poetic truht refers to the subject-matter of poetry-the experience that the poet wants to express. The law of poetic beauty refers to the form and style of poetry.

Then Arnold takes up the different ways of judging poetry, and tells us about three estimates of poetry. The historic estimate judges a poet in relation to his own time. The personal estimate concerns the personal likes or dislikes of the critic or the reader. These two are not very reliable methods. The third estimate is called the real estimate or the touchstone method. This is a very important method and has been discussed seprately in a later lesson (Lesson 5b.3.)

According to him excellence depends on the matter as well as the manner of poetry. Chaucer has been of immeasurable influence. His viewpoint is tolerant and humorous and his poetry is smooth and melodious. But he lacks "high seriousness" which is a quality all great poetry must have.

Just as he does not give the status of classics to chaucer's works, so does he deny it to Dryden and Pope as well. He holds that the eighteenth century was an age of good prose but not of poetry. Here Arnold shows the bias of his classicism. Nor is he able to overcome the danger of personal estimate when he praises Burns for his scottish poems and not his English ones. He also fails in comparative criticism when he compares him with Chaucer, for Burns is a lyrical poet and chaucer a narrative one. The two should not be compared.

In this essay Arnold tries to answer two important questions— what is poetry and what is its function in society. He answers both of these questions most successfully in the very beginning of the essay : poetry is a criticism of life according to the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty, and that it consoles and sustains mankind to an extent that neither philosophy nor religion can.

5a. 3 Colcusion

It is noticeable that Arnold's criticism is always written in a very attractive and assertive manner. he is not so rugged as Dr. Johnson yet in his own way he has as much assertiveness as the great Dr. had. He shares another feature with Dr. Johnson in that he is very practical in his approach to poetry. He has given us many memorable phrases as tools of criticism like "touchstone", "natural magic", "high seriousness", "criticism of life",etc. *The study of Poetry* embodies some of his best theories.

5a.4 Important Questions.

(a) Long answer questions :

(i) Summarise in your own words the main ideas of *The Study of Poetry*.

(ii) What idea do you get of Arnold as a critic from *The Study of Poetry* ?

(b) Short answer questions :

(i) Explain the term "high seriousness"

(ii) What is meant by "poetic truth"?

(iii) What is meant by "poetic beauty"?

4a.7 Suggested Readings

Wllek, Rene'— A History of Modern Criticism.

Watson, G.— The Literary Critics.

Ford, B. ed — From Dryden to Johnson (Pelican Guide to English Literature, vol. 4)

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UNIT–5

Lessson–5b

Litarary Criticism : Arnold
The Study of Poetry (b)

Lesson Structure

5b.0 The Objective
5b.1 Poetry as a Criticism of Life
5b.2 Poetry as a Substitute for Religion
5b.3 The Touchstone Method for judging Poetry.
5b.4 Conclusion
5b.5 Important Questions
5b.6 Suggested Readings

5b. 0 The Objective

In the previous lesson you have learnt about the important ideas expressed in Arnold's famous essay *The Stury of Poetry*. In this lesson you will learn about the three main ideas expressed in it : (a) poetry as a criticism of life, (b) poetry as a substitute for religion, and (c) the touchstone method of judging poetic excellence.

5b. 1 Poetry as a Criticism of Life

There are many ways in which poetry how been defined. The earliest and the most famous of these is the one given by Plato : "Poetry is an imitation of Life." This was followed by Aristottle and other ancient critics. The same phrase was taken up by the English critics of the Renaissance, but with a difference. When Sir Philip Sidney and his contemporaries used the phrase "imitation of life" they did not mean mere slavish copying. They meant that poetry was an interpretation of life.

Arnold gave this definition of poetry a new depth by calling it a "criticism of life". In his essay on wordworth he declares :

> "Poetry is at bottom a criticism of life : The greatness of a poet lies in his powerful and beautiful application of ideas to life."

By calling poetry a criticism of life Arnold assigns to it an extemely important role. This is a result of the claim that poetry will one day supplant religion. It is only the best

poetry that can take this high place and the best poetry is also a criticism of life. Poetry can criticise life only if the poet is absolutely honest and sensible. In life there is truth as well as untruth. It is the task of poetry to differentiate between good and evil, and truth and untruth. But this is not enough, for life cannot be divided neatly into these two divisions. The border-line between them is a very wide one and there is much that is half-true. Poetry highlights that which is but half true ad separates it from the true and the untrue. It is by doing this that poetry can give a true criticism of life. Arnold emphasizes this :

> "A criticism of life will be a power in proportion as the poetry conveying it is excellent rather than inferior, sound rather than unsound or half sound, true rather than untrue or half true."

Arnold says that poetry should present a criticism of life, thereby highlighting the content of poetry. He is, however, quite emphatic on the point that in order to be effective poetry should pay attention to the style as well. He puts this idea in a well-known sentence:

> "Criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the law of poetic truth and poetic beauty."

These two elements, poetic truth and poetic beauty, are of the very highest importance for good poetry. Arnold tells us that not only does poetry differentiate between truth and untruth and half-truth, but it does so in elegant and beautiful language. In fact style and substance must go hand in hand to give excellence to poetry.

Arnold's views, therefore, place equal importance on diction as well as subject. It is only when both are of an equally high order that poetry becomes a true criticism of Life. His designation of poetry as a criticism of life has been widely commented upon by many critics. H.W. Garrod agrees with Arnold and comments in addition :

> "Poetry has organic unity and therefore it is a criticism of the choos of Life."

5b. 2 Poetry as a substitute for Religion

Arnold's claim for poetry is a very high one. He is of the opinion that a day will come when poetry will take the place of religion. This, of course, has to be understood against the background of victorian times. The victorian Era was an age of doubt and despair. People started to lose faith in their religion. Scientific theories like Darwin's theory of evolution together with the prevalence of corruption in Church brought about this loss of faith. Yet man is basically an intensely religious creature and wants to have faith in religion. Arnold knew that man will not be able to live without religion and he tried to find a substitute for it in poetry. This proves his faith in poetry.

First of all, religion can differentiate between truth and untruth, but it cannot guide us where half-truth is concerned (see 5b.1. above). Yet life is full of half-truths. Poetry can help us here, because it can deal with that which is half-true and half-false. It is by doing this that poetry can perform the task that is performed by religion as well as the task that goes beyond the scope of religion.

One of the most important tasks performed by religion is that of dissolving all doubts about moral issues. Here poetry does all that religion does and more, for it can differentiate not only between that which is good and that which is evil, but also judges those things that have elements of both.

Arnold points out that religion had ceased (in his day) to support and console the human spirit. Right in the beginning of the essay he says :

> There is not a creed which is not shaken, not a dogma which is not shown to be qestionable.

He points out that poetry is different from all dogmas and creeds in that it depends on ideas, and ideas cannot grow old or prove to be false. It is this feature that qualifies poetry for the high station of being a substitute for religion according to Arnold.

He however, is careful to point out that it is only the best poetry that is fit for this purpose, not all poetry. It is only poetry which is a criticism of life that can take the place of religion. Such poetry must have the quanlities of "high seriousness" as well as beauty of style. Not all poetry has both of these qualities. It is with this in mind that he offers a few touchstones from the very best poetry to be found in Europe from Homer onwards.

Arnold's high claims for poetry have been severaly criticised by many later writers. What Tillotson says is very revealing :

> True poetry for him could not but be as solemn as the Church.

This reference to the Church is exactly what Arnold's claims for poetry logically leads to. For him poetry is going to support religion. It is to be expected that only that poetry which comes nearest to religion will fulfil this expectation, not light and frivolous poetry.

5b. 3. The Touchstone Method

Arnold first propounds his "touchstone"method in this essay. Here he gives a very high status to poetry declaring that poetry can be a substitute for religion. In order to fulfil that sacred task poetry has to be of very high quality. It is while talking about the way to judge the quality of poetry that Arnold introduced the touchstone method.

According to him there are three ways of judging poetry : the historical estimate, the personal estimate and the real estimate. This third method is the trust and the most reliable

method for judging peotry. The real estimate enables the reader to separate the best poetry from the inferior. This is important because it is only the best poetry that can become a substitute for religion.

Arnold proposes that the reader should always keep in mind some examples of poetry of the very best kind and use them as touchstones for judging other poetry :

> "To have always in one's mind lines and expressions of the great masters and to apply them as touchstones to other poetry."

Just as a goldsmith judges the purity of gold by rubbing it against a touchstone, so a reader can easily judge poetry by comparing it with other poetry of past ages that has stood the test of time. Arnold knew that it was difficult for an ordinary reader to know what is good poetry and what is not. He therefore gives a few touchstones which will help the reader. He takes lines and passages from writers like Homer, Sophocles, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton and ohters and tells the readers to compare any other poetry with these.

The touchstones he offers have great range and variety in every possible way. In point of time his examples range over more than two thousand years, for he takes examples from Homer and also from Milton. He covers different types of literature, that is, epic (Homer, Virgil, Milton), religious poetry (Dante, Milton), narrative poetry, drama (Sophocles, Shakespeare). As far as language goes he has Greek, Latin, Italian, French and English. His touchstones thus are above the limitations of time, space, language and also religion.

Arnold's Touchstone method is of great practical value, yet it has been criticised by many later writers. Wimsatt and Books are against this method because it encourages the reader to neglect to read long works and only to pay attention to isolated lines and passages:

> "The touchstone method is an open appeal to chunk lets."

5b. 4. Conclusion

Arnold' love of Hellenic culture, literature and art are reflected in the large body of criticism he produced. His views on poetry and the important role of the critic in society mark him out as one of the original minds of the victorian Era. His basic aim as a critic is cultural regeneration of society.

He was a poet and a critic. His criticism, thus, is the product of his personal experience as a poet. He was appointed the Professor of Poetry at Oxford and this helped him to develop his critical theories. Two of his important works are *On Translating Homer* and *The Study of Celtic Literature*. His critical work can be broadly divided into two categories : (a) on the art of poetry, and (b) on the art of criticism. He was intensely aware of the havoc caused by scientific theories and the Industrial Revolution, and pinned his faith on poetry. He held that

poetry is superior to both science and religion because these do not console and sustain mankind as poetry does. He looked for ideals models in poetry to the great poets of bygone times because their work does console and sustain us. Like Aristotle, he holds high seriousness as the hallmark of great poetry. Together with the quality of natural magic (that is, beauty of expression), high seriousness is what gives sublimity to poetry and makes it attain eternal value that surpasses the limits of time and space, language and religion.

5b.5 Important Questions.

(a) Long answer questions :

(i) Evaluate Arnold's definition of poetry as a criticism of life.

(ii) Give in your own words the arguments for poetry as a substitute for religion.

(iii) Explain the Touchstone method as given by Arnold.

(b) Short answer questions :

(i) Write down the languages from which Arnold chooses his touchstones.

(ii) Make a list of the literary forms Arnold chooses his touchstones from.

5b.6 Suggested Readings

Wllek, Rene'— A History of Modern Criticism.

Watson, G.— The Literary Critics.

Ford, B. ed — From Dryden to Johnson (Pelican Guide to English Literature, vol. 4)

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Lessson–5c

Critical Analysis of Unseen Passages

Lesson Structure

5c.0 The Objective
5c.1 Introduction to Practical Criticism
5c.1.1. The Process of Practical Criticism
5c.2 Criticism of Poetry.
5c.3 Criticism of Prose
5c.4 Important Questions
5c.5 Suggested Readings

5c. 0 The Objective

This lesson aims at making the student familiar with familiar with the technique of evaluating unseen passages of prose and poetry. This is known as practical Criticism. There are many methods of doing it and the simplest of these methods will be given here.

5c. 1 Introduction to Practical Criticism

A Literary text like a prose piece or a poem has two important aspect : form and content. The content deals with a subject or an idea whereas the form deals with the way it has been expressed. The critic will have to pick up the main idea of the passage and then comment on the language, style and other literary devices that the writer has used. A simple idea can be expressed in a complex way, and the opposite is also true : a complex idea expressed simply.

Practical criticism is in itself a vast subject. Many critical schools exist and some of them have been explained in the first three units. They all have their own methods. It is not necessary for the student to follow any of them. They has only to show that he has read and understood and appreciated the passage in his own way. The processed outlined in the next section will help him in doing so.

First of all the student should understand the passage and it is necessary that the passage be read with attention for this. At this elementary stage what matters is understanding the meaning, so no need is there to pay attention to unfamiliar words and phrases. The meaning of a word usually becomes clear while reading the text. It understanding the meaning is hampered by an unfamiliar word, use a dictionary. Then, after understanding the basic meaning