

THE
INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC SERIES
VOL. LV.

COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

BY

HUTCHESON MACAULAY POSNETT

M.A., LL.D., F.L.S.

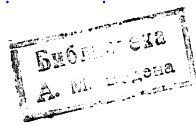
BARRISTER-AT-LAW; PROFESSOR OF CLASSICS AND ENGLISH LITERATURE
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND

AUTHOR OF "THE HISTORICAL METHOD," ETC.

LONDON

KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH & CO., 1, PATERNOSTER SQUARE

1886



Ä



411-499

(The rights of translation and of reproduction are reserved.)

Ä

P R E F A C E.

To assume a position on the border-lands of Science and Literature is perhaps to provoke the hostility of both the great parties into which our modern thinkers and educationists may be divided. The men of Literature may declare that we have fallen into the hands of the Philistines, and that the mere attempt to explain literary development by scientific principles is worthy of none but a Philistine. The men of Science may be inclined to underrate the value of a study which the unveiled presence of that mysterious element, imagination, makes apparently less definite than their own. In a word, our position may arouse hostility and fail to secure friendship. What, then, is our apology for assuming it?

To our friends, the men of Science, we would say that the culture of imagination is of the utmost service alike in the discovery of new truths and in the diffusion of truths already known; that the supposed hostility of Science to Literature, by discrediting this faculty, tends to lower our attainments alike in Science and Literature; and that the study on which we now propose to enter

affords a splendid field for the exercise at once of analysis and of imagination.

To our friends, the men of Literature, we would say that nothing has contributed more largely to lower the value of their studies in the eyes of thinking men than the old-fashioned worship of imagination, not merely as containing an element of mystery, but as altogether superior to conditions of space and time; that, under the auspices of this irrational worship, the study of Literature tends to become a blind idolatry of the Unknown, with a priesthood of textual pedants who would sacrifice to verbalism the very deity they affect to worship; but that the comparative study of Literature not only opens an immense field of fruitful labour but tends to foster creative imagination.

Mr. Matthew Arnold in his *Discourses in America* has recently discussed this supposed conflict between Science and Literature; and, though his treatment of the definition of Literature—a subject to which we shall presently refer—is by no means satisfactory, few will refuse to join with him in the hope that Literature may some day be “studied more rationally” * than it is at present. To such rational study this volume is intended as a contribution, however slight—an effort, it may be feeble, to treat Literature as something of higher import to man than elegant dilettantism or, what is possibly worse, pedantry devoted to the worship of words.

Should the present application of historical science to Literature meet with general approval, the establishment

* *Discourses in America*, p. 136.