

**THE NEW CRITICISM: A
LECTURE DELIVERED AT
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY,
MARCH 9, 1910**

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A LECTURE

DELIVERED AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

MARCH 9, 1910

BY

J. E. SPINGARN

PROFESSOR OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE
IN COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY



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NOTE

THE present paper on the Newer Ideals of Criticism formed the concluding lecture of a series on the Literatures of the World delivered by a number of the professors of Columbia University during the winter of 1909-10. It was first published (under the general title of "Literary Criticism") in the *Columbia University Lectures on Literature*, from which it is now reprinted.

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Fortunately for criticism, it does not live by the grace of poets, to whom it can be of small service at its best, but by the grace of others who have neither the poet's genius nor the critic's insight. I hope to persuade you this evening that the poets have been mistaken in their very conception of the critic's craft, which lives by a power that poets and critics share together. The secret of this power has come to men slowly, and the knowledge they have gained by it has transformed their idea of Criticism. What this secret is, and into what new paths Criticism is being led by it, is the subject of my lecture to-night.

At the end of the last century, France once more occupied the centre of that stage whose auditors are the inheritors of European civilization. Once more all the world listened while she talked and played, and some of the most brilliant of her talk was now on the question of the authority of Criticism. It is not my purpose to tell you (what you know already) with what sober and vigorous learning the official critics of the *Revue des deux Mondes*

espoused the cause of old gods with the new weapons of science, and with what charm and tact, with what grace and suppleness of thought, Jules Lemaitre and Anatole France, to mention no others, defended the free play of the appreciative mind. Some of the sparks that were beaten out on the anvil of controversy have become fixed stars, the classical utterances of Criticism, as when Anatole France described the critic not as a judge imposing sentence, but as a sensitive soul detailing his "adventures among master-pieces."

To have sensations in the presence of a work of art and to express them, that is the function of Criticism for the impressionistic critic. His attitude he would express somewhat in this fashion: "Here is a beautiful poem, let us say 'Prometheus Unbound.' To read it is for me to experience a thrill of pleasure. My delight in it is itself a judgment, and what better judgment is it possible for me to give? All that I can do is to tell how it affects me, what sensations it gives me.