

CHAPTER V

ON COMPOSITION

I

I HOPE to give, at least once in each term, a short lecture upon the practical part of literature and literary study. This will be, or ought to be, of much more value to you than there could be in a single lecture upon the characteristics of an author. I want to speak to you only as a practical man of letters, as one who has served his apprenticeship at the difficult trade of literature. Please understand that in saying this, I am saying only "I am a workman," just as a carpenter would say to you "I am a carpenter," or a smith, "I am a smith." This does not mean in any sense that I am a good workman. I might be a very bad workman, and still have the right to call myself a workman. When a carpenter tells you, "I am a carpenter," you can believe him; but that does not mean that he thinks himself a good carpenter. As for his work, you can judge of that when you find occasion to pay for it. But whether the man be a clumsy and idle workman, or be the best carpenter in town, you know that he can tell you something which you do not know. He has learned how to handle tools, and how to choose the kind of wood best adapted to certain sorts of manufacture. He may be a cheat; he may be very careless about what he does; but it is quite certain that you could learn something from him, because he has served an apprenticeship, and knows, by constant practice of hand and eye, how a carpenter's work should be done.

So much for my position in the matter. Now I want to begin my lecture by trying to disabuse your minds of two or three common errors in regard to literary composition. I

do not say that you all indulge these errors; but I think it not improbable. The first error against which I wish to warn you is the very widespread error that the making of literature—that is to say, the writing of books or poems—is a matter that you can learn through education, through the reading of books, through the mastery of theories. I am going to be absolutely frank with you, but quite heterodox notwithstanding, by telling you that education will not help you to become a poet or a story-teller any more than it could help you to become a carpenter or a blacksmith. There are accessible to you, in libraries, any number of books and treatises about different kinds of woods, about different kinds of tools, and about the industry of wood-work. You might read all of these, and learn by heart every fact of importance that they contain; but that would not enable you to make with your own hands a good table or a good chair. So reading about writing will not teach you how to write. Literature is exactly like a trade in this sense that it can only be acquired by practice. I know that such a statement will shock certain persons of much more learning than I could ever hope to acquire. But I believe this would be entirely due to what is called educational bias. The teachers who teach that literature as a practical art has anything to do with the mere study of books, seem to forget that much of the world's greatest literature was made before there were any books, that the poems of Homer were composed before there were any schools or grammars, that the sacred books of nearly all the great civilizations were written without rules, either grammatical or other—and yet these works remain our admiration for all time.

Another error to be considered, is that the structure of your own language is of such a kind that Western rules of literary art could not be applied to it. But if there be any truth in such a belief, it is truth of a most unimportant kind. As I have told you that a knowledge of literary technicalities, grammatical or prosodial, will not teach you how to write, you will already be able to guess how little I

think of the importance to you of what are commonly called rules of composition. These foreign rules, indeed, are not applicable to your language; but they have no value whatever in the sense I mean. Let us for the time being throw all such rules overboard, and not even think about them. And now that the position is thus made clear, or at least clearer, let me say that the higher rules of literature are universal, and apply equally well to every language under the sun, no matter what its construction. For these universal rules have to do only with the truth; and truth is truth everywhere, no matter in what tongue it may be spoken. Presently we shall turn back to the subject of the universal rule—indeed it will form the principal part of this lecture.

The third error against which I wish to warn you is the foolish belief that great work, or even worthy work, can be done without pains—without very great pains. Nothing has been more productive of injury to young literary students than those stories, or legends, about great writers having written great books in a very short time. They suggest what must be in a million cases impossible, as a common possibility. You hear of Johnson having written “Rasselas” in a few weeks, of Beckford having done a similar thing, or of various other notables never correcting their manuscripts—and the youth who has much self-confidence imagines that he can do the same thing and produce literature. I do not believe those stories; I do not say exactly that they are not true; I only say that I do not believe them, and that the books, as we have them now, certainly represent much more than the work of a few weeks or even months. It is much more valuable to remember that Gray passed fourteen years in correcting and improving a single poem, and that no great poem or book, as we now have the text, represents the first form of the text. Take, for example, the poets that we have been reading. It is commonly said that Rossetti’s “Blessed Damozel” was written in his nineteenth year. This is true; but we have the text

of the poem as it was written in his nineteenth year, and it is unlike the poem as we now have it; for it was changed and corrected and recorrected scores of times to bring it to its present state of perfection. Almost everything composed by Tennyson was changed and changed and changed again, to such an extent that in almost every edition the text differed. Above all things do not imagine that any good work can be done without immense pains. When Dr. Max Müller told Froude, the historian, that he never corrected what he wrote, Froude immediately answered "Unless you correct a great many times, you will never be able to write good English." Now there is good English and good English; and I am not sure that Froude was right. Froude was thinking, I believe, of literary English. Correct English can be written without correction, by dint of long practice in precise writing. Business letters and official documents and various compositions of a kindred sort must be correct English; they are written entirely according to forms and rules, exactly like legal papers in which the mistake of one word might cause unspeakable mischief. But all this has nothing to do with literature. If the art of writing good English or good French or good Japanese were literature, then the lawyers and the bank clerks would represent the highest literature of their respective countries. So far, however, as Froude meant literary English, he is absolutely right. No literature can be produced without much correction. I have told you of primitive literature composed before the time of books and of grammars, which was and is, and will long continue to be, unrivalled literature. But do you suppose that it never was corrected and changed and re-made over and over and over again? Why, most assuredly it was, and corrected not by one only but by thousands and thousands of persons who had learned it by heart. Every generation improved it a little; and at last, when it came to be written down, it had been polished and perfected by the labour of hundreds of years.

Now I suppose all of you have at some time wanted to

get books about how to write English, I suppose that you have all found them, and that the result was only disappointment. It would have been disappointment just the same if you had been looking for French books on how to write French, or German books on how to write German. No books yet exist that will teach you literary work, which will teach you the real secrets of composition. Some day, I trust, there will be such books; but at present there are none, simply because the only men capable of writing them are men who have no time to give to such work. But this having been said, let us return to the subject of Japanese composition. Before trying to give you some practical rules, let me assure you of one thing, that all your foreign studies can be of no literary use to you except in relation to your own tongue. You can not write, you will never be able to write, English literature or French literature or German literature, though you might be able, after years of practice and foreign travel, to write tolerably correct English or French or German—to write a business document, for example, or to write a simple essay dealing only with bare facts. But none of you can hope to be eloquent in any other tongue than your own, or to move the hearts of people by writing in a language which is not your own. There are very few examples in all English literature of a man able to write equally well in two languages—in French and in English for example, close as are these tongues to each other. With an oriental language for a mother tongue, the only hope of being able to create literature in a foreign language is in totally forgetting your own. But the result would not be worth the sacrifice.

I suppose that many of you will become authors, either by accident or by inclination; and if you produce literature, prose or verse, it is to be hoped that you will influence the future literature of your country, by infusing into the work those new ideas which a university course must have forced upon you by thousands. But this alone, this imparting of new ideas, of larger knowledge, would not be literature.

Literature is not scholarship, though it may contain scholarship. Literature means, as I have said before, the highest possible appeal of language to the higher emotions and the nobler sentiments. It is not learning, nor can it be made by any rules of learning.

And now we can turn to the practical side of the subject.

I begin by asking you to remember that the principles of literary composition of the highest class must be exactly the same for Japan or for France or for England or for any other country. These principles are of two kinds, elimination and addition—in other words, a taking away or getting rid of the unnecessary, and the continual strengthening of the necessary. Besides this, composition means very little indeed. The first thing needed, of course, is a perfect knowledge of your own tongue as spoken; I will not say as written, for a perfect knowledge of any tongue as written is possible only to scholarship, and is not at all essential to literature. But a knowledge of the living speech, in all its forms, high and low, common and uncommon, is very desirable. If one can not hope to obtain the knowledge of the whole spoken speech, then I should advise him to throw his strength into the study of a part only, the part that is most natural to him. Even with this partial knowledge excellent literature is possible. But full knowledge will produce larger results in the case of large talent.

II

In all this lecture you must not forget my definition of literature as an art of emotional expression. And the first thing to be considered is the emotion itself, its value, its fugitive subtlety, and the extreme difficulty of “getting hold of it.”

You might ask why I put the emotion before the sensation. Of course the sensation always precedes the emotion. The sensation means the first impression received from the senses, or the revival in memory of such an impression. The emotion is the feeling, very complex, that follows the

sensation or impression. Do not forget this distinction; for it is very important indeed.

Now the reason why I am not going to say much to you about the sensation, is that if a sensation could be accurately described in words, the result would be something like a photograph, nothing more. You might say, a coloured photograph; and it is true that if we discover (as we shall certainly some day discover) the art of photographing in colours, such a coloured photograph would represent almost exactly a visual impression. But this would not be art. A photograph is not art; and the nearer that a painting resembles a photograph by its accuracy, the less it is likely to be worth much from the artistic point of view. To describe sensations would be no more literature in the higher sense, than a photograph could be called art in the higher sense. I shall therefore boldly take the position that literature is not a picture of sensations, but of emotions.

All this must be very fully illustrated. When I say "emotion" you perhaps think of tears, sorrow, regret. But this would be a mistake. Let us begin by considering the very simplest kind of emotion—the emotion of a tree.

Two things happen when you look at a tree. First you have the picture of the tree reflected upon the brain through the medium of sight—that is to say, a little card picture, a little photograph of the tree. But even if you wanted to paint this image with words you could not do it; and if you could do it, the result would not be worth talking about. But almost as quickly, you receive a second impression, very different from the first. You observe that the tree gives you a peculiar feeling of some kind. The tree has a certain character, and this perception of the character of the tree, is the feeling or the emotion of the tree. That is what the artist looks for; and that is what the poet looks for.

But we must explain this a little more. Every object, animate or inanimate, causes a certain feeling within the person who observes it. Everything has a face. Whenever you meet a person for the first time, and look at the face

of that person, you receive an impression that is immediately followed by some kind of feeling. Either you like the face, or you dislike it, or it leaves in you a state of comparative indifference. We all know this in regard to faces; but only the artist and poet know it in regard to things. And the difference between the great artist and the great poet and the rest of the world is only that the artist or the poet perceives the face of things, what is called the physiognomy of things—that is to say, their character. A tree, a mountain, a house, even a stone has a face and a character for the artistic eye. And we can train ourselves to see that character by pursuing the proper methods.

Now suppose that I were to ask all of you to describe for me a certain tree in the garden of the University. I should expect that a majority among you would write very nearly the same thing. But would this be a proof that the tree had given to all of you the same kind of feeling? No, it would not mean anything of the sort. It would mean only that a majority among you had acquired habits of thinking and writing which are contrary to the principles of art. Most of you would describe the tree in nearly the same way, because, in the course of years of study, your minds have been filled with those forms of language commonly used to describe trees; you would remember the words of some famous poet or story-teller, and would use them as expressing your own feelings. But it is perfectly certain that they would not express your own feelings. Education usually teaches us to use the ideas and the language of other men to describe our own feelings, and this habit is exactly contrary to every principle of art.

Now suppose there is one among you of a remarkably powerful talent of the poetical and artistic kind. His description of the tree would be startlingly different from that of the rest of you; it would surprise you all, so that you would have to look at the tree again in order to see whether the description was true. Then you would be still more astonished to find that it was much more true than any

other; and then you would not only discover that he had enabled you to understand the tree in a new way, but also that the rest of you had but half seen it, and that your descriptions were all wrong. He would not have used the words of other men to describe the tree; he would have used his own, and they would be very simple words indeed, like the words of a child.

For the child is incomparably superior to the average man in seeing the character of things; and the artist sees like the child. If I were to ask twenty little children—say, five or six years old—to look at the same tree that we were talking about, and to tell me what they think of it, I am sure that many of them would say wonderful things. They would come much nearer to the truth than the average university student, and this just because of their absolute innocence. To the child's imagination everything is alive—stones, trees, plants, even household objects. For him everything has a soul. He sees things quite differently from the man. Nor is this the only reason for the superiority of the child's powers of observation. His instinctive knowledge, the knowledge inherited from millions of past lives, is still fresh, not dulled by the weight of the myriad impressions of education and personal experience. Ask a child, for example, what he thinks of a certain stranger. He will look and say "I like him," or "I dislike him." Should you ask, "Why do you dislike that man?" the child, after some difficulty, will tell you that he does not like something in his face. Press the little fellow further to explain, and after a long and painful effort he will suddenly come out with a comparison of startling truth that will surprise you, showing that he has perceived something in the face that you did not see. This same instinctive power is the real power of the artist, and it is the power that distinguishes literature from mere writing. You will now better understand what I meant by saying that education will not teach a person how to make poetry, any more than a reading of books could teach a man how to make a table or a chair. The

faculty of artistic seeing is independent of education, and must be cultivated outside of education. Education has not made great writers. On the contrary, they have become great in spite of education. For the effect of education is necessarily to deaden and dull those primitive and instinctive feelings upon which the higher phases of emotional art depend. Knowledge can only be gained in most cases at the expense of certain very precious natural faculties. The man who is able to keep the freshness of the child in his mind and heart, notwithstanding all the knowledge that he absorbs, that is the man who is likely to perform great things in literature.

Now we have clearly defined what I mean by the feeling or emotion which the artist in literature must seek to catch and express. We took the simplest example possible, a tree. But everything, and every fancy, and every being to be treated of in literature must be considered in precisely the same way. In all cases the object of the writer should be to seize and fix the character of the thing, and he can do this only by expressing the exact feeling that the thing has produced in his mind. This is the main work of literature. It is very difficult. But why it is difficult we have not yet considered.

What happens when the feeling comes? You feel then a momentary thrill of pleasure or pain or fear or wonder; but this thrill passes away almost as suddenly as it comes. You can not write it down as fast as it vanishes. You are left then only with the sensation or first impression of the thing in your mind, and a mere memory of the feeling. In different natures the feeling is different, and it lasts longer in some than in others; but in all cases it passes away as rapidly as smoke, or perfume blown by a wind. If you think that anybody can put down on paper this feeling exactly as it is received, immediately upon receiving it, you are much mistaken. This can be accomplished only by arduous labour. The labour is to receive the feeling.

At first you will be exactly in the condition of a person

trying to remember a dream after waking up. All of us know how difficult it is to remember a dream. But by the help of the sensation, which was received during sleep, the feeling may be revived. My recommendation would be in such a case to write down immediately, as fully as you can, the circumstances and the cause of the emotion, and to try to describe the feeling as far as possible. It makes no difference then whether you write at all grammatically, nor whether you finish your sentences, nor whether you write backwards or forwards. The all-essential thing is to have notes of the experience. These notes should be the seed from which the plant will be made to grow and to blossom.

Reading over these quick notes, you will perceive that the feeling is faintly revived by them, especially by certain parts of them. But of course, except to you, the notes would still be of no possible value. The next work is to develop the notes, to arrange them in their natural order, and to construct the sentences in a correct way. While doing this you will find that a number of things come back to your mind which you had forgotten while making the notes. The development of the notes is likely to be four or five times longer, perhaps even ten times longer, than were the notes themselves. But now, reading over the new writing, you find that the feeling is not revived by it; the feeling has entirely vanished, and what you have written is likely to seem commonplace enough. A third writing you will find to better both the language and the thought, but perhaps the feeling does not revive. A fourth and a fifth writing will involve an astonishing number of changes. For while engaged in this tiresome work, you are sure to find that a number of things which you have already written are not necessary, and you will also find that the most important things remaining have not been properly developed at all. While you are doing the work over again, new thoughts come; the whole thing changes shape, begins to be more compact, more strong and simple; and at last, to your delight, the feeling revives—nay, revives more strongly

than at first, being enriched by new psychological relations. You will be surprised at the beauty of what you have done; but you must not trust the feeling then. Instead of immediately printing the thing, I should advise you to put it into a drawer, and leave it there for at least a month, without looking at it again. When you re-read it after this interval, you are certain to find that you can perfect it a great deal more. After one or two further remodellings it will be perhaps the very best that you can do, and will give to others the same emotion that you yourself felt on first perceiving the fact or the object. The process is very much like that of focussing with a telescope. You know that you must pull the tubing out a little further, or push it in a little further, and then pull it again and then push it again many times before you can get the sharpest possible view of a distant object. Well, the literary artist has to do with language what the sight-seer must do with a telescope. And this is the first thing essential in any kind of literary composition. It is drudgery, I know; but there is no escape from it. Neither Tennyson, nor Rossetti, nor anybody else of great importance in English literature has been able to escape from it within our own day. Long practice will not lighten this labour in the least. Your methods may become incomparably more skilful; but the actual volume of work will always be about the same.

I imagine that some of you might ask: "Is there no other way of expressing emotion or sentiment than that which you have been trying to describe to us? You say that the highest literature is emotional expression; but there is nothing more difficult than the work you have suggested; is there no other way?"

Yes, there is another way, and a way which I sometimes imagine is more in harmony with the character of the Japanese genius, and perhaps with the character of the Japanese language. But it is just as difficult; and it has this further disadvantage that it requires immense experience, as well as a very special talent. It is what has been called

the impersonal method, though I am not sure that this title is a good one. Very few great writers have been able to succeed at it; and I think that these few have mostly been Frenchmen. And it is a method suitable only for prose.

An emotion may be either expressed or suggested. If it is difficult to express, it is at least quite as difficult to suggest; but if you can suggest it, the suggestion is apt to be even more powerful than the expression, because it leaves much more to the imagination. Of course you must remember that all literary art must be partly suggestive—do not forget that. But by the impersonal method, as it has been called, it becomes altogether suggestive. There is no expression of emotion by the writer at all—that is to say, by the narrator. Nevertheless the emotion comes as you read, and comes with extraordinary power. There is only one very great writer of our own times who succeeded perfectly by this method—that was Guy de Maupassant.

A number of facts may be related, quite dispassionately and plainly, in such a manner as to arouse very great feeling; or a conversation may be so reported as to convey to the mind the exact feelings of the speakers, and even to suggest every look or action without any description at all. But you will see at once that the great difficulty here lies not so much in the choice of the word values (although that also is indispensable) as in the choice of facts. You must become a perfect judge of the literary worth—I mean the emotional value—of the simplest fact in itself. Now a man who can make such judgments must have had a vast experience of life. He must have the dramatic faculty greatly developed. He must know the conversational peculiarities of the language of all classes. He must be able to group men and women by types. And I doubt very much whether any person can do this while he is young. In most cases the talent and capacity for it can develop only in middle life, because it is only by that time that a person could have the proper experience. Therefore I could not recommend an attempt to follow this method at the beginning of a lit-

erary career, though I should strongly recommend every conceivable cultivation of the powers which may render it possible. Remember that in addition to experience it requires a natural faculty of perception as vivid as that of a painter. I have mentioned one name only in relation to this kind of work, but I should also call your attention to such stories as those of Prosper Mérimée — “Carmen,” “Mateo Falcone.” Occasionally you will find stories by Daudet, especially the little stories of the war between France and Germany, showing the method in question. But in these the style is usually somewhat mixed; there is some description attempted, showing a personal feeling. In the best work of Maupassant and of Mérimée, the personal element entirely disappears. There is no description, except in some conversational passages put into the mouth of another person; there are only facts, but they are facts that “take you by the throat,” to use a familiar expression.

I am sure that you are not yet quite satisfied by these definitions, or attempts at definitions, of the two working methods. I suppose that there are among you some good writers capable of writing in a few weeks, or even in a few days, a story which, if published in a Japanese periodical, would please thousands of readers, and would bring tears perhaps to many eyes. I do not doubt your powers to please the public, to excite their emotions, to strengthen their best sentiments; and I have said that it is the office of literature to do this. But if you ask me whether I would call this work literature, I should answer “No; that is journalism. It is work which has been quickly, and therefore imperfectly, done. It is only the ore of literature; it is not literature in the true sense.” But you will say, “The public calls it literature, accepts it as literature, pays for it as literature—what more do you want?”

I can best explain by an illustration. Next to the Greeks, the Arabs were perhaps the most skilful of poets and artists in describing beauty in words. Every part of the body had a beauty of a special kind; and this special beauty had a

special name. Furthermore all beauty was classified, ranked. If a woman belonged to the first rank of beauty, she was called by a particular name, signifying that when you saw her the first time you were startled, and that every time that you looked at her again after that, she seemed to become more and more and more beautiful until you doubted the reality of your own senses. A woman who belonged only to the second class of beauty would charm you quite as much the first time that you saw her; but after that, when you looked at her again you would find that she was not so beautiful as you had thought at first. As for women of the third, fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh classes of beauty, it is only necessary to say that the same rule held good; more and more defects would show themselves, according to the class, upon familiarity. Now the difference between cheap emotional literature of the journalistic sort and true literature, is exactly of the same kind. Cheap literature pays best for the time being, and great literature scarcely pays at all. But a great story written by a master seems more and more beautiful every time that you read it over again; and through generations and centuries it seems to be more and more beautiful to those who read it. But cheap literature, although it pleases even more the first time that it was read, shows defects upon a second reading, and more defects upon a third reading, and still more upon a fourth reading, until the appearance of the defects spoils all the pleasure of the reader, and he throws away the book or the story in disgust. So do the public act in the long run. What pleases them to-day they throw away to-morrow; and they are right in throwing it away, because it does not represent careful work.

One more general observation may be made, though you should remember that all general statements involve exceptions. But bearing this in mind, it is not too much to say that what are called classics in any language are classics because they represent perfect workmanship, and that books which are not classics usually represent imperfect workmanship.

III

The next subject to consider will be construction—that is to say, the architecture of the composition, the first rules for putting the thing together.

The most common difficulty of literary work is how to begin. Everybody, all over the world, is troubled just this way. A boy is, to whom you give a subject and tell him to write about it. How shall I begin? The greatest poets, the greatest essayists, the greatest dramatists are not all superior to this weakness. They all have to ask themselves the same question at times. The beginning is the difficulty. But the experienced learn how to avoid it. I believe that most of them avoid the trouble of beginning by very simple means.

What means?

By not beginning at all.

This may require a little explanation. In the old days there were rules for beginning, just as there were rules for everything else. Literature was subjected to the same imposition of rhetoric as were other compositions. We shall have more to say about this when we come to the subject of style. In history, in the critical essay, above all in philosophy, a beginning is very necessary. Scope and plan must be determined beforehand. You must know what you want to say, and how you intend to say it, and how much space will be required for saying it. Serious and solid work of the purely intellectual kind must be done according to a fixed and logical method. I am sure that I need not explain why. But it is quite otherwise in regard to poetry and other forms of emotional and imaginative literature. The poet or the story-teller never gets the whole of his inspiration at once; it comes to him only by degrees, while he is perfecting the work. His first inspiration is only a sudden flash of emotion, or the sudden shock of a new idea, which at once awakens and sets into motion many confused trains of other interrelated emotions and ideas. It ought

to be obvious, therefore, that the first inspiration might represent not the beginning of anything, but the middle of it, or the end.

I was startled some years ago in Kyoto while watching a Japanese artist drawing horses. He drew the horses very well; but he always began at the tail. Now it is the Western rule to begin at the head of the horse; that is why I was surprised. But upon reflection, it struck me, that it could not really make any difference whether the artist begins at the head or the tail or the belly or the foot of the horse, if he really knows his business. And most great artists who really know their business do not follow other people's rules. They make their own rules. Every one of them does his work in a way peculiar to himself; and the peculiarity means only that he finds it more easy to work in that way. Now the very same thing is true in literature. And the question, "How shall I begin?" only means that you want to begin at the head instead of beginning at the tail or somewhere else. That is, you are not yet experienced enough to trust to your own powers. When you become more experienced you will never ask the question; and I think that you will often begin at the tail—that is to say, you will write the end of the story before you have even thought of the beginning.

The working rule is this: Develop the first idea or emotion that comes to you before you allow yourself to think about the second. The second will suggest itself, even too much, while you are working at the first. If two or three or four valuable emotions or ideas come to you about the same time, take the most vigorous of them, or the one that most attracts you to begin with, unless it happens to be also the most difficult. For the greater number of young writers I should say: Follow the line of least resistance, and take the easiest work first. It does not matter at all whether it is to belong to the middle or to the end or to the beginning of a story or poem. By developing the different parts or verses separately from each other, you will soon discover this astonishing fact, that they have a tendency to

grow together of themselves, and into a form different from that which you first intended, but much better. This is the inspiration of form as construction. And if you try always to begin at the beginning, you are very likely to miss this inspiration. The literary law is, let the poem or the story shape itself. Do not try to shape it before it is nearly done. The most wonderful work is not the work that the author shapes and plans; it is the work that shapes itself, the work that obliges him, when it is nearly done, to change it all from beginning to end, and to give it a construction which he had never imagined at the time of beginning it.

You will see that these rules, results of practical experience, and perfectly well known to men of letters in every country of Europe, are exactly the opposite of the rules taught in schools and universities. The student is always told how to begin, and always puzzles himself about a beginning. But the men who make literature, the poets, the great story-tellers of the highest rank—they never begin. At least, they never begin at the beginning according to rule; they draw their horses from the hoof or the tail much more often than from the head.

That is all that I have to say about construction. You may think this is very little. I reply that it is quite enough. Instinct and habit will teach all the rest; and they are better masters than all grammarians and rhetoricians. What a man can not learn by literary instinct, and can not acquire by literary habit, he will never, never be able to obtain from rules or books. I am afraid that some of these opinions may seem very heretical, but I must now be guilty of a much greater heresy, when I introduce you to my ideas about style. I think—in fact I feel quite sure—that everything which has been written upon the subject of style is absolute nonsense, because it mistakes results for causes. I hold that such writing has done immense injury to the literary student in every part of the world; and I propose to prove to you that there is no such thing as style.

IV

I suppose you will ask me, "Why do you talk to us about the styles of Macaulay and Burke and Ruskin, if you do not believe that there is such a thing as style?" I will answer that it is my duty in lectures to explain as far as I can the reasons why different writers are valued; and in order to do this I must use the word "style" because it is customary, and because it indicates something. But the general notion attaching to that something is wrong. What was called "style" no longer exists. What is called "style" ought to be called something else—I should say "character."

If you look at the dictionary you will find various definitions of the word "style," but all these can be reduced to two. The first, or general style, is simply rhetorical; it means the construction of sentences according to a complete set of rules, governing the form and proportion of every part of the sentence. This once was style. There was a time when everybody was supposed to write according to the same rules, and in almost exactly the same way. We might expect that work done by different individuals according to such rules would be all very much alike; and as a matter of fact, there was a great likeness in the styles of French and English writers during the time that classical rules of composition were in force. I suppose you know that by classical I mean rules obtained from study of the Greek and Latin writers. The effort of Western men of letters during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was to imitate the old classics. So they had rules and measures for everything, for every part of a sentence, and for the position of every word. Therefore the styles did greatly resemble each other. In France the similarity I refer to was greater than in England, the French being a more perfect language, and much closer to Latin than English. For example, you would find it very hard to distinguish the style of a story written by Diderot from the style of a story written by Voltaire. The Encyclopædists, as they are called, wrote

very much after the same fashion. But a fine critic could detect differences, nevertheless. For no matter how exact the rules might be, the way of obeying them would differ according to differences of character, mental character; I need scarcely tell you that no two minds think and feel in exactly the same way. These differences of individual thinking and feeling necessarily give a slightly different tone to the work of each writer, even in the most rigid period of classical style. And this difference of tone is what we call style to-day—after the old classical rules have been given up. But there is still much popular error upon the subject of individual style. People think still with the ideas of the eighteenth century. They think that there are rules for individual style, because there are rules for classical style. They think that when we talk of the style of Macaulay or Froude, of Arnold or of De Quincey, we mean certain rules of composition by which the literary method of one man can be known from that of another. I should like to see any man living attempt to define these rules. The authors themselves could not define them. There are no such rules. This is altogether an error—and a very serious error. The differences are not due to any definable rules at all; they are due entirely to individual differences of character. And therefore I say that style, in the modern meaning of the word, is character.

This remains to be proved. Let us see what any author's style means to-day. It means that his method of constructing sentences differs appreciably from the method in which other men construct their sentences. And how is the difference shown? Chiefly in three ways:

1. By a certain metrical form of sentence peculiar to the writer.
2. By a certain quality of sound—sonority—in the sentence, not due merely to measure, but to a sense of the musical value of words.
3. By choice of words giving particular impressions of force or colour.

Now how can we define and illustrate these three peculiarities in any writer? I say that it cannot be done. One might, as Mr. Saintsbury did, take some sentences from the Bible, or from any volume of rich prose, and arrange the sentences so as to show their measure and accent, by the same means that the accent and measure of poetry can be shown. But even thus the cadences could not be shown. In order to show the cadence we should have to adopt the suggestion of a very clever American man of letters, Sidney Lanier, and set the sentence to music—I mean write it with a musical notation above every word, in addition to the use of accents and feet. So much might be done. But there would still remain the impossible task of defining an author's conception of word values. Words are very much like lizards; they change colour according to position. Two different writers using the same word to express the same idea can give to that word two entirely different characters, for much depends upon the place of the word in the sentence, or, in simpler language, upon the combination to which it belongs. And all this work is more or less unconscious on the author's part. He chooses not by rule, but by feeling, by what is called the literary instinct. Attempts have been made to define differences of this kind as exhibited in the styles of different authors by counting and classifying the verbs and adjectives and adverbs used by each. These attempts resulted in nothing at all. The same thing has been tried in regard to poetry. How many times Tennyson uses the adjective "red" and how many times Swinburne uses the adjective "red" may be interesting to know; but it will not help us in the least to understand why the value of the same adjective as Tennyson uses it is quite different from the value it obtains as used by Swinburne. All such differences must be due to psychological differences; therefore again I say that style is character.

And here let me utter a word of warning as to the uselessness of trying to study "style" in modern English authors. I have often been asked by students whom they

should read for the study of style—and other questions of that kind, showing that they did not understand what style really is. I must even venture to say that no Japanese student who has not spent a great many years away from Japan, can possibly understand differences of foreign style. The reason must be obvious. To appreciate differences of style in foreign authors, you must have an absolutely perfect knowledge of the foreign language; you must know all its capacities of rhythm, accent, sonority, and colour. You must know the comparative values of one hundred thousand words—and that for you is impossible. Therefore, so far as foreign literature is concerned, do not trouble yourselves trying to understand anything about style which does not depend upon old forms of rhetoric. And even if you should learn enough of the old rules to understand all the rules and sub-rules for the construction of an eighteenth century sentence, the want of training in Greek and Latin would make that knowledge almost useless to you. Style can be studied by you only in a very vague way. But I hold that way to be the most important, because it means character. What I have just said is, of course, a digression, because it is of Japanese and not of English composition that I am now going to speak.

Here you must recognize that I am sadly hampered by my absolute ignorance of the Japanese language. There are many things that I should like to talk to you about which it is out of my power to talk of for this reason. But there are general facts, independent of differences of language; and I believe that by keeping to those I shall not speak altogether in vain. In Japanese, or in any other language, the style of the writer ought to represent character, if any style, except a purely conventional one, be possible. And now what I want to say is this: If any writer does his best to perfect his work, the result of the pains that he takes will be style in the true sense. That is, his work will have an individuality, a character about it, differentiating it from all other work on the same subject. It will be

recognizably his, just as much as his face or his way of talking belongs to him and not to anybody else. But just in the same degree to which he does not take pains there will be less evidence of character, therefore less style. The work of many clumsy people will be found to have a general family resemblance. The work of the truly energetic and painstaking will be found to differ prodigiously. The greater the earnestness and the labour, the more marked the style. And now you will see what I am coming at—that style is the outcome of character developed through hard work. Style is nothing else than that in any country.

Here observe another fact. In the general history of literature, wherever we find a uniformity of style, we find no progress, and no very great literary achievements. The classic period of the English eighteenth century is an example. But the reverse is the case when general style disappears and individual style develops. That means high development, originality, new ideas, everything that signifies literary progress. Now one bad sign in the English literature of the close of the present century—that is, the English literature of to-day—is that style has almost disappeared. There is a general style again, as there was in the first part of the eighteenth century. Out of a hundred English novels published this month, you would scarcely be able to tell the difference between one author's writing and another's. The great stylists are dead, except Ruskin, and he has ceased to write. The world of fiction is again governed by a set of rules which everybody follows; and novel writing, as well as essay writing (with rare exceptions), has become a trade instead of an art. Therefore nothing great appears, and nothing great is likely to appear until a reaction sets in. There is of course the extraordinary genius of Kipling, who keeps aloof from all conventions, and has made new styles of his own in almost every department of pure literature. But there is no other to place beside him, and he probably owes his development quite as much to the fact that he was born in India as to

his really astonishing talent. And this brings me to the last section of this lecture—the subject of language. One fact of Kipling's work, and not the least striking fact, is the astonishing use which he has made of the language of the people. Although a consummate master of serious and dignified style when he pleases to be, he never hesitates to speak the speech of the streets when he finds that it serves his purpose better. Well, remember that Emerson once said, "The speech of the street is incomparably more forceful than the speech of the academy."

V

I now hope that you will have a little patience with me, as I am going to speak against conventions. I believe that Japanese literature is still to a great extent in its classic state, that it has not yet freed itself from the conventions of other centuries, and that the full capacities of the language are not expressed in its modern productions. I believe that to write in the vernacular, the every day speech of conversation and of the people, is still considered vulgar. And I must venture to express the hope that you will eventually fight boldly against these conventions. I think that it is absolutely essential. I do not believe that any new Japanese literature can come into existence, and influence life and thought and national character, and create for Japan what she very much needs, literary sympathy, until Japan has authors who will not be afraid to write in the true tongue of the people. One thing is certain, that the change must come. Whoever helps it to come will be doing his country an inestimable service, for so long as literature is shaped only to the understanding of a special class of educated persons, it cannot influence the nation at all. The educated classes of any country represent but a very small portion of the great whole. They must be the teachers; yet they can not teach in the language of the academy. They must teach in the language of the people, just as Wyclif, and Chaucer, and other great English men of letters

once found it necessary to do in order to create a new public opinion. Japan will certainly need a new popular literature; and although you may say that a certain class of popular literature is furnished by a certain class of writers, I would answer that a great popular literature cannot be furnished by uneducated persons, or by persons without a large range of knowledge; it must be furnished by scholars, or at least by men of taste, who are willing to speak to the masses in their mother tongue, and who care to touch the hearts of the millions. This is the true object of literature in any country. And so far as literary expression is power, think of what is lost by allowing that power to be cramped in the same way that English literature was cramped a hundred years ago. Here is a man who can delight ten or twenty thousand readers of culture, but who can not be more than a name to the nation at large. Here is another man who can speak to forty millions of people at once, making himself equally well understood by the minister in his office and by the peasant in his rice-field. Who is the greatest force? Who is able to do most for the future of his country? Who represents the greatest power? Certainly it is not the man who pleases only twenty thousand people. It is the man who, like the young English poet already mentioned, can speak to all his countrymen in the world at the same time, and with such power that everybody both feels and understands. Recently when the Russian emperor proposed disarmament of the European powers, our young poet sent to the London *Times* a little poem about a bear—a treacherous bear. There is no part of the English speaking world in which the poem was not read; and I am quite sure that it had much more effect on English public opinion than the message of the Emperor of Russia. That is power. The man who can speak to a hundred millions of people may be stronger than a king. But he must not speak in the language of the academy.