

**THE FRENCH REVOLUTION
AND THE ENGLISH
POETS: A STUDY IN
HISTORICAL CRITICISM**

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The French Revolution and the English Poets: A Study in Historical Criticism by Albert Elmer Hancock

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A STUDY IN HISTORICAL CRITICISM

BY

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PREFACE.

THIS little book is a revision of a study made at Harvard University and presented there as a dissertation for the doctor's degree. The work was completed in April, 1897,—before the appearance of Professor Dowden's book on the same subject,—and it is now published, by the advice of friends, as a slight contribution to the strictly scientific or historical criticism of the English Romantic Movement. The field, perhaps, has been already well ploughed; but the reploughing, with the historical method, has yielded some more or less important discoveries and has placed some old ideas in stronger lights. The repetition of certain matters of common knowledge has been necessary, at times, in order to preserve a logical and continuous argument. I am glad to record here many obligations to preceding studies, especially to the writings of Morley and Taine; to these aids I have added the results of my own observation and reflection. With a new collation of materials, new interpretations of certain facts, and the maintenance of a historical point of view, the book, I trust, has an individuality of its own, and therefore justifies its issue.

I wish to express my personal thanks to the instructors and friends who have helped me in my work on other occasions as well as on this; I recall with gratitude the many acts of kindness of Professor C. T. Winchester of Wesleyan, of Professors Hill, Kittredge, Wendell, and Gates of Harvard, of Dr. A. H. Thorndike of Adelbert, of Dr. Bakewell of Bryn Mawr, and of my colleague Dr. John A. Walz. Professor Gates, with whom I was closely associated in this work, has very kindly consented to prefix a few words on the proper use and value of the historical method. In subscribing to his remarks I may add that I regard the method only as a means to an end; it is a path, winding, laborious perhaps, often passing through disheartening undergrowth, but it leads to a summit and the broad clear view.

A. E. H.

HAVERFORD COLLEGE,
January 7, 1899.

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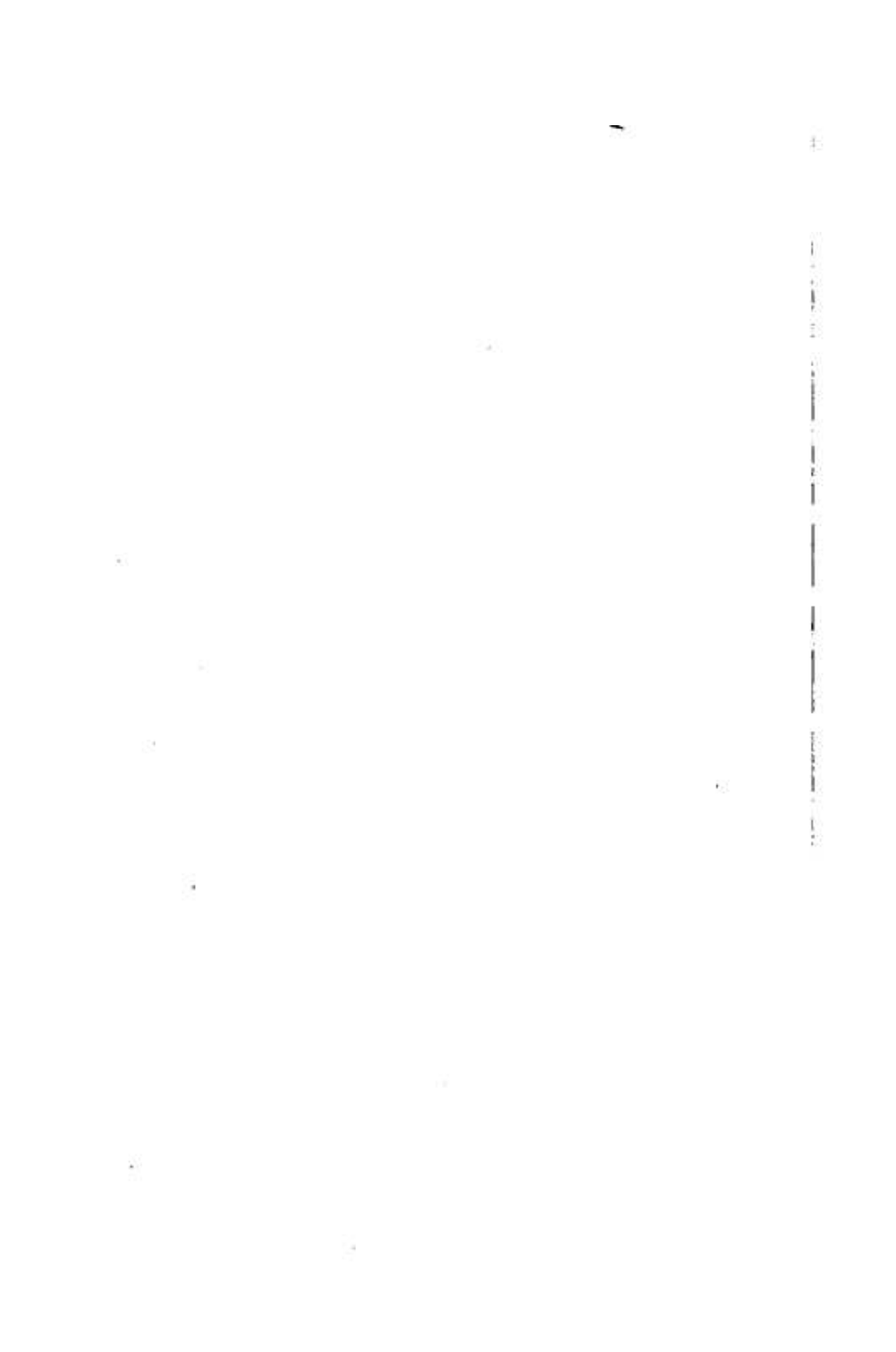
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A NOTE ON HISTORICAL CRITICISM.

LEWIS E. GATES.

To attempt a general defence of the use of the historical method in the study of literature—as if the method were still a novelty or an experiment—would argue a dim sense of what has happened, during the last hundred years, in the world of thought. During this period the historical method has re-created the sciences that deal with human nature, and to-day all these sciences speak an idiom that implies historical points of view and conceptions. It is a commonplace that the science of ethics, for example, has been reconstituted through the use of the historical method; ethical theory now recognizes as one of its fundamental principles the general truth that the individual man varies from age to age according to his relationship to a growing and developing social organism, and that his duties vary with his varying nature and his varying environment. Political theory has been transformed through the acceptance and use of similar truths. Theories of all sorts that concern the manifold nature of man and the play of his various powers will be found on analysis to agree in at least one point—their loyalty to historical conceptions. The framers of these theories no longer occupy them-

selves solely with generalizations about the abstract characteristics of an ideally constructed man. Rather they describe the development of human nature under some particular aspect, as it can be traced in actual history through orderly changes from generation to generation; or they study the individual man of a given time and place as made what he is through his special relation to the society to which he belongs,—a society with a definite structure and definite functions, which determines in various calculable ways the character and habits and minds and imaginations of those who serve it. And the continual postulate in all these theorizings is that no set of man's activities (or their products) can be thoroughly understood except as they are studied in their historical development and in their sociological relations to other human activities.

Such being the unmistakable trend of modern thought, students of literature surely need make no apology for adopting the historical point of view and using the historical method. In fact it is to these very influences that can largely be traced the renovation of literary criticism during the last hundred years. He would indeed be an audacious objector who should contemn the changes in literary theory directly due to historical and sociological methods of study. The origin of epic poetry, the value of the Three Unities as laws of the drama, the proper use to be made of Greek culture by modern artists,—these are some of the subjects which at once come to mind as having been put in a new light during the last century through historical treatment; to exhaust the list of such subjects would be to run through pretty