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## BOOK REVIEWS

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*Literary criticism in antiquity.* By J. W. H. ATKINS. Cambridge: University Press; New York: Macmillan, 1934. 2 vols.

One of the characteristics of recent literary studies, on which Professor Atkins remarks, is a growing interest in ancient works of literary criticism. His restatement of the views concerning literature current in ancient Greece and Rome is addressed, doubtless in view of this increasing interest, not to classical specialists, but to the larger body of readers interested primarily in critical activities of more modern times. As addressed to that audience, his two volumes possess unusual merits: he has conformed to his statement of purpose by assembling a carefully meticulous collection of literary judgments and criteria covering the period from the earliest fragmentary statements of Greek writers to those contained in the works of men who wrote at the end of the first century after Christ; he has gone for his materials not only to writers who deal expressly in literary criticism, but to philosophers, rhetoricians, grammarians, and the practitioners themselves of the arts in question; he reports on the scholarly literature and sets forth the state of scholarly opinion on questions of date and authenticity of writings; he is careful to remark on the literary, social, and political conditions contemporary with critical writings and to speculate on the possible influence of social and intellectual conditions as shown in the writings of poets and critics; and finally, he traces the evolution of critical doctrines continuously so that he is unusually successful in showing the effect of Greek on Latin thought and the transmutation of Greek ideas during the period of the Roman Republic and early Empire. For the large audience which he addresses, who presumably will wish to fill a lacuna in their knowledge, Professor Atkins has provided an excellent statement of what they would find in Plato, Aristotle, Theophrastus, Callimachus, Cicero, Horace, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, the Senecas, Tacitus, Demetrius, Longinus, Quintilian, Plutarch, Lucian. The reader may proceed with the assurance afforded by the author's method: he may be sure that the sources and secondary materials have been examined carefully, that reference will be made to statements even in unlikely portions of a writer's works and that minor figures and fragments will be reported and related to the narrative; he will find the references accurate and the style clear.

It is perhaps a consequence of the plan of the book and its merits that the Hellenistic and Roman period is treated more successfully than the Hellenic, and that in the case of writers concerning whom our information is fragmentary or whose statements about art and literature are without systematic

expansion the reader will come from Professor Atkins' book with a more nearly adequate idea of the doctrine than in the case of writers whose approach to literature is philosophical. In a book whose virtues are expository, Neoptolemus of Parium and Dio Chrysostom may be restated with full justice whereas Plato and Aristotle may suffer. Thus the method of quoting from the dialogues of Plato results in the construction of a system of thought in which Professor Atkins is correct in finding much that is puzzling and contradictory. This mystery is somewhat attenuated by reference to the character of the time in which Plato worked and the literature he considered, to the pioneer nature of his work and sometimes even to the varying subject matter of his dialogues. Typical of this manner of treatment is the conscientious examination of the problem involved in Plato's criticism of the poets (I, 46-51). After setting forth a variety of explanations that have been offered and showing their inadequacies, Professor Atkins presents his own solution: Plato's argument was a piece of special pleading; he was presenting a brief for the plaintiff, philosophy, without considering for the time being the rightful claims of the defendant, poetry; he was correct in attacking poetry as the main avenue to truth, but not in his wholesale proscription of epic and dramatic poetry; his so-called attack on poetry is of secondary interest to the constructive side of his work (I, 66). Similarly in the exposition of Aristotle, the system of citation permits Professor Atkins to ignore the order which Aristotle himself followed in the development of the *Poetics* and on any given subject to quote indifferently from any of his works. He occasionally remarks, as when he states that according to Aristotle the function of poetry is "the giving of a certain refined pleasure" (I, 80), that the doctrine is not to be found in the *Poetics*. The view which results is consequently one of atomized doctrines, joined together when need be by Professor Atkins' historical or critical reasons, since the reasons of the original writer are frequently omitted.

Professor Atkins shows a suspicion of any systematic treatment of critical criteria, which appears particularly as strictures against fixed principles and a priori reasons, and he shows a corresponding enthusiasm for writers who remark on the relativity of critical standards to ages and tastes. Yet he is equally insistent on a permanent character in literature and he is on the alert for recognitions and hints of it in the writers he surveys. Taken in isolation from the analyses and arguments which support them, these insights are dulled to truisms: that art is a blend of representation and expression; that the ends of art are attained by a balance of free creation and control; that its appeal is neither to an individual nor to an age but to something elemental and universal in man (II, 354 and *passim*). In virtue of this doctrinal atomism it is surprising how much the writers of the six hundred years have in common, notwithstanding the relativity of criticism to its age: not only is Aristotle close to Plato, but in the later ages of grammarians and rhetoricians the statements made in agreement with or in development of earlier doctrines emerge more strongly than the doctrinal differences which were consequent on ap-

proaching literature from a philosophic, a grammatical, or a rhetorical point of view. Yet it should be remembered that such analytical weaknesses as the book displays are not inconsistent with the expository accuracy which the author set as his aim. He has written a survey of ancient literary criticism which is thorough, precise, clearly written and intelligently organized.

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