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Donne's Poetry

Donne's poetry is so uneven, at times so startling and fantastic, that few critics would care to recommend it to others. Only a few will read his works, and they must be left to their own browsing, to find what pleases them, like deer which, in the midst of plenty, take a bite here and there and wander on, tasting twenty varieties of food in an hour's feeding. One who reads much will probably bewail Donne's lack of any consistent style or literary standard. For instance Chaucer and Milton are as different as two poets could well be, yet the work of each is marked by a distinct and consistent style, and it is the style as much as the matter which makes the "Tales" or "The Paradise Lost" a work for all time. Donne threw style and all litera-

ry standards to the winds, and precisely for this reason he is forgotten, though his great intellect and his genius had marked him as one of those who should do things "worthy to be remembered". While the tendency of literature is to exalt style at the expense of thought, the world has many men and women who exalt feeling and thought above expression; and to these Donne is good reading. Browning is of the same school and compels attention. While Donne played havoc with Elizabethan style, he nevertheless influenced our literature in the way of boldness and originality; and the present tendency is to give him a larger place, nearer to the few great poets, than he has occupied since Ben Jonson declared that he was "the first poet

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of the world in some things,
but likely to perish "for
not being understood." For
to much of his poetry we
must apply his own satiric
verses on another's crudi-
ties!

"Infinite work! which
doth so far extend
That none can study
it to any end."

The end.

Munni Bhushan Sinha
Deptt. of English
S.S. College, Jehanabad