

AN ADLE ESSAY

ON THE VOCAL INTERPRETATION OF LITERATURE

BY THOMAS O'HAGAN, M.A., PH.D., IN THE CURRENT NUMBER OF THE CATHOLIC READING CIRCLE REVIEW.

The study of literature has been of late years becoming more and more rational in its aim and purpose. There was a time, and that not very long ago, when literature was forced to yield up its spirit in the classroom to a kind of piddling analysis or a talk about grammar, philology, rhetoric and sundry other irrelevant subjects.

To-day, however, in the best schools and colleges, this vicious method, which has for years worked destruction to true literary culture, has pretty well died out; nor is a through ticket by flying express down the centuries from Chaucer to Shakespeare any longer regarded as a satisfactory evidence that the privileged passenger knows much of the glory which nestles on the way.

How any person can hope to become a literary scholar in the highest and best sense of the word without assimilating the informing life of literature has always seemed to me a problem in direct need of solution. I can well understand how one may possess himself of the literature of knowledge without such assimilation, but how he can become possessed of the literature of power without responding to the inner life of an art product, is to me a question inconceivable.

Nor has the old spirit been fully and wholly exorcised, as yet, from the class and lecture room. There are still to be found those who believe that the analytical exegesis of literature should be the main purpose of the teacher—that to elucidate the intellectual thought which articulates a poem, precipitating from a concrete creation into a barren abstraction—this and this alone should be the aim and end of all literary study in the school or lecture room.

The fault with such persons is, that they do not fully understand and appreciate the true meaning and import of literature, mistaking its lesser coefficient for its chief and primary one. No definition of literature can be at all adequate which does not take into consideration the spiritual element as a factor. The late Brother Azarias, whose study of literature was most profound, clear and sympathetic, gives us a definition in the very opening chapter of his charming little volume, "A Philosophy of Literature," which is entirely satisfactory. He regards literature as the verbal expression of man's affections, as acted upon in his relations with the material world, society and his Creator. Professor Corson, of Cornell University, in his admirable work, "The Aims of Literary Study," defines literature as the expression in letters of the spiritual co-operating with the intellectual man, the former, he adds, being the dominant coefficient.

Knowing, then, that the spiritual element constitutes the informing life of a poem, how can teachers fritter their time away with brilliant analytics, which do little or nothing for true literary culture? Better, far better, that the students under their charge be turned loose in some library—there to browse at will, free to follow their literary tastes and inclinations.

I have long considered, that examinations for certificates and degrees are for the most part a detriment to literary studies—that they dull the finer faculties of appreciation and magnify the importance of mere acquisition. Assuredly, when a young man finds that in order to reach his sheepskin, he must be able to discuss the Elizabethan English, as found in Shakespeare's Macbeth and As You Like It, or trace the gerundial infinitive through Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, he will pay little heed to either the spirit of Shakespeare or Chaucer, as embodied in their works.

In our great eagerness to fill our heads with facts, without any co-ordination, we lose sight amid the stress and strain of our educational work of the one great fact: That if we would be wisely educated, we must seek it on the basis of a maximum of education with a minimum of acquirement.

It is impossible to play fast and loose with the spirit of literature and not suffer for our insincerity. Literature is a jealous mistress and will brook no rival. Those who woo her must come with clean hearts and minds, setting aside all thought of mercenary returns, for as Mrs. Browning says:

We get no good In being ungenerous, even to a book And calculating profits—so much help By so much reading. It is rather when We gloriously forget ourselves and plunge Soul-formerly, headlong into a book's profound Impassions for its beauty and salt of truth— 'Tis then we get the right good from a book.

Another fault which characterizes the literary studies of to-day is, that we grasp at too much, and, not a little that we would fain compass is, as far as literary training and culture are concerned, entirely unimportant. A few great literary personages—epochal men—who have handed the intellectual torch down the centuries—these are worthy of a devoted study. I think it is Ruskin who says that he who knows the history of Rome, Venice, Paris and London has a full knowledge of modern civilization. Twenty authors are not many, still they largely cover the great masterpieces of poetic thought, both ancient and modern. Homer, Virgil and Dante, Calderon, Moliere and Goethe, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth and Tennyson—these contain much of the best thought in all ages, and yet I have but named little more than half of the twenty. There is a flood of ephemeral literature—chiefly novels—day by day deluging the land, which fashion and frivolity set up for literary study. How much harm these novels do, leaching with their waves the moral shores of life, God alone knows. To-day, in the minds of many, the novel has supplanted the Bible, and the ethics of George Eliot take precedence of the Sermon on the Mount. It is doubtful if the late Car-

dinal Newman or John Ruskin ever read a line of Tolstoi, Ibsen or Kipling, and yet they hold respectable places in literature.

Passing now from the subject of literature in itself to a consideration of its interpretation, I desire to touch on the subject proper of this paper: The Vocal Interpretation of Literature. The spiritual element in a poem is indefinite and cannot be formulated in terms of x and y. No examination on paper, be it ever so thorough, can satisfactorily reach it. The only full response to this spiritual element, this essential life of a poem that can be secured by the teacher is through a vocal rendering of it. But before he is capable of doing so, he must first have sympathetically assimilated the informing life of the poem. This is why no person need hope to become a great reader without a deep and a pathetic study of literature, nor a great interpreter of literature—which means a great teacher of literature—without the vocal capabilities requisite for voicing the indefinite or spiritual element, which constitutes the soul of an art product. A true literary scholar is one who grows soulward. It is not enough that he store his mind with intellectual facts, he should grow vitalized at every point of his soul in his literary studies.

Let knowledge grow from more to more. But more of reverence in us dwell!

Knowledge is of the intellect, wisdom and reverence, of the soul. We should aim in our study of literature to pierce through the shows of things—to reach the vital, quickening, spiritual element, by breaking through the baffling and perverting mesh of words, which hide and blind it. How true the lines of the late poet laureate:

I sometimes hold it half a sin To put in words the thoughts I feel. For words, like nature, half reveal And half conceal the soul within.

Herein, then, comes the office of the voice in literary interpretation—to aid in laying bare the soul within. When the same time is given in preparing the voice for the high office of literary interpretation that is now devoted to it in preparation for the operatic and concert stage, then we may look for the best and highest results in literary study. Then, indeed, with the throbbing pulse of poetry felt in the class and lecture room and the divine infection of inspiration will do its benign work, cheating the lazy and indifferent student of his hours and days.

Many make the mistake of believing that they may become capable vocal interpreters of literature in a month or a year, whereas the great work should cover a lifetime. Professor Corson of Cornell University, who is acknowledged to be the ablest vocal interpreter of literature in America, once told me that he had been reading aloud for an hour each day during the past twenty-five years. Those who have been privileged to hear Professor Corson interpret vocally the great masterpieces of poetic literature, as found in Shakespeare, Tennyson, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Milton and Browning, can better understand and appreciate the true value of vocal culture as a factor in the great work of literary interpretation.

If we could combine the voice work of our best schools of elocution and oratory with the fullest and most comprehensive courses in literature found in our best universities, we might soon hope for the very summit of literary culture and training. The worst of our elocution schools are a positive injury to vocal training as a worthy factor in the interpretation of literature, inasmuch as they induce both superficiality and artificiality, their chief ambition being to graduate pretty girls with pretty gowns, who can recite some catch-penny piece of current literature before an assemblage of admiring friends, according to the numbers or lines upon an elocutionary chart or fashion-plate. When these graduates leave their schools after a six months' course, all equipped and prepared to voice the depths of Shakespeare, the heights of Milton, or the zigzag involutions of Browning, they never fail, also, as a rule, to carry away with them the brand or trade-mark of their respective manufactories.

In the best of our elocution schools, such as are found in Boston, Philadelphia and New York, where sander and more thorough methods are pursued and a certain measure of literary scholarship finds a habitation and a name, respectable attention is given to some of the chief masterpieces of literature, and a graduate knows something more than the scraggy selections found in a few recitation books.

Still the aim of all these schools is to turn out readers and teachers of reading, and this very aim precludes a deep, serious and comprehensive study of literature.

In many of our leading colleges and universities there is a professor of oratory, who trains young men for declamation and intercollegiate contests in oratory and debate, but here again the aim determines the character and limitations of the work done. The fitting and special department for voice training in a college or university is within the sphere of English literature, for it is as needful in the dramas of Shakespeare as in the orations of Webster and Burke, as requisite in the lyrics of Moore, Burns and Longfellow as in the glorious epics of Homer, Dante and Milton; as potent in the sonnets of Cowper and Wordsworth as in the tender elegies of a Shelley, an Arnold or a Tennyson.

But what about the vocal interpretation of literature in our primary and intermediate schools—in our academic preparatory to college and university work? It is here where the great work of vocal culture should begin—and begin in earnest too. But it should never be pursued as an accomplishment or means of frivolous display. The aim should be in every class, the adequate voicing of literary thought. Teachers will find in the voice an invaluable aid in the work of interpreting, particularly lyrics.

The lyric being feeling, a sympathetic vocal interpretation of it will give a better insight into its poetic moment or inspirational thought, around which centres the whole structure, than hours of sentence chopping and phrase stitching. For the purpose of illustrating this fact let us take Tennyson's exquisite

lyric, "Break, Break, Break," which, as Maurice F. Egan says, crystallizes a mood. Here is the delightful little gem:

"Break, break, break, On the cold gray stones, O Sea! And I would that my tongue could utter The thoughts that arise in me. O well for the fisherman's boy, That he shouts with his sister at play! O well for the sailor-lad, That he sings in his boat on the bay. And the stately ships go on To their haven under the hill; But O for the touch of a vanished hand, And the sound of a voice that is still! Break, break, break, At the foot of thy crags, O Sea! But the tender grace of a day that is dead Will never come back to me."

It will be remembered, that this lyric, as well as another poem, "In the Valley of Lankeret," though not contained in the linked elegy of "In Memoriam," are practically a part of it and are co-radical as to their subject of inspiration—the sorrow come by Tennyson for young Hallam. Here are the lines of the second poem:

"All along the valley, stream that fastest white, Deepening thy voice, where the deepening of the night, All along the valley, where thy waters flow, I walked with one I loved two and thirty years ago. All along the valley while I walked to-day, The two and thirty years were a mist that rolls away. For all along the valley, down thy rocky bed Thy living voice to me was as the voice of the dead. And all along the valley, by rock and cave and tree, The voice of the dead was a living voice to me."

It is easy to find the poetic moment in the first lyric, as it may be seen and felt at once that the whole poem—thought centres around the inspirational lines:

"But O for the touch of a vanished hand, And the sound of a voice that is still!"

I have seen an examination paper, strewn with questions upon this lyric, among them being one asking for the reason why the first line "Break, break, break," is shorter in the number of its feet than any of the others. As well ask for the reason of the permanency of parental or filial affection. The question is entirely gratuitous to one who has assimilated the poem in its essential life and can voice it properly. To those who have not responded, or worse, cannot respond to the informing life of the lyric, a technical answer is of as much value as are many of the treatises that assume to deal with the subject of versification. But enough. Let the reader be assured of one thing: That the vocal interpretation of literature is in every way a subject worthy of his attention, and that he is the best interpreter of literature whose every faculty is fully developed—not the least of which is the voice—and who brings to his work a full and vitally spiritualized life.

DEVOTION TO ST. ANTHONY OF PADUA.

The pious clients of Saint Anthony of Padua are counted by the legion; every day they become more fervent, and they form a glorious aureole for this Saint, who is so solicitous and tender towards those who pray to him with confidence. Confidence in Saint Anthony is the first condition for obtaining favors through his intercession—confidence in his kindness and power, and absolute confidence in the wisdom of his decisions.

St. Anthony loves those who go to him with the loving trustfulness of a child towards his father. The greatest favors obtained have been asked for most simply and plainly. If, however, you desire to have this Saint for your advocate, pray to him with no other desire than that God's will may be fulfilled in your regard, for this great servant of the Most High was before all a model of perfect obedience, and nothing is so pleasing to him as the imitation of his virtues.

The charity that you give in St. Anthony's honor will draw down upon yourself and your families many spiritual and temporal blessings. The peace possessed by this holy monk will reign in



Old Rip Van Winkle went up into the Catskill mountains to take a little nap of twenty years or so, and when he wakened, he found that the "cruel war was over," the monthly magazines had "fought it over" the second time and "blown up" all the officers that had participated in it. This much is history, and it is also a historical fact that, during the same length of time, Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery had become the most celebrated, as it is the most effective, Liver, Blood and Lung Remedy of the age. In purifying the blood and in all manner of pimples, blotches, eruptions, and other skin and scalp diseases, acrofulous sores and swellings, and kindred ailments, the "Golden Medical Discovery" manifests the most positive curative properties.

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A scrofulous condition of the blood invites catarrh, bronchitis, and consumption. We're all exposed to the germs of consumption, grip, and malaria—yet only the weak ones suffer. When you're weak, tired out, and debilitated, or when pimples and blotches appear—heed the warning in time. The "Golden Medical Discovery" sets all the organs into healthy action—especially the liver, and that's the point of entrance for these germs. Then if the blood be pure, they'll be thrown off. There's no risk.

CAUTION—Accept no substitute for the "Golden Medical Discovery" that may be recommended to be "just as good." It may be better for the dealer, because of paying him a better profit, but he is not the one who needs help.

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your heart; his love of God, his tender compassion for the poor, will be your happiness, and will excite you to follow his grand example; and rest assured that there will be no grace that he will not be ready to ask from God for his faithful clients. If when on earth he was so kind that the people enthusiastically applauded him, what must be his kindness now that he is in the enjoyment of celestial happiness.—N. Y. Catholic Review.

CATHOLIC AUTHORS AND PUBLISHERS.

HOPEFUL INDICATIONS OF A DEMAND FOR GOOD CATHOLIC BOOKS.

TOO MANY PIOUS TRANSLATIONS—INFLUENCE OF THE SUMMER SCHOOL—CATHOLIC FICTION—HIGH PRICES PUT MANY BOOKS OUT OF THE REACH OF THE COMMON PEOPLE.

The multiplication of our Catholic Summer Schools, the increase in the number of our Reading Circles, and the unquestionable fact that by reason of these and other agencies our American Catholic population is exhibiting a greater intellectual and literary activity than ever before, and one that gives promise of continuance and fuller development, may be considered as so many causes which contribute to render brighter the outlook for Catholic authors and publishers. The lectures delivered at the Summer Schools are calculated to send the students who attend the sessions in search of books wherein the topics discussed obtain fuller treatment than it is possible for any speaker to give them in a few lectures. The courses followed by the reading circles naturally, and even necessarily, lead to larger reading and, consequently, to

A GREATER DEMAND FOR BOOKS.

And as the Summer School lectures and the reading circles' studies deal, as a rule, with Catholic subjects, from Catholic points of view, the Catholic author whose works furnish the fullest information desired regarding such subjects, and the Catholic publisher who puts such works before Catholic readers, would seem assured a good market for their wares. The time may not yet have come in this country when the Catholic poet whose songs possess real merit can hope to grow rich from their publication. Poetry, be its character what it may, is always more or less of a drug in the literary market, partly on account of its superabundance, no doubt, and partly by reason of its varying character; and the Catholic publisher who declines to add to the glut can hardly be accused of lacking enterprise or denying encouragement to ambitious bards. That

GOOD CATHOLIC STORIES

find a sale which repays, if it does not enrich those who write and those who publish them, would seem to be sufficiently demonstrated by the reception extended to the works of Father Finn, Maurice Francis Egan, Miss Dorsey, Miss Crowley and other Catholic story-tellers; while the demand for such books as Dr. Parsons' "Lies and Errors of History," Dr. Zahm's scientific treatises, Bishop Spalding's essays, etc., shows that the upward tendency in Catholic literary arts is not confined to works of fiction alone. Profitable ventures by Catholic authors and publishers have of recent years been made outside of the lines here indicated; but such strokes have been exceptional ones; though there is, of course, no reason why they may not be more frequently made in the future.

Viewing the field broadly, however, it seems reasonably safe to assert that the Catholic publisher who undertakes to meet the increased and increasing intellectual activity which American Catholics are at present exhibiting, by bringing out new timely and meritorious books, will have no reason to repent of his efforts. He may not wax suddenly wealthy; but the signs are all deceptive if he proves a financial loser, or even fails to secure a substantial profit. He will certainly consult his own interests far better in doing this than in crowding his shelves with translations, oftentimes poor, of

PIOUS BOOKS

published in other lands, for which—exception made, of course, of exceptionally excellent works—there never was any remunerating call in this country, and is hardly any appreciable demand now.

The Catholic publisher who puts too high a price on his wares or who presents them in unattractive shape, may readily lose the profit he should derive from his ventures. There is a limit in all things, the old saw says; and unquestionably the costliness of Catholic books, which has hitherto prevailed here, and which has by no means wholly ceased yet, has injuriously affected the sale of many of them. Any Catholic bookseller, who has seen really good works remain unsold upon his hands because the price asked for them put them out of the reach of the common people, and limited their sales to certain rare periods, such as Christmas or the time of a mission, can testify to that fact. There is an undeniable growing demand in this country for good Catholic literature; but it is an intelligent and discerning demand, and the publisher who would benefit by it must meet it intelligently, not alone in the character, but also in the cost of the books with which he undertakes to supply its needs.—Wm. D. KELLY in the Catholic Citizen.

APOSTOLATE OF PRAYER.

General Intention for January, 1896—The Church in France.

In this year of grace the French celebrate the fourteenth centenary of the baptism of Clovis, which took place on Christmas Day, A. D., 496. This great event in the history of France has fittingly been called the Baptism of France; for with the baptism of Clovis, France, "the Church's Eldest Daughter," takes on the character of a Christian nation. It is natural, then, that the French should celebrate the commemoration of this important event with the greatest possible solemnity. It is for the spiritual results of the celebration that we are asked to pray this month.

The event is in every way an inspiring one for the French Catholic, as it brings him back to the ages of faith and to the company of the saints—of St. Clotilde

and St. Genevieve, St. Remond and St. Vedastus—to those memorable days, which France owes her nationality as well as her Christianity, which led up to the glories of Pepin, Charlemagne and St. Louis, which has made her what she has always been proud to call herself—the Grande Nation, that has been spiritually favored as, perhaps no other country on earth.

But who will deny that her glories as a Christian nation have been greatly diminished? Side by side with faith and devotion to the Church, almost overshadowing them, we find, in this once so favored land, all social and moral ills in the most exaggerated form: Freemasonry in its worst phase, liberalism, socialism, communism, naturalism, rank infidelity and open persecution of the Church and her religious orders. For the removal of these evils she asks for our prayers. Let us pray, then, during this month, that God may "turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and of the children to their fathers," that He may not visit them with the punishment that they deserve, but that this may be for them a year of abundant spiritual fruits.—Little Messenger.

RELIGIOUS NEWS ITEMS.

The Very Rev. Father Bernard (Jennings), O. S. F. C., has been elected Minister Provincial of the Irish Capuchins.

The Right Rev. Dr. McDonnell, Bishop of Alexandria, Canada, and Mgr. Eberard, Bishop of Rio Janeiro, have arrived in Rome.

Over 6,000 persons attended the funeral of Mgr. Lasagna, the Silesian missionary in Brazil, who was recently killed in a railway accident.

Mgr. Azarias has sent to the Holy Father a letter on behalf of the Armenians thanking him for the 50,000 lire sent for the relief of the distress.

The Right Rev. Mgr. Madden, Vicar-General of the diocese of Clonfert, was recently invested by the Conductor Bishop, Most Rev. D. Healey, with the insignia of Domestic Prelate to His Holiness the Pope.

The Rev. J. F. McCarthy, late of Jackson, Neb., is now situated at Sidney in the extreme western part of that State. His post of duty is 123 miles from the next nearest priest. Recently he started on a seventy-five mile journey to celebrate Mass at a mission.

Cardinal Moran delivered a masterly sermon at the laying of the corner stone of St. Francis' School, Paddington, on November 3, on the True Church. He gave a brilliant review of the history of the Church, explained the true unity of Christendom and brushed aside all the objections which are urged against it.

Rev. Bartholomew Stack, formerly assistant at St. Francis de Sales Church, Utica, has been assigned by the Right Rev. Bishop Ludden to the pastorate of Canlitus, which also comprises Jordan and Split Rock. Father Stack succeeds Father Ryan, who has been promoted to Utica.

In far away Patagonia among the tribes that inhabit the bleak country Catholicity has obtained a firm foothold. A vicariate apostolic has long been established there and Mgr. Magnani is the present ecclesiastical head with Terra del Fuego as his see. The Catholics in the jurisdiction number 3,500.

It is rumored that Rev. E. S. Kelly, pastor of St. Cecilia's Church, Chicago, is to become Bishop of Concordia, which see has been vacant for some years. Father Kelly is a well-known priest and is chaplain of one of the Illinois regiments in the report of which he received special praise from the commanding officer last summer.

Montmartre Basilica is one of the chief sanctuaries of Europe and attracts an immense number of pilgrims. Three hundred day pilgrimages are reckoned during the course of each year. The total number of the faithful from all parts of the world who may pay a visit of prayer to the church is one million, of which three hundred thousand approach the Holy Communion.

At the last meeting of the French Academy of Moral and Political Science, the Francois Joseph Audiffred prize of 15,000 francs was granted to the Abbe Rambaud, priest of the Diocese of Lyons. It was stated that the Abbe Rambaud's life had been entirely one of sacrifice and devotion to the poor, the weak and the deserted. The Abbe Rambaud is the founder of several important charitable institutions.

On Nov. 16 the Second National Synod of Australia opened. Twenty prelates including Cardinal Moran, Archbishop Carr of Melbourne, Archbishop Dunne of Brisbane and Archbishop O'Reilly of Adelaide with sixty of the senior clergy took part in the proceedings. Tasmania was represented by Bishop Delany and a number of clergy. New Zealand is not represented in accordance with arrangements made long since.

The Spanish correspondent of the Liverpool Catholic Times learns that two English ladies, the Misses Baylis, have recently been received into the Catholic Church at Corunna, and Miss Laura Butler de Muro at Madrid. A soldier named Ventura Grijalba, who was brought up a Protestant, has also become a convert at

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RECTOR Milbank, South Dakota, Oct. 10, 1895

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RELIGIOUS NEWS ITEMS.

Madrid. The Queen Regent of Spain, who was godmother of the convert, invited him to the palace, and presented him with £20 and a massive gold chain.

A BRAVE GIRL'S ACT.

SAVED A TRAINLOAD OF PEOPLE FROM BEING HURLED TO CERTAIN DEATH.

A wreck on the Baltimore & Ohio Southwestern was averted last night, by little Mary Och, a nine-year-old girl, near Slocum bridge, in this county. The little girl was out with a lantern hunting a stray horse, which she discovered was caught fast in a bridge near a sharp curve of the railway. Knowing that the evening accommodation train, which is generally crowded with passengers, was nearby due, the child crawled across the lofty trestle, past the frightened horse, and then around the curve, where she built a large fire in the centre of the track to attract the attention of the trainmen. Her efforts were successful, the train being stopped within a few feet of the beacon. Had the engine struck the horse, it with the train would have been thrown into the creek bed, a distance of eighty feet. There were over a hundred passengers on the train and their gratitude to the brave little girl was unbounded.

unfortunate

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