

Ventures at Literary Criticism

A Student Encroaches on the Prerogative of W. D. Howells

Our English literature today is no longer its own master. It has been invaded by the arts and sciences and has gone over bodily into bondage. The greatest writer of our age was Ruskin, and he never produced a line that was written for its literary sake. His books are simply magnificent popular text-books on art. So, too, in lower circles our short stories and magazine articles deal not with moral or spiritual truths, but with the theories of sociology and psychology, or with the practical details of some social class. Through the medium of the story Flin presents the world of graft; Spearman reveals the railroad; Kipling paints the sea and fisherman. The world strives for facts and not ideas. We feed the understanding while we neglect the intellect. In this age of the specialist, men know only the tangible. If you make your life objective you will succeed—not otherwise. Competition is fierce and men struggle to produce. Thought is of value, not for its own sake, but for the number of pounds it can get lifted up and replaced in the physical world. In its hot progress the age fails to be introspective. As yet no strong man has had the courage and wisdom to sacrifice success to power; to stand aside while life goes by and observe its true meanings. When we find a man who can contemplate without action, who can measure action by its purpose and not by its results, we shall have a return of powerful literature.

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I have just finished reading Phillips' Paolo and Francesca. It seems to me an excellent piece of work. The passion of the dim old story, with all its far-brought mystery and its aroma from centuries of retelling, reposes quite naturally in its setting of clear modern English. Phillips has not tried strenuously to reproduce local color, or environment, or any such superficial thing, but has caught at the psychic factors, allowing all pettier things to take care of themselves; and it is surprising how modern the story is in its new dress. When we think of it, that has been the procedure of all great writers—they chose tales of sure foundation. Shakespeare follows Boccaccio, and Goethe rejuvenates Faust. It takes centuries to make a plot. A few lines dropped by Dante have furnished

the theme for loving hearts and quick brains, until today we have a dozen stories in the finished form. It is the old which is eternally and inevitably the new.

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Last night I read a page or two in Madame Bovary. At first I was disappointed. Having heard so much of Flaubert's painful labors with his wonderful prose rhythm, I looked for sentences which should beat and pulse like changing music. I found nothing according with such a fancy, and soon growing tired of a critical attitude, I fell into the train of the narrative and read with interest. The composition dropped from my attention and the subject matter alone held me. I have now begun to see that this lack of attention to detail was the best compliment I could pay to the style. This prose writing of Flaubert's is a work of art, and like all true works of art, it acts without ostentation. Just as a sun-lit meadow or a lovely flower will lift your thoughts and feelings toward the divine thought and feeling which they embody, even when you are thinking least of them, so does the style of Madame Bovary perform its part. It is the proof of greatness in any work of art that it conveys with the nearest possible approach to perfection the idea which it was meant to convey, and no other ideal than the purpose of its maker will serve to measure it by. God meant the flower to lift you unconsciously to Him; that it does so is a proof of its perfection. Thus Flaubert's writing eradicates itself while it performs the one sole duty in which it can be measured—the powerful conveyance of thought. You may study it for itself, just as the botanist or the poet studies the flower, but in its highest meanings it is a thought-conveyer, and it is the surest sign of its power that it performs its duty organically and with least obstruction of self.

Dante Address Tonight.

A large attendance of members of the graduate school and resident alumni is looked for at the address by Rev. Stritch upon "Dante." The meeting of the Graduate club, under whose auspices the address will be given, is to be held at the home of Mr. and Mrs. A. J. Sawyer, 5 Floral Park. Below will be found a very valuable Dante bibliography contributed by Rev. Stritch for the benefit of University people interested in literature bearing upon the great Italian's life and work:

1. Stories from Dante—Norley Chester.
2. A Shadow of Dante—Maria Francesca Rossetti.
3. A Companion to Dante—Scartazzini. (Translated by A. J. Butler.)
4. Dante's Ten Heavens—Edmund Gardner.
5. Life and Works of Dante—J. F. Hogan, D. D.
6. Introduction to the Study of Dante—J. A. Symonds.
7. Italian Literature: cc. I and II, Vol. I. J. A. Symonds.
8. Dante's Divina Commedia—Hettinger. (Translated by H. S. Bowden.)
9. The Teachings of Dante—Charles Allen Dinsmore.
10. Dante and Catholic Philosophy—Ozanam.
11. The Spiritual Sense of the Divina Commedia—W. T. Harris.
12. The Spiritual Sense of the Divina Commedia—Azarias in his Phases of Thought and Criticism.
13. James Russell Lowell's Essay on Dante.

14. Dante and Other Essays—Dean Church.
 15. Studies and Estimates of Dante—Dean Plumptre.
 16. Studies in Dante, 1st and 2nd Series—Dr. Moore (Oxford).
 17. Dante's Divine Comedy. A Commentary, 2 Vols.—D. J. Snider.
 18. Some Modern Readings from Dante—H. W. Mable, in his Essays in Literary Criticism.
 19. The Notes to Longfellow's Translation of the Divine Comedy.
 20. Readings on the Inferno, the Purgatorio and the Paradiso, in 6 Vols.—The Hon. W. W. Vernon.
 21. Carlyle's Heroes and Hero-Worship. Lecture: The Hero as Poet.
 22. Contribution to the Textual Criticism of Dante's Divina Commedia—Dr. Edward Moore.
 23. Concordance of the Divina Commedia—Dr. E. A. Fay.
 24. An English Commentary on Dante's Divina Commedia—H. F. Tozer.
 25. The Dante Dictionary—Paget Toynbee.
 27. Tutte le Opere di Dante Alighieri (The Oxford Dante). N. B.—The four volumes immediately preceding are valuable particularly for students of Dante in the original.
 28. The Physical System of St. Thomas Carnoldi—Translated by E. H. Dering.
 29. Pastor's History of the Popes from the Close of the Middle Ages. Vol. I.
 30. Saltsbury's History of Criticism, Vol. I, Bk. III, cc. 1st and 2nd.
 31. Critical, Historical, and Philosophical Contributions to the Study of the Divine Comedy—H. C. Barlow.
 32. The Holy Roman Empire—James Bryce.
- ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS.
The Divine Comedy has been translated:
1. Into verse by Boyd, Cary, Wright, Longfellow, Haselfoot, Plumptre, Wilstach. These translations are complete. Parsons, Musgrave, Shadwell, and others have translated the Commedia in part.
 2. The minor poems have been translated by Plumptre.
 3. The New Life, or Vita Nuova, by Charles Elliot.
 4. The Convito, by K. Hillard.
 5. Dante's Letters, translated with notes, by C. S. Latham.

This is not an exhaustive list of works which the English speaking student of Dante may use with profit, but it is fairly representative of the ever-growing volume of Dante literature in English or by English-speaking scholars.

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