

INTERPRETATION OF POETRY.

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PROTRACTED discussions between men of antagonistic religious and scientific creeds sometimes arise from fundamental differences of mental constitution and of education; but frequently they arise merely from misunderstanding of terminology and proposition. How many bitter and rancorous debates might have been averted by a mathematical precision in the definition of terms to be used.

Owing to a wise administration, quite alive to new methods of education, the schools of Ontario have recently made great and gratifying progress in the study of English. The Universities are giving prominence to the study of the language of Shakespeare and Tennyson, with results that seem to warrant a further extension of the English Department. Perhaps a more generally admired movement never affected the curriculum. There are vague rumours that some slight jealousies exist between the friends of English and the friends of Natural Sciences, or between the moderns and the classical men, but even the fear that the new study may encroach upon Greek and physics is magnanimously forgotten in the thorough approval of an effort to push the claims of our own tongue.

It is not surprising that the growth of the English department has led to many views of the best methods of teaching literature and the science of language. The rule that the pupil must do what he can for himself has been questioned very little and there has been a strong reaction against books of second-hand criticism and histories of literature. There is a desire that students shall *learn to read* in the best sense of the word, and that they shall read extensively enough

to acquire by their own efforts a familiar acquaintance with our authors, their minds, and their modes of expression.

At present High School pupils learn to read with thoroughness and appreciation; little time is given to the history of literature; the extensive reading which is to bring the wide familiarity with our great writers is left to the University course, or to the student's efforts for himself. I cannot avoid the conclusion that in consideration of the number of High School pupils who never proceed to a college course it would be wise to add to our secondary course a Literature Primer such as Stopford Brooke's, to serve rather as a reader's guide than as a work of criticism of history. In our Collegiate Institutes such a primer could be mastered in one of the junior forms, and the results would surely be of the greatest worth. The reaction against the old use of Collier and Craik has been extreme. But this is a minor matter, and certainly the work of our masters is to teach boys and girls to read thoroughly well. The purpose of the present paper is to add something to the flood of light that has been thrown on the subject of literature teaching by answering some of the questions involved in that great and all-important question, What is good reading?

There are still wise and learned educationists who object to minute analysis of a poem, and advocate a broad general discussion of its meaning. Is it possible that remembrances of grammar lessons on Milton, and grammatical analysis of Hamlet's soliloquy have a distinct connection with this opinion? Some remarks I have recently heard point to the con-