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Editorials.

THE STUDY OF POETRY.*

THERE are, we may safely guess, not less than five or six thousand teachers employed in the Public Schools of Ontario, and several additional thousands in other provinces of the Dominion, who are under thirty years of age. But a very small percentage of these have had the advantage of a full university training. Probably the majority have not had even an extended collegiate course. Circumstances compelled a large proportion of the whole number to leave school or college as soon as they had reached the point at which they were qualified to pass the necessary examination for the lowest grade of teacher's certificate. Other thousands are every year quitting school at the same point, and undergoing the same examinations, with the same end in view. We are noting the fact, not as a reproach to either the individuals concerned or to the school system of the Province. We

* Select Poems: Being the literature prescribed for the Junior Matriculation and Junior Leaving Examinations, 1897. Edited, with introduction and notes, by W. J. Alexander, Ph.D., Professor of English in University College, Toronto. Toronto: The Copp, Clark Company, Limited.

are sure that very many of these young teachers are doing excellent service in training the scores of children entrusted to them for their elementary education; also that very many of them deserve the highest credit for the grit and perseverance by dint of which they have surmounted obstacles which would have deterred many less ambitious youth from persevering in the arduous path which has brought them to the goal already reached.

But what of the future of these thousands of young men and women who are thus fairly entered upon a course of cultivation which, if faithfully continued by a diligent use of the opportunities within their reach during the hours they can redeem while engaged in the practice of their profession, may lead them forward to a place eventually among the educated and influential of the land, and, at the same time, open up to them the paths to those loftier enjoyments which lie beyond and above the sphere of any but thoroughly cultivated minds? Well, then, may we venture to put the question to every young man and woman who belongs, by education and occupation, to the classes we are addressing? What are you doing to carry on the work of self-culture which you have so happily begun? Surely you will not allow yourselves for one moment to feel as if you had already attained. There are within easy reach of every one of you storehouses of the best literature the world has ever seen. There is practically no limit to the progress which may be made along the lines of literary improvement by almost any one of you who has a genuine mind-hunger. We assume that, in pressing forward to the goal already reached, you have acquired the essential condition of all scholarly progress—the mastery of the will over the mental faculties. You have, too, the ability and the skill requisite to enable you to make good use of the tools with which all mind-culture is carried on. These conditions—the power of concentrated attention, on the one hand, and the knowledge how to use books of the first quality, on the other—being present, the rest is comparatively easy. It is but a matter of time and of delightful mental toil. We know that the young teachers, as a class, are above, rather than below, the average in ability, for a certain kind of natural selection has placed them where they are. It is, as a rule, by no means the dullest or most sluggish who choose for themselves, or have chosen for them by parents, the more extended course in Public and High Schools, which is the ordinary preparation for teachers' cer-

tificates. Hence it is with the greater confidence that we plead earnestly with these that they be not content with present literary attainments, but press steadily and strenuously forwards towards other and higher goals. We do not now speak with special reference to fitness for higher positions in the teaching profession, or in any other profession or pursuit. Such ambitions are, within reasonable bounds, perfectly natural and legitimate, but the inducements to effort are generally sufficient. The kind of progress we would gladly stimulate is equally desirable and useful for the farmer and the artisan, as for the lawyer, or professor, or minister. The only condition of its attainment is, or should be, the possession of those faculties of mind and heart which make the man or the woman capable of acquiring and enjoying it.

The highest of all forms of literature is, by common consent, the poetical. The classics of all languages of the first rank are rich in poetry. The English is especially opulent in this form of wealth. No student of English can lay claim to any high measure of culture, who has not learned to appreciate and enjoy the productions of British poets of the highest rank—who has not obeyed Horace's injunction to the Latin students of his own day, "To turn over the great masters with daily, with nightly, hand." In order to do this with the highest profit and delight one must know how. In this, as in every other line of study, we "learn to do by doing." The best of all advice to the young man or woman who would learn to read the English masters is to *read* them. Yet the novice in this line of study may, undoubtedly, be greatly helped by judicious hints from those who have been over the ground before him, especially those who have made a study of the best methods for unlocking the rich storehouses of poetry, ancient and modern; or, to vary the figure, of the shortest paths to the Heliconian groves of the West, where one may slake his thirst at the "wells of English undefiled."

This too long preamble brings us to the point which we set out to reach. The subject, we may say frankly, was suggested by the admirable introduction to the excellent volume whose title we have given in a footnote, as the text of this little sermon. We were particularly pleased with the clear, concise, and eminently sensible and practical directions given by Dr. Alexander in the paragraphs which we shall presently take leave to quote, to aid the beginner in the study of a classic poem. It is but meet that we should first say a few words touching the