

Literature In Its Relation To Life

Prof. W. O. Raymond, M.A., Ph.D., of University of Bishop's College, Lennoxville, Que., Delivers Alumni Oration at Closing Exercises At U. N. B. This Afternoon—Life and Literature Discussed.

Prof. William O. Raymond, M.A., Ph.D., of the English department of the University of Bishop's College, at Lennoxville, Quebec delivered the Alumni Oration to the 1935 graduating of the University of New Brunswick this afternoon. The title of the address was "Literature and Its Relation to Life", and the full text of it was as follows:

"According to the entertaining myth that Plato puts upon the lips of Aristophanes in the Symposium, the form or shape of a human being was originally quite different from what it is at present. Man was in his primeval state, round not flat, or approximately flat. His back and sides were joined together so as to form a circle, and each individual had four arms and as many legs and ears. But men having rebelled against the gods, Zeus called an Olympic Council and contrived a way to curb their arrogance. 'Me thinks', he said, 'I have a plan which will humble their pride and mend their manners. They shall continue to exist, but I will cut them in two, and then they will be diminished in strength and increased in numbers. They shall walk upright on two legs, and if they continue insolent and will not be quiet, I will split them again and they shall hop about on a single leg'. Zeus, then carried his threat into execution, cutting men in two as one might divide an apple. Every one of us is, therefore, only the half of what may properly be termed a man. We are but a cross-section having one side only like a flatfish, the imperfect portion of an entire whole.

I shall not attempt to follow Plato's ingenious interpretation of this myth as symbolic of his doctrine of Platonic love. Our younger generation at least, is more apt to turn to Freud rather than to Plato as an authority in matters of sex appeal.

But with due apology to the shade of the great philosopher, I venture upon a different application. This myth, it seems to me, may serve to illustrate the penalty that every individual must pay for being a member of a social group, and it has particular point in a modern age of specialization. The complex machinery of our twentieth century civilization splits the individual into sections as the hand is divided into fingers. We are either absorbed in a special business or profession, or focusing all our energies with a view to entering upon a definite business or profession. Law, Engineering, Commerce, Politics, Medicine, Theology,—these are jealous gods and they seem to exact from their followers absolute concentration and devotion. And so as life peddles out to us the wares of a particular occupation, we tend to lose sight of the essential integrity and wholeness of our manhood. "Nature"

as Emerson says, 'is not slow to equip us in the prison-uniform of the party to which we adhere'. Enrolled in the ranks of our profession "we come to wear one cut of face and figure, and acquire by degrees the gentlest asinine expression".

University Function

And yet an occasion such as this reminds us that there is something in the spirit and genius of a University that is for ever at war with tendencies that threaten to sweep the individual into side-currents and eddies away from the central stream of life. The very name University implies an organization that has a universal aim, and is, therefore, opposed to all narrowness and sectionalism. "I have taken all knowledge to be my province" writes Francis Bacon in one of his letters, voicing the noble ambition of a great scholar of a generous age. These words might be the charter or motto of a University. All knowledge is its province, and nothing of human interest can be alien to it. Cardinal Newman has defined the aim of a University as the cultivation of the intellect as an end in itself, and the goal of a University education as enlargement or enlightenment of mind. The primary business, therefore, of a college of liberal arts is neither technical nor professional. It deals with human values that are absolute, not relative. It has to do first and foremost with man as man, not man as an engineer, a doctor, or a lawyer. Whatever it may contribute to a man's worldly success, it has failed in its purpose if it has not taught him how to escape the consequences of worldly success.

If a cultural education is based on a vision of life as a whole, if it centres on that humane nurture of the intellect that, apart from practical and utilitarian ends, aims at enlightenment of mind, then the renewal of our contact with our foster-mother, the University, ought to have a bracing and a clarifying effect upon our lives. It should be a return of the human spirit upon itself; one of those red-letter days of experience and insight when a man becomes aware of his life's flow

And hears its winding murmur, and he sees
The meadows where it glides—
the sun, the breeze.

And there arrives a lull in the hot race
Wherein he doth forever chase
That flying and elusive shadow,
Rest.

And then he thinks he knows
The Hills where his life rose,
And the Sea where it goes.

Through its place amongst the Humanities, English Literature as a subject of University study, professes to be in vital relationship with life.

And today, it seems to me to be the very keystone of the humanistic arch. The Classics have fallen on evil days, and, for the time being at any rate, have lost that proud position which they held in the days of our fathers. For the majority of University students today, the two central humanistic and cultural disciplines are those of English Literature and History. It is, therefore, all the more necessary that we keep steadily in view the primary humanistic quality of literature that lies in its contact with life. To some, such an emphasis on the importance of the Humanities may seem to be a clinging to an archaic tradition of the past. I should rather regard it as an imperative gospel of the greatest practical urgency that holds in the hope of the present and the promise of the future.

For if there is one truth that is certain in our confused and troubled times, it is that only a shift of emphasis from reliance on material things to a fresh appreciation of human values can save our western civilization. The Humanities, it has been said, are not in the good graces of Democracy; which is one of the reasons why Democracy today is on the rocks.

We have travelled far in our worship of material things and mechanical invention. From the days of Lord Macaulay down to the present, we have witnessed the triumphant march of Science. And now we have reached a closed door. Like a gigantic Frankenstein or a Robot, the machine we have created threatens to turn and rend us.

The tremendous tools that Science has placed in our hands are in themselves, unmoral. They may be instruments of good or evil. Science has filled the earth with her products, and we are in the midst of a world wide depression and economic distress. Science performs miracles of urgency, and at the same time forges weapons for a war of poison gas and bacteria. The most highly educated and scientific nation in modern Europe reels back into paganism apace.

Back of all political, economic, and social difficulties lies the basic human problem. Since the days of Plato and Aristotle, we have advanced beyond calculation in our control of the material resources of life, but in our ways of dealing with each other, in the cultivation of a sane and understanding human spirit, we seem to lag immeasurably behind. Knowledge as indeed come but Wisdom everywhere lingers. In a more critical sense than Matthew Arnold ever dreamt of, we are today:

"Wandering between two worlds,
one dead,
The other powerless to be born".

Cultivation is at the cross-roads, and unless we can substitute a Society built on human values for one which is but a cunning piece of mechanism, we shall witness what Spengler has predicted in "The Decline and Fall of the West."

Is ours then an age when University men and women can afford to neglect the study of the Humanities; disciplines based on those very human values which are of such fundamental import in the life of mankind today?

Teaching English

We must, however, at this point face a criticism. It is frequently said that while literature should be one of the Humanities, its relationship to life is often hidden by the way in which English is taught and studied as a University subject. This is a grave charge and cannot be dismissed lightly. We must, in the first place, admit that our study of literature is to a large degree concerned with criticism and analysis. Such criticism and analysis, it is urged, removes literature into a scientific laboratory, and destroys its touch with life.

"Our meddling intellect
Misshapes the beautiful forms of things—
We murder to dissect".

A common confusion in snap judgments of this nature is a failure to discriminate between criticism and analysis as an end in itself and as a means of an end. Literature is an art and the goal of all literary study is aesthetic enjoyment. But there is a wide difference between a vague and merely nebulous appreciation of literature and an enlightened, understanding appreciation of it. The true function of criticism is to travel through an analysis of particulars on to the vision of a work of art as a whole—that is as an organic structure.

In recapturing that vision of the whole, the student, in a sense, returns to his starting point. But he returns to it as a man who voyaging around the world comes enriched by all the landscapes of his journey. He has learnt that it is too dear a bargain to purchase centrality of life and clearness of intellectual vision by dependence on the obvious, the immediate, the abstract. He has been taught that all growth of mind involves a Pilgrim's progress, and that not to step out of a lighted circle into the darkness perchance, with a faith that when he regains the light the circumference of the circle will be enlarged is, in reality, to abide in the city of Destruction.

And yet is there not some justice in the accusation that in our University study of literature we have at times lost sight of the forest in the trees, and wandered by by-paths into a labyrinth where a jungle growth conceals the highroad of life?

One "Idol of the Academic Marketplace" is the way in which we have applied the methods of historical and scientific research to English Literature. It would be folly to deny the relative value of these methods. Science with its respect for facts, its eye for detail, and its analytic tools, is the born foe of vague impressionism. And how often has the teacher of literature to insist that there can be no sound judgment or appreciation that is not based on accurate and precise information. "Knowledge," Newman says, "is the indispensable condition of expansion of mind, and the instrument of attaining to it." Impressionism without knowledge may lead to devastating conclusions. The college student who wrote in his bluebook: "The Humanists were as their name implies: they were the followers of Hume", had a lively imagination but his facts were somewhat shaky.

I call the following illustrations from the archives of my own examination papers:

"In 1588, Captain Kidd wrote 'The Spanish Tragedy,' and Shakespeare drew some material from that."

"In the opening verses of Keats' 'Ode to a Nightingale' the poet says that drinks and dope do not make him happy, but that poetry and beauty do."

"The Ancient Mariner of Coleridge went to a church and married a bride who was red as a rose. The Ancient Mariner then took his bride on a honeymoon trip to the cold and silent waters of the South Pole. The vessel was navigated by a helmsman and a steersman. When they reached the South Pole a bird was flapping about. They sailed back to the Equator where the Ancient Mariner and his bride were overcome by a heat-wave which reduced them to a state of Life-in-Death. Another ship came sailing by and took them off their own vessel. After various adventures they returned home. Then the Ancient Mariner woke up and lo it was all a dream."

The antidote to impressionism of this order is to be found in the advice of Tindale: "Cleave unto the text and plain story."

Yet to forget that literature is a creative and humanistic art; to be content with the raw materials of facts without building upon them judgments of values, is a greater error than lawless impressionism. Sometimes our researches into sources, documents, and the meaning of words, suggest the activities of weasels hunting for eggs or the labours of ants in their burrows rather than the work of adventurous and constructive minds.

Literature To turn now to the consideration of Literature as a fine art in its relation to life.

Literature is not life in its immediate practical aspect. It is an artistic reconstruction of life through vision and imagination. Literature holds the mirror up to life and nature, but not through a bald photographic realism. It is a painting rather than a photograph of life and nature. Life in art is not driven on by the urge of the will, hurrying restlessly from point to point,—it is an object of contemplation and reflection. This step away from reality may seem to weaken the connection of literature with life, but viewed from another angle, it adds to the insight into life we gain through literature. In the actual world of affairs we so often are distracted and confused by what is merely trivial and accidental. We are pulled this way and that by practical considerations or aims, and we fail to realize the true meaning and significance of our

Of Interest to Women

COCKTAILS, FRUIT, FISH AND VEGETABLE

CRANBERRY JUICE COCKTAIL

2 cups cranberries
1-2 cup granulated sugar
3 cups water
2 tablespoons lemon juice

Cook cranberries and water until all the skins pop open (about 5 minutes). Strain through cheese cloth. Bring the juice to boiling point, add sugar and cook until it boils 2 minutes. Add lemon juice and chill. This makes 10 servings.

GINGER ALE FRUIT JUICE CUP

2 cups orange juice
Juice of 1-2 lemons
1 cup grapefruit juice
1 pint ginger ale

Serve this fruit and ginger ale mixture ice cold in glasses which have first been frosted around the top. Dip the rim of the glass in orange or rub it with orange pulp, then dip in granulated sugar immediately. This makes six servings.

CITRUSFRUIT JUICE COCKTAIL

1-2 cup granulated sugar
3 tablespoons lemon juice
1-4 cup water
Few grains salt
1 cup grapefruit juice
1-2 cups carbonated water
1-2 cup orange juice
12 sprigs fresh mint
1 tablespoon Sherry jelly

Make a syrup of the sugar and water by boiling them together for five minutes. Combine with fruit juices, salt and carbonated water and shake thoroughly in a cocktail shaker. Put crushed ice in cocktail glasses, pour in mixture and serve at once. Garnish each glass with sprig of mint and 1-4 teaspoon Sherry jelly. This makes 12 servings.

GRAPEFRUIT GINGER COCKTAIL

2 cups grapefruit pulp
1 tablespoon preserved ginger
2 cups diced fresh pineapple
1 tablespoon ginger syrup
Green cherries.

Mix the fruits together and add the finely minced ginger and the syrup from the preserved ginger. Serve in cocktail glasses and decorate with green cherries. This makes 6 servings.

ORANGE CHERRY COCKTAIL

2 oranges
Large black cherries
2 tablespoons Creme de Menthe
Cut oranges in half crosswise and with a sharp knife, carefully remove every other section. Make attractive edges on the shell by cutting in points. Place sweet, black cherry in place one large cherry in center. Arrange cut out sections attractively on top of cocktail and chill. Add one-half teaspoon Creme de Menthe to each cocktail just before serving. This makes 4 servings.

MELON MINT COCKTAIL

2 cups cantaloupe cubes
1-4 cup small mints
Mix the cantaloupe cubes with broken after-dinner mints, allowing about 12 mints to the medium-sized melon. Serve very cold in sherbet glasses or from melon shell. This makes 4 servings. Two tablespoons lemon juice may be added for tartness.

RAINBOW COCKTAIL

1 cup seeded green grapes
Powdered sugar
1 cup diced pineapple
1-2 pint ready-made orange ice
1 cup sliced strawberries
4 sprigs fresh mint
Prepare fresh fruit, place in separate bowls, and sprinkle lightly with sugar. Let stand covered in the refrigerator until ready to serve. Place a layer of green grapes, a layer of pineapple, then a layer of sliced strawberries in dainty parfait glasses. Repeat. Place a small scoop of orange ice on top, garnish with a sprig of mint. This makes four servings. Diced bananas may be substituted for the pineapple and diced honeydew for the grapes with equally good results, if you prefer.

For True Enjoyment

"SALADA" TEA

experiences. The soldier in the front trenches is in the midst of the conflict but the smoke and roar of cannon cloud and daze his vision. The general behind the lines is farther from the scene of action, but he has a clearer insight into the nature and the fortunes of the battle.

A Comparison

In his book on "The Enjoyment of Poetry", Max Eastman has a striking illustration of the difference between what he calls poetic people and those who are exclusively practical. "A simple experiment", he writes, "will distinguish two types of human nature. Gather a throng of people and pour them into a ferry-boat. By the time the boat has swung into the river you will find that a certain proportion have taken the trouble to climb upstairs in order to be out on deck and see what is to be seen, as they cross over. The rest have settled indoors to think what they will do upon reaching the other side, or perhaps lose themselves in apathy or tobacco smoke. We may divide all the alert passengers on the boat into two classes; those who are interested in crossing the river, and those who are merely interested in getting across. And we may divide all the people on the earth, or all the moods of people, in the same way. Some of them are chiefly occupied with attaining ends, and some with receiving experiences. The distinction of the two will be more marked when we name the first kind practical and the second poetic."

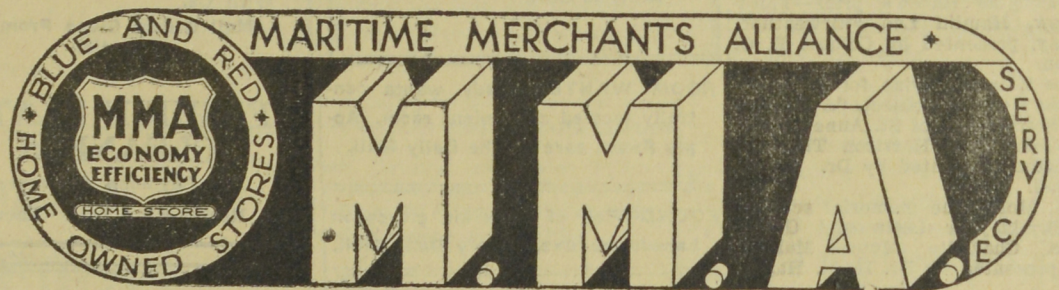
When a Walt Whitman crosses Brooklyn Ferry, he is not absorbed in a practical end so that the present slips through his fingers. He is interested in life itself and its significance. His eye catches: "—the white sails of schooners and sloops—the ships at anchor The sailors at work in the rigging, or out astride the spars. The large and small steamers in mo-

tion, the pilots in their pilot houses, The white wake left by the passage, the quick tremulous whirl of the wheels, The flags of all nations, the falling of them at sunset, The scallop-edged waves in the twilight, the laded cups, the frolicsome crests and glistening".

I have spoken of literature as a picture, not a photograph of life. That is to say it is a significant, selective, representation of life, culling out what really counts and is genuinely characteristic. Literature has the virtue of holding the flashes of man's experience fast caught through the magic of art, so that they become a joy for ever, not the toy of a passing moment. It is this quality we have in mind when we refer to a work as a Classic. A great creation of Art has a contact with the heart of life that makes it a permanent possession of the human race. "Age cannot wither it nor custom stale its infinite variety." As Milton puts it: "Many a man lives a burden to the earth; but a good book is the precious lifeblood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life."

Often it is the function of the artist to show us significance in things we might ordinarily dismiss as trivial. The scene depicted in the Grecian Urn of which Keat wrote, was a passing bubble of life in itself, but the artist's eye caught the beauty of it and made of it an imperishable thing: "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on: Not to the sensual ear, but more endearing, Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone". Literature has sometimes been de-

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