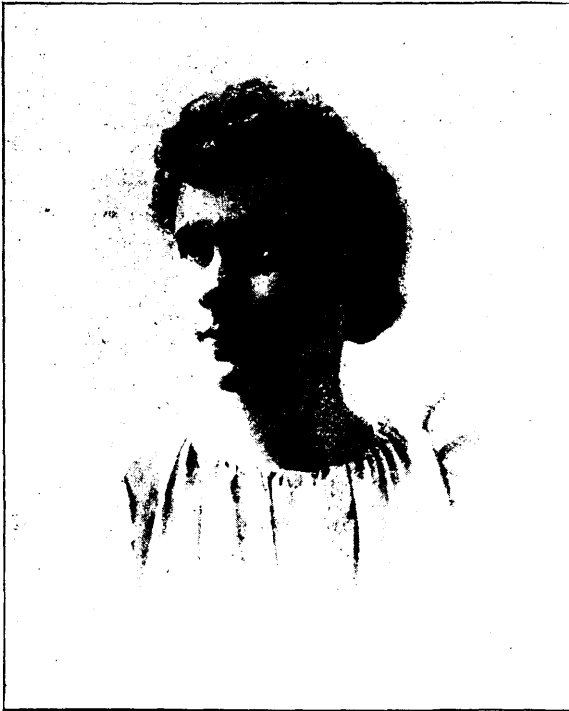


BEHIND THE READING DESK.

BY THOMAS O'HAGAN, M.A., PH.D.

READING has of late years become a very popular factor in the entertainment of the people. Scarcely a programme is now made up in which the elocutionist does not figure. But with this widespread demand for reading has set in a manifest degeneracy in the character of the readings which obtain at our public entertainments.



MARGUERITE DUNN.

There was a time when reading meant literary interpretation crowned by every grace of mind and soul—the consummate flower of true culture and scholarship: now, however, it has lost this primary and very essential signification, and means a hundred other things, but not this one thing necessary.

I attribute this evil that has of late years possessed our Reading Desk to the innumerable “shoddy” schools of elocution which have sprung up across the border in well nigh every city of the Republic—schools whose sole aim is to grist out graduates bearing in every part of their elocutionary outfit the trade mark of their respective

schools as distinctly emphasized as the brand upon a Texas steer. This is notably an age of sham, as is evidenced in the aged patriarch who dyes his hair to cheat high heaven in the bestowal of her gift of kindly but frosty years, that he may thereby the better coquette with the things of the earth.

I remember in my boyhood of being privileged to hear the great English reader, Bellew, and I have treasured up the memory of that delightful evening ever since. I am not much given to the admiration of things English, but I must confess that nearly all the *really* great readers I have ever heard have hailed from that “tight little island.” As the scholar, emerging from Cambridge, or Oxford, or Trinity, Dublin, has much less sham in his educational make up than the

graduate of any other institution I know of, so the English reader carries about him a polish, a culture, a grace and ease of manner, as well as a genuine scholarship, which are but vaguely seen in the readers of our land!

Let it be remembered that I am not