

Highland Park Department.

THE OSSOLI.

Thursday afternoon of last week, before a large and appreciative audience—members of the "Ossoli"—a paper of unusual merit was read by Mrs. F. B. Green on Emily Dickinson.

As a great painter transfers to a canvas something of a likeness of a scene from nature, creating through his genius a permanent treasure for the eyes of the world, as, thus doing, the artist brings to life beauties that otherwise might for many have been lost—through not being noticed, so Mrs. Green gave to many of her hear-



MRS. BERTHA BAKER GREEN.

ers such a beautiful and comprehensive word picture of the too little known Emily Dickinson, as could have been given only by one in love with her subject and by one whose mind was stored the fruits of much research into the life and character of that subject. It is to be regretted that lack of space makes impossible giving Mrs. Green's paper in full.

Mrs. Green began by saying: "Today we are to pass by the broad thoroughfares of literature, that gleam in the sunlight of popularity, are known and frequented by the majority of readers, and turning aside, will explore a certain shady by-way, that is full of beauty to the seeing eye, and where one may unconsciously feel drawn closer to the great heart of nature."

"The genius of this retreat where as yet only a few rays of appreciation are

glimting through the thick foliage of obscurity, is Emily Dickinson. One who truly wrote as the birds sing, not caring whether the world heard or not, never thinking whether her songs would meet with praise or blame—simply voicing the music of her soul-tides, as they rose and fell upon the shore of her being!

It is difficult for many to understand and appreciate this writer, so bravely does she defy established rules, so fearlessly does she scan life's mysteries. "Art for art's sake" seemed not to enter her thought; but "soul for soul's sake" was pre-eminent. Judged by the little "foot rule" of the generally accepted definition of the art of poetry, Emily Dickinson was too much of a non-conformist to be allowed a place among poets; but judged by the truer definition of art, as given by Tolstol: namely, "Art is a human activity consisting in this, that one consciously, by means of certain external signs, hands on to other, feelings he has lived through, so that others are infected by those feelings and also experience them"—under that judgment, she is freely admitted with many others whose thought exceeds the measure of the lines."

"We are so wedded to self-imposed conventionality, so accustomed to limiting thought and soul action to personally, that it is difficult to realize its actual unimportance. Does a writer become famous, we at once ask to know his superficial surroundings, his daily habit of life, the estimation in which he is held by his neighbors; and if opportunity presents, we could slyly lift a corner of the curtain of his domestic life, to judge whether all is in order, flattering ourselves we are

We are chiefly catering to curiosity. Not the outward manifestation of life, not what one seems but what one thinks and feels, should appeal to us. I would not belittle the power of environment as a potent factor in development, or as an expression of being, but the real ego lies below that; for what matter form, feature, sex, or surroundings, when heart speaks to heart, when we appropriate thoughts fraught with joy, for our grieving, hope—for our despondency, strength—for our weakness."

"Curiosity regarding the life of Emily Dickinson must of necessity remain to a great degree unsatisfied, for very little is known of her. She was born

in Amherst, Mass., in 1830. Her father, Hon. Edward Dickinson, was a leading lawyer of Amherst, and treasurer of the college. Emily lived, from choice, a very secluded life, though on the occasions of the annual reception given by her father to prominent towns-people and families connected with the institution, she performed the duties of hostess so gracefully, that no one could guess her usual life of retirement."

"Her natural shrinking from contact with the world, and her habit of observing, unobserved are shown in the following verses:—

"I'm nobody; who are you?
Are you a nobody too?
Then there's a pair of us;
Don't tell, they'd banish us, you know!

How dreary to be somebody!
How public; like a frog!
To tell your name, the live-long day
To an admiring bog!"

"She counted among her few intimate acquaintances, Helen Hunt Jackson, who first persuaded her to allow a few of her poems to be published; also T. W. Higginson, whose criticism of her literary work she highly prized, and with whom she corresponded for some time. Doubtless many of us are indebted to his extracts from that correspondence, printed in the "Atlantic" some years ago for our first knowledge of her.

"It seems she made no effort to express herself in verse until after the age of thirty. She allowed but few of her poems to be published, and those were under protest. Not until after her death, in 1886, were her writings given to the world, and we were made aware of the existence of this genius, who could so powerfully appeal to the human heart, bringing it into touch with nature, and its own vast domain!"

"Why is that Emily Dickinson's poetry appeals to us so strongly? Is it because she tells us that the sky is blue and the rose is red? Not at all. But because in revealing to us the beauty of nature, she reveals her own soul, and we feel the kinship of humanity with the universe!"

Thus Mrs. Green finished a paper, the greater portion of which has been omitted here, and perhaps one can do no better than note in conclusion two of the many happy choices Mrs. Green so delightfully rendered, from Emily Dickinson:

THE GENTIAN.

"God made a little gentian,
It tried to be a rose,
And all the summer laughed!