

ELCCUTION AND POETRY.

By J. T. McNeill.

A variety of incoherent sounds may be heard daily, echoing from the roof of St. John's schoolroom. They range from a high, angelic tenor to a hoarse, bellowing bass. In the early stages one could hear only detached and meaningless syllables; now the utterances are framed into intelligible, if fragmentary, speech. Byron apostrophizes the deep and dark blue ocean; Spartacus harangues the gladiators. From such sublimities the casual intruder turns away abashed and amazed; even the valiant caretaker seeks his subterranean stronghold.

But there is a most serious purpose connected with this extraordinary performance. The aim is nothing less than to develop in us the divine gift of speech. It has been discovered that there is neither piety nor power in a weary monotone, and the preacher of to-day must acquire a natural and forceful elocution. A psalm of rejoicing is not to be read in funereal manner, nor a New Testament dialogue as a solemn discourse. The appeal is to intelligence and feeling, qualities which should be present in religious as well as in secular oratory.

The regrettable fact is that in the process of our improvement there is so much to unlearn. It is not easy to overcome the habits of voice and manner that have long been ignorantly practiced in private and public speech at this late date, when we are already so burdened with other studies, that faithful practice is almost an impossibility. When we recall the way in which noble prose and lofty poetry were maimed and mutilated in the "dull mechanic exercise" of reading in the public school, we excuse ourselves for some of our present limitations. Although the human voice is as prone to perverseness as is the moral nature, yet it is usually allowed to form its own habits without assistance or restraint. Only a very small minority of the pupils of the public schools ever study elocution at all, and most of them grow up without any realization of its importance. In university curricula so little emphasis is placed on training for public speech or reading that many an otherwise well educated man leaves the university quite unqualified to express himself with any