

## RHETORIC.

The critical faculties of certain undergraduates seem to attain a development in exquisite harmony with the growth of their creative powers. It is no new thing to hear the most contemptuous censures of the College paper from persons to whom the lowliest flights of composition are almost impossible, or to find clumsy literary fledglings, who have crawled unawares into some dull corner of the contemporary press, pronounce all connection with VARSITY a serious compromise of their exalted smallness. Amusing as appears this air of lofty superiority in persons lacking the essential elements of English scholarship, it is by no means so naively interesting as the ludicrous strictures that often emanate from humbler minds. There are some readers whose highest aim and proudest boast it is, to be, and to be considered, eminently practical, and whose broad, receptive intellects can never grasp this vital truth, that in various departments of art the most practical critic must often be exactly the reverse of what is commonly understood as practical. It is altogether likely that a practical man would be a most impractical critic of Tintoretti, or Rubens, or Turner, and a practical man would hardly be able to produce a practical criticism of *Samson Agonistes*, the *Ode to Evening*, or the solemn music of *In Memoriam*. To be practical very often means to be narrow, and petty, and blind. This is seen in many departments of human activity, and in none more often than in literature. Nor is it difficult to detect your impractical practical literary critic. One test is sufficient. If ever he reads a paragraph slightly raised above mediocrity by warmth of tone or symmetry of form, he invariably delivers himself of this supposed anathema: it is *rhetorical*.

Rhetoric is nothing more nor less than the fitting expression of thought in spoken or written word. Fitting expression is not necessarily plain or bald expression. On the contrary, the most proper style of discourse is very often a forcible, an elegant, a lofty style, bald only in its grandeur, simple only in its unity and proportion. Rightly speaking, therefore, to be rhetorical means to adapt the manner to the subject and the occasion, whether the style be plain as Wellington's Waterloo despatch, or splendid as Junius' Letter to the King. Anything, however, less simple than a business letter, anything displaying more variation of color, more glow of spirit, more splendor of diction than Hallam's Constitutional History, all this is "rhetorical," all this is bad.

Such intolerance is one of the evil results of our mechanical educational methods, and the low popular ideals of the day. Masterpieces of literature are studied in the schools for the sake of the logical content, and not of the graceful form. Young men and women grow up under the influence of one predominant principle, to grasp, to get, and to hold, but the love of beauty is condemned, neglected, or suppressed. The use of the word "rhetorical," expresses the inability of a person thus trained to appreciate the emotional and æsthetic qualities of style. They desire to read, it is true, but their writers, especially their VARSITY writers, must be just a little clumsy, just a little commonplace.

The practical teaching of late years has gone altogether too far. It is a mistaken policy to focus all the attention of scholars or students upon the content of a literary production. Very likely such instruction will produce specimens who can draw up a logical analysis of a given poem, but that system must be radically defective which, while it turns out hundreds able to recount just what *Michael* contains, produces few or none of sufficient æsthetic sense to recognize the beauty of the lines *To a Highland Girl*. Such, however, is the present mode. Doubtless there are many who can describe, in orthodox critical phraseology, the faults and merits of Milton and Shelley, Keats and Rossetti; but how many have advanced far enough in the cultivation of literary taste, really to enjoy *Lycidas* and

*Adonais*, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, and *The Blessed Damozel*? How many can detect the "ring of false metal" in the *Lays of Ancient Rome*? How many can accurately point out where pomp becomes pomposity in the works of Dr. Johnson? No wonder such people consider forcible and elegant writing "rhetorical." They have been so busy in analysing and classifying the meaning of literature, that any attraction in literary form must seem to them heretical and almost vicious. They have subjected works of art to so close a scrutiny that they have not really seen them at all. A call to admire force and beauty of style, is to them like a call from Satan to worship his own inventions. And yet, how glorious the gift of beauty! How great the blessing to know and enjoy it. Let undergraduate readers and critics survey the ages. Let them for a moment forget their practical principles, and recognize the complex nature of man. Little indeed that was practical has survived without the aid of style, without the aid of rhetoric. Beauty of style has saved us Homer and Virgil, Herodotus and Livy, Plato, Demosthenes, and Cicero. Yes, and would there now be a Shakespeare, if no one had possessed the divine gift to write such verse as this:—

These our actors,  
As I foretold you, were all spirits and  
Are melted into air, into thin air:  
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,  
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,  
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve  
And like this insubstantial pageant faded,  
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff  
As dreams are made on, and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep.

Prose, good, plain, practical prose, might in some degree have conveyed to the world the facts of life and thought that Tennyson and Browning wove into the texture of their poems, but those facts would now be dead, and those great names would not be names of light. A material age may despise all that is not material, but the noble ideal of "sweetness and light," apart from the errors of its great expounder, can never die. It was a faithful oracle, that the Elizabethan born too late, spoke to the Grecian urn, and to all succeeding time:

O Attic shape! Fair attitude! With brede  
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,  
With forest branches and the trodden weed;  
Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought  
As doth eternity: Cold pastoral!  
When old age shall this generation waste,  
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe  
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,  
"Beauty is truth, truth beauty,"—that is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

—ALASTOR.

## A PROFESSION.

BY AN UNDERGRAD.

That idea will persist in keeping itself in view. Get out! Who wants a profession? Not I. I am well enough content as I am. What can you give me that should cause me to leave my present happy state? What can you give me to compensate for the company of the wittiest, the deepest, the most sympathetic, not only of this age and country, but of every age and nationality? You ask me to use all my energy, all my time, and whatever talent I may possess in the pursuit of what? For the gratification of ambition perhaps? Or may it be to secure comfort, or less still, a living? Granted that it is any one or all of these, I ask of what use are they? Of what use is a living, but that it may be enjoyed by one-self or others? Of what use is comfort, when all the energy