

THE LITERATURE LECTURES.

**They Set Forth Absolute Standards—
Of Much Value This Year and
Much Promise for the Next.**

The tendency of modern life is toward specialization. This is no less true in the intellectual than in the mechanical sphere; if it now takes forty men to make a shoe, where one sufficed before, so it takes twenty instructors to turn out a Bachelor of Arts, in place of the few tutors—"men of all work"—of the olden time. The demand on all sides is for men who are masters, each in his field; and thus it happens that in the modern University every one of the hundreds of instructors stands in the eyes of the world for one subject, which he *knows*. As in the Faculty, so in the student body, almost every serious man is devoting his best energies to the mastery of a single branch of learning; the intellectual life of the whole University tends toward segregation.

Now this state of things, while unquestionably furnishing the best possible means to the development of individual power, has been criticized as cultivating intellectual narrowness—as favoring absorption in details, and blindness to the larger matters of literature and life. It has been said that this analytical tendency in modern life is opposed to the broad culture which should be, after all, the peculiar mark of the University man; and that a professor who has a specialty is likely to be unable to deal effectively with subjects requiring breadth of grasp and a large sympathy.

But true synthesis must rest upon analysis, and any real knowledge of the generic is permitted only to him who knows the species which make up the genus. It is indeed probable that the first impulse to specialization springs from the desire for a more perfect synthesis, and that men are led to the study of the particular in the hope of thus obtaining the means for a broader, surer knowledge of the whole. Mastery of details is the only sure road to mastery of their sum; and it is noteworthy that, in this case, the whole is greater than the mere sum of its parts, for every part gains a larger meaning by being brought into relation with the rest.

These facts have received a striking illustration in the course of lectures just closed at Yale on the broad subject of Literature. This course—which, it is hoped, will be continued in future years—was arranged with the object of giving to an audience without special training a view of Art—especially Literary Art—in its very broadest lines. For the student-body in particular, the course was of special value, inasmuch as it attempted to present ideas about Art and its significance, which should supplement their individual work, whatever it might be, and should make apparent the harmony, the essential unity, of the whole world of Art and Literature. Such a task could not be performed by any one man; it was made possible only by focusing upon a common topic choice rays of light from the special studies of a number of scholars. These scholars were all Yale men, and all specialists, in the best sense—men who *know* their subject by virtue of having lived with it and lovingly studied it for years; and the success of this, perhaps the first attempt at coöperation among Yale specialists in the service of Art, augurs well for the future of both Art and specialism.

The lectures were held on six successive Wednesday evenings, beginning January 11, in the South Gallery of the Art School. The first lecture, on 'Literature,' which served as an introduction to the whole course, was appropriately delivered by Professor Cook, to whose initiative the University owes this series of lectures. The course was closed by Professor Ladd, who spoke on a similar general topic, 'The Philosophical Basis of Literature.' The four intervening lectures were devoted to special phases of

the main subject: the Epic, treated by Professors Seymour and Gruener; and Comedy, by Professors Morris and Luquiens.

PROFESSOR COOK'S DEFINITION.

Professor Cook, after touching on the necessity of definite standards in literature, as in other departments of thought, proposed the following tentative definition:

'Literature is so much of recorded thought and sentiment as is deemed worthy of re-usage and public recognition by various generations of one or several peoples, without being the distinctive property of the specialist; together with such record of thought and sentiment as, in the judgment of the best equipped and most dispassionate experts, possesses in a high degree the essential qualities which inhere in the works thus accredited by the judgment of mankind.'

He took up this definition, point by point, defending it, and then went on to apply it to a number of works of literature, ancient and modern, showing, among other things, the supreme place which this test gives to the Bible. Supporting his statements by quotations from Tolstoi's *What is Art?* he showed that catholicity is the essential feature of a classic, and then proceeded to distinguish between the classics of all the world and the classics of the world's rulers, that is, of the people whose convictions are among the most powerful of the forces that mold their own and succeeding times.' He pointed out the scholar's duty and privilege to secure a wider public for these 'classics of the few'—that is, to increase the number of those who truly rule the world, in that they 'think and plan for the well-being of others.'

He then passed to a consideration of the subdivisions of literature, prose and poetry—a distinction which was shown to be based upon relative power, not upon form. 'Poetry is more powerful than prose, first, by reason of its greater intensity, and, secondly, by reason of its greater scope.' After giving various definitions of poetry the speaker said that it is 'the quintessence of literature.'

Poetry falls into two classes, lyric and non-lyric: in the one, the poet seeks primarily to reveal himself; in the other, to 'make us acquainted with the feelings, the motives, and the characters of others.' The method of the first is direct, that of the second indirect; here, character is portrayed largely by means of action. Non-lyric poetry, dealing largely with acts, is either narrative or representative, according as the action is thought of as past or present; in the one case, we have the epic; in the other, the drama. The latter, always depicting, as it does, a struggle, demands 'compression, the most careful selection of significant incidents, the profoundest knowledge of the human heart, sequence according to the logic of the emotions and the outcome discerned by the dramatist, constant movement, and undeviating progression to a climax'; it offers the most difficult problem which man can set before his creative faculty. The speaker closed by touching upon other forms of literature, which should sometime in the future find treatment in this course of lectures.

THE EPIC IN ITS GREEK FORM.

Professor Seymour spoke on 'The Epic in its Greek Form—Homer.' He began with a discussion of the epic in general, and showed how all epic poetry, save the 'natural, unstudied epics of the Hindus, Finns, Russians, Germans, and Spaniards,' goes back to Homer, whose name now stands for the Greek epic. Homer differs from all other epic writers in that he is 'so openly interested in the scenes of war and of adventure which he depicts; he is unconscious, naïve, and *thinks* little of the form of his poem.' 'A great poem must be the work of a great poet,' and this general statement must be true also of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*; but to the personality of Homer, or even to his home, we have not the slightest

clue. The speaker touched on the 'Homeric question,' and said that men are no longer inclined to credit extreme theories, either of a single or of a multiple authorship for the poems. He was guarded in the statement of his own views, but expressed the belief that epic poetry was first cultivated by the Æolian Greeks, from whom there descended to Homer many lays with regard to the wars before Troy and other similar expeditions involving battle and stirring adventure; these lays were composed in a heroic verse with laws well established, and with many epithets and formulas already fixed.

Three stages have been noted in the development of the natural epic of the people: first, disconnected songs; second, similar disconnected songs, all having to do with the same person or event; third, an organic cycle of song, with beginning, middle and end, like every other work of art.' The speaker believes the poems of Homer to have been developed from within, each out of a single lay, thus passing directly from the first to the third of the above stages. A single canto was first produced; this proving popular, others of allied subject followed, not probably, in the order in which they now stand. The poems were not written down until about four hundred years after Homer's time, and, during this period of oral transmission, extensive additions were made, some extracted from earlier lays, others the work of later poets. The speaker went on to define Epic Poetry as 'a narrative in heroic verse of a dignified story, of considerable extent, with organic relation of parts.' Further, 'the story is to be told so far as possible by the words of its persons, and should not be so long that it cannot be brought easily under a single glance of the mind's eye.'

Homer's poems are marked by great compression, and are very dramatic—about one-half their entire length consists of speeches, not reckoning the long narrative speech of Odysseus. The lecturer drew a sharp distinction between the epic, which is essentially narrative, and descriptive poetry, illustrating the point by considerable passages of his own masterly translation. The whole lecture was rendered more illuminative by continuous references to parallels in other literatures, and by the application to all epic poetry of the principles deduced from Homer.

THE EPIC IN ITS GERMAN FORM.

Professor Gruener's subject was 'The Epic in its German Form—the Nibelungen Lied.' This poem—the greatest among twenty German epics—is the *Iliad* of the German race; in the Napoleonic era, when the people of the German states suffered so sorely because of their divided condition, the Nibelungen Lied served as a bond to unify them and give them again a truly racial feeling. The lecturer pointed out three stages in the development of the Northern Epic: first, a story, as of Siegfried, found among all the Germanic tribes, exists without any historic basis—a pure nature-myth; second, such a story is localized, and its hero identified with a historic personage, as in the *Beowulf*; third, such a localized myth, with many real historic elements added, is developed from within into an artistic whole—an indistinguishable compound of myth and history—the Nibelungen Lied. This poem, which was first worked up into a whole in the twelfth century, is the most highly developed specimen of the true popular epic which the Germanic races have produced.

The first part of the poem—the Siegfried-Brünhilde story—is pure myth, either of the sun, or of winter and summer; the second part—the story of Kriemhild and Etzel—is founded on history, though a strong mythical element is interwoven with it. The poem contains many incongruities, but is none the less effective for that. The story of Kriemhild's vengeance, in particular, is 'a splendid torrent, moving by leaps, but moving ever in one direction.'

The Greek poet was an inspired bard; the German poet only a reporter of

PICK PATTERNS NOW.

The sooner one chooses his colored shirts for the season, the better pleased he will be. We have just received eight hundred different designs in Madras, Cheviot, Oxford and the combination Silk-and-Linen. We will have the pure silk ones in a few days.

Many graduates send to us from all over the country. We can send you samples and make you shirts wherever you are.

CHASE & CO.,

New Haven House Block.

FRANK A. CORBIN,
TAILOR

TO THE

STUDENTS OF YALE

AND TO THE

GRADUATES

in all parts of the country

Address:

1000 Chapel Street,
New Haven, Conn.

facts. He always refers to a source—often non-existent—and intrudes himself only to foretell an event, or emphasize a statement. His poem contains no long speeches: the epic hero is a man of deeds. The German epic poet lacks sense of form and proportion, as compared with the Greek; he is overfond of incident, and uses little decoration—his longest similes are but three lines each. He is, in general, incapable of the grand style.

After some remarks on the Nibelungen metre, the lecturer proceeded to speak of the moral depth of the poem, of the gloom of its atmosphere, and of its essentially tragic nature. This is the tragedy which was inherent in early German life—the spirit of the time of Tacitus, when life was one long struggle. This tragedy was, however, not sad to the Germans, to whom death meant glory at the hands of the Valkyrs.

The poem is, in essence, heathen and savage; the elements of chivalry and Christianity are applied from without. The characters are well differentiated; but all are elemental, mighty, Titanic, each dominated by a single passion; the German epic is Æschylean in spirit, while the tone of the Homeric epic is more nearly that of Sophocles. The speaker closed by showing how each of the important characters of the Nibelungen Lied personifies some type of loyalty, which, he said, is the soul of German epic poetry.

COMEDY IN ITS LATIN FORM.

Professor Morris spoke on 'Comedy in its Latin Form—Plautus and Terence.' He said that it would be his task to show that broad farce may be worthy the name of literature. Although there was no permanent theatre

[Continued on 201st page.]

KNOX Spring Hats are Out.