

BOOKS AND CULTURE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "MY STUDY FIRE," "SHORT STUDIES IN LITERATURE," ETC.

XII.—THE IMAGINATION.

The Lady of Shalott, sitting in her tower, looked into her magic mirror and saw the whole world go by—monk, maiden, priest, knight, lady, and king. In the mirror of the imagination not only the world of to-day, but the entire movement of human life moves before the eye as the throngs of living men move on the streets. For the imagination is the real magician, of whose marvels all simulated magic is but a clumsy and mechanical imitation. It is the real power, of which all material powers are very inadequate symbols. Rarely taken into account by teachers, entirely ignored by educational systems and philosophies, it is the divinest of all the powers which men are able to put forth, because it is the creative power. It uses thought, but, in a way, it is greater than thought, because it builds out of thought that which thought alone is powerless to construct. It is, indeed, the essential element in great constructive thinking; for while we may have thoughts untouched by the imagination, one cannot think along high constructive lines without its constant aid. Isolated thoughts come unattended by it, but the thinking which issues in organised systems, in comprehensive interpretations of things and events, in those noble generalisations which have the splendour of the discovery of new worlds in them, in those concrete embodiments of idea which we call works of art, is conditioned on the use of the imagination. Plato's Dialogues were fashioned by it as truly as Homer's poems; Hegel's philosophy was created by it as definitely as Shakespeare's plays, and Newton and Kepler used it as freely as Dante or Rembrandt.

Upon the use of this supreme faculty we depend not only for creative power, but for education in the highest sense of the word; for culture is the highest result of education, and the final test of education is its power to produce culture. Goethe was in the habit of saying that sympathy is essential to all true criticism; for no man can discern the

heart of a movement, of a work of art, or of a race who does not put himself into heart relations with that which he is trying to understand. We never really possess an idea, a bit of knowledge, or a fact of experience until we get below the mind of it into the heart of it. Now, sympathy in this sense is the imagination touched with feeling; it is the imagination bringing thought and emotion into vital relation. In the process of culture, therefore, the imagination plays a great part; for culture, it cannot too often be said, is knowledge, observation, and experience incorporate into personality and become part of the very nature of the individual. The man of culture is pre-eminently a man of imagination; lacking this quality, he may become learned by force of industry, or a scholar by virtue of a trained intelligence, but the ripeness, the balance, the peculiar richness of fibre which characterise the man of culture will be denied him. The man of culture, it is true, is not always a man of creative power; but he is never devoid of that kind of creative quality which transforms everything he receives into something personal and individual. And the more deeply one studies the work of the great artists, the more distinctly does he see the immense place which culture in the vital, as contrasted with the academic, sense held in their lives, and the great part it played in their productive activity. Dante, Goethe, Tennyson, Browning, Lowell were men possessed in rare degree of culture of both kinds; but Shakespeare and Burns were equally men of culture. They shared in the possession of this faculty of making all they saw and knew a part of themselves. Between culture of this quality and the creative power there is something more than complete unity; there is almost identity, for they seem to be two forms of activity of the same power rather than distinct faculties. Culture enables us to receive the world into ourselves, not in the reflection of a magic mirror, but in the depths of a living soul; to receive that world in such a way that we possess it, it ceases

to be outside us and becomes part of our very nature. The creative power enables us to refashion that world and to put it forth again out of ourselves, as it was originally put forth out of the life of the divine artist. The creative process is, therefore, a double process, and culture and genius stand in indissoluble union.

The development of the imagination, upon the power of which both absorption of knowledge and creative capacity depend, is, therefore, a matter of supreme importance. To this necessity educators will some day open their eyes, and educational systems will some day conform; meantime, it must be done mainly by individual work. Knowledge, discipline, and technical training of the best sort are accessible on every hand, but the development of the faculty which unites all these in the highest form of activity must be secured mainly by personal effort. The richest and most accessible material for this highest education is furnished by art, and the form of art within reach of every civilised man, at all times, in all places, is the book. To these masterpieces, which have been called the books of life, all men may turn with the assurance that as the supreme achievements of the imagination they have the power of awakening, stimulating, and enriching it in the highest degree. For the genuine reader, who sees in a book what the writer has put there, repeats in a way the process through which the maker of the book passed. The man who reads the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* with his heart as well as his intelligence must measurably enter into the life which these poems describe and interpret; he must identify himself for the time with the race whose soul and historic character are revealed in epic form as in a great mirror; he must see life from the Greek point of view, and feel life as the Greek felt it. He must, in a word, go through the process by which the poems were made as well as feel, comprehend, and enjoy their final perfection. In like manner the open-hearted and open-minded reader of the Book of Job cannot rest content with that noble poem in the form which it now possesses; the imaginative impulse which even the casual reading of the poem liberates in him sends him behind the

finished product to the life of which it was the immortal fruit; he enters into the groping thought of an age which has perished out of all other remembrance, he deals with a problem which is as old as man from the standpoint of men who have left no other record of themselves. In proportion to the depth of his feeling and the vitality of his imagination he must saturate himself with the rich life of thought, conviction, and emotion, of struggle and aspiration, out of which the greatest of the poems of nature took its rise. He must, in a word, receive into himself the living material upon which the unknown poet worked. In such a process the imagination is evoked in full and free play; it insensibly reconstructs a life gone out of knowledge; selects, harmonises, unifies, and, in a measure, creates. It illuminates and unifies knowledge, divines the wide relations of thought, and discerns its place in organic connection with the world which gave it birth.

The material upon which this great power is nourished is specifically furnished by the works which it has created. As the eye is trained to discover the line of beauty by companionship with the works in which it is revealed with the greatest clearness and power, so is the imagination developed by intimacy with the books which disclose its depth, its reality, and its method. The reader of Shakespeare cannot follow the leadings of his masterly imagination without feeling a liberation of his own faculty of seeing things as parts of a vast order of life. He does not gain the poet's creative power, but he is enlarged and enriched to the point where his own imagination plays directly on the material about it; he receives it into himself, and in the exact measure in which he learns the secret of absorbing what he sees, feels and knows, becomes master and interpreter of the world of his time, and restorer of the world of other times and men. For the imagination, playing upon fact and experience, divines their meaning and puts us in possession of the truth and life that are in them. To possess this magical power is to live the whole of life and to enter into the heritage of history.

Hamilton W. Mabie.

SHALL AND WILL AGAIN.

A REPLY TO MR. BARR.

Mr. Robert Barr's paper on Shall and Will in the December BOOKMAN is so delightful a bit of whimsy that it is perhaps better to make no serious comment upon it. Yet, as true words are often spoken in jest, so jestful words are not seldom taken for true; and Mr. Barr's screed, in effect, preaches a doctrine dangerous to the dignity and beauty of the English tongue.

The delicate, sensitive use of *shall* and *will*—and more broadly, the delicate sensitive use of English words as a whole—is the very touchstone of style. A feeling for the *nuances* of language, for the niceties of mood, tense, and form which imply its historic life, is and ever has been the hall-mark of the good and the great writer. Although it is a fact that English has, in the rough attrition of the centuries, become a speech comparatively uninflectional, it is also to be kept in mind that sufficient of the historical past of English remains to allow of a host of subtle word-uses harking back to good old custom and revered with the best traditions. English to-day is by no means the "grammarless tongue" which Richard Grant White, in a chapter condemned by all philologists, once declared it to be. The right manipulation of *shall* and *will* is just one of the cases in point, showing the writer's literary culture, his instinctive grasp of reputable speech-modes. I do not hesitate to say, categorically, that no great English stylist can be mentioned who does not uniformly prove himself a master of the very different shadings gained by the proper handling of these auxiliary words. Contrariwise, their mishandling always bespeaks the lack of literary experience. I have before me a letter from the editor of a well-known monthly, in which *shall* and *will* are placidly interchanged from Alpha to Omega. The impression of vulgarity made by this stylistic defect is as strong as if I should see the writer use his knife in lieu of his fork at table.

Nor is the philosophy of *shall* and *will* such a deep or difficult thing. The following simple table tells the whole

story, and should bother neither Mr. Barr nor any one else :

I shall	}	Expresses futurity.
Thou wilt		
He will		
We shall	}	Expresses volition.
You will		
They will		
I will	}	Expresses volition.
Thou shalt		
He shall		
We will	}	Expresses volition.
You shall		
They shall		

This exposition, illuminated by a few examples, can be made part and parcel of one's scientific knowledge in five minutes' time, so that, thereafter, the statement in a letter that "I will be pleased to see you," shall grate (as it should grate) upon your linguistic nerves, and you shall be able to say why it is wrong—because volition is implied where the expression of pure futurity was intended. Newspaper English is notorious for this failing, and it is a *bêtise* which is spreading, woe worth the day!

But not for a moment do I mean to claim that a self-conscious, analytical explanation of the use of *shall* and *will* is necessary to the avoidance of sin. Not at all. The writer who is naturally called to literature, and whose commerce with great books is wide and deep, will handle this problem, as he will others, by instinct. Intuition, not analysis, will guide him. A thorough immersion in the main stream of English literature, together with due exercise in the craft of writing, will make it impossible to admit such a blemish upon the fair page of one's style. Very interesting, and calling for a special word of reply, is Mr. Barr's reference to the Scotch inability to discriminate between *shall* and *will*. Concerning this, it may be said that there is no evidence in the older English literary monuments that the Scotch (*i.e.*, Northern English) were careless about the handling of these auxiliaries. The dialectical variations