



The Literary Department

Learning for Life



Literary Culture in the League

BY REV. F. L. FARWELL, B.A.

We Epworth Leaguers live in an age that demands our best thought and our best service, and to think best and to serve best we must have strong, broad and broad-visioned, able to distinguish between the non-essential and the essential, not emphasizing the one, but laying hold of the other; ready to seize the situation and to meet the need; thinking rapidly, willing quickly, and acting promptly. This sanity and self-control and large vision, the elements of a strong personality, are developed and strengthened most appreciably by literary culture, that is to say, cultivation of the self by a systematic, continuous and purposeful study of the best literature and a well regulated exercise of the mind, by analysis and synthesis, by destructive criticism and constructive judgment in the realms of thought and reason, and by general literary culture.

Literature is the expression of human thought and effort and ideals, and for the Epworth Leaguer to be privileged to ramble through its various pages is to reap the benefit of the experience of all the ages.

The classification of literature varies according to the method chosen. If we classify according to national proclivities, we may have English, American, Canadian, German, French, Italian, Scandinavian literature, and so on. Adopting another classification, we have literature of literature, of art, of architecture, of philosophy, of politics, of economics, of morals, of religion; or there may be the literature of poetry, of essay, of humor, of romance, of drama, and so on. There is about this classification, however, something mechanical and artificial; and to study literature according to any or all of these classifications is not conducive to the best results. It is true that Chaucer, or Shakespeare, or Milton, or Shelley, or Keats, or Tennyson, or Browning, or Poe, or Longfellow, any or all of these offer a field of literature that cannot but be fruitful. It is true that Dickens, Scott, Macaulay, Carlyle and Emerson, are all instructive, stimulating and inspiring, and yet when we have given our best to the study of the literature of these authors, and have memorized and even made part of ourselves choicest bits of poetry or prose, we feel that there is in their messages to humanity a richness we have not tasted and a meaning we have not sought, for the reason that we are not acquainted with the conditions of the age in which they wrote, nor do we always know the motives which prompted their song or prose, and having failed to learn the conditions and to know the motives, we have failed to catch the spirit of their message. The devotion of our time to the study of great literary periods, such as the Renaissance or the Victorian era, having regard to the moral, social and political conditions of the people, the motive of the writer, and so on, will yield to the reader a richer culture and a larger outlook than could possibly be developed by the study of a single writer or a number of writers without reference to the age in which they lived.

Or again, literature may be roughly classified into retrospective, introspective and prospective or prophetic. The retrospective is a record of the past and an expression of its life; the introspective is metaphysical, self-examining, resulting in revelation of the feelings and thoughts and motives of a people and of the race; the prospective or prophetic is an expression of the ideals

and aspirations of the human heart and of humanity.

The Bible is a book which lends itself perfectly to classification of this kind. The historical books of the Old Testament and the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles of the New Testament forth clearly and fully the life of a people striving after a fuller and more perfect conception of God and His purpose. The Psalms, Proverbs, Job, the Songs of Solomon and Ecclesiastes, are introspective and bear forth the inner struggles, the doubts and fears, the hopes and aspirations of men in their individual capacities and as the representatives of a nation yearning toward the unseen. The Prophets, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Amos, Micah, Hosea, are wonderful interpreters of the best and noblest ideals of their respective ages, and in the light of these ideals see in the future their highest development and realization.

All literature lends itself more or less to this classification. Sometimes the productions of a single author may be so divided. Tennyson is a splendid example of this class. His songs and ballads record the spirit and might of English power. His "In Memoriam" expresses the doubts and fears of the age in which he lived in respect of philosophy and religion, and the contest going on between the old and the new. In "Locksley Hall" he grows prophetic and sees visions of "airy navies grappling in the central blue" which are today in actual process of realization. The study of literature in this way proves exceedingly instructive and helpful.

As to the kind of literature we should read, we are agreed that in first place stands the Bible. In simplicity of narrative, in unselfishness of motive and in grandeur of vision in interpretation of the highest and noblest in life, reaching out to the perfections of God Himself, the Bible as a literary book, stands alone.

Next in order of importance, because of their tendency to develop a strong, optimistic, aggressive type of life, I would suggest philosophical and historical studies, and church history, with special regard for the great underlying principles along which Christian civilization has progressed. Then secular history, with special reference to the culmination of great movements, such as the fall of the Roman Empire, the Renaissance, the French Revolution, the Revival of the Eighteenth Century, the colonization movement of the Seventeenth, Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries; the economic and social progress of the last half century, and last, but not least, the great formative forces of our own national life and its relation to the world life. Then follow biography, such as John Knox, John and Charles Wesley, Wm. Ewart Gladstone, Abraham Lincoln—the greatest political humanitarian of his or of any age—Wm. Lyon MacKenzie, Jonathan Edwards, Egerton Ryerson. And then come essays in Macaulay, Carlyle, Emerson, poetry, romance, the drama, associated with such names as Shakespeare, Browning, Thackeray, Dickens, Longfellow, Whittier, Oliver Wendell Holmes.

Do not despise magazines and newspapers, although I suppose journalism is not really a department of literature, and yet I know of no better medium of conveying a nation's ideals to a world than through the medium of the press, and if this condition were fulfilled, newspaper reading would be one of the best mediums of self-development and enlightenment. All the kinds of literature I have mentioned are helpful and inspiring to the discriminating reader and student in mak-

ing him a better man, a better citizen and therefore a greater power for service. Yet very frequently the desire for such reading is absent from the minds of our Leaguers. They must be aroused and stimulated by a strong literary leader and by interesting them in debating clubs, oration contests, the writing of essays, poetry, short stories, satires, dramas, etc. Draw out the Leaguers by giving them an opportunity to show their best and you will be surprised at the latent talent that will express itself in some one of the phases mentioned.

Every League should also have a well selected library, with an active librarian at the head of the circulating department, and in addition, wherever possible, educational classes should be organized and led by competent teachers. We hope to have organized within a year or two years at least in association with our Sunday School and Epworth League department, and if we can, with our Methodist colleges, a correspondence school and a summer training and arts school for Epworth League and Sunday School workers. The literary department is the real key more for our young people than it is doing to-day. But it needs in the general organization and in the local work strong, steady and broad-visioned leadership, sane and serious thinking, hard and aggressive work, and a conscientiousness of the really great importance and absolute necessity of literary culture as an essential quality of the best and most aggressive Christian service.

Toronto, Ont.

An "Epworth Era" Evening

When an enlarged list of subscribers is received we are sometimes curious enough to seek information as to how they were won. The following will explain how they did it in Listowel, Ont. In answer to our letter of enquiry, the pastor, Rev. R. D. Hamilton, supplied us with these facts:

The pastor volunteered to take charge of an evening of interest of the Epworth League paper, "THE EPWORTH ERA." The programme was arranged in the form of a literary entertainment with a few choice selections of music, vocal and instrumental, interspersed. Two readings from THE EPWORTH ERA—one from the first issue of the paper and the other from the last number—were given by members of the League. Then the pastor followed with a short address, giving a ray outline of the Epworth League to the launching of the "Era," showing a copy of the first volume and outlining some of the prominent features.

A year's papers—twelve in number—were taken apart and pasted together in twelve strips and hung upon the wall so the Leaguers could see the amount of printing they would get in one year. 288 pages of reading matter, 9 x 12 in. The columns were pasted in one long strip they would make 800 feet, or if put in ordinary book form would make a volume of over 600 pages of first class reading matter—altogether for 50 cents.

The pastor commended the paper and expressed the belief that one could not find its superior upon the American continent, all things being considered. At the close of the address the pastor and president made a canvass of the Leaguers present and secured fifteen subscribers to add to the list.

The evening proved interesting, and profitable to the Leaguers, the new subscribers will be profited by the Era's monthly visits, the paper will have a wider circulation, and the editor will be pleased.

"GO, AND DO THOU LIKEWISE."

We need not say that both editor and publisher fully agree and join in this wise and scriptural admonition.

"We need to do God's work more than He needs us to do it."—Gypsy Smith