

**"WRITE — OR WRONG"**

One of the essential elements offered in a liberal education is the art of self-expression. Most aspirants to a liberal education claim that they are receiving a truly liberal education, and are willing to defend their system against the so-called progressive method. But although we claim that we are the beneficiaries of a classical education which we term liberal, yet when we duly reflect on our mental development, we cannot help but realize that we have been overlooking and are consequently now lacking self-expression, an essential constituent of that mode of intellectual development, of which we try to convince ourselves that we are the recipients.

The first objection to this latter statement, no doubt, will be that our public speaking and speech classes are adequately providing, for our benefit (that essential which I have termed the art of self-expression. If we mean self-expression to be merely vocal expression, that point may be conceded. But self-expression includes much more than merely the art of externally manifesting in guttural sounds the objective concepts, thoughts and ideas of the intellect. It signifies also the ability to manifest one's ideas in written as well as spoken word. And it is in this sense that I say that most of us, in pursuit of a liberal education, are unknowingly by-passing an essential element of our goal. We are overlooking it, not because it has not been offered to us, but because we are not making an effort to strive for it. It is because of the fact that most students understand self-expression to be the ability to stand before an audience and expound, that its counterpart, the art of writing, has been neglected. In comparing the two, we see that the art of writing is even more valuable than the ability to expound vocally, because in speaking, our words and therefore our ideas, significant as they may be, are grasped only by those who are within hearing distance. The written word, however, and consequently the ideas signified by it, can reach the minds of men far and near. Moreover, the written word will leave a more significant and lasting impression on the minds of the recipients than will the spoken word.

I have been showing that we are emphasizing a less important aspect of self-expression to the detriment of a primary aspect, which is an essential of a liberal education. Now the main reason for this lack of the development of our potential writing ability can be traced to the neglect of another essential of the liberal arts, and which though emphasized by our professors, has been avoided and neglected



by the aspirants to a liberal education. This underestimated essential is reading. Theodore Maynard believes that the weakness is not that young people are not taught to write, but that they are not taught to read. I believe that one of the deepest regrets of a student, as he graduates from college is that he by-passed a significant portion of his education by not taking advantage of library facilities offered at college. We are so much the less worthy of a liberal arts degree because of our inability to express ourselves adequately in writing, and this inability is due primarily to our lack of appreciation of books and desire for reading. Therefore a solution to the problem of writing can be attained only by a solution to the problem of reading. It is not that there is no material available today for reading, but this will be the case in the future if our generation does not produce writers. We, or rather our children, will find themselves in a vicious circle. There will not be available written material for them to read from which to draw substance for their own writings, merely because we, the prospective writers of today, are not taking advantage of the treasures left to us by our literary predecessors.

It is clear then that writers must to a great extent derive material for their writing by reading, but this does not solve the problem fully. Philosophers will tell us that every finite being is composed of matter and form. Although our topic is not a philosophic one, we comply here with this theory. The matter for our writing will be useless unless presented in an appealing and logical manner. Therefore a second essential in writing is a suitable style. Most writers are identified almost as much by their style as by their names. A primary danger in literature today is the tendency to imitate the style of others rather than to use originality in style. Many who have gathered suitable material for writing have not had the technical literary training which develops a facility of expression.

A danger which must be guarded against in our Catholic Colleges is that authors may be chosen for study in courses on literary style, not on the technical merits of their writing, their style, but on the content of their works. We must judge Catholic authors not as Catholics, but primarily as writers and literary experts. If we should limit ourselves, in our pursuit of style, to the study of Catholic writers whose merit lies in the content of their works rather than in their style, we would not be realizing the end of our study, nor would we achieve our goal, which is the acquisition of the means of expressing our thoughts and ideas properly and appealingly.

In the conflict which is raging toady in the educational world between the progressive and liberal educational theories, the latter finds itself in need of ardent supporters who will take up the pen in its defence. It claims to have given this ability to its beneficiaries, but the fact that the beneficiaries of a liberal education have not produced the fruits of this ability, indicates that this seed, though planted, had no found fertile soil.

Finally, the treatment of such a topic can be viewed in its entirety only when the role of the Catholic College student in the field of literature is taken into consideration. Having received from the Church an education based on the fundamental principles of truth, they must not neglect to aid the Church in its attempt to diffuse truth throughout the world. In our own country, we observe the extent to which truth is being distorted, by anti-religious elements. This war on truth, being waged chiefly through the medium of writing, must be counteracted through that same art by our Catholic College educated laity, as well as by the Clergy.

THOMAS J. KANE '55.

