

THE VARSITY.

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Literary criticism, to be of value to the reading public, should be genuine and spontaneous. This statement may, at first, seem to be superfluous. But the various methods resorted to in the present day for securing notices of books and magazines amply warrants our seemingly trite remark. Outside of the literary weeklies there is hardly anything that can be honestly called anything approaching genuine literary criticism. And here, Homer sometimes nods also. Now-a-days the author or publisher not only produces the book or magazine, but undertakes the duties of an indulgent critic. Lowell has finely satirized this in the "press notices" attached to his *Biglow Papers*. He there remarks that it is customary to attach such notices to second editions; that they are procurable at certain established rates; that they are not intended or generally believed to convey any real opinions; that they are purely a ceremonial accompaniment of literature, and resemble certificates to the virtues of various moribund panaceas. He consequently concludes that it will be not only more economical to prepare notices himself, but to prefix them to the primary, rather than risk the contingency of a second edition of his *Papers*. In this Lowell has burlesqued a state of affairs very much akin to the farce he perpetrates himself; he simply broadens the effects. The great difference between Homer Wilbur and his imitators is that the Pastor of Jaalam had wit enough to write depreciatory notices of his own work, whereas modern authors never touch the minor chords at all.

To lay aside allegory and metaphor, what we wish to protest against is the present style of dishonest criticism—for it is practically nothing less—of books and magazines that is palmed off on the public as honest and original. In this fast age the public is very wary of buying books, or even of reading poems and articles, unless they are heralded with a great flourish of newspaper and magazine praise. If this flourish is not genuine and spontaneous the public is misled, and literature suffers thereby. And for this reason: that the general public—too ready to adopt the current cant of the day on literary matters—is led to believe, after all, that such and such a book or poem is really good, on account of the almost unanimous encomiums of the press concerning it. And the authors themselves are misled into thinking that mediocre work will pass for genius in a community that either is too lazy to inform itself, or which takes the work at the value placed upon it by its author or publisher.

Curious stories are told of Delane, of the *Times*, in regard to the reviews and reviewers of the Thunderer. The reviewer was almost invariably unknown to the author whose work he criticized. If by any chance Delane heard that any of his staff of reviewers had written a favourable or unfavourable review because of private friendship or dislike, he promptly put the reviewer's MS. into the wastebasket. He did much to develop an absolutely impartial literary review department in the *Times* and throughout England. It is a pity that journalistic ethics—on this subject at least—were not more strictly enforced with us on this side the Atlantic. Recently an author wrote to the editor of the *New York Independent*, saying that he was anxious to obtain a large sale of his book and believed that a favourable notice in the *Independent* would secure this. He said he was willing to pay for the notice, and asked what

the cost per line would be. The editor promptly replied: One million dollars a line. This fact—honourable to the *Independent* as it is—shows that such requests are not uncommon; and if not uncommon are sometimes acceded to. We have mentioned these facts, and have brought up this subject because we receive every day requests to "give a favourable notice" to this and that; and receive cards and notices "for the convenience of editors who have not time to prepare notices," containing glowing and picturesquely favourable reviews of books and magazines, the contents of which are entirely unknown, and which are just as likely as not to be indifferent, or even absolutely bad. The extent to which this system of procuring reviews has gone is astonishing and alarming. Astonishing to those unacquainted with literary or newspaper work; alarming to those who are in the guild, as indicating a very low level of professional morality, if not an entire absence of honesty and sincerity. It is bad enough, perhaps, to have to submit to superficial, careless, or malicious criticism; but how much more lowering and degrading it is to listen to the idle *claqueurs*, paid for their work; and to see it palmed off on the public as the genuine expression of honest conviction. We speak of the freedom of the press, but one of its most important functions is succumbing to the rush and hurry of the day, united to the influence of monetary considerations; and the average literary criticism is fast becoming a parody and a farce.

Mr. Duncan's letter in another column requires a word or two in reply. The misunderstanding has evidently arisen from a confusion of the words "University" and "College." We used these words in their separate and strict meanings, and not as interchangeable. As we understood it, University College—not the University of Toronto—gives the instruction. The Professors and Lecturers are those of the College, not the University. There is no University Professoriate as yet. University College, and the various theological colleges, resemble one another in this: That each college is supposed to do work specially in the interests of its own students. The theological colleges do their Divinity work; and University College its Arts work. Orientals, it will not be denied, pertain rather to the Theological than to the Arts Faculty. They should be taught, therefore, by the college or colleges more directly interested; in other words, by the theological colleges.

On the other hand, a University—provided it possess a University professoriate—can be very legitimately called upon to provide instruction in Orientals. A secular University may do this with propriety; but such claims cannot be urged in the case of a secular Arts college. In a University curriculum Orientals are undoubtedly on a par with Classics or Moderns, but in that of a secular Arts college—where the claims of Arts students should be pre-eminent—Orientals stand, relatively, on a different footing.

Again, Mr. Duncan states that there are upwards of forty students in the Oriental department. We do not doubt this. But we should like to know how many of these are *bona fide* Arts students, who are in attendance as such at University College, and not as students of the affiliated Theological colleges? How many of these forty are studying Orientals simply as a branch of higher education, and not as a branch of their purely Theological education?

The argument which Mr. Duncan brings forward in relation to the study of Political Economy, viz: that it would be difficult to get an instructor with such an evenly-balanced mind that he would not hurt the political and social prejudices of his students, is one which might with much greater force be applied to the study of Philosophy and Ethics. For in this department the instructor is almost thoroughly master of the situation, for the simple reason that the average student has, as a rule, no knowledge of the subject—either historical or otherwise—before he comes for instruction; and naturally takes the instructor's *dicta* without question.

But students do come to college with some views—however crude they may be—on political and social questions, and are more qualified to form independent opinions on subjects than they are on questions of philosophy and the like. In almost every subject—Philosophy, History, Ethics, and Political Economy—those who instruct are supposed to have definite opinions formed upon them, and do not act merely as exponents of mouthpieces of the views of others. The only difficulty in regard to such subjects is in getting