

A

PLEA FOR LITERATURE

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

BEFORE THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF CANADA
ON MAY 26, 1908

By S. E. DAWSON, C.M.G., Lit.D. (Laval).

MONTREAL

E. M. RENOUF, LIMITED, ST. CATHERINE ST.

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PREFATORY NOTE.

This address was delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Royal Society of Canada by the President for the year 1907-8. It forms part of the "Transactions" and will appear in the usual annual volume. It is issued, in the meantime, in its present form by request.

OTTAWA, June, 1908.



A PLEA FOR LITERATURE.

It will be my endeavour to direct your attention for a short time this evening to some of the objects aimed at in founding the Royal Society which appear to have attracted less than their legitimate share of popular interest; to some of the functions which the Society is performing and may perform; and to indicate some directions in which it may develop. My remarks will be concerned chiefly with the first two sections—the literary sections. The scientific sections express the activities of a scientific era. They deal with material things and make their appeal to the practical genius of the age. They need neither explanation nor apology; for, in popular opinion, science is held to have a basis of real utility which is lacking in literature. The attention of mankind is focussed as never before on the advance of science as it strides from victory to victory over the world of matter; but let us step out of the blaze of noon and rest awhile in the quiet shade of the world of the spirit.

In providing so largely for literature, as distinguished from science, the founders of our Society were following French models. The Royal Society of London, founded in 1660 “for improving Natural Knowledge,” has steadily observed the limitations of its charter; but Cardinal Richelieu, twenty-five years previously (in 1635), had founded the French Academy for purely literary objects. That great statesman

recognised the power of literature, and, for two hundred years, the French language and literature dominated Europe, and the Academy exists to this day a power in the world of literature, as is the Royal Society of London a power in the world of science.

During the formation of our Society the view was strongly advocated that it should be organized after the pattern of the Royal Society of London and with the same limitations. There were many, however, among those called to Lord Lorne's counsels who were familiar with the traditions of French literature. Broader views prevailed, and the objects of the French Academy, together with the objects of the Royal Society of London, were covered by the different sections of the one Royal Society of Canada. In this way Science and Literature can give each other support. The influence of small bands of students of different subjects is combined, and an institution was founded upon the broad basis of the experience of two races, two nationalities, and two languages—a counterpart of Canada itself.

The Society has passed the period of adolescence, and, this year, both series of its "Transactions" are rendered available to all by an index covering the whole twenty-four volumes, prepared with great labour by one of the fellows of Section One. The wealth of research over the whole fields of Science and Literature thrown open to scholars is now manifest, and the founders of the Society have been justified by the results. To have built on so wide a plan showed an abiding faith in the future of our country, then only commencing to enter upon its astonishing period of expansion. It would have been natural for men of little faith to have founded some institution for the cultivation of Applied Science; but here is an institution for nourishing the intellectual life of the country—to follow the study of Science and Literature into every field, and for their own sakes—not for any immediate

material return. It would have been far simpler to have followed precedent than to have traced out a new course; and it would have been far easier to have copied the Royal Society of London than to inaugurate a Society upon a new plan adapted to meet the intellectual requirements of a country so constituted as ours.

It is impossible to overlook the fact that, as the years pass, there is a growing tendency to exalt Science at the expense of Literature; and the complaint that "Letters are neglected and Science is all in all" is too well founded. An idea is prevalent among the practical men who control the purse-strings of the age that there is a certainty and utility about knowledge of the material world which Literature does not possess, and this tendency is evident by the large endowments bestowed of late years upon science in the older colleges, by the number of new scientific institutions formed, and by the increasing throngs of students following strictly scientific studies; while what used to be known as "the humanities" are correspondingly undervalued, and have to rely on the endowments of former generations. In this respect our Society has been assisted by the French traditions in favour of Literature, for Literature was always patronized by the French kings and honoured by the French Court. The love of letters in old France passed oversea into Canada with the cultivated officials and highly educated ecclesiastics who came over from time to time. The literary exercises at the Jesuits' College at Quebec were graced by the presence of the Governor and his little court, and we read of one occasion when the son of a wheelwright of Quebec—the youthful Jolliet, afterwards to be the discoverer of the Mississippi—took a brilliant part in the public exercises of the College and the Intendant Talon—great statesman though he was—thought it not beneath his dignity to take part with the students, and spoke like the rest in Latin with fluency and correctness. Quebec

was then a small village—the gateway of a great unknown wilderness. Though the stress of life was very great and the people had to be practical, yet they could take an interest in Latin discussions on philosophical questions. Jolliet was no worse a canoe-man because of his knowledge of Latin—nor, 2,000 years before that, was Socrates less staunch a foot soldier at Potidea and Delium because of his devotion to moral philosophy.

And yet those who wished to confine the Royal Society of Canada within the limits of the Royal Society of London were not altogether without reason. There is undoubted truth in Lord Beaconsfield's remark, when offering a baronetcy to Tennyson, "that it is in the nature of things that the tests of merit cannot be so precise in literature as in science," and, as Lord Macaulay says, "the province of literature is a debatable land." What may be possible in a highly centralized country like France is out of the question in a decentralized country like Canada, where local patriotisms still obstruct that organic unity which we all hope will be realized in future years. The appraisal of current literature, especially of poetry, is, fortunately, not one of the functions of our Society; for no institution ever has been devised which could so isolate itself from the time-spirit enveloping it as to anticipate the literary judgments of even the next succeeding generation. Posterity is the only infallible judge; for although, as Pope tells us,

Most have the seeds of judgment in their mind,

the ripening of those seeds is retarded or prevented by the dominating spirit of the age. It took seven years to sell the first edition of 1,300 copies of "Paradise Lost," and Milton received ten pounds for his share; but the nation was then in the full tide of reaction against the Puritans, and Butler's "Hudibras" was the popular poem of the period. No con-

ceivable Academy would have crowned "Paradise Lost" then, or for two generations after. "All men," as Cicero says, "by a certain hidden faculty approve or condemn works of art or letters," but they do so infallibly only after the mists of the age clear away. Great works in poetry originate independently of stimulation or reward.

Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise
(That last infirmity of noble mind)
To scorn delights, and live laborious days.

The passion of creative art will neither be encouraged nor discouraged. Most of the greatest works in Literature were written before copyright was thought of. Dante could not help writing his great poem. Neither Shelley, nor Keats, nor Tennyson, nor Browning, were drawn into literary pursuits by any outward force. Horace, in his well known ode, sets forth the inducement—the spur of fame. He writes:

"I shall not wholly die, and a large portion of my being will escape Death. I have built a monument more enduring than bronze . . . which the innumerable series of years and the flight of time cannot destroy."

It is so also with great works in prose. The idea of Gibbon's great history was suddenly revealed to him as he sat on the steps of the church of Ara Coeli, on the site of the Capitol, and listened to the friars singing vespers. Then his life's work was set for him, and the mystic power of the genius of Rome seized his soul. The pursuit of letters, as well as that of the higher science, is its own reward. The literary sections have useful work to do in other directions than the criticism of current literature. The great mass of mankind will judge aright when local and ephemeral opinion clears away, and work will endure in so far as it touches the universal heart of humanity or rests upon the universal law of beauty.

Our Society has not specifically laid upon it the high mission laid upon the French Academy by its original charter

“to work with all diligence to keep the language pure, eloquent, and capable of treating the arts and sciences.” That was a grand aim, worthy of the Cardinal Minister who made France so great. For a language is a living organism always in transition, like a pine tree putting forth new leaves and shedding old ones in accordance with its own laws. “*Oratio* next to *ratio*—speech next to reason,” said Sir Philip Sidney, “is the greatest gift bestowed upon mortality,” and each language is at once the product and the manifestation of the genius of the race or nation speaking it. With characteristic insight the Greeks used one word, *logos*, for reason and speech. The ideas are inseparable. Shelley puts speech first. Prometheus,

Gave man speech and speech created thought.

The root words of a language are few, and, for the most part, are the same for many languages; the full vocabulary of a language being an extension into secondary, tertiary, or many more derived and metaphorical meanings, modified by suffixes and prefixes. This is not a chance process, but the genius of each people guides it, and the manner of making these changes reveals the intelligence of each people and its characteristic way of looking at the universe around it. Therein lies the spirit of the language, and the so-called silent and superfluous letters are clues to the logic of its evolution. The process goes on unconsciously and cannot be accelerated—even by a strenuous President or a confident multi-millionaire. The pine tree will not be hurried into dropping its leaves. The people are sovereign here, and will not drop a word, or a letter even, at the bidding of anyone. As Horace tells us, “Custom is the law and arbiter and rightful legislator of language.”

Much complaint has arisen in recent years of the difficulty of English spelling. How can it be otherwise if spelling is

not taught in the schools, and if the "letters Cadmus gave" are submerged in phonic systems or other recent experimentation. Words are not arbitrary signs, but are embodied thoughts. They have life-histories reaching back through innumerable years and teaching, often by these very despised silent letters, about affiliations of races in the dim past beyond the record of history. It is pleasing and instructive to trace these embodied thoughts through their changes, and it is helpful in acquiring a knowledge of other tongues as well as in understanding our own.

Whatever sympathy we may have for those who have no time to learn to spell, let us not permit them, Procrustes-like, to cut down the English language to the measure of their capacity. Rather let them turn to some of the abandoned etymological spelling books and learn words, not singly and separately, but in their groups and families; for English is not a jargon or a collection of Chinese ideographs, but an organ of thought naturally formed in the course of long centuries unconsciously by the English people. New words we must have for the new things under our skies, but we must jealously watch lest we gradually and unconsciously drift away into a Canadian dialect either in spelling or accent, and, even if we have as a Society no collective mandate for the task, it will be well to inquire whether our manner of speech is being kept as close as possible to the central standards and, to adopt the great Cardinal's phrase, whether we as Canadians are working with all diligence to keep the language pure and eloquent.

The spheres of Science and Literature, though they may seem at times to coalesce, are profoundly diverse. The former is fundamentally quantitative—the latter is radically qualitative. Science is based upon the principle laid down by one of the greatest of her votaries: "*All things exist in number, weight, and measure.*" Yes! All things; save the will and

the spirit of man. All things; save love, joy, honour, patriotism, and every other motive which stirs the human spirit to action or gives value and dignity to the life of man. For such things as these there is neither number, weight, nor measure; and yet in them is all that makes life worth living. They are the fields in which literature is supreme; for it deals with the whole region of the spirit—the whole world of mind—and nothing in that world can be apprehended quantitatively. It is doubtless easier to appraise work done in science than work done in literature—the scientific student can measure his results by definite and readily accepted standards, while work in literature must abide the general judgment of mankind. For that reason, in an industrial age, the pursuit of literature is not favoured by practical men; but they forget that, while science deals with the material forms and forces of the universe, literature has for its sphere the whole of the moral and intellectual forces past, present, and future. "Who knoweth the things of a man, but the spirit of a man which is in him?" Now the "things of a man" are just those things which men really care for and by which civil society advances or retrogrades.

These "things of a man," so profoundly interesting to humanity, lie within the domain of probable truth—a vast region extending from the merest probability to the highest moral conviction—while science with its mathematical methods and its weighings and measurements, lays claim to certainty, and in that is a great attraction for practical minds. But the sciences are no guide to life, and, in proportion as men obtain control of the forces of nature, do they need instruction from other sources of knowledge. In History, Political Economy, Sociology, and their kindred studies will be found the clues leading to the higher civilization and happier life of man. These are sometimes called "sciences" very incorrectly; for they all deal with probable truth.

Their last word is never said, for they extend as civilization evolves and humanity advances. The *Dreadnought*, with its amazing adaptations of science, may be blown to atoms in an instant by a torpedo from below or by dynamite from an air-ship from above. The hopes of the race are bound up rather in such things as the discussions of the Hague Conference—they are among the "things of a man."

We can now apprehend the full meaning of Matthew Arnold's definition of literature as the "Criticism of Life." Life! that is the life of man—human life—life which we fondly believe will endure in some more or less developed form when the spent sun has become as cold as the moon; but, in any case, life which is to each one of us far more than any scientific fact or theory ever discovered or propounded. For thousands of years our views of science have been grossly erroneous, while the principles of life have been in the main the same. The laws of conduct have been more stable than the theories of the constitution of matter. Man struggles and succeeds or fails now just as at the dawn of history, and we still sympathize with the idylls of Solomon and the Shulamite girl in the Bible, and smile at the gossip of the Syracusan women in Theocritus. Happiness is success, and happiness is dependent upon conduct. Now conduct is the subject matter of literature, whether we read it in Homer, or Plutarch, or Thucydides, or Shakespeare, or Kipling, or even in our own Drummond's sympathetic portraiture of our quaint and very dear friend—the Habitant of Quebec.

Literature, then, being the study of human life, it is, of necessity, the most practical of all studies—practical because it deals with the varied experiences and capacities of the human soul. For that reason great statesmen have been trained in letters rather than in science—in classics rather than in mathematics. Their field is human life and in the mirror of what are happily called "the humanities" that life

is reflected. The statesman seeks to move men, and he must study mankind—study them in the past in history—in the present in current literature, and from thence make his deductions for the future. With truth did Pope write:

The proper study of mankind is man.

That is the highest kind of knowledge; for all social institutions are stable in proportion as they are based upon it, and it is the most important to human happiness. "Know thyself" had the place of honour among the maxims of the seven sages inscribed upon the temple of Delphi, five hundred years before Christ. These sages were not theorists. They were statesmen, law-givers, men of affairs, and, like the writers of Ecclesiastes and Proverbs, were ignorant of all we know as exact science. Manners and circumstances change, but the master springs of conduct are unchanged, and, in the great works of former ages, we may see ourselves acting in a different stage setting and before a different audience.

"Visible and tangible products of the past," says Carlyle, "I reckon up to the extent of three. Cities with their cabinets and arsenals; then tilled fields with their roads and bridges; and thirdly—books. In which third truly lies a worth far surpassing that of the two others." Not only are they surpassing in worth, but in endurance. The great cities of the ancient world, once the centres of great empires—Babylon, Tyre, Carthage, Thebes—are mounds of ruins. The rich plains of Asia and the productive fields of Northern Africa, once the granary of the Roman world, have, for long centuries, remained untilled; but the literatures of Greece, Rome, and Judea, still sway the minds of men. The wealth and luxury of the merchant princes of old equalled anything existing in our day; but their civilization was material and their memory has passed into oblivion. The temple libraries recently exhumed contained deeds, contracts, leases, and such

like practical documents, but nothing corresponding to the literature of the Jews or Greeks. The life was material, and therefore perished like the docks and palaces. The whole wealth and power of Asia was hurled back by a small band of idealists at Marathon and Thermopylæ, and, while the native annals of those great powers are a blank, the history of the little cantons of Greece and the deeds of their citizens have been a guide through all the ages. The names of many of the poorest citizens of Athens are familiar to us, but who knows the names of the merchant princes of Tyre and Sidon? Perished are their docks and palaces, perished are their names and deeds; but the work of the "blind old singer of Scio's rocky Isle" still lives.

Other creations may fade, to shapeless ruin decaying;
Over the world of thy song, youth's earliest dawn is still playing.

While the monuments of ancient literature are enduring and are still influencing the actions of mankind, it is not so in the case of those studies which deal with the world of matter. The science of Aristotle has been obsolete for centuries—his logic, rhetoric, and poetics are text books in our great Universities. The last shred of Greek physical speculation—the atomic theory—which was generally accepted at the close of the nineteenth century has been hopelessly shattered. We had, until the last few years, a working theory of the material universe, but we must now look round for another, and we are face to face with the fact that the triumphs of science have been chiefly in ministering to the comforts of the outer life. We are no nearer to the inner reality of the material world. It is now the duty of sociology to apply these rich conquests over the entire area of human life and elevate the whole race to a higher moral and intellectual plane by mitigating the struggle for life. In that task the study of mankind alone can guide us, and where can

the spirit of man be studied if not in its interaction with the Time-spirit throughout the ages, as portrayed upon the scroll of history?

Great as have been the changes wrought by the advance of science during the last fifty years, the changes of the last decade in our fundamental conceptions of matter and of the ultimate constitution of the universe have been still more profound, and I am proud to add that some of the Fellows of our Society are among the leaders in this movement of scientific thought. The human mind will not rest without a rational theory of the inner reality of the world in which it finds itself. Such theories had been left to the philosophers until, in 1808, Dalton adopted the atomic theory, and it was frankly accepted by the leaders of science. "The atomic theory," said Clifford, "is no longer in the position of a theory, but these facts are definitely known and are no longer suppositions." These tiny atoms are, according to another leader of scientific thought, "the foundation stones of the material universe, which have existed since the creation unbroken and unworn." Existing, according to some, from eternity unchanged and unchangeable. They were, in old Roman days, the theme of the great poem of Lucretius; as in our day Emerson sang:

The journeying atoms,
Primordial wholes
Firmly draw, firmly drive
By their animate poles.

Never has a revolution in thought occurred with a rapidity so startling. The electrical theory of matter which now holds the field impresses the imagination of every thoughtful man and leads to far-reaching conclusions. The atom is no longer a minute mass of impenetrable ponderable matter. It is a system within which a thousand points or monads of electricity whirl and vibrate with inconceivable energy. These

points, or monads, or electrons, as they are called, are not in any sense material, while the atom is simply the field within which they exercise their amazing force. We begin dimly to discern the primary evolution from force of what is known as matter and its continuous development into the various elements, while the latest researches of Ramsay and Rutherford are justifying the dreams of the alchemists of past ages.

I am making no attempt to discuss these questions—to do so is beyond my competence. They are present in the minds of all thoughtful men—they are being worked out in this Society, and their bearing upon the main theme of this paper is that this new theory is destroying materialism by eliminating the material. It presents to us a universe built up, not of matter but of force. It opens up the vision of a grand unity as the foundation of reality. Matter is foreign to us, but force we know; for surely the human will is a force, and passion and intellect are forces, living and energizing in the world. Physics are being reconciled to metaphysics, and the material dissolves into the immaterial. Literature and Science are travelling hand in hand into the region of the imponderable forces where dwells the hidden reality of the universe.

This increasing approximation of scientific theory and speculative philosophy is modifying also the long conflict between science and religion. Our eminent fellow countryman, George John Romanes, commented upon it in his last thoughts. He drew the broad distinction that, while science dealt with proximate causes, philosophy dealt with ultimate causes; in which latter category he placed the human will, and he argued that our fundamental ideas of causality and energy arise from our consciousness of human will as a self-originating force. Now the chief value of literature is that it is the crystallized product of the conflict of the will of man with its environment—in history and archæology—in the

forms of thought, as in language, grammar, and logic—in sociology and in law, as in morals and politics. As science interprets the interplay of invisible and imponderable forces, so also literature displays the myriad forces of the will and mind of man; and there is no reason to suppose that one kind of force perishes more than the other. So Browning writes in "Rabbi Ben Ezra":

All, that is at all,
Lasts ever, past recall,
Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure.

The pursuit of literature must then be of the first importance as an incentive to action, and as a means of enlarging the capacity and happiness of mankind; for it is in Society that man finds his fruition.

Unless this world is a training school for the formation of character, in other words for the moulding of the will, it is difficult to imagine its reason for existing. In history, and more especially in biography, we can trace the development of character acting and reacting in contact with other wills. History is a continuous moral judgment. For better or worse, the happiness of large masses of men—the fate of empires often—hangs on the will of one man; and again when, from the fathomless depths of personality, a genius arises like Cæsar or Napoleon, the destinies of the world are changed. But even comparatively insignificant men may start a complete series of sequences. There are points on the water partings of our great rivers where a chance pebble may divert a tiny rill into the Gulf of Mexico or the Gulf of St. Lawrence. So it is at the fountain heads of history. The success of the American Revolution was primarily due to the omission of Lord George Germaine to notify Howe of Burgoyne's expedition from Canada. Burgoyne unsupported, surrendered at Saratoga, and decided the intervention of France. The American Revolution brought on the French

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Revolution, and these two events changed the face of the world. The fate of Canada, in 1775, hung upon Carleton, and trembled in the balance on the night of November 7th, when the little party in Bouchette's barge took him safely to Quebec, paddling with the palms of their hands as they passed through the narrow channel at the entrance of Lake St. Peter. Again, in 1812, the fate of Canada hung upon Brock when he boldly assumed the offensive, and the surrender of Detroit and Michilimackinac heartened the Canadians for the struggle.

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Conduct is the fruit, or final result, of character, and the lives of great men are finger posts of guidance, or beacons of warning, as we pass through life. There lies the immense value of biography, and especially of such works as Plutarch's Lives. But we need not go as far as Plutarch. In a few weeks we shall be celebrating the memory of Champlain, the founder of our country—not a great man, as the word is commonly used, but a model of perfect conduct in every relation of life. Among the men who shine in the annals of the Western Hemisphere, he stands among the very first. Loyal to his King, constant to his country, faithful, brave, unselfish, and with full confidence in the future of Canada, his record is a source of pride to every Canadian, and to all time they will do honour to themselves in honouring his memory. Everyone trusted him, from the wild savages of the lakes to the King on the throne of France, and he was true to all. His influence still exists, and his noble character is still a power for good. No nobler theme can inspire our studies. Let us continue to commemorate his life and deeds in the future, as the volumes of our "Transactions" show we have done in the past.

History, as a department of literature, must not, however, be confused with mere annals—dry records of occurrences like the compilations in almanacs and annuals. These are

materials for history—the dry bones which must be clothed with flesh and blood and endowed with the breath of life by the co-ordinating and vivifying power of the intellect. The facts have not only to be ascertained, but fused and brought into relation with the sum of human experience, in which the universal principles which sway mankind are embodied. The high creative imagination of the poet is not called for; but the lower representative imagination is necessary—the faculty by which the historian transports himself into strange or remote circumstances, and throws his mind into sympathy with the actors of bygone ages. Only in that way can he discern the universal and so impart unity to his work.

To say that it is sometimes untrue is no more a reproach to history than to any other branch of knowledge. Contemporary history is seldom impartial. But the truth prevails in the end, as has been notably manifest in the case of the American Revolution. For a hundred years never was history so perverted, but, within the last fifteen years, our loyalist forefathers have been more than justified by a new school of historians grouped around the greater United States Universities who, writing from original sources, have risen above the special pleading of Baneroft and the rest, and admit (to borrow one of their own phrases) that “false and exaggerated conceptions of British despotism and tyranny had prevailed in American literature.” So far has this gone that a professor of history in one of the State Universities has prepared for his own students a text book on the history of the American Revolution, extracted from Lecky’s “History of the 18th Century,” which might be adopted with acceptance in any University in Canada.

Literature, at the highest level of its power, is expressed in poetry, which must be counted among the Fine Arts, since it is the product of the creative power of the imagination and is clothed with beauty of form, of proportion, and of cadence.

Music expresses pure emotion, and in it the deep passion underlying universal humanity seeks expression; but its utterance is indefinite. Painting, while definite, is limited to the presentation of action at one moment of time, but poetry is not only the music of language, but it sustains its action over indefinitely long spaces of time. It appeals to the intellect as well as to the emotions, and touches all the chords of life. Poetry is more philosophical than history, and its subject matter is higher; for, while history relates what the spirit of man has done, the power of the imagination, working on an ideal plane, reveals what it is possible for the spirit of man to do.

And yet a reference to the volumes of our "Transactions" will show that no poetry has appeared in the English literary Section, and very little in the French. There is no fixed standard by which it can be measured, and the judgment of posterity be anticipated. Poetry of the very highest order has not yet been written in Canada, nor probably anywhere upon this western continent. Much beautiful descriptive poetry we have, but the great creative Canadian poet has yet to appear. When he comes he will be a gift from the unknown; colleges, nor societies, nor culture will produce him. The origin of poetic genius is hidden in the impenetrable mystery of personality. Great poets arise from all classes and under all circumstances. Burns was a ploughman, Keats a surgeon's apprentice, Shakespeare had no regular education, all three sprang from the people; Byron was a nobleman; Shelley belonged to the gentry; Milton and Tennyson were the products of a complete university training. Genius rises superior to conditions of birth, and, being instinctively in harmony with the universal consciousness of mankind, transcends the local and particular and illuminates all it touches with

The light that never was on sea or land,
The inspiration and the poet's dream.

Herein lies the difficulty of the immediate appreciation of the highest class of poetry. That in it which is universal appeals eventually to all sorts and conditions of men in all times and places; but, in the meantime, it is judged by the local and particular element—the time-spirit which environs us. Hence the gravest mistakes both of appreciation and depreciation have been made, and even the French Academy has not been infallible. Glover's "Leonidas" was received with a general chorus of praise—it is now practically unknown; Bailey's "Festus" was supposed to be a poem for all time, but is never mentioned now; as for Tupper's "Proverbial Philosophy," no book in recent times has had so great a sale, it is now most deservedly buried beyond hope. On the other hand, "Paradise Lost" fell flat on the public which restored the Stuarts, while Butler's "Hudibras" was received with acclaim. We all know how long Wordsworth, Browning, and Tennyson had to wait for general recognition. Such errors manifest the overpowering influence of transitory conditions on literary judgments. Some of Kipling's work will suffer from the same cause, and probably in proportion to its present popularity.

The principles of poetry were laid down by Aristotle in his "Poetics," and Horace in his "Art of Poetry." Art, including poetic art, Aristotle defined as an imitation of nature. He did not mean by that a simple repetition or representation of nature; but that the poet is in a true sense a maker, and, while he creates after the manner and on the lines of nature, he adds something from the ideal world of his imagination—something higher, which nature was aiming at but did not attain. In illustration take our own national emblem, the maple leaf. There are no two mature leaves precisely alike—there is something particular in each, but the variations are within fixed limits. Yet nature had in view an ideal form which may be seen in a young leaf as it

unfolds. So also Turner reproduces nature, but the landscape is glorified by his genius. In like manner a great portrait painter reproduces the face of his original truly; but at its highest expression. He shows the man as he might be—as God intended him to be. In art, then, the soul is exalted by the contemplation of the universal ideal, and in that way shares the creative rapture of the poet.

It follows from this that poetry has an entirely different canon of truth from history; for, while history deals with what has happened, poetry deals with what may happen. Aristotle somewhat paradoxically observes that it is better to follow the impossible which is probable than the improbable which is possible. There must be the truth of consistency. The poem must be congruous with the ideal or the universal basis of human nature, while that which is particular or accidental is of slight account. Therefore, in Shakespeare's "Winter's Tale" we are not troubled at reading of a shipwreck on the coast of Bohemia. In reading the "Idylls of the King" it is not in the least important whether King Arthur ever lived. The character drawn by Tennyson is grand and noble—ideally true to universal type. So also with Enoch Arden—how far the story is founded on fact is immaterial, the type of heroic self-sacrifice is felt to be true and possible to human nature and so rests on the universal.

While the literature of a people is the expression of the genius of that people it is, at the same time, a formative power which moulds and preserves national character. Especially is this true of poetry, for in its poetry the ideals of a people find utterance, and, just as the plays of Aeschylus were both the outcome and the stimulus of Greek national life at the critical period of the Persian wars, so the plays of Shakespeare were at once the epic of English history and the support of English freedom in its struggle with Spanish despotism. Nations live their lives—they rise, endure, and

pass away. Knowledge has no bearing on their duration. Life is spiritual, and the soul of a people is not in what it has, or what it knows of the material world; but in the spiritual power of its aggregate personality. If material prosperity could have built up an empire Carthage would have crushed Rome, but Carthage is now nothing but a name, and its character and history are recorded only by its enemies. Yet what impartial observer in those far-off days would not have anticipated the success of Carthage. She had commercial eminence, a powerful navy, and wealth without end. While her antagonist was without money and had to learn the art of building ships, Carthage had commerce, manufactures, and capital; but not one writer or bard to kindle the flame of patriotism in her soul. As the nationalities of modern Europe crystallized out of the confusion of the middle ages, a distinctive national literature grew up in each and embodied its ideal. The Arabs overran Asia and Africa with a book, and the literary style of the Koran was an important factor in its initial reception in Arabia.

The great empires of the East, for all their wealth and power, passed away without leaving any records save in the Greek and Hebrew histories; but there is one small off-shoot of the Semitic race which has been preserved to the present day by the power of its literature. The Bible is, in fact, the literature of the ancient Jewish nation. Its selection and preservation form no part of my theme. My object is to point out the amazing power it has had in preserving the Hebrew people through 2,000 years of unparalleled persecution. It contains all forms of literature, but especially poetry, of the very highest order. The triumph song of Moses, the lament for Jonathan, the philosophical drama of Job, the sweet idyll of Ruth, the grand prophetic outbursts of Isaiah, the treasury of the soul of all humanity in the Psalms, make the book a wonder of literature, and a heavy responsibility

rests upon the Philistines who put it out of the schools. Without king, noble, or priest, without country, city, or temple, without any material holding ground, this book has kept alive the Jewish nation in all lands and supported it under the most dreadful oppression. Not only beside the rivers of Babylon, but beside all the rivers of the habitable world has this people wept the bitter tears of the alien; but the power of their literature kept the memory of Zion perennially fresh in their souls.

During the last twenty-five years the idea of a Canadian nationality has been rapidly growing, and the change is reflected in our literature, especially in our poetry. To weld all Canada into one nation is an arduous task, and the statesmen will need the aid of the writers of Canada. The double history and origin of our people stand in the way of that intimate fusion so important in the formation of national solidarity. The problem is not the absorption of a few thousands of scattered foreigners; but to unite in common aspirations the French and English elements of our society. That was done in England, but it took a long time; for our Edward the Third could not speak English, and, until the closing years of his long reign, French only was taught in the schools. It was the influence of Chaucer which decided the issue, and his poetry fixed the language we speak; but, like the victory at Quebec, the result was not a conquest; for, while the grammar is English and the common vocabulary is Saxon, the majority of words in our dictionaries are of French and Romance origin. This cannot be repeated; for both languages are now fully formed by great literatures, but much can be done by frankly facing the facts as they are, by having the outlines of French history taught in the English schools, and by promoting the teaching of the French language in every way short of rousing opposition by making it obligatory. It is ignorance which causes estrangement.

In this respect the work of our late colleague, Dr. Drummond, has been most important. With the insight of a true poet he discerned, through the outer husk, the true nature of the Habitant, and interpreted the soul of one-third of our people to the other two-thirds. For one hundred and fifty years the Habitant had lived his self-contained life. Happy, contented, and good natured, he was untroubled by envy of his richer neighbours. Those few of the English people who knew the Habitant liked him, but did not stop to study him until Drummond revealed the intrinsic worth of his character, his humour, his patient courage, his endurance, his simple faith in God.

The same tendency is manifest in the unification of our history by the increased devotion of English Canadians to the study, in the original authorities, of the period of the French Regime. The organization of the Champlain Society of Toronto is only one instance, though a notable one, of the movement in Ontario. It is now recognized that in the battles on the Plains of Abraham both sides won. The English troops overran the country, but the French continued to possess it. The French lost nothing, but gained free institutions; and, by dint of long companionship, the English have come to regard the history of Old Canada as theirs also. While the French Revolution severed the French Canadians from France, the sequence of the American Revolution severed the English Canadians from the English-speaking people of the South. The two elements of our people are nearer and more to each other than to either of the nations from which they sprang, and, in the study of the history of their common country, the two races find a bond of common interest drawing them closer, year by year, as they know each other better.

The broad field of human interest thus included within the limits of literature has been, in some important sections,

diligently cultivated by the Fellows of the Royal Society. The monographs and papers in the French and English literary sections are so numerous and valuable that it has become impossible for anyone to write upon the history of the northern part of this continent without reference to the series of our "Transactions." The two sections have vied with each other in elucidating the Cartier voyages. The Cabot voyages have been placed in their true historical setting, and the movement which resulted in the erection of the Cabot tower at Bristol, England, originated here. The tracks of the early explorers have been traced, and, in short, there is scarcely any part of the history of Canada which has not been treated in scholarly monographs. Good original work has been done in the archæology of the Indian tribes and in the philology of the Indian languages. On looking over the index to the first and second series of our "Transactions," compiled by Mr. Sulte, and just issued, one is surprised at the extent and variety of the information these volumes contain.

Important as these studies have been in the past, they must be considered only as a foundation for future work. Thanks to the intelligent liberality of our Government, Ottawa is becoming a resort for serious students of American history. The Archives building and its precious contents are a monument of wisdom which, while recognizing science, is also broad enough to acknowledge the importance of literature. It stands as an evidence of patriotic pride—pride in the stainless annals of our common country—pride in Champlain and Frontenac, as well as in Brock and Carleton. Treasures of history still unworked lie there waiting for the diligent student, and in proportion as our opportunities are great so also are our obligations.

Then, again, our interests are widened by the dual origin of our people. Two languages awaken our sympathies with two distinct streams of civilization. The histories of the two

great mother nations supply us with an infinity of themes. Two great systems of law and two widely different systems of settlement broaden our outlook over the past and guide us in our forecast of the future.

In literature, then, we find unfolded the chequered story of the struggle of the human soul with time and circumstance. Often defeated, but never despairing, the race of man presses on in its allotted course. Faint, but still pursuing, it follows its ideals—the higher civilization in this world, the higher life in the next. Science tells us that force is never destroyed, but transformed, and our life here is a force, struggling, rebellious against its environment, and seeking something higher; as the dragon fly strains out of his muddy covering to become a living flash of light in the sunshine.

For the high gods took in hand
Fire, and the falling of tears,
And a measure of sliding sand
From under the feet of the years;
And froth and drift of the sea;
And dust of the labouring earth;
And bodies of things to be
In the houses of death and of birth;
And wrought with weeping and laughter,
And fashioned with loathing and love,
With life before and after
And death beneath and above,
For a day and a night and a morrow,
That his strength might endure for a span
With travail and heavy sorrow,
The holy spirit of man.

The holy spirit of man!! Holy in its capacity, in its possibility; nay, more, in its ultimate destiny. The failures, the sorrows, the joys, the triumphs, of the "holy spirit of man"—*these are the subject matter of literature.*