

scenic arrangements are still quite apparent. In the great theatre of Syracuse, whose capacity ranged from 10,000 to 20,000 auditors, Professor Mahaffy found that a friend talking in his ordinary tone could be heard perfectly at the furthest seat, and that too with the back of the stage open. Here is something for modern architects to meditate on.

In his low estimate of the poetry of Pindar, and the philosophy of Socrates, our critic will probably find some eager antagonists, but his arguments exhibit a front that is not very assailable.

His orthography shows some playful eccentricities: why write *rythm* and not *ryme*, and *retoric*; if we adopt Nikias and Kimon, why retain *c* in Alcibiades?

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THE ENGLISH POETS. Selections, with critical introductions by various writers, and a general introduction by Matthew Arnold, edited by Thomas Humphrey Ward, M.A. Vol. 1, Chaucer to Donne; Vol. 2, Ben Johnson to Dryden. London and New York: Macmillan & Co.; Toronto: Copp, Clark & Co. 1880.

THESE handsome and elaborately edited volumes will fill a want long felt by the lovers of English verse. No attempt at a complete collection of the English poets has been obtainable since the extinction of Dodsley's and other editions of the writers up to the end of the eighteenth century—editions only to be found now in a few great libraries. It is true, Bell's edition of the English Poets, published some few years ago, attempted something of the kind; but these were expensive, too large in size for the modern taste in books, and were edited by one of the most incompetent and worthless of modern writers, the late George Gilfillan. For thoroughness of treatment and completeness of critical comment these volumes leave nothing to be desired, while the size of the books is convenient, and the type, paper and binding of the best.

Mr. Matthew Arnold gives value to this work by a charming introductory essay on poetry, written in that manner which is his alone, which the *Saturday Review* (in its better days) well described as the inimitable

prose style of one who is also a great poet. This is not the place to discuss Mr. Matthew Arnold's writings (an essay on that subject will appear in the next number of the *Canadian Monthly*), but there is reason to regret that the editor of "The English Poets" before he set to work at his selections, did not read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest, the counsel given in Mr. Arnold's essay, to wit, the importance of judging poetry *on its own merits as poetry*, and the danger in estimating the value of poetry of allowing the judgment to be warped either by historical or personal considerations. This is a critical act which very few minds are capable of performing, since it needs what is one of the rarest of gifts, the power of estimating with a catholic taste poetry on its own absolute merit. Mr. Arnold's perfectly sound canon reads rather strangely as the preface to a book which estimates poetry not at all as poetry, but on historical grounds! "The English Poets" is nothing if not historical!

For instance, the first volume contains an immense mass of verse which has absolutely no poetical value, which is only there because it fills up the literary interval between Chaucer and the Elizabethans. Occleve, Lydgate, Gower, Henryson, have no poetical value. In the words of the Psalmist, there is none of them a poet, no not one; they have gone astray, and are altogether worthless. With the one splendid exception of the great ballad literature, there is nothing in the dreary age between Chaucer and the Elizabethans which any human being could place above the literary calibre of Blackmore or Tupper. This judgment is that of Green, in his admirable and glowingly-appreciative chapters on literature, in the "History of the English People," and it is that of every mind capable of appreciating poetry for its own merits.

But as a historical collection of English verse, and such a work is most necessary in studying the evolution of our literature, these volumes are of the highest excellence. Each author is prefaced by a critical introduction by a *litterateur* who has made a special study