of the subject.

A study of a number of these definitions, chosen as representative of the majority of them, reveals the fact that none of them are entirely satisfactory for the purpose of this study. With scarcely an exception they are rhetorical and descriptive rather than scientific and philosophical. They merely indicate the general features of the art - give a pictorial view, as it were - without entering into particulars, without going to the essence. This is quite what might be expected since the men who wrote them practically always approached the subject from a strictly aesthetic viewpoint. Certain men, like Newman, whose minds were inclined to philosophy as well as to literature, went deeper into the nature of the art and offered the world more scientific and philosophical considerations. But, while these latter definitions are quite adequate in so far as they go, they are not comprehensive enough to meet all the requirements set down for a complete and satisfying definition.

For a definition to be philosophical, adequate, and usable it must bring out clearly the genus and the specific difference

of the thing defined; otherwise no clear grasp will be had of the complete nature of the subject under consideration. Further, it must be complete, exclusive, clear, brief, and correct. Quite obviously, if the limits of the subject are to be laid down definitely, the first two qualities are essential - complete, so that everything that rightly belongs to the species is included; exclusive, so that nothing which does not is excluded. Brevity and clarity have to do rather with the form than with the subject matter of the definition, but they are essential to any definition that is workable. They imply a selection of words and construction which will eliminate any obscurity or ambiguity, without at the same time employing excess verbiage. The last requirement, that of correctness, may seem uncalled for; yet, in a study so broad and complex as the one in hand, there is considerable room for error, confusion, and misunderstanding.

If so precise a definition, which must lay down of necessity almost absolute limits for literature, seems to some to restrict art and to circumscribe genius, let them keep in mind the eternal truth that only under law can there be genuine freedom. Let them recall, too, that a genius does not fall outside the family of men by the mere fact of his superior talents; nor does the work of a man as an artist escape the laws which govern the artist as a man.

A close analysis of several classical definitions of literature, both descriptive and somewhat philosophical, will help not only to eliminate those things which are too general for the type of definition required, but will also help to bring out more clearly those principles on which a usable, philosophical definition may be constructed.

Of all the definitions of the non-philosophical type, that of Emerson is the most brief and, perhaps, the most unsatisfactory, because it is the most strictly descriptive. "Literature," he says, "is the record of the best thoughts."<sup>1</sup> Without a doubt the best thoughts of some of the greatest men of history make up that body of writings which we know as literature. And yet the same might be said of much that is certainly not literature. Surely the product of the mental labors of the great mathematicians and lawyers of history cannot be denied the title of good thought, nor, still less, can their thoughts be regarded, per se, as literature.

A beautiful building or a locomotive is the record of the best thinking of architects and engineers as much as is a first class poem that of the best thoughts of a poet. The best thought of the best men of history has found its expression and left its record in other fields than that of letters. The most perfect products of every line of human endeavor will remain for posterity as the record of the best thought. One must find a definition more exclusive and more penetrating than that

offered by the American essayist, poet, and philosopher.

Turning to Matthew Arnold, who was most assuredly a literary scholar, a repetition of the idea contained in the definition just cited is found. He says, "Literature is all knowledge that reaches us through books." <sup>2</sup> Again, common sense tells us that, although this statement describes all that literature is in a certain general sense, it does not give us even so much as those surface marks by which we could distinguish literature from other writings which also convey knowledge. Knowledge comes to us through geography books and sport-magazines. We can gather knowledge from almanacs and even from telephone-books. Of course, Arnold meant a definite kind of knowledge, but even when we take this into consideration, we must see that "knowledge which comes to us through books" describes at best the content of literary works. It does not reach to the essence of the subject. It embraces writings which must be excluded from the body of real literature.

Quite in conflict with this definition of Matthew Arnold is that given by DeQuincey. He says, "All that is literature seeks to communicate power; all that is not literature to communicate knowledge." <sup>3</sup> And he continues, by way of explanation:

"Now, if it be asked what is meant by communicating power, I, in my turn would ask by what name a man would designate the case in which I should be made to feel vividly, and with vital consciousness, emotions which ordinary life rarely or never supplies occasions for exciting." <sup>4</sup>

Commenting on this passage, C. T. Winchester points out that DeQuincy made this power of effecting the emotions the distinguishing mark of literature. He, himself, goes farther and makes it the sine qua non of literary works. "It is the power of appeal to the emotions that gives a book permanent interest, and consequently literary value."

Before a criticism of either of these statements is offered it might be well to follow, step by step, the arguments which led Winchester to this conclusion - a line of thought probably very similar to that which DeQuincy followed in the construction of his definition.

"Literature in general, " Winchester argues, "is a 'criticism of life' or, perhaps better, an expression and interpretation of life. And the point to be noticed here is that it is this power over emotion that makes literature an interpreter of life. For life, in the large moral sense in which we use the word, is determined, not principally by outward facts and circumstances, nor yet by thought and speculation, but by its emotions. Emotions are motives, as their name implies; they induce the will; they decide the whole current of life. Character is indicated by them, and must always be educated through them..... Literature, therefore, which at once speaks the feelings of the writer and stirs those of the reader, is necessarily the truest and deepest record of human life." 7

And a few pages later he concludes, ".....appeal to the emotions is the essential element of literature."

Turning to literary history for a substantiation of his argument he makes these discoveries:

"Some book, made up of pretty trifles of verse about garlands, and girls, and locks of hair, we admit instantly to the category of literature. One set of books contains enduring truths that men can never hereafter forget or live without; other books contain some graceful nothings that a Waller has said or sung to his Sacharissa, a Herrick to his Julia. Yet the weighty books we shake our heads over and rule out; the books of trifles are unquestioned literature." 9

And why? Because (he argues) literature consists not of those books which contain certain truths of permanent interest but of those which are themselves of permanent interest. Eternal, universal truths are too important in themselves to depend for their permanence on any one book or set of books. They live in the minds of men and will live when the book in which they were first recorded is forgotten. But the book which speaks a truth, no matter how simple or unimportant, in such a way that, with each rereading of it from generation to generation, the strength and beauty of its truthfulness sets an ever responsive chord vibrating is a book that is literature. That eternal chord in man which is made to vibrate with each new reading of a piece of literature, he says, is man's emotional make-up.

"What quality will we find in a poem (which contains an unimportant truth but proves itself literature by strangely refusing to die) and in a treatise on calculus, or geology, or philosophy (which contains truths of undoubted value, but is not ranked as literature)? Just this: the poem appeals to the emotions, while the treatise appeals to the intellect."<sup>10</sup>



Much that Winchester has to say regarding the necessity of emotional appeal in literature is true in so far as it goes, and his statement of the case is so lucid that it is not difficult to point out the error involved. One finds no difficulty in agreeing with him that literature never attempts to state a fact merely as fact, but presents the fact in some of its emotional relations. Nor need one be told that it is precisely this addition of emotional effect which is one of the qualities which help to make "David Copperfield" or "Vanity Fair" or "Hamlet" literature, and the lack of it in books of law or mere factual history which deprives them of the same distinction. Yet it is hard to see, if we consider the very legitimate claim which books like Newman's "Idea of a University" or Ruskin's "Stones of Venice" lay to the coveted title of literature, how this "appeal to the emotions" can be "the essential element of literature."

Again, there can be no disagreement with his statement that the powerful and beautiful rendering of a truth, no matter how trivial, will find a response in the emotional nature of a man. But he errs in making this response the sole norm for the establishment of literary excellence. It is the error of mistaking a part for the whole, of overemphasizing one characteristic of literature at the expense of the others. His mistake lies rather in his psychology than in the application of principles. The initial misstep is made when he says

that life is guided, not by thought and speculation, but by emotions; that emotions decide the whole current of life.

Is not this emotionalism? Does it not lead to pure subjective criticism? Is there not in it a note of threat or challenge against the superiority of the higher faculties of the human soul? Does he not, when he states in another passage that literature "is the writer's criticism of life, that is, the impression which life, as he sees and imagines it, makes upon his emotions, and which he, in turn, tried to impress on ours," place too much stress on mere feelings?

Emotions and feelings, after all, are unstable, untrustworthy things, subject to a great extent to material sensations and external and physical conditions. Often enough they are violently agitated; they change from moment to moment; they are rarely dependable. Not infrequently they are in revolt against the higher faculty of the soul - the intellect. Emotions are motives it is true, but in a sane, rational life it is the intellect which must choose or reject these motives as good or bad. It is the intellect which induces the will and decides the current of life. Winchester, himself, admits that some truth, no matter how insignificant, is the first requisite for a piece of literature. But truth is the object of the intellect, not of the emotions.

For all these reasons, the appeal to the emotions as the essential element of literature must be rejected. Literature,

to be true, must appeal to the whole man - to his mind, his will, his heart, his imagination, and his emotions. Man's complete nature is the eternal chord that is set vibrating by the reading and rereading of any composition that is real literature.

If emotion must be rejected as the foundation of a satisfactory definition of literature, then surely the pleasure of the reader, whether purely intellectual or only physical or a mixture of both, must be turned down on similar grounds.

Mere intellectual pleasure seems to be the basis for the definition which Stopford Brooke had in mind when he wrote the following: "Literature is the written thoughts and feelings of intelligent men and women, arranged in such a way as to give pleasure to the reader."<sup>12</sup> Of course, no one will deny that esthetic pleasure is one of the ends of literature, but as compared to the true end, which is the elevation of human souls, it is a secondary and relatively unimportant one. And, while the definition tells us something of the content and the form of literature, it gives us nothing whatsoever of the essence.

John Morley offers another descriptive definition. "Literature," he writes, "consists of all books where moral truth and human passion are touched upon with a certain largeness, sanity, and attractiveness of form."<sup>13</sup> This certainly is brief enough and, to some degree, it excludes all that is not true literature. But it is not complete, and it contains terms that are not entirely clear. It does not mention the

genus of literature. Except in the words "largeness, sanity, and attractiveness of form," the fact that literature is an art is scarcely hinted at. And in the use of those terms the definition becomes a little ambiguous. What is meant by "largeness"? Has the term to deal with scope or with the writer's outlook? Even the words "moral truth" might be interpreted in a variety of senses. If by them he means those eternal truths which have to do with life, with God, man, and the universe, in all their relations to one another, then he is correct. But as they are stated these words might have as many meanings as there are students to read them. A working definition of literature must be more precise, clearer, more complete.

The definition of literature which Hamilton Wright Mabie gives is an example of another class of definitions which contain intimations of the truth and yet are phrased in language so vague that they are entirely unsatisfactory. "The inspiration of some phase of life," he says, "and the stamp of some form of beauty are characteristics of all true works of literature."<sup>14</sup>

There is another type of definition which will satisfy the student who is looking for a purely descriptive exposition of literature. It does not pretend, as a matter of fact, to be a definition in the true sense of the word. It attempts to give only a broad view of the subject, merely indicating the general features of literature. As such, the examples cited

below are not useful to the purpose at hand, except, perhaps, in so far as they bring out some quality of literature which might be incorporated in the definition which we intend to construct.

One such exposition is contained in Sainte-Beuve's "Causeries du Lundi" in which, though his purpose is to describe a classical author, he really describes the content of literature. A classical author, he says,

"is an author who has enriched the human mind, who has really added to its treasure, who has got it to take a step farther; who has discovered some unequivocal moral truth, or penetrated to some essential passion, in the heart of man where it seemed as though all were known and explored; who has produced his thought or his observation or his invention under some form, no matter what, so it be large, acute, and reasonable, sane, and beautiful in itself; who has spoken to all in a style of his own, yet in a style which finds itself the style of everybody, ..... in a style that is at once new and antique, and is the contemporary of all the ages." 15

Observe that the Frenchman, with true Gallic acumen, traces the roots of all that is literature to the depths of man's soul, placing the emphasis on the recording of those moral truths and those essential passions which come from the whole man, body and soul, in a real world. Note, too, the qualities of style on which he insists. He does not place too much emphasis on the largeness, sanity, or beauty of literary invention; he rather stresses the personal element of the style, which is, at the same time, universal, both new and old.

Another exposition of this kind we find in the writings of Cardinal Newman.

"Literature," he says, "consists of the enunciation and the teachings of those who have a right to speak as the representatives of their kind, and in whose words their brethren find an interpretation of their own sentiments, a record of their own experience, and a suggestion of their own judgments." 16

Once more, we see that the content of literature is indicated and described. Newman, with his usual sharpness of intellect and discretion, insists that only those who "have a right to speak as the representatives of their kind" can produce literature. Thus, deftly, he eliminates the works of the vicious, the vulgar, and the light-minded. He indicates very clearly, too, those qualities which will act as an index to true literature, but does not touch upon the essential notes of the art.

There are two definitions of literature, formulated by men possessed of no small literary insight and of the philosophical attitude of mind necessary for the task, which contain elements which cannot be overlooked in a study of this kind. The first is that of Brother Azarias, a Brother of the Christian Schools; the second is Newman's classical definition.

"Literature," Brother Azarias says, "is the verbal expression of man's affections as acted upon in his relations with the material world, society, and his Creator." 17

Here for the first time the entire field of literary source material is mentioned: the threefold foundation upon which literature must be built. And here, too, that relationship between man, as the model, and the rest of the world, as the background, is brought into prominence. This relationship must be noted because literature, which is an interpretation of life, must see that life in its full scope before it can make an accurate interpretation.

Newman's definition, "By letters or literature is meant the expression of thought in language, where by 'thought' I mean the ideas, feelings, views, reasonings, and other operations of the human mind.",<sup>18</sup> is philosophical in the sense that it makes human thought the basis of all literature. There is no need here of entering into a lengthy exposition of the terms which the Cardinal employs. That he does himself in his famous essay on literature. It is enough here to point out his insistence on the fact that all literature is the externalization of personal thought. This matter of the "twofold logos" of thought and expression will be treated later when an analysis of the definition to be constructed in this paper is made. So, too, will the precise meaning of the word "personal" when applied to thought. It is sufficient to say here that it most certainly does not mean merely subjective thought. Nor are all the narrow implications which attach to such a concept of thought to be connected with his use of the word. This term, as

understood here, can only mean the totality of the man as it finds expression, first, in the mind and then in its verbal reproduction. What follows from this interpretation of the word will be dealt with in the next chapter.

The final definition chosen as a type of philosophical exposition of literature and upon which the definition to be proposed in this thesis will be largely constructed is that of Pere Longhaye, S.J.. It is given here without comment except to point out that it lacks the one note which must be added - the personal quality of thought which finds expression in literature. Literature, the French Jesuit says, is "l'art d'exercer sur l'homme par la parole une action morale puissante et ordonnée."<sup>19</sup>



FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER II

1. American Scholar, p. 230.
2. Function of Criticism, p. 139.
3. "Letters to a Young Man", Works, X, p. 48.
4. ibid., p. 49.
5. Principles of Literary Criticism, p. 42.
6. ibid., p. 42.
7. ibid., p. 48.
8. ibid., p. 56.
9. ibid., p. 39.
10. ibid., p. 41.
11. ibid., p. 48.
12. Quoted by C. T. Winchester,  
Principles of Literary Criticism, p. 36.
13. On the Study of Literature, p. 32.
14. Short Studies in Literature, p. 7.
15. Causeries du Lundi, p. 16.
16. The Idea of a University, p. 306.
17. Philosophy of Literature, p. 1.
18. The Idea of a University, op. cit., p. 306.
19. Theorie des Belles-Lettres, p. x.

CHAPTER III

Pere Longhaye's definition of literature as "the art of exercising upon our fellow men through language a moral influence of a powerful and well ordered kind" might stand as a completely satisfactory formulary were it not for two points. One of these, the failure to mention the personal quality of thought necessary in true literary work, was pointed out in the last chapter. The second, the use of the phrase 'exerting a moral influence', must be considered here. There are various kinds of moral influence which can not be called literature, v.g. the moral influence of good example, good conversation, and instruction. And, although the word moral as it is used by Longhaye is to be taken in the broad rather than in the strictly ethical sense, still it might easily be understood to imply that literature must be homiletic.

Keeping these two points in mind, the following definition of literature may be formulated: Literature is the art of embodying in language personal thought possessing the quality of powerful and well-ordered appeal.

To this definition the usual standards of adequacy must be applied. A philosophical analysis must then be made to bring out more clearly certain facts which the definition can only indicate. A study of the words employed will be sufficient to justify the use of each of them and, when this has been done,

the conclusions which may be drawn from such a definition can be readily deduced. These conclusions, together with certain basic considerations concerning the nature of literature, its foundations and elements, will be taken up in the following chapter. In this chapter it will be enough to study the wording of the definition itself with a view to justifying its content.

There are two standard of adequacy which must be applied to any definition, whether it be of an art, of a science, or indeed of anything at all. The first looks to substance; the second, to form. A simple inspection of the wording of the present definition sufficiently justifies it by the first test. The question, "Does the definition measure up to the standard of adequacy in regard to substance?" might philosophically be put in this way, "Does it name both the genus and the specific difference of the thing defined?" Or, in other words, does it touch the essence of the subject under consideration? Is the specific difference so brought out as to include all forms, kinds, and types of composition properly and generally regarded as literature, to the exclusion of everything that may not be so regarded?

The first of these questions demands a straightforward answer. Yes, the definition does contain the genus and specific difference of literature. In its broadest and narrowest acceptation, literature is generically an art for it is certainly "a skillful and systematic arrangement or adaptation of means

for the attainment of an end" (to follow the definition of an art given by the Standard Dictionary). That end, it goes without saying, is the presentation of the beautiful. More will be said later concerning the purpose and end of literature, so the matter need not be gone into in detail here. The fact that the Standard's definition applies to skills and crafts as well as to the fine arts need cause no confusion; the domestic cat and the Bengal tiger are included in the same biological genus. 'Art' is the genus to which literature belongs.

The rest of the definition might well be considered a complete statement of the specific difference of literature. In the strictest sense, the words "of embodying in language" are sufficient to differentiate the art of letters from all the other fine arts. The modifying terms "personal thought, etc." bring out what we might call the *propria* of literature. These *propria* (flowing as they do from the essences of things) may, therefore, be treated with good reason in connection with the essence of literature and will thus be readily bound up with the very heart of the subject.

As for the second standard - the validity of the definition in regard to form, it is again a matter of answering a question asked earlier in this study, "Is the definition complete, exclusive, clear, brief, and correct?" The answers to this question will be brought out more definitely and satisfactorily as a closer analysis is made of the terms of the

definition, but a short answer can be given at once. Certainly the definition is as brief as any satisfactory definition can be. Other accepted definitions in science, philosophy or art, let us say, are no shorter. And as for clarity, it is obscure only in the sense that the subject defined is so objectively complex that it does not lend itself (per se at least) to a subjectively complete and immediately understood definition. As we shall see, however, a consideration of the terms employed will suffice to make the definition clear enough to any intelligent reader. In a definition of this kind it cannot be expected that more should be done in the way of definiteness than to include everything and anything which belongs strictly to the subject defined and to exclude all that does not. And so, too, with completeness. A definition, if it were to express every element and leave nothing to implication, would become entirely too long and altogether unwieldy. The correctness of the definition it is hoped will be demonstrated in the analysis which is to follow.

According to the definition of 'art' given in the Standard Dictionary, any systematic adaptation of means to an end may be included in the concept. This would, as has been pointed out, cover any purposeful activity of man wherein natural ability or knowledge, skill, dexterity, facility or power were applied practically. Thus we speak of the 'art of mathematics', the 'art of sailing', the 'art of boxing'.

It need hardly be said that it is not in this extremely broad sense that we use the term 'art', but in the sense in which it means the embodiment of beautiful thought in sensuous forms, as, for example, in pictures, statues or speech. In a word, what we mean by art is all those human activities commonly known as 'the fine arts'. To this genus belong paintings, sculpture, music, architecture and literature.

With this in mind it is easy to see how the words 'in language' differentiate the art of letters from all other fine arts, making it the specific art that finds its expression in words.

It is evident, however, that, if we were to confine our definition to this phrase 'embodying thought in language' without any modification, we should not have an adequate definition of literature. Any rational use of speech might be so defined and the term literature applied to every form of written expression. As a matter of fact, the word 'literature' is used in daily speech as descriptive of almost every form of writing. The gaudy advertisements sent out by travel companies and department stores are called their 'literature'. Practically every branch of science, from agriculture to zoology has its 'literature'. Government bureaus send out their 'literature' on weather, the national parks, fishing, gold mining and emigration. Catholics, communists, and Christian Scientists apread 'literature' in the form of magazines

and pamphlets. The use, in the definition, of the noun 'art' and the phrase 'possessing the quality of powerful and well ordered appeal' quite definitely eliminates all such forms of written expression.

The word 'art' excludes, too, from the concept of literature all writing that is purely scientific or merely utilitarian. All text books, histories, technical works and the like, which lack this artistic note are at once relegated from the province of literature. It must not be thought, however, that there are no histories or books of science which possess artistic quality. Certainly, the historical works of Macaulay and some of the scientific writings of Darwin and Huxely are literature. But they are considered literature, not because of their scientific or historical value but because they possess those qualities demanded for true literary expression.

Were it not for the fact that the term 'art', like the word 'literature' itself, has lost in this present age its true and complete significance, it would not be necessary to add to the definition of literature as, 'the art of embodying thought in language', the modifiers 'personal' and 'possessing the quality of powerful and well ordered appeal' as applied to thought. To the mind not tainted by false philosophy, artistic thought would be only personal thought as Newman understood it. To the mind free from materialism and the other 'isms' of modern thought, to the critic not bound by the false doctrines

of 'Art for art's sake', subjectivism, and pseudo-realism which divorces man and literature from all that is spiritual and transcendental, all artistic thought would possess the quality of powerful and well ordered appeal. But, as the terms 'thought' and 'art' are understood generally today, a definition of literature which did not include the modifying terms mentioned above would admit into the realm of literature writings which are not the expression of personal thought rightly understood, writings whose only claim to artistic expression is a certain cleverness of craftsmanship or of technique, and even writings which express thought that is undignified, trivial, or vitiated. How the modifying terms of the definition exclude such writings from the proper concept of literature shall be seen immediately.

The adjective 'personal' when applied to 'thought' in the definition does not carry with it the meaning of 'subjective' in the sense commonly attributed to that term, that is of a decidedly one-sided outlook, colored by a man's sentiments and prejudices. It means, rather, the expression in his thoughts of the whole man, body and soul, with all the powers of the body and the faculties of the soul functioning as God intended them to. In literature this personal thought, this totality of the personality of the writer, is given expression in speech with the purpose of affecting the totality of the personality of other men.

This is, of course, the crux of the question concerning



the difference between scientific, or technical, writings and literature. It is not that books of chemistry, ethics, law and economy are not literature because they fail to appeal ( as many critics claim) to the emotions of the reader, but rather because, in such works, words are employed, according to Cardinal Newman, "as mere vehicles of things",<sup>1</sup> and not as language expressing personal thought. By 'things' he means those objects and "matters which, even were there no individual man in the whole world to know them or to talk about them, would exist still."<sup>2</sup> And the words which are used to set forth these 'things' are "not language, speech, literature, but rather....symbols."<sup>3</sup> In literary works, words are used to express thought. What Newman meant by 'thought' he explains in his definition of literature quoted on page twenty-six of this thesis. He further elucidates his idea in his famous essay on 'Literature', in which he speaks of the use which a man of genius makes of language:

"The man of genius uses it (language) as he finds it indeed, but subjects it to his own purposes, and moulds it according to his own peculiarities. The throng and succession of ideas, thoughts, feelings, imaginations, aspirations, which pass within him, the abstractions, the juxtapositions, the comparisons, the discriminations, the conceptions, which are so original in him, his view of external things, his judgments upon life, manners, and history, the exercise of his wit, of his humor, of his depth, of his sagacity, all these innumerable and incessant creations, the very pulsation and throbbing of his intellect, all does he image forth, to all

does he give utterance, in corresponding language, which is as multiform as this inward mental action itself and analogous to it, the faithful expression of his intense personality....." 4

In short, thought is the man, and literature is the outward expression of thought, inseparable from it, forming with it the twofold logos. For this reason Longhaye says, "Language is a human thing par excellence, most characteristic of man..... literary talent is the flower of the soul, the soul showing herself simply, and with her all the objects of her thoughts: God, man, the world; all faithfully rendered, but, nevertheless, well marked by the imprint of her personality."<sup>5</sup>

It follows then quite logically that all purely scientific writing, which expresses merely the intellectual workings of the human mind, must be excluded from the realm of literature. So, too, must all writings be excluded which do not recognize and express in some way the rational and spiritual in man, no matter how beautiful the language or how perfect the technique.

The final words of the definition, "(personal thought) possessing the quality of powerful and well ordered appeal," are, perhaps, more important to the modern student of literature than any other part of the definition, for they give him a rational basis for refusing to accept as literature all of the crude, immoral, materialistic writing which is made so much of today by certain critics.

Prescinding for a moment from the controversy concerning

the divorce of literature from morality, the freedom of the artist from ethical laws in his artistic work, let us consider the nature of language itself. Its proximate purpose is to serve as the normal instrument of commerce between souls, as the channel through which "the ideas, feelings, views, reason-<sup>6</sup>ings, and other operations of the human mind" flow from mind to mind. "Language," says Pere Longhaye, "is the great social tie."<sup>7</sup> To act upon men is its reason d'etre and its end. To appeal to our fellow men, to effect or to influence them, is our only reason for using language. The effect upon our fellow men of our use of language may be uplifting or degrading; it may be merely entertaining or amusing; but it achieves, in any case, its proximate purpose.

But, beyond this proximate purpose, language, as a human act, has another purpose, a final end, which is to help men to attain to their final destiny. As a human act it is bound by the laws of ethics, and, because it is a social act as well, those laws must govern it in a very particular way.

Now, if all of this is true of ordinary language, how much more is it true of literature, which is language in its highest form, the artistic embodiment of personal thought carrying with it the full force of the powers of man's soul!

If, then, literature is to fulfill both its proximate and its ultimate purpose, it must possess two qualities in its appeal to and its effect upon men; it must be powerful; it must

be well ordered. Writings which do not possess these qualities cannot be designated as literature.

Keeping in mind the purpose of literature and its noble function as the highest instrument of commerce between souls, it is easy to understand why these two qualities are necessary. In its appeal to the totality of man's nature, the expression of thought in language must be forceful if it is to rise above ordinary speech or language. And to possess this quality of powerful appeal the creator of literature must employ all of the powers of his nature, his intellect, his emotions and his imagination. In so doing he must respect the order which God placed in the two essential sources of literature: man's own nature and the external world about him. If he is false to the divinely established order which exists in himself and in the universe, either through ignorance or because he holds to a false philosophy of life, he cannot create true literature.

The degree in which each power of the writer must be present in order to produce literature depends upon the purpose he has in writing each piece of composition. In a lyrical poem, in which emotional appeal is primary, the imagination and the emotions will naturally play a greater part than the intellect, and yet the intellect will not be entirely ignored. Shelley's 'Adonais' falls far short of the great literature it might have been because it is almost entirely lacking in intellectual appeal. And on the other hand, Newman's 'Idea of a University'

has achieved literary greatness because, in spite of the fact that its appeal would seem to be entirely intellectual, all of the author's well developed powers of imagination and his well balanced emotions color and enliven each page of those famous lectures. In a simple poem like 'Daisy', Francis Thompson exhibits all of the powers of his soul just as he does in his awe inspiring 'Hound of Heaven'. Even enthusiastic lovers of Wordsworth admit that a great part of his work fails to reach the stature of literature because it lacks that power of appeal which the expression of the poet's whole nature gives to such poems as 'Intimations of Immortality'.

On the insistance that literature should conform to the order which God placed in man and in nature, more will be said in the following chapter when the sources of literature are considered. Here it will suffice to point out that writings which deny or ignore the supremacy of the spiritual over the carnal in man's dual nature deny or ignore the sole grounds on which man possesses significance as literary material, the fact "that he is a man, neither angel nor animal, but a deathless spirit wayfaring with a body of death, which is nevertheless co-principle with that spirit and sharer in its immortality." <sup>8</sup> Such writings, moreover, go contrary to the ultimate purpose of literature in so far as they hinder rather than aid souls in the attainment of their final end. It cannot be denied that many writings of this kind possess a certain force and beauty

due to the technique and the facile style of their authors, but no sound thinker can deny that in so far as they repudiate the order of things which God has established in the nature of things they lack true beauty. For true beauty is, according to St. Thomas Aquinas, "Integritas ordinis", the plenitude of order.<sup>9</sup> That completeness of "full unfolding of power in order", as Pere Longhaye interprets it, certainly cannot be present in books which deny man his spiritual dignity and appeal only to the sensual and animal in him.

Against what has been said in this regard it may be argued that there is disorder in the world and in the soul and that, in order to interpret man adequately, disorder has a place in literature. But this objection is beside the point. No one denies that sin is a part of life and as such has a place in literature. The point insisted upon here is that sin must be recognized as sin, moral disorder as moral disorder. And, beyond this, moral disorder must not be treated in such a way as to make it sinfully exciting or attractive, lest the ultimate end of literature be neglected.

Moral disorder as a fact in life most certainly plays a large part in much that is rightfully recognized as great literature. As a part of the conflict in the soul of man struggling toward his eternal destiny (that conflict which, as has been pointed out, gives man his true significance as literary material) sin is almost a necessary concomitant of

literature. The great tragedies of Shakespeare are full of it; it is present in almost every chapter of the novels of Thackeray and Dickens. Yet, no one could ever claim that the murderous ambition of Lady Macbeth or the greed of Shylock are painted as anything but serious moral disorders. Dickens never drew a pen portrait of one of his despicable characters in such a way as to invite imitation. Nor were the details of the reprehensible careers of Thackeray's worldlings ever set down in a manner so vivid and graphic as to excite the passions and stir the baser emotions of the reader by the very reading of them. It is in precisely this latter respect that Hervey Allen's Anthony Adverse fails to meet the requirements which must necessarily be laid down for great literature.

Another objection may arise, "What of the privileges of art? Is not what is asked virtue rather than conformity to artistic canons?" The objection may well be answered in kind by a series of questions, "Is art outside of or contrary to human nature? Are the laws of any art independent of the natural law? Is virtue a thing not to be demanded of a man just because he happens to be an artist?" To answer these questions in the affirmative is repugnant to the right thinking mind. Order forces itself upon such a mind, and conformity to that order becomes a necessity for those who think correctly. Let the shallow mind plead "art for art's sake, freedom for artistic inspiration, autonomy for genius". The thinking man knows that

genius is nothing but force unfolding under rules. He knows that artistic inspiration is that soaring into full flight of the human faculties under the sovereign guidance of the intellect and the will. He knows that the more genius and inspiration are ordered and in conformity to the divine play, the more free, the more effective, and the more forceful they will be.

If these laws of order and power hold true as guides in the judgment of literature and in excluding from it everything that is vitiated and untrue, they hold equally well as sifting principles that require the exclusion from literature of everything that is hopelessly trivial or clearly unworthy of the title.



FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER III

1. The Idea of a University, p. 291.
2. *ibid.*, p. 291.
3. *ibid.*, p. 292.
4. *ibid.*, p. 293.
5. Theorie des Belles-Lettres, p. 3.
6. The Idea of a University, *op. cit.*, p. 306.
7. Theorie des Belles-Lettres, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
8. Well of English, p. 161.
9. Theorie des Belles-Lettres, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

CHAPTER IV

In the preceding chapter a definition of literature was formulated and its completeness and validity demonstrated. All that remains to be done now is to indicate several conclusions which may be drawn from the definition. These conclusions have been touched upon in the analysis but it is well to enlarge upon them here because of their vital connection with the subject and because an understanding of them is essential to the forming of sound judgments upon works of literature.

Speaking of the formation of such sound judgments, Blanche Mary Kelly says:

"When properly exercised, that function (criticism) means the application to creative work of universally recognized standard of achievement, its evaluation in the light of a law that is part of the very nature of things. The recognition of such a law is a Catholic principle, depending for its validity upon an objective perfection to which all excellence approximates and aspires. The critic's business is to discover the degree of that approximation, but with the rejection of such a norm, with the reason for a thing's excellence sought in itself, in the maker's inclination or the critic's preference, criticism deteriorates into private judgment, with one man's guess as good as another's." 1

Now, it was to aid the critic in his search for, or rather, the rediscovery of, such a norm that the formation of the definition and its analysis were attempted. The only logical conclusion which the definition leads one to is this, if literature is an

interpretation of life, then the true philosophy of literature must conform to the true philosophy of life, and the only true norm for literary criticism is that body of truths which deal with the world of created things and man, the two sources of all literature.

With regard to the conformity of literature to the world of creatures, it is enough to say that a writer must believe in the existence of the external world and the ability of the mind to reach truth concerning it, if he is to be logical in his interpretation of life. He must recognize, too, the order and purpose placed in these physical things by God, particularly in regard to the destiny of man.

Here, the question may be asked, but what of highly imaginative writing, like Alice in Wonderland, in which irrational creatures are given powers they do not possess and in which physical laws are trifled with. The book is certainly literature, and yet it fails to conform to objective verity. The answer is that Lewis Carroll does not try to make us believe that Alice grew and shrank, and that the Spring Hare went to a tea party.

The other foundation, or source, of literature is man, as God made him. And it is natural that this should be so; the full expression of man's nature gives force to writing; the recognition of the legitimate order that exists in man's nature gives order to literary expression. It has been seen in the

first chapter of this study that the false conceptions of man's nature, of his powers or of his state have led writers into the errors which have afflicted the literary world from time to time. Therefore, a clear understanding of that nature as a foundation of literature is essential to a correct understanding of what literature is.

We know from revelation and may even conjecture by unaided reason that man was not always in the state in which he now finds himself. He has fallen from higher and more noble state. The fact of original sin forces itself upon us at every turn of life. "But I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind." Faith teaches us, too, that man is not depraved because of this original sin; he is merely deprived of that higher state and now lives in a condition of weakened nature which makes him subject to sin. The writer who does not take cognizance of these facts cannot produce true literature because he does not interpret human life as it is in toto.

Reason teaches us that man is a creature, dependent upon a Power which has created him and which preserves him in life. It tells us that God has established an order and a law governing the relationships between man and the creature world, between man and his fellow men, between man and Himself. The principles which underlie these relations, the laws governing the activities which arise from them are universal and unchanging. Always and everywhere those relations which are

inferior by nature must take second place to those which are higher. That is the foundation of all rational ethics; that is the first rule of life; it is the norm of morality. As had been pointed out before, literature, as an interpretation of life - a reflection of man's acts - must interpret accurately and adequately, preserving the proper order of things. That is not to say that literature may not portray any violation of the moral law. Such violation exists. To deny the fact would be as false to life as it would be to deny the fact of the law. But to picture these violations as natural, ordinary and correct; to portray man as an animal without soul, with no moral obligations to either God or his fellow men; to make vice a virtue, or at least to condone it, all this is to falsify the very nature of things. And it must be insisted upon again that writings which are the vehicles of such error fail as literature.

In this regard Blanche Mary Kelly says, "To depict life wholly in terms of beauty, man as entirely free from coarseness or sensuality as universally noble and magnanimous would surely be to falsify both, but it is equally false to paint wholly in sombre hues. .....My quarrel is not so much with sordidness, nor the methods of these novelists, but with the view of reality which more readily understands it in those terms. For reality is inextricably bound up with man's spiritual nature and his eternal destiny."<sup>2</sup>

Here the final conclusion of the thesis is touched upon, the positive attitude which the definition proposes in the matter of literature's connection with and interpretation of life. If man is considered as he really is, having a soul endowed with the potency to conquer time and eternity, what broad horizons are opened up for the writer? Dante, who grasped the Catholic concept of man as no other author has ever done, was able to produce literature of a quality never attained to by any other author. And this fact stands out through the whole history of literature: the more a writer understood and appreciated the nature of man as it is, the greater, other things being equal, was the quality of the literature he produced. Aside from the genius of such men as Shakespeare and Calderon and many others, this knowledge of the exalted nature of man, of his intrinsic nobility and dignity in spite of his weakness, was the chief reason for the greatness of their writings.

"To look at the man (merely as our physical eyes see him) is but to court deception ." says R. L. Stevenson. "We shall see the trunk from which he draws nourishment, but he himself is above and abroad in the green branches, hummed through by the wind and nested in by nightingales. And the true realism were that of the poets, to climb up after him like a squirrel and try to catch some glimpse of the heaven for which he lives."

And Leonard Callahan, O. P., writing of an Esthetic which directs all its energies to the mere investigation of real life and of sensible beauty, says, "it falls short of its supreme mission." "For," he continues:

"As Michaelangelo once wrote, 'The soul of man winging its way toward the heavens whence it descended cannot rest in the contemplation of the fragile and deceptive beauty which allures the bodily senses, but in its sublime flight it seeks to attain to the universal principle of beauty.' And Kant, for all his wild fancies, never lost sight of the higher meaning of beauty: 'Beauty is the reflection of the infinite upon the finite; it is a glimpse of the godhead.' This does not imply that man should reject sensible beauty as an evil, but simply that he should avoid taking it as its face-value, and seek to penetrate beyond its veil. Beneath the beauty of the phenomenal world swells a more vital, a more enduring beauty; hidden under the fleeting forms of nature and art one should detect the eternal exemplar, the invisible beauty of God shadowed forth in his works. 'For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made.'"

FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER IV

1. Well of English, p. 330.
2. *ibid.*, p. 161.
3. "Virginibus Puerisque".



CONCLUSION

At the outset of this present study, a statement of this thesis was made: Since literature is an interpretation of life, a firm and clear understanding of it may be had by turning to that science which studies life and draws from it those laws and principles by which life is governed. That science is philosophy.

To simplify matters, a definition of literature was drawn up and analyzed along philosophical lines. Keeping the principles of psychology and ethics and the other branches of scholastic philosophy in mind, and intensive inquiry into the essence of literature was made. The genus, the specific difference, and the propria of literature were indicated and discussed at length. From that discussion the following conclusions were reached: Literature is a fine art and, as such, must possess those qualities which will distinguish it from the trades and skills. Literature, apart from its status as an art, is a human activity and, because it is, it has its standards and principles; it is not autonomous; it must respect the nature of things, conform to the nature of man, to the divine scheme of fact and truth, and to the supreme end and purpose to which all finite existences are ordained. The norm for critical judgment of literature, after the artistry, the skill of expression, and the technique of the author have been

taken into consideration, is the degree of its conformity to the order existing in the world of created things and in man as God made him. And, finally, that literature may exert a powerful and well ordered appeal conformable to its high purpose and, therefore, necessary for the attainment of its noble stature as true literature, all the faculties of man, his appetites, his imagination, his emotions, and his intellect, must be brought into play, all guided and controlled by the light of reason and the power of the sovereign will.

If these objective and fundamental facts have been demonstrated, then the purpose of this study has been fulfilled. If the Christian position on literature has been brought out more sharply, if any aid has been given to the critic toward a return to a more rational and a more humanistic understanding of this difficult problem, then the labor expended has been well worth while.

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