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978-1-107-42659-7 - The Element of Irony in English Literature: An Essay

F. McD. C. Turner

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**THE ELEMENT OF IRONY
IN ENGLISH LITERATURE**

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IN
ENGLISH LITERATURE
AN ESSAY
BY
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*Donaldson Bye-Fellow of Magdalene College
Cambridge*

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PREFACE

This essay was awarded the Le Bas prize in 1924 and is now, rather behind time, I fear, published in accordance with the regulations of that prize. With the permission, and in some cases on the advice, of the Adjudicators, certain alterations and additions have been made. In particular, much of the last chapter and some of chapter iv is new.

But I feel that little improvement has been made; the essay remains, as it was in its original form, quite inadequate, if anything approaching a comprehensive review of English irony is expected. Many authors, famous in our literature, and admirable in their use of irony, are unmentioned here, and even Gibbon, the very name that must spring first to the mind of an Englishman when irony is discussed, receives but scant attention. But I must let the essay explain itself: the only irony which seems to me to have been at any time so characteristic as to deserve to be considered an element in our literature is the kind that in this

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essay I have called prophetic; and Gibbon's irony is not of this kind. Of many English poets, indeed, the same cannot be said; but in so short a book it seemed impossible to attempt an exhaustive survey even of prophetic irony, and I thought it best to confine myself to works of prose.

F. M^CD. C. T.

December 1925

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