

✻ LITERARY. ✻

A GERMAN CRITIC'S ESTIMATE OF BURNS.

THE ancient German critic Scherr, in his History of Literature, refers to Scotland as being the well-spring of poetry of the people, and to "two poets of the first rank" to whom a new order of English literature was mainly due, *i.e.*, Burns and Scott. The following is a translation of his *critique* on Burns :

"Robert Burns, who carried the Scottish popular poetry to its highest development and thereby essentially contributed to renewing the youth of British national literature, was born Jan. 25, 1759, in a poor clay cottage in Ayrshire, and died, worn out by sorrow and care, July 21, 1796, at Dumfries. If the much abused and seldom deserved title of *nature poet* belongs to any, it belongs to Burns, who, while following the plough—alone and solely through the strength of his genius—soared out of the soul-cramping sphere of poverty into the sunny ethereal heights of poesy. He was a born poet, says Carlyle, Burns' countryman and best critic. Poetry was the heavenly element of his being. Poverty, obscurity, and all other evils save the desecration of himself and his art, were light to him. Pride and worldly agitation lay beneath his feet, and he looked alike on the nobleman and the servant, on the prince and the beggar, and on all that bore the stamp of manhood with clear recognition, with brotherly love, with fellow-feeling and sympathy. A virtue as of green fields and mountain skies lives in his poetry; it recalls to us the life of nature and natural country folk. There lies in him a firm strength and yet abundantly a sweet inborn grace. He is tender and is strong, yet without constraint or apparent effort. He melts the heart or kindles it with a power which seems accustomed and familiar. We see in him the softness, the tender sympathy of a woman, united with the strength, the deep earnestness and the passionate fire of a hero. Tears lay in him, and a consuming fire lay like lightning hidden in the drops of the summer cloud. He has in his breast a tune for every note of human feeling. Even the most hasty survey of Burns' poetry will confirm this praise of Carlyle's, while a closer acquaintance with the poet must make him dear alike to soul and heart. Would you find out how a true nature poet raises the commonest occurrences of country life into the sphere of penetrative thought or of humor?—read Burns' 'Stanzas to a Mountain Daisy,' or his 'John Barleycorn.' Would you know how reckless sport and laughter can be skillfully united with a penetrating awe?—let him tell you the tale of 'Tam O' Shanter.' Would you discover how the heart of the people clings to Home and Fatherland and national memories?—listen to the plaintive melodies of Burns' 'My Heart's in the Highlands,' 'Bonnie Castle Garden,' &c., &c. The innermost rejoicing of happy love breaks out in his song 'It was upon a Summer's Night;' a glow of love and tenderness surviving

death and the grave breathe in the wonderful poetic songs to the praise of Mary Campbell—Highland Mary, To Mary in Heaven, &c.—and from the same poet heart with these lingering sighs sprang also the triumphal song of democratic self-consciousness and boldest manhood, 'A Man's a Man for a' that.' Well might Burns, in one of his songs, glance with just pride at his position as a free Scottish folk-singer. While he infused fresh softness into the poetry of his native land, he has at the same time enriched the literature of the world. The wonderful sympathy which Burns found among all classes of the Scottish people brought popular poetry into rich blossom and increased the number of popular poets."

THE THIRD ESSENTIAL.

NEARLY three hundred years ago Lord Bacon wrote the following sentence in an essay on studies : "Reading maketh a full man ; conference a ready man, and writing an exact man." The title which Bacon gave his essay is significant, when we consider that the object a student has in view when he goes to College is to study, or, putting it in another way, to pursue his studies. Bacon tells us that to do this three things are necessary. There must be reading, writing, and lastly, just as important as these, if not more so, conference. The ordinary College curriculum makes abundant provision for the first two of these necessities, but allows the third to go begging. This is a state of things that is greatly to be deplored, and one which we should hasten to remedy. There is no denying that the ability to get on one's feet when occasion requires, and to express one's thoughts in a ready manner, which is both fluent and forcible, is an accomplishment of incalculable advantage. There is also no denying the fact, that it is only the odd man in a hundred who is graced with the accomplishment, and that only a very small proportion of College graduates possess it. This important element of education is universally relegated for development to the debating clubs and societies which students are in the habit of forming among themselves. In these societies the speaking usually falls to the lot of a few, or rather the few it is who make use of their advantage. The great majority of the human race have not will power strong enough to enable them to get up and speechify in public when they can get out of it. There is, however, a redeeming feature, and it is this. When any of the majority are compelled two or three times to speak or debate in public the trouble ceases, and it is afterwards hard to restrain them and to keep them quiet. They are like heavy boulders on the top of a mountain, it requires great force to move them, but when they are set going the effect is terrific. This paradoxical or rather compensating constitution of human nature can surely be put to good account. Why should not public speaking and debating be made a compulsory part of the College course, and be provided for in the curriculum? What easier than to provide that each Professor shall appoint subjects for members of his class to prepare for