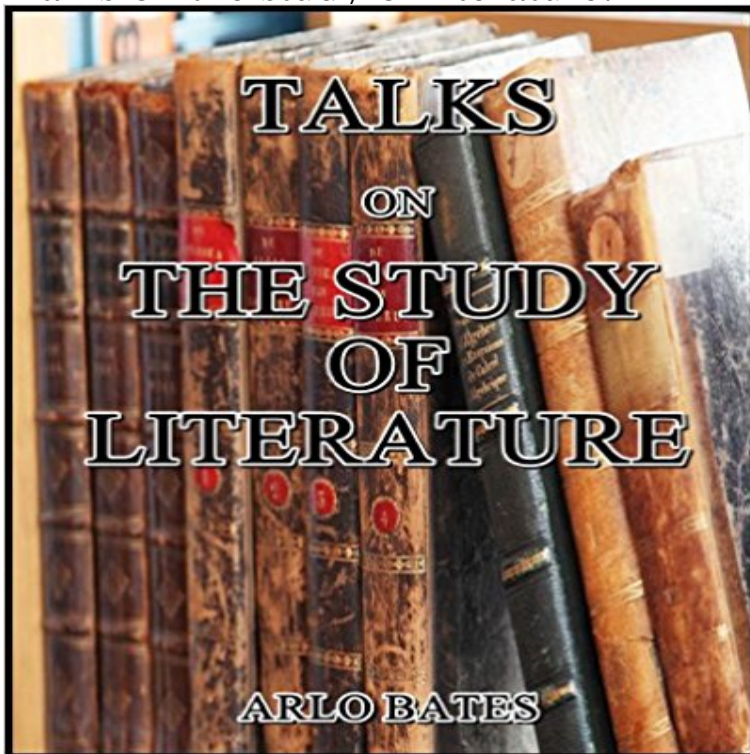


## Talks on the study of literature.



Technical excellence which displays the cleverness of the artist rather than imparts the emotion which is its object, defeats its own end. A book so elaborated that we feel that the author was absorbed in perfection of expression rather than in what he had to express leaves us cold and unmoved, if it does not tire us. The messenger has usurped the attention which belonged to the message. It is not impossible that I shall offend some of you when I say that Walter Pater's *Marius the Epicurean* seems to me a typical example of this sort of book. The author has expended his energies in exquisite excesses of language; he has refined his style until it has become artfully inanimate. It is like one of the beautiful glass flowers in the Harvard Museum. It is not a living rose. It is no longer a message spoken to the heart of mankind; it is a brilliant exercise in technique. Literature, then, is genuine emotion, adequately expressed. To be genuine it must come from the imagination; and adequate expression is that which in turn reaches the imagination. If it were not that the phrase seems forbiddingly cumbersome, we might, indeed, define literature as being such writings as are able to arouse emotion by an appeal to the imagination. A sensational story, what the English call a penny dreadful or a shilling shocker according to the cost of the bundle of cheap excitement, may be an appeal to the emotions, but it aims to act upon the senses or the nerves. Its endeavor is to work by the grossest and most palpable means. It is an assault, so to say, upon the perceptions. Books of this sort have nothing to do with imagination, either in reader or writer. They would be ruled out by all the tests which we have given, since they are not sincere, not convincing, not consistent, not true to life. One step higher in the scale come romances of abounding fancy, of which *She* may serve as an example. They are clever feats of intellectual jugglery, and

it is to the intellectual perceptions that they appeal. Not, it is true, to the intellect in its loftiest moods, but the understanding as distinguished from the feeling. No reader is really moved by them. The ingenuity of the author amuses and absorbs the attention. The dexterity and unexpectedness of the tale excite and entertain. The pleasure experienced in reading these books is not far removed from that experienced in seeing a clever contortionist. To read them is like going to the circus, a pleasant diversion, and one not without a certain importance to this over-wrought generation. It is amusement, although not of a high grade. Do not suppose, however, that I am saying that a story cannot have an exciting plot and yet be literature. In the restricted sense in which these lectures take the term, I should say that *The Adventures of Captain Horn*, an agreeable book which has been widely read of late, is not literature; and yet *Treasure Island*, upon which perhaps to some extent the former was modeled, most certainly is literature. The difference is that while Stockton in *Captain Horn* has worked with clever ingenuity to entertain, Stevenson in *Treasure Island* so vividly imagined what he wrote that he has made his characters human, informed every page with genuine feeling, and produced a romance permanently vital. The plot of those superb masterpieces of adventure, the *D'Artagnan Romances*, is as wild, perhaps as extravagant, as that of the marrow-curdling tales which make the fortunes of sensational papers; but to the excitement of adventure is added that unification, that humanization, that perfection of imaginative realism which mark Dumas as a genius. Talks on the study of literature, *The Study of Literature*, *The Language of Literature*, *Contemporary Literature*, *The Intangible Language*, *The Value of the Classics*, *The Texture of Poetry*

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