

THE BOOK SHELF.

(Conducted by ALBERT LEE, '91.)

"Mere Literature."

The question as to what real literature is, has been asked more than once, and as many times answered; and no doubt, if the replies of the wise men and the learned were brought together they would harmonize fairly well. Professor Woodrow Wilson in his collection of essays, "Mere Literature" (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co.), puts the query again, and himself answers it. His statement is that the essence which makes a piece of writing "Literature" is reality. "A description written as if with an undimmed and seeing eye upon the very object described; an exposition that lays bare the very soul of the matter; a motive truly revealed; anger that is righteous and justly spoken; mirth that has its sources pure; phrases to find the heart of a thing, and a heart seen in things for the phrases to find; an unaffected mien set out in language that is its own—such are the realities of literature. Nothing else is of the kin."

That is a long sentence, but it is full of wisdom and there is material in it for thought. I wish there were space to quote further, but we shall have to be satisfied here with the briefest of extracts, in the hope that they may act as sign-posts toward a journey through the book itself.

Professor Wilson differentiates very clearly and pleasantly between scholarship and literature, and the manner in which he does this is typical of the clear, epigrammatic form of the essays in the book, which treat particularly of literature. "Scholarship," he says, "is the realm of nicely adjusted opinion. It is the business of scholars to assess evidence and test conclusions, to discriminate values and reckon probabilities. Literature is the realm of conviction and vision. . . . It speaks individual faiths. Its ground-work is not erudition, but reflection and fancy. . . . If literature use scholarship, it is only to fill it with fancies or ship it to new standards, of which of itself it can know nothing."

From the general production of literature, Professor Wilson turns to that special field in which he has shown himself a careful laborer, and talks of the writing of history. It is perhaps interesting to quote his idea of how the writing of history should be done. It "must be based upon original research and authentic record, but it can no more be directly constructed by the piecing together of bits of original research than by the mere reprinting together of state documents." He then goes on to illustrate his idea with a very clear example, and one that comes right home to most of us. He says that whoever wishes to write the history of the early days of our nation, must saturate himself with the opinions of those times and look at events not from the Nineteenth century, but from the Seventeenth. "Let the historian, if he be wise, know no more of the history, as he writes, than might have been known in the age and day of which he is writing. A trifle too much knowledge will undo him. It will break the spell for his imagination. . . . He must look far and wide upon every detail of the time, see it at first hand, and paint as he looks; selecting, as the artist must, but selecting while the vision is fresh, and not from old sketches laid away in his notes. . . . The historian needs an imagination quite as much as he needs scholarship, and consummate literary art as much as candor and common honesty."

In the essay on "A Calendar of Great Americans" is given the best definition of the American Constitution that I have ever seen. Professor Wilson explains the difference between the English and the American idea of liberty and of Constitutional Government, and shows how the consideration of constitutional questions is different in the two countries. "The American constitutional statesman constructs policies like a lawyer. The standard with which he must square his conduct is set him by a document, upon whose definite sentences the whole structure of the government directly rests. That document, moreover, is the concrete embodiment of a peculiar theory of government. That theory is, that definitive laws, selected by a power outside the government, are the structural iron of the entire fabric of politics, and that nothing which cannot be constructed upon this stiff framework is a safe or legitimate part of policy. . . . Other nations have had written constitutions, but no other nation has ever filled a written constitution with this singularly compounded content, of a sound, legal conscience and a strong national purpose."

The discussion of great Americans in this essay is highly interesting, and Professor Wilson gives very fresh ideas on the great men of our history. He points out the strength and weakness of their characters and shows which were foreigners in their methods and which were distinctively American. Of Lincoln, whom he considers as one of our truly great Americans, he says: "He was not fit to be President until he actually became President." Perhaps the chief value of this essay is that it will suggest lines, along which profitable courses of reading may be taken, for it surely points out a number of very interesting subjects which every American should wish to be familiar with.

"The Pomp of the Lavillettes."

Although perhaps not quite so good as some of his earlier books, "The Pomp of the Lavillettes" by Gilbert Parker, (Boston, Lampson, Wolfe & Co.) is much better than his book of short stories which he published last Fall. The scene of the present tale is laid in Canada—that land which Mr. Parker is rapidly making his own, in a literary sense—Bonaventure is the little French village, which witnesses the comedies and the tragedies of his tale, and the incidents are drawn at the time of the rising under Papineau. One of the best drawn characters is that of Ferrol, the Irishman. It is he who marries one of the Lavillettes, having made love to the other—but he deservedly dies. There is lots of life and motion and considerable vigor to the story, and there is no doubt about its being interesting, in spite of the fact that Mr. Parker sometimes stoops to effects that might be considered more suitable to the melo-drama than to literature.

"Warfare of Science With Theology."

The Honorable Andrew D. White, '53, the newly appointed ambassador to Germany, will carry the prestige of a fresh literary success when he crosses the sea. His Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom, (D. Appleton & Co.) has attracted more serious attention than any book of its general kind published for a long time, and its sale is said to continue to be very large. The book has aroused much interest in England, where all the principal journals have devoted much space to its consideration.

"The History of Oratory."

(Reviewed by a Yale Debater.)

With the revival of public speaking in the Universities, Professor Sears' book on "The History of Oratory" may be considered a timely contribution to the bibliography of the subject. The book presents a history of the art of speaking by giving a sketch of typical men who have been great in oratory, with an analysis of their work.

The sketches are of necessity brief, and treat of the orator's life only as it relates to his art. The analyses are truly critical and in them the author shows an intimate knowledge of the oratory of all ages. The principles of eloquence for which each of the great masters stand are considered and also the cause of the beginning, and growth, decadence and revival of the art.

There is always something disappointing in studying the triumphs of orators. There is always that in the man himself which defies analysis or reproduction on the printed page. In the recent talk on Daniel Webster, whom he knew personally and whose great efforts he heard, Prof. E. J. Phelps spoke of this point particularly. He said that many a sentence in Webster's oration we would now pass over without a second thought, which were among the most effective of the speech in which they were contained, simply from the manner and spirit of the man himself as he uttered them. This power, Mr. Phelps attributed to personal magnetism, the same quality which makes a great actor. As he expressed it, "Webster seemed to be able to place his finger on the imagination of his hearers," whereupon the whole scene rose before them, more vividly than would have been possible in the spoken word.

But the student may also use his imagination, and in some measure, bring himself, under the spell of the master.

Of particular interest is the author's view of the present condition of oratory. Its low estate is due to a reconstruction period in matters of legislation and a commercial era in the world

at large. The Universities, however, in all things are the first to catch the returning light and the revived interest in public speaking among students may be taken as harbinger of a revival in oratory. Fresh hope is given by the intercollegiate debates of the East and the oratorical contests of the West. From these academical performances it is not a long step to the court room, the people's platform and the commemorative occasion. And so we may come again to another time of real oratory. The situation in the world at large seems to indicate such a result. And so the necessity is present, and pre-eminently for collegiate speakers, of gathering the lessons left by the masters of the art in the past that, profiting by their successes and failures, the men of the present and future, may know how they can best instruct, convince and persuade. To such study, Professor Sears' book is a most helpful contribution.

Advisory Committee Appointed.

The Advisory Committee, consisting of one graduate each from Yale and Harvard, has been appointed for the purpose of deciding all disputes that may arise in making arrangements for the athletic contests to take place between these two Universities during the next four years. The two gentlemen appointed are Walter Camp, '80, whose connection with Yale athletics needs no repetition here, and James J. Storrow, jr., who was a previous captain of a Harvard crew, and has recently lent his services as coach. The appointment of these two gentlemen was made in accordance with the provisions of the well-known athletic agreement drawn up by Mr. Camp and Dr. Brooks. No occasion has yet arisen to require the services of this Committee.

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