

Literature and Science.

ON HEARING A LADY READ THE "ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE."

(From the *Halsfax Critic*.)

TITUS supreme song of him who dreamed
All beauty, and whose heart foreknew
The anguish of vain longing seemed
To breathe new mystery, breathed by you :

As if the rapture of the night,
Moon tranced, and passion-still, were stirred
To some undreamed divine delight
By sudden singing of a bird.

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GOETHE IN THE CLASS-ROOM.

THE character of any epoch in literature is philosophical as well as historical, and can be comprehended only when surveyed from the double stand-point. It is a fact arrived at inductively by considering the works of writers whose careers fall within the epoch, and at the same time a product whose factors are the elements of contemporary civilization—a fact essentially human, and subject to the necessities of heredity and circumstance. Historically, literature is little more than a compendium of facts; philosophically, it is the sublimest of human creations, a massive tapestry, through which may be traced the subtle action and reaction of intellectual genius. The specialistic method, dealing with particular authors, which has now been generally adopted in systematic literary study to a certain extent, recognizes this to be true; but there is danger of making such treatment too local and individual, with little or no reference to the social and mental status of their surroundings and the general spirit of their age.

Any analysis of literary character resolves itself into two lines of investigation—the one native, probing into national prejudices, institutions, and customs, which make up its individuality; the other foreign, and having to do with that boundless range of influence insensibly emanating from one country to another, and leaving its impress in the more delicate shadings of fashion and sentiment.

The prevailing tendency of study to ignore this foreign element in literary character is much to be deplored. The subject is, doubtless, too vast and complex for thorough handling in general academic work, yet it is certain that more attention could be appropriately and conveniently attracted to those international lines of cause and effect, so inextricably binding together modern genius.

Perhaps, with regard to preceding centuries, this might be done most advantageously in outline; but all contemporary literature is radiated so directly from one great master that no philosophic comprehension of it is possible without special consideration of his individual greatness. Our epoch leans on Germany, and should be studied with direct reference to that country. The universality of German influence should be enforced with as much prominence on the student's mind as on the fundamental principles of a science before actual investigation is permitted. Otherwise, how can he be brought to understand the transformation of British thought and sentiment as reflected in the early literature of our country? The transition from the classicism of a Pope to the idealism of a Wordsworth, bridges a chasm too narrow and deep to have been effected by purely indigenous forces. Whence that sudden growth of intellectual criticism which snatched Shakespeare from the inconoclasts of actors and placed him foremost on the book-shelves of scholarship? Whence that intense love of nature seeking poetic ideas in fields and forests rather than in drawing-room and library! Whence that exaltation of man encumbered with all his common wants and necessities above the flimsy conceptions of chivalry and sentimentality? Whence that marvellous production of scientific works which have almost revolutionized civilization? Whence that ceaseless striving after truth, be it at any cost, even to the sacrifice of most cherished spiritual hopes and beliefs? Such queries must spontaneously arise in minds before which are brought out the antithesis of the last two centuries in their ideas and principles.

The key of our literary epoch is to be found in Germany and in the hands of one man, Goethe, who "represents in himself alone," said Mme. De Stüel, "the whole of German literature," and nowhere has its influence been so widely propagated as among English-speaking people. They were the first to appreciate and grasp at the genius which made the obscure duchy of Saxe-Weimar the focus of European interest. Coleridge and Wordsworth were among his earliest disciples, imbibing those doctrines of metaphysical and literary art which led to a complete overthrow of native prejudices in matters of speculation and criticism. Scott looked to him for guidance and assurance; he was the hero, and more than once the pattern of Byron; Carlyle compared him to the god-like, while the American sage, Emerson, followed close in his footsteps. All the elements of influence did not originate with him, but he appropriated, summed up, and practically applied the revelations and suggestions made by his great predecessor, Lessing, as well as those of his worthy compeers in literature and philosophy. All the

channels of his nation's genius seemed to centre in him as a kind of reservoir, destined to replenish and colour the sea of international thought.

Goethe's work was prophetic—a foreshadowing of the comprehensive civilization of to-day. The characteristics of his genius are identical with those of contemporary thought, and the parallelism is the most effective illustration of his individual power.

As a poet, Goethe is the genuine precedent of Wordsworth and all his professional successors. His ideals and inspiration were sought out of the whole range of humanity and the universe of nature. The little court of which he was the idol did not monopolize his interest, but rather by its very compression produced an overflow which extended to the outer rim of poverty and ignorance. While tarrying for a short time among the miners he wrote: "How strong my love has returned upon me for these lower classes, which one calls the lower, but which in God's eyes are assuredly the highest! Here you meet all the virtues combined: contentedness, moderation, truth, straightforwardness, joy in the slightest good, harmlessness, patience." Such an expression of democratic enthusiasm at that stiff-necked period, when aristocracy plumed itself most arrogantly, is certainly portentous of the philanthropy which has become such a prominent feature of our age. All his life he found enjoyment in mingling with artisans and becoming initiated into their handicrafts. "I know very well," says Werther, "that we are not, and cannot be, all equal; but, in my opinion, he who avoids the common people in order to command their respect is as culpable as a coward who hides himself from his enemy because he fears defeat." Labour was as poetical to him as luxury, for back of it lurked the same human nature which inevitably links man into one universal brotherhood. The same active curiosity led him to seek fellowship with foreigners, and be made acquainted with their national peculiarities. The Jews particularly engrossed his attention, and excited in him a certain awe and reverence for their steady adherence to old Scriptural beliefs and dogmas. The exquisite portraiture of provincial manners and passion in *Hermann and Dorothea*; the faithful delineation of citizen life in *Egmont*; the peasant scene in *Götz*, evince familiarity with the common grades of existence, and afford a kind of complement to the court intrigues and aristocratic foibles of *Tasso*, the classicism of *Iphigenia*; while as a culmination of his many-sided art rises the great drama of humanity, *Faust*, which, sifting man's soul out of its carnal environment, subjects it to a series of metaphysical, ethical, and æsthetic experiments.—*Journal of Education*.