Hiram Corson: Interpretative Reader, English Teacher, Literary Scholar.

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HIRAM CORSON: INTERPRETATIVE READER, ENGLISH TEACHER, LITERARY SCHOLAR

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

The Department of Speech

by

Linda Frances Welden
B.S., Georgia Southern College, 1964
M.S., Georgia Southern College, 1968
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ABSTRACT

Hiram Corson (1828-1911) was a prominent American literary scholar of the nineteenth century. He achieved recognition as a professor of English literature, an interpretative reader of works by American and British authors, and an author of books and articles on literary study. Advising that a student could profit more from hearing an interpretative reading than from reading about literature, he recommended that a teacher could cultivate his voice, assimilate the literature, and then perform it. Corson exemplified his philosophy in his practice.

Two earlier studies have surveyed Corson's writing and teaching career. The present study goes beyond them, analyzing Corson's personal and professional correspondence, books, speeches, and unpublished manuscripts. Student publications at Cornell, newspaper items, periodical articles, and taped interviews supplement the investigation. Consequently this study presents a comprehensive picture of Corson's life and work.

During the first half of Corson's life he acquired his education, sought early employment, became an elocutionist, gave readings and literary lectures, and held professorships at Girard College and St. John's College. In addition he and his wife Caroline Rollin were associated with a school in Washington, D. C.

In 1870 Corson was appointed Resident Professor
of Rhetoric, Oratory, and English Literature at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, where he spent the remainder of his life. His first decade at Cornell established the pattern he continued throughout his career. In the classroom he employed interpretative reading in his teaching of literature. His readings soon extended beyond his classroom to include all students, as well as others. He gave readings and lectures in Ithaca and cities beyond. In 1877 he lectured to the New Shakspere Society of London.

Corson was influential in establishing the popularity of Browning studies. He organized the first Browning Club and was a charter member of the London Browning Society. Acclaimed as a leading Browning scholar, he read and lectured from the poet's writing in America and abroad. He was personally acquainted with Browning and was instrumental in organizing Browning Societies for the oral study of the poet's works.

Corson continued his English teaching, interpretative reading, and literary scholarship at Cornell until his retirement in 1903. He pursued his customary activities when Professor Emeritus and also intensified his interest in spiritualism. Honors were bestowed upon him in his last years and complimentary reminiscences of acquaintances followed his death. His influence on teaching persisted in English pedagogy beyond his lifetime.
Hiram Corson's long experience as an interpretative reader, English teacher, and literary scholar fully justified the recognition his contemporaries gave to his work. His publications and some representative speeches reveal the origins and development of his literary theory, but it is his exemplification of that theory in his own career that validates for modern oral interpretation scholars the value of his theory and practice. Corson is appropriately credited with confirmation of the importance of interpretative reading to an understanding of literary texts, with advocacy of interpretation as a tool for practical literary criticism, and with rejection of the mechanical tradition in the study of literary performance.
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Hiram Corson, a prominent interpretative reader, English teacher, and literary scholar in the nineteenth century, devoted most of the eighty-three years of his life to the study of literature. Although he received little formal education, he seemed to view the world around him as his university. As a young man in Philadelphia, he went to the theatre to study Shakespeare through the performances of his friend Mrs. John Drew and her company. As private secretary to Daniel Webster and Lewis Cass, he had the opportunity to hear and to transcribe American oratory in some of its finest hours. As an assistant to Charles Jewett at the Smithsonian Institution, he had access to the original library of Congress for his independent research; in addition, he attended the lectures sponsored by the Smithsonian. In essence, he had a self-designed education that any literary scholar might envy.

For Corson learning was not a compartmentalized activity; rather, it was a way of life. It is not surprising, therefore, that he began to teach. From seminaries for young women and private lessons to
ministers he went on to college teaching. In 1870 he joined the faculty of the newly-founded Cornell University, where he spent the rest of his life. During the thirty-three years of his professorship and later as an emeritus professor, Corson was active as a teacher, a public reader, and a literary scholar. In all three facets of his career he was concerned with the relationship of the voice to literature.

Corson's concentration at Cornell was in teaching English literature. W. T. Hewett's history of that university quoted the professor's philosophy of teaching poetry:

How is the best response to the essential life of a poem to be secured by the teacher from the pupil? I answer, by the fullest interpretative vocal rendering of it. On the part of the teacher, two things are indispensable, first, that he sympathetically assimilate what constitutes the real life of the poem; second, that he have that vocal cultivation demanded for an effective rendering of what he has assimilated. Lecturing about poetry does not, of itself, avail any more for poetical cultivation than lecturing about music avails, of itself, for musical cultivation.¹

Hewett also discussed Corson's method of literary instruction.

Lectures were given on English literature, poetical and prose, from the fourteenth to the nineteenth century inclusive, in eight groups, of which Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, Pope, Wordsworth, Browning, and Tennyson were made the central figures. Lectures were given daily, except Saturday, and to the

same class, so that there were about two hundred lectures and readings given during the academic year.

The literature was presented mainly in its essential character, rather than in its historical, though the latter received attention . . . . It was considered of prime importance that [the students] should first attain a sympathetic appreciation of what is essential and intrinsic, before the adventitious features of literature—features due to time and place—be considered.2

As an extension of his classroom teaching, Corson gave reading performances on campus. Hewett reported that these readings were given each Saturday morning during the academic year, and the selections were from English and American prose writers. The performances were open not only to students but also to any visitors who wished to attend. According to Hewett, the class members were also required to read the entire selections from which the readings were chosen.3

Another history of Cornell gave evidence of the support Corson received for these performances from the university's president, Andrew D. White.

Corson let himself go, thundering Shakespeare to his classes and giving public readings every Saturday morning. Occasionally he arranged in Sage Chapel readings accompanied by organ music. These recitals White found to be among the most uplifting and ennobling in his experience.4

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2Hewett, p. 46.

3Ibid.

Corson's reading performances and lectures were not limited to the Cornell campus. He travelled extensively, lecturing on other college campuses and to societies of Browning, Chaucer, and Shakespeare in several communities. He also presented lectures and readings to similar societies in England.

In addition to teaching and public reading, the professor devoted much of his time to scholarly writing. He published a number of volumes concerned with the study of literature. He also wrote critical articles for the university publications and for literary periodicals.

This study reconstructs the history of Hiram Corson as teacher, reader, and scholar through an investigation of his published writing, his personal correspondence, and related supplementary works. This man was a significant proponent of oral reading in the study of literature. The history of nineteenth-century education would be incomplete without an investigation of the life and work of Hiram Corson.

Scholars in speech and specifically in oral interpretation have identified Hiram Corson as a pioneer in the interpretative reading of literature in America. Mary Margaret Robb, a pioneer oral interpretation historian, devoted several pages of her study to a summary of Corson's philosophy contained in one of his books, The
Voice and Spiritual Education. He was also mentioned in Speech Education in America.

John T. Marshman noted that Corson "stimulated great interest in the best literature through his reading aloud to his classes" and advised that "he wrote an illuminating little book, The Voice and Spiritual Education, which is still worth reading, especially to those interested in oral interpretation." Helen Hicks discussed Corson along with Samuel Silas Curry and Charles Townsend Copeland as "the three great C's of those early years" in the teaching of oral reading. Donald E. Hargis further investigated Corson's published work concentrating on The Voice and Spiritual Education, The Aims of Literary Study, and A Primer of English Verse. Hargis also listed Corson's influence on a number of "commentators on speech," referring the reader to the work of H. H. Fuller,


8Helen G. Hicks, "Corson, Copeland and Curry on Reading Aloud," Re-establishing the Speech Profession, the First Fifty Years, eds. Robert T. Oliver and Marvin G. Bauer (Speech Association of the Eastern States, 1959), p. 84.

9Donald E. Hargis, "Hiram Corson and Oral Interpretation," Western Speech, XXIX (Winter, 1965), 37.

Two unpublished theses are on the work of Hiram Corson. The first, a brief but valuable study by Nancy Jane Hartung, contains a biographical sketch of Corson, an analysis of his philosophy of interpretation based on his published work, and a discussion of his influence on certain modern interpretation theorists.¹⁰

Kristin Krum Marshall, author of the second unpublished thesis, was the first interpretation scholar to survey the Corson papers in the University Archives at Cornell, in Ithaca, New York. When she did her research, the Corson collection was still in its original form in the scrapbooks that the professor had kept on his career. Unfortunately the archivists at Cornell have been forced to dismantle the scrapbooks, and the collection is now kept in cardboard boxes with limited identification of the contents. Consequently the documentation concerning scrapbooks in the Marshall thesis is of little value. The study, however, is an impressive one. Chapter I provides a general biography of Hiram Corson. Chapter II discusses his religious beliefs and states that most of his "philos-

ophy of education is derived from his religious beliefs. 11 Chapter III concentrates on his published works and divides his theory of literary study into four parts: "his definitions of literature, the aims of literary study, methods of studying literature, and poets most worthwhile to study." 12 It also compares his philosophy with that of Kant, Tolstoy, and Croce. Chapter IV discusses Corson's theories of vocal training as expressed through his writing, although the theory was "not systematic." 13 Chapter V lists the reasons gleaned from his books for "the use of oral interpretation in teaching and studying literature." 14 Chapter VI provides an overview of his lectures and public readings, emphasizing the year 1873-1874. Chapter VII notes his influence.

Appendix A is a photograph of Hiram Corson, Appendix B contains copies of some of his letters from famous people, Appendix C lists his examination questions in English literature, and Appendix D lists the selections included in An Elocutionary Manual.

Although the Marshall thesis promises to place "particular emphasis on his teaching of literature," it


12 Marshall, p. 64. 13 Marshall, p. 91.

14 Marshall, p. 146.
does so without an attempt at historical perspective. Scholars in English education, however, are aware of Corson's work. One such historian, Arthur Applebee, credits Corson with being among those teachers who provided "the academic roots for a dissenting tradition" from emphasis on philology "which would contribute in the years after 1900 to the rejection by the high schools of the collegiate model."\(^{15}\) John Searles in his dissertation also mentions Corson as an English teacher who emphasized oral reading.\(^{16}\) Two books used in teaching English in the normal schools in the early decades of the twentieth century are indebted to Corson. The present study shows Corson's influence on these works by Percival Chubb and by George R. Carpenter, Franklin T. Baker, and Fred N. Scott and Corson's subsequent influence upon the teaching of English in the high schools.

Hiram Corson was an English teacher, an interpretative reader, and a literary scholar. The primary emphasis of the present study is on these correlated careers. Whereas the Marshall thesis surveys some aspects of Corson's life and work, the current study is a detailed account of his activities. The dissertation begins with

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\(^{16}\) John Rexford Searles, "Some Trends in the Teaching of Literature since 1900" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1942).
an account of his career prior to his appointment at Cornell. The remaining chapters are organized according to his career emphases within the decades of his life. This work is the first to investigate Corson's family correspondence and much of his professional correspondence. Through these letters and through unpublished manuscripts, newspaper items, periodical articles, and taped interviews, most not previously investigated, a comprehensive picture of Corson's life and work emerges. The primary source of this information is the Hiram Corson collection in the Department of Manuscripts and University Archives in Olin Library on the campus of Cornell University. An investigation of the materials contained there was revealing. First, it showed Corson's professional relationships with the literary scholars and writers of his day and enabled the researcher to establish his place among them. Second, it provided Corson's own accounts of and reactions to his interpretative reading activities. Third, it gave a thorough account of his materials and methods in classroom instruction. This investigation of the complete collection of his personal papers provided the details necessary for a comprehensive account of his life and work.

Throughout their lives Hiram, Caroline, and Eugene Corson maintained contact during their many separations through correspondence. The researcher is indebted to them not only for being gifted writers but
also for realizing the historical value of their letters and for preserving them. Hiram Corson held his wife's letters in such esteem that he made them an object in his will. Indeed, all the professor's correspondence that he decided to preserve is an aid to the researcher in evaluating his career.

To separate the life of Hiram Corson from his work is impossible because his work was his life. A complete study must necessarily concentrate not only on his activity but also on the available personal responses he had toward his involvements. The present work incorporates biographical information with facts concerning his teaching of English, his interpretative reading of literature, and his contributions to literary scholarship. To Hiram Corson, the essence of poetry was its spirit, not just its meaning. To this researcher, it is who Hiram Corson was that is the substance of his career, not merely what he taught.

This study is divided into eight chapters. The present one introduces the work. Chapter Two provides a biography of Corson with emphasis on his literary involvements prior to 1870, when he became associated with Cornell University. Chapters Three through Six develop his career at Cornell according to decades and illustrate his main concerns during those years. Chapter Three discusses the years 1870-1879, when he was establishing his reputation at Cornell. Chapter Four deals with the
years 1880-1889 and his association with the Browning Movement. Chapter Five is concerned with the last decade of his formal teaching career. Chapter Six discusses the last eleven years of Corson's life and investigates his interest in spiritualism and its correlation with his literary theory. Chapter Seven explains the origin, development, and influence of his literary theory, and the final chapter presents a summary and conclusion.
Chapter 2

A BIOGRAPHY OF HIRAM CORSON BEFORE 1870

Hiram Corson began an official affiliation with Cornell University in 1870 that was to last for the rest of his life. During the years of his professorship at Cornell he achieved an international reputation as a respected literary scholar, as a revered teacher, and as a gifted performer of literature. However, Hiram Corson was forty-two years old and near the exact middle of his lifetime when he assumed Cornell's Chair of Rhetoric, Oratory, and English Literature. The first half of his life was the groundwork upon which the reputation of the second half was built. Consequently a study of his early years should illuminate his later successful career.

Corson verified his birthdate in a letter to his wife dated November 6, 1878: "This is my birthday. I'm half a century old!" He was born in 1828 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the third child and first son of Joseph Dickinson Corson and Ann Hagy Corson. The Corsons were descended from a long line of Quakers. Joseph Corson was held to be unusually bright, possessing special talent in mathematics. The young Hiram was educated at home by his parents, with his father giving him individual instruction.
in mathematics.¹

In 1843 he was sent to the classical and mathematical school in Norristown, Pennsylvania, where the Rev. Dr. Samuel Aaron was principal. After completing the course of study there, he enrolled in the classical school in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, under the principalship of the Rev. Dr. Anspach. Here he studied for nearly five years, concentrating on Latin and Greek and reading extensively.² His granddaughter, Pauline Corson Coad, later reported that her grandfather taught himself to read Greek in order to study the New Testament in its original text.³

He left Pennsylvania for Washington, D.C., in the fall of 1849.⁴ Then twenty-one, Corson was employed as "an official reporter of the proceedings of the United States Senate."⁵ He reported Daniel Webster's "Seventh


²Corson, p. 98.

³Information from an interview between a Cornell University Archivist and Pauline Corson Coad, taped June 23, 1958, in Savannah, Georgia.

⁴Corson, p. 97.

⁵Handwritten biographical document from the Corson collection written "By a member of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences" in 1898. p. 2. Hereafter cited as PBD.
of March" speech in this capacity. Later, as Webster's private secretary, he prepared the index to the Everett edition of the Senator's works. He also served for a time as secretary to Senator Lewis Cass.

Corson accepted a position in the summer of 1850 with the Smithsonian Institution, which had been founded in 1846. At that time, the Smithsonian was in charge of American copyrighting, and Corson was for several years in charge of the copyright correspondence. During his tenure at the Smithsonian he attended the lectures sponsored by the Institution, as well as making "an extended study of English, French and German literatures" in the original library of Congress housed at that time in the Smithsonian.

A major influence on Corson's life was Caroline Rollin, whom he married in 1854. Their marriage certificate, written by hand on blue notepaper, reveals the details of their wedding.

This may certify to all whom it may concern that Hiram Corson, Jr. of Washington City and Miss Caroline Rollin, at present of Boston, and late of Washington, but originally of Paris in France, were united in Matrimony, in the city of Boston, Massachusetts, on the thirteenth day of September, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and fifty four by me. (signed) R. W. Cushman, Minister of the gospel in Boston.

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6PBD., p. 3. 7Ibid. 8PBD., p. 3. 9Ibid. 10Corson, p. 97.
According to Mrs. Coad, her grandparents met while they were teaching in the same school. She appears to be mistaken, because Mrs. Corson's correspondence in later years indicates she had been employed as a governess with a family who had brought her to this country from France. Corson substantiated her employment with a handwritten note on an envelope from Mrs. Davis. He wrote:

Mrs. Ella Cushman Davis is the daughter of Rev. Dr. R. W. Cushman who invited my dear wife to this country, and in whose family she lived, in Washington, D.C., until their removal to Boston. He married us there on the 13th of September, 1854.

Corson followed Caroline Rollin to Boston, married her, and brought her back to Washington to live.

Caroline Rollin Corson was a scholar in her own right. Two months after her marriage she was corresponding with Henry Wadsworth Longfellow concerning her translation of his "Hyperion" into French. Longfellow wrote her that it would please him to look over some chapters of the manuscript, and that he would read it all if his eyes were in better condition.\textsuperscript{11}

Another letter from Longfellow to Mrs. Corson indicates not only some bad news from the poet but also that Caroline had shared with him an account of family difficulty. The poet wrote that he was sorry to report that his publisher had declined to print her work because

\textsuperscript{11}Letter from Henry W. Longfellow to Caroline Corson, November 30, 1854.
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\(^{11}\)Letter from Henry W. Longfellow to Caroline Corson, November 30, 1854.
the printer's charges for books in a foreign language were considerably higher than for books in English. He added:

Upon reflection I am inclined to agree with him, that it would be better to have the translation appear first in Paris... . I am really and sincerely grieved to hear of the misfortunes that have befallen you, but you will rise superior to them. I hope and believe that your school will flourish and prosper.12

The bad news concerning publication was short-lived, for on May 15, 1855, Longfellow wrote Caroline: "I am glad you have found a publisher for 'Hyperion' in New York, and assure you that I will look over the proof sheets with great pleasure." The other "misfortunes" are mysterious, but they possibly concerned Corson's employment. In 1855 he was seeking a position as Librarian of the New York Society Library. Corson preserved copies of two letters of recommendation for this position, the first from John S. Meehan, Librarian, Library of Congress, and the other from Meehan's three assistants. The former stated: "He is a good linguist, and is well acquainted with every department of literature," and the latter concurred:

We know him to be a thorough scholar, an apt linguist and an experienced bibliographer, with an extensive acquaintance with general literature, and of a highly critical and sound literary taste. His assiduity in bibliographical research, while engaged upon the catalogue of this Library, on the plan of the Smithsonian Institution, has afforded him a most valuable

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12 Letter from Henry W. Longfellow to Caroline Corson, March 9, 1855.
experience, and his exclusively literary turn of mind renders him devoted to his profession.  

Another letter, dated June 4, 1855, indicates that Corson resigned his position with the Smithsonian. Francis Markoe, of that Institution, wrote him:

From all I know and have seen of your talents, acquirements, manners, and character, I should say that the New York Society Library could not select any gentleman better adapted than yourself in all respects to act as Librarian. Though sorry to lose you from our society, I will do anything in my power to forward your wishes in this or in any other regard.

No evidence indicates that Corson did indeed receive an offer from the New York Society Library. Rather, the Corsons became associated with the school to which Longfellow had referred in his letter to Caroline.

A pamphlet entitled "Circular and Catalogue of the Female English and French Collegiate Institute, Washington, D.C., For the Scholastic Year Ending 1 July 1858" lists Hiram and Caroline Corson as Principal and Vice Principal. The catalogue announced that the school had been operating successfully for four years but did not state that the Corsons had founded the school. A letter to Corson from J. M. Gillis, patron of the school and father of two students, Fannie and Rebecca, does date the Corsons' association at least as early as August 29, 1856.  

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14 The Marshall thesis designates "the beginning of Corson's formal teaching career" as 1865 with his appointment to Girard College. (Marshall, p. 7.)
that date Gillis wrote to recommend the school because the Corsons had been able to please both the parents and the students.

Principal Corson was in charge of the English department, and his school day was spent, according to the circular, in "the hearing of recitations and the general government of the Institution." The 1858 catalogue, which Corson wrote, contains the earliest published account of his attitudes toward the teaching of English through interpretative reading. He stated:

An important end to be obtained in early education is to cultivate a habit of systematically careful and critical reading. Whoever reads at all should make it a duty to read with all the faculties wide awake, and, as much as possible, focalized upon the subject at hand.

The system that he suggested can be summarized in five steps:

(1) Exercise in what Corson referred to as "the logical analysis of the higher poetry."

(2) Study of etymologies in order to give "definiteness to the meanings of words."

(3) Knowledge of Greek and Latin to understand etymologies.

(4) Special care in training and developing "the organs of speech for the easy and rapid enunciation of all the elementary sounds." Because children have pliable "muscles of articulation," he held, students should undertake vocal training in early life.
(5) Vocal exercise "in the tones and other affections which give expression to the various emotions of the mind." He suggested the following teaching method: "Extracts should be selected in which the emotions are best displayed, and the voice daily exercised in their expression."

He concluded the catalogue section on reading with a statement of his philosophy:

No acquisition which may be ranked among elegant accomplishments, is perhaps rarer than that of good reading. This is partially attributable to the little estimation of its importance, but especially to the means employed in its cultivation, which are usually too imperfect and limited to produce much result.  

For a time either the school was less than successful financially, or the Corsons were unable to live within their income, as bills from their creditors reveal. One such bill was from J. W. Taverner of Philadelphia, an elocutionist with whom Corson was later associated professionally. It read, "I am indeed sorry to trouble you with another application, and I would not do so at all but that I am really in want of the cash."

According to a letter from S. Gilman to Corson, July 15, 1856, the Corsons were attempting to find teaching positions in the South. Although he wrote, "I do not think

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there is any opening in Charleston to suit your immediate views," he enclosed a clipping which he identified as being from "the Charleston papers":

Teachers wanted for the Cheraw Academy—Gentleman, As Principal, qualified to prepare boys for the Junior Class in the South Carolina College, and a Lady as Assistant, competent to teach the usual branches of female education, including drawing and painting.

Concerning Corson's application for the position, Gilman warned that religious beliefs might interfere.

Without advising you to any unworthy shrinking or reticence in regard to your principles, I may frankly say, that your emblazoned connection with a Unitarian Church would do you no special good in the lat. and long. of Cheraw. In short, you must be as cosmopolitan in your pretensions on all great subjects as your conscience will allow, unless indeed your conscience can be somewhat South Carolinian in its sympathy.

Certainly "South Carolinian sympathy" in 1856 would have included positive reactions to slavery and states rights. Gilman advised Corson to seek references, informing him that names were very important. His letter suggested that "Jefferson Davis's and Mr. Seaton's names would no doubt serve you in Cheraw. Mr. Davis would probably interest the S. C. gent. in your behalf."

Whether or not the Corsons applied for the jobs in Cheraw is unknown; however, the next year saw Corson attempting a seemingly desperate step. Still in Washington, he received a letter dated November 14, 1857 from "Her Britannic Majesty's Legation in Washington," informing him

I have to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 12th ins. requesting to be informed whether volunteers will be received for military employment
in India. I have to acquaint you in reply that Her Majesty's govt. do not intend to have recourse to foreign enlistment in any form.

Having been discouraged on one hand because of his church membership and on the other because of his citizenship, Corson moved back to Philadelphia, his hometown. The Cornell faculty biographer reported:

His literary interests had always been pronounced and his intervals of leisure had long been given to literary study, when in 1859 he removed to Philadelphia, where he began permanently to devote himself to the study and teaching of English literature. For some years he gave private lectures in Philadelphia.¹⁶

But Corson was in Philadelphia at least as early as December 1, 1858. There he became an associate of J. W. Taverner, the elocutionist who had previously loaned him money. For the first time, Corson began to call himself an "elocutionist." He and Taverner issued an advertisement dated December 1, 1858, and headed: "J. W. Taverner and H. Corson, Elocutionists, Philadelphia." Corson's address was given as "No. 705 Chestnut St." The circular announced:

Mr. J. W. TAVERNER, having extended his instructions in ELOCUTION, beyond what his personal attention is able to embrace, has the pleasure to announce, that he has associated with him, Mr. HIRAM CORSON, an accomplished Elocutionist, and late Principal of the Female English and French Collegiate Institution, in Washington, D. C. He hopes, therefore, to be able, in future, to fulfill with regularity, periodical engagements with Colleges, Theological Schools, and Seminaries, without any of those occasional failures and delays which have been unavoidable during several years past. To such Institutions, a Course of Analytic and Practical Instruction, of the most thorough and philosophical character, will be afforded. Private Instruction will be pursued, in the same manner, as heretofore.

¹⁶PBD, pp. 3-4.
A letter to Hiram Corson initialed "D. H. N." and headed "Washington, D. C., Dec. 21, 1858," mentioned that Corson was going on tour and advised that he look for a place to open a school. The letter also gave some indication of his financial status in Washington:

Be sure and call on us, as you pass this way. If you owe any one here, you might be put to trouble by creditors, if it were known when you visit the city. I give you this point in order that you may not incur such a risk, unless there is an absolute necessity for tarrying here.

One of the places that Corson visited on his tour was Trenton, New Jersey. A testimonial letter from there dated January 1, 1859, attested to his success.

The undersigned having, during the last month, been under the instruction of Mr. Hiram Corson, Elocutionist, do hereby express their entire satisfaction with the lessons received, eight in number, and their favorable opinion of Mr. Corson's ability.

It was signed "S. Wright, Pastor of Central Baptist Church" and "Rich. B. Duane, Rector of St. Michaels."

Early in 1859, the Corsons had entered a new teaching venture. At this time they were conducting a "class of Young Ladies in Philadelphia or the neighborhood." In March of the same year, H. O. Apthorpe, an elocutionist who corresponded with Corson for many years and who frequently loaned him money, wrote that he would be happy to send a testimonial concerning his opinion of and confidence in Corson, or to write any institution in Philadelphia in his behalf.

A printed circular announced the opening of the school.

Prof. HIRAM CORSON and Madame CAROLINE ROLLIN CORSON, late Principals of the "Female English and French Collegiate Institution," Washington, D. C., will open a School for Young Ladies, on the 19th of September, 1859, at No. 929 Clinton Street, the number of pupils to be strictly limited to 15. Careful and thorough instruction will be imparted in all the branches of a liberal and polite English and French education . . . . Special attention will be given to the Logical Analysis of Language, English Composition, Rhetoric, Elocution, English Literature, Drawing, and Mathematics.

Charges for resident pupils were $325 per year, and for day pupils the yearly fee was $125.

Listed as references in Philadelphia were: Prof. Charles Short; Rev. M. A. DeWolfe Howe, D. D.; Prof. H. O. Apthorpe; Mr. John Pennington; and Rev. W. H. Furness, D. D. (father of one of Corson's closest friends, H. H. Furness). Washington, D. C. references were: Professor Joseph Henry, LL.D., Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution; Col. H. K. Craig, U. S. A.; John A. Campbell, Assoc. Justice Supreme Court; and Prof. W. E. Jillson, Columbia College.

Prof. Charles C. Jewett, for whom Corson had worked at the Smithsonian, was listed as a reference in Boston.

The next year the Corsons issued the same circular, with changes only in dates, location, and fees. Opening was scheduled for September 10, 1860, this year at 907 Spruce Street. Resident pupils were still required to pay $325, but fees for day pupils were lowered to $100, with girls under 13 required to pay only $60 per year.
In addition to teaching and presumably to continuing his association with Taverner, Corson seems to have embarked on another facet of his career in 1860. A long letter from H. O. Apthorpe dated February 21 of that year indicates that Corson had read Longfellow aloud for an audience and had asked Apthorpe for his reaction. In addition to providing insight into Corson's elocutionary skills, the letter is a rare document of criticism by one nineteenth-century elocutionist of another. Apthorpe began his letter by praising Corson's elocutionary skill:

And first of all let me say unequivocally that it would have been difficult for me without the appearance of flattery to have expressed to you my high appreciation and I must say admiration of your voice and elocutionary accomplishments. It should be remembered that the odds were sadly against you in the selection of literature when we consider that my taste had never yet been brought to love Longfellow, or to enjoy any images of the 'horrible and ghastly.' The intonation which elocutionists think necessary for that style does not suit my ear. I don't now intend a criticism, merely an individual expression of private taste. . . . The compass, power and flexibility of your voice must never be an object of envy with all who deserve the name of Elocutionist.

Apthorpe's letter also sheds light on Corson's education in elocution. He seems to have taught himself this subject as he had earlier studied literature on his own.

I imagine you still consider it to be your principal misfortune that you cannot find a master competent to conduct you to the point you are capable of reaching. You will find yourself drawn to the necessity of being your own teacher; and that, while your avocations continue so numerous and pressing, will take a long time and almost endless experiment.

If there are points wherein you do not excel I will not set myself up in judgment upon them. You can't expect it, and should not desire it. Your mind is not
settled how far individual taste should be allowed to assert its authority in the view of what may be strictly artistic. Nor do you fully know where to look for the latter with confidence.

I would not hesitate to seek throughout Europe if I thought I could find a master who could make me improve as I believe you can be made to. And I would offer an hundred dollars at the outset to such master to be paid when rich enough to do it without effort; whether he should propose to give you 12 or 100 lessons.

Corson seems to have decided to continue as his "own master," for later in the year he began a series of "Parlor Readings" at the residence of Charles J. Peterson, 1501 Walnut Street, Philadelphia. According to a note from Peterson, the paid audience for the first reading was forty four, in addition to some people who attended on complimentary tickets. The circular announcing the second lecture discussed the time, place, and material to be read:

Mr. Corson will deliver his second Lecture on EDGAR ALLAN POE, on Tuesday evening, December 18, 1860, commencing at 7 3/4 o'clock, at the residence of Charles J. Peterson, Esq., No. 1501 Walnut Street. The Lecture will treat especially of Poe's principles of Literary Art and Criticism and his Theory of the Poetic, and will comprise the reading of his principal poems, and passages from his prose works.

Tickets 50 cents; to be had at the 'Librairie Etrangère,' No. 1323 Chestnut Street.

An article in the Sunday Transcript, Philadelphia, May 6, 1860, revealed that Corson also held these "Parlor Readings" in his own house:

On Tuesday Mr. Hiram Corson, a distinguished professor of elocution, will give a lecture on 'Fancy and Imagination, illustrated by various poems.' Mr. Corson is a most remarkable reader, and these entertainments are enjoyable because they are within the circumscribed limits of Mr. Corson's own drawing-
Corson also delivered his Poe lecture on February 26, 1861, at the Mount Holly Institute for Young Men and Women at Mount Holly, New Jersey, a town close to Philadelphia. C. E. Aaron, principal of the school, wrote to make the arrangements on January 1, 1961.

A lecture of an hour and a half, combining the greater part of your two lectures on Poe, would be highly acceptable. Your introducing some of Poe's best poems would be a delightful feature in the affair.

The Aaron letter also indicated the subject matter of other Corson lectures, in addition to providing insight into the audience at the Poe lecture, which seems to have been open to townspeople as well as to students.

I sincerely wish that we of Mt. Holly might enjoy your lectures on Aesthetics. But you know how it is in these country towns. Literary taste is confined to a few, and an audience that would appreciate such efforts as yours would be exceedingly select.

When Corson went to Mt. Holly, he carried with him a letter of introduction to Franklin B. Lewis which was signed "Cousin McArhonds" and headed "Phila., Feb. 26, 1861." Lewis was possibly an influential citizen of Mt. Holly, for the letter instructed him that should Corson meet with encouragement, "he will make arrangements for other lectures, or give some of his Parlor Readings, such as we have so much enjoyed in our city this winter."

Returning from Mt. Holly, Corson presented more
lectures in Philadelphia in early April. At the same time, he was corresponding with Dr. E. Schums of Mt. Holly concerning another lecture, scheduled for April 22, 1861. Schums requested specific selections to be read: "Childe Harold's Address to the Ocean," "The Bridge of Sighs," "Hiawatha's Wooing," and "Nothing to Wear." Charles Aaron added a note to the same letter, indicating that the reading was to be done to benefit the Lyceum in Mt. Holly, and requesting that "The Charge of the Light Brigade," "The Lost Heir," "The Skeleton in Armor" and "The Execution" be read also, and "If time should allow, you might add passages from The Merchant of Venice." But the reading was not fated for presentation. On April 19, 1861, Schums wrote a hasty note to Corson, informing him that "Consequence of the intense excitement the war news has caused among us, we have concluded to postpone your readings indefinitely." Not to be outdone by civil war, Corson offered to read to benefit the Ladies of the Soldiers' Aid Association in Mt. Holly, and the reading was scheduled for June 18, 1861. In response to the performance, Aaron wrote of some criticism he had

18Letter to Hiram Corson from Charles E. Aaron, Mt. Holly, New Jersey, April 9, 1861.

19Letter to Hiram Corson from Dr. E. Schums, Mt. Holly, New Jersey, April 17, 1861, with a postscript from Charles Aaron.

20Letter to Hiram Corson from C. E. Aaron, Mt. Holly, New Jersey, June 10, 1861.
encountered:

Some who heard and enjoyed your reading have expressed a regret that you did not stand while reading so that they could see as well as hear you. Your features were hidden from some of your auditors by the large bouquets which stood near you. For my part I see no reason why a sitting posture is not as favorable in your case as any other, apart from the desirableness of a commanding position in addressing a mixed audience. In a parlor, I prefer the position which you adopt.21

Later in the same year, Corson reinstated his lectures in Philadelphia, this time on a larger scale than his earlier parlor readings. An article in The Press, Philadelphia, November 6, 1861, reviewed the first of a series of lectures on the subject "Studies in English Poetry, Literary Art, and Criticism." The lecture was at four o'clock at Concert Hall, and the reviewer labeled it "the experiment of a day lecture." He wrote that the audience "though not large, was select, and evidently appreciative." The reviewer quoted Corson as saying that the purpose of the lecture was "to set forth principles by which he would be guided in those that were to follow."

According to the report, the principles to be followed in the lecture series were:

(1) To read poetry to most advantage the reader ought not to attempt analysis, but rather to place himself passively under the influence of his author. It was thus the emotional appeals could alone be made effective to the reader. The 'Locksley Hall' of Tennyson was singled out to illustrate the principle he wished to enforce in this particular.

21Letter to Hiram Corson from C. E. Aaron, Mt. Holly, New Jersey, June 19, 1861.
The first reading of that great poem might impress the reader with its sensuous phase merely, whilst a second, third, or more readings were required to realize all its depth and beauty. Every true poem was a piece of articulate music.

(2) The final stage at which we arrive in the study of a great poem was, to make the features of it typical of forms which do not strictly belong to it; yet this effect was by no means accidental; it was a subtle emanation from the mind of the poet influencing the reader's conceptions.

(3) The disadvantages of cultivating one element of our nature to the neglect of others were also well presented. It was the aim and function of art to correct such irregularity of development and culture. The most gifted intellect, stored with the abundance of human knowledge, unless gifted with emotional capacity, was, at best, but a one-sided creature—a being out of tune.

(4) Another subject intimately connected with the intelligent study of poetic and dramatic literature, was vocal culture. The music of poetry was clearly and tersely defined by the lecturer. With most minds the silent study of poetry was impossible.

The reviewer concluded with the critical comment that "the style in which the lecture was written, as well as the manner in which it was read, was in harmony with the nature and dignity of his elegant theme," and "gave promise of a succession of literary treats in the lectures which he is to deliver in future upon this subject in this city."

The Philadelphia Press for October 20, 1862, contained an article entitled, "Professor Corson's Lectures" which discussed the success of the 1861 lectures while announcing the second yearly series.

Surely no man deserves more at the hands of a community, and, be it recorded to the disgrace of practical-engulfed human nature, no man gets less than he who strives to raise the standard of literary taste . . . . When these natures, however, do find the sounds that
satisfy their ingrained or engrafted longing, their worship is very enthusiastic. Of this no better evidence is needed than the brilliant success which last winter gave to Prof. Corson's course of "Lectures on English Poetry, Literary Art, and Criticism."

The review went on to state that the course had begun as an experiment and had continued twice each week for the unprecedented length of twenty-five weeks, and added:

Prof. Corson's wide reading, his high aesthetic culture, his taste--of unusual delicacy and truth; his keen and merciless analytical powers, tempered by a genuine literary catholicity, won the enthusiastic admiration of all who were fortunate enough to come within the literary circle of Leypoldt's. The class quickly increased to the room's utmost capacity....

Another announcement appeared in the North American and U. S. Gazette, Philadelphia, October 28, 1862. It said in part:

Professor Corson is just the ripe scholar and the powerful thinker needed to give literature this dignified stand among us, and make Leypoldt's exquisite rooms the shrine of our best talent and culture. Professor Corson's analytical powers are extraordinarily subtle; his learning--in other literatures, too, than our own--is wide and deep; while his beautiful vocalization gives him an unusual charm as a lecturer.

The second annual course of lectures began on October 14, 1862. The lectures were again held at Leypoldt's Foreign Reading Rooms, No. 1323 Chestnut Street, but the advertisement assured the public "that the Foreign Reading Rooms have been much enlarged and newly fitted up, and every provision has been made for their comfort."

The circular stated that the course would include a general review of English Literature from Chaucer to the present (1862), and that the leading and representative authors of each period would be treated separately.
Poets designated to receive special attention were Byron, Shelley, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Tennyson, and the Brownings. Lectures distributed through the course were:

"The Metaphysics of Art,"

"Individuality in Nature and Art,"

"Accident in Nature and Art,"

"The Organic Unity of an Art Product,"

"The Real and the Ideal,"

"Form as an Element in the Expression of Poetic Sentiment,"

"Distinctions between Ancient and Modern Verse,"

"English Metres and Stanzas,"

"The Distinctions between Prose and Verse,"

and "The Philosophy of Style."

Time of the lectures was set for Tuesday and Friday afternoons, at 4:30, extending from October 14, 1862, "to about the middle of next May." Ticket prices were as follows: entire course, $5.00; twenty tickets, admitting to any lecture, $3.00; ten tickets, $2.00; and single tickets, $.25.  

In addition to the Tuesday and Friday lectures in Philadelphia, Corson decided to introduce his lecture series in Germantown on Monday from 4 to 5 o'clock, and on Thursday from 1 to 2 o'clock. His circular stated that Professor Hiram Corson took pleasure in announcing "to the

22 All information about "Second Course of Lectures" from circular advertisement, Philadelphia, September 16, 1862.
Ladies of Germantown and vicinity," that he would begin a course of "twenty-five lectures on English Poetry, Literary Art and Criticism." The series was held at Madame Clement's Young Ladies' Seminary, West Walnut Lane, Germantown. The introductory lecture on Monday, November 10, 1862, charged no admission fee, but course tickets were $4.00 and single tickets were $.25.

The advertisement announced the following works to be read and analyzed:

- Browning: "Aurora Leigh"
- Keats: "The Eve of St. Agnes"
- Coleridge: "Ancient Mariner" and "Christabel"
- Shelley: "Cenci"
- Milton: "Lycidas," "Comus" "L'Allegro," and "Il Penseroso"
- Shakespeare: Macbeth
- Spenser: "Faerie Queene, Book I"
- Chaucer: "Prologue" and Knightes Tale"

Although Corson was busy as a lecturer and reader, his ambition was to teach in a university. Consequently, openings in various colleges were frequently discussed in correspondence with a number of his friends. Samuel Cleveland wrote Corson on July 31, 1863, that he had learned of a vacancy in Hobart College, Geneva, New York, of the Professorship of Rhetoric and Elocution. He revealed that the salary was $1200; "that is, I believe,
the ordinary pay of professorships in our colleges." In an attempt to secure the position, Corson collected letters of recommendation from a number of his well-respected acquaintances. His personal copy of the letter from Professor Charles Dexter Cleveland, L.L.D., father of Samuel Cleveland, to Abner Jackson, President of Hobart College, was filled with praise:

Understanding from my son in Philadelphia that Professor Hiram Corson is an applicant for the chair of Rhetoric and Elocution in your college, I take the liberty of warmly commending him for the professorship. I have known Prof. Corson for many years' have heard him lecture upon English Literature, Literary Art and Criticism, upon Taste and Rhetoric, and I can truly say that I never heard anyone more completely master of his subject. He is a very profound thinker, and of really great learning. German, French, and English literature are mastered by him; and while the subjects upon which he lectures would seem to be dry, he throws into them, by the charms of his rhetoric and the graces of delivery, a deep interest which holds his audience to the end.

In another letter of recommendation, John S. Hart wrote to President Jackson specifically about Corson's talents as lecturer and elocutionist:

He has lectured in Philadelphia for several successive years to select classes of gentlemen and ladies on English literature, and with steadily increasing classes. His criticisms on the great English poets are marked by original thought and study, and by uncommonly fine powers of discrimination. His critical judgments are themselves a fine aesthetic study. His elocutionary powers also are of a high order, and his readings of the poets, independently of his criticisms, are admirably adapted to the development and culture of a taste for the beautiful. I do not know a public lecturer (with the exception of Emerson) who combines to so remarkable a degree elocutionary power with originality of thought in matters of taste and criticism. As an elocutionist, indeed, he is superior to Mr. Emerson, having apparently given the subject more study, and having by nature an equally fine voice.
The recommendation by Samuel M. Cleveland to Jackson contains a specific reference to Corson's study of elocution:

Mr. Corson has been a most devoted student as he is a most devoted disciple of Dr. Rush; and therefore has gone to the ultimate authority for all that we have of value on the subject of Vocal Philosophy. As results of this careful study of principles have ensued Mr. Corson's own exquisite reading and a system of practical instruction that adapts and presents—with admirable clearness and thoroughness—all that Dr. Rush's researches have revealed to the Elocutionary world.

A. T. Fiske, Dean of the Shakespeare Society in Philadelphia, and Dr. Charles Short, President of Kenyon College in Ohio, wrote a joint letter to Dr. Jackson at Hobart, in which they testified that Corson had taught elocution and rhetoric in the leading schools in Philadelphia for some years, "with marked success," and they told of the success realized by his two courses of lectures to "large and cultivated audiences, who have shown the highest estimation of his teachings." They continued: "Mr. Corson has devoted the best years of his life to a close study of English literature and the vocal expression of the best English Authors."

Despite the high praise in his letters of recommendation, however, Hiram Corson did not receive an appointment at Hobart College. Instead, he remained in Philadelphia and continued his lectures and readings.

A Trenton, New Jersey paper carried the following letter to Professor Corson and his reply, obviously
intended as an advertisement for what was entitled, "Prof. Corson's Complimentary Lecture."

(Trenton, New Jersey, January 2, 1864) Dear Sir:—The undersigned citizens of Trenton, highly appreciating your peculiar gifts as a Lecturer and as a Professor of the noble and dignified art of oratory, grateful also for the generous aid extended by you to some of the benevolent enterprises of the city, desire to testify to you in some substantial way, the deep sense of appreciation and of obligation which are alike your due. They beg leave, therefore, respectfully to solicit from you, at some time most suitable to your convenience, the favor of a Lecture and Public Reading, the proceeds of which, it will afford them great pleasure to tender for your acceptance. They desire also to assure you that one of the best public halls in the city will be placed at your disposal, should you afford them the pleasure of complying with their request.

The letter was signed by fifty men, including John S. Hart.

Corson's reply to the letter was dated "Philadelphia, 20th Jan., 1864," and stated:

Gentlemen: I have received your favors of the 2d inst. It affords me great pleasure to accept the invitation you so cordially extend to me, to deliver a lecture before the citizens of Trenton, by whose kindness and hospitality I have, on several former occasions, been honored. I will appoint Tuesday evening, the 2d of February, if that be a favorable time, and will take for my subject, "Longfellow and His Poetry."

But these public letters did not present the complete story. Although Corson announced that he had selected February 2 as the date for his lecture and reading, a letter to him from John S. Hart dated January 2, 1864 indicates that the decision was premeditated by the issuers of the invitation:

Now for your own Lecture and Reading. I have conferred with several gentlemen in regard to it, and have concluded that the best time for it will be Tuesday, February 2. We have written a letter to you inviting you to come, and are getting it signed . . . . you will have a first-rate, paying house, a well-appreciating one . . . . We fixed upon that particular
day for several reasons. The Legislature will then be in full blast. Our Normal and Model schools both have their semiannual exercises about that time, creating a little excitement. Tuesday is free from all church engagements.

The same letter also indicated that Corson would be performing in Trenton in January.

I have concluded to have our School Readings next week, on Thursday evening, the 14th. We have announced that you have kindly consented to assist us, and that you will read probably selections from Tennyson. This gives you entire freedom as to your pieces. I have left for you half an hour. Can give you more, if you desire, as your part of the entertainment will be the best we can offer, and I would be very happy to curtail other parts of the programme, only that I fear to impose upon your good nature.

The State Gazette, Trenton, New Jersey, reported the lecture in their edition for February 1, 1864. The article, entitled "Prof. Corson's Lecture," stated:

This celebrated lecturer and elocutionist will give one of his choicest discourses, that on Longfellow, tomorrow evening, in the hall of the Model School. No living American, probably, has made a more critical study of English Poetry than Professor Corson. His criticisms are remarkable, equally for their research, and their fine aesthetic appreciation of what is beautiful, while, as a lecturer, he has a wonderful power of vocal expression in the recitation of passages quoted.

The February 2, 1864, Trenton Daily Monitor included an announcement of the professor's lecture with a discussion of other lectures appearing in Trenton the same week. The article reported that on February 1, Frederick Douglas had spoken "in his masterly way at Temperance Hall." The only competition for the Corson lecture was the Honorable E. R. Carswell, of whom the article stated that he would "doubtless please our citizens as thoroughly as
in his former efforts." Of Corson the article said:

This gentleman is well known to our citizens, and needs no introduction from us. His peculiar talent in the analysis and criticism of every subject he considers, and the beautiful rendering of the leading compositions of our favorite authors, we have spoken of before. He has a grand topic to consider to-night, and those who attend will receive new ideas of the beauties, and the failures too, of our great American poet, besides enjoying the rare privilege of hearing the gentleman read several selections from the author whom he reviews, in the effective manner, and with the strange vocal power which he so fully possesses.

Reviews of the lecture and reading provide insight concerning both the audience and the content of the performance. Trenton's Daily State Gazette reported for February 3, 1864:

The lecture of Prof. Hiram Corson, of Philadelphia, on Longfellow and his poetry, attracted a large and appreciative audience to the hall of the Model School last evening. The lecture, whether viewed as a criticism or as an independent literary production, ranks among the best efforts to which it has ever been our privilege to listen. He gives to his author all the merit that rightfully belongs to his poems—many of which to popular judgment are invisible—but at the same time criticises severely and justly the spirit of imitation, almost, in many instances, if not entirely, amounting to plagiarism, sustaining the charge by undeniable references to Latin and German authorities. The splendid rendering of the leading selections of the Poet were a literary luxury that is seldom to be enjoyed, and will long be remembered. The attention and interest of the audience were secured without the omission of a minute, and frequent applause testified to their sincere approbation.

The Trenton Daily Monitor also reported on February 3 that the lecture had both praised Longfellow as a poet and criticized that same poet for plagiarism, "which was long ago proved by the brilliant, unfortunate and infamous Edgar Poe." The review also said, "Prof. Corson's lecture, last
evening, was such an entertainment as seldom falls to our lot in Trenton. Both as a reader and a lecturer, Prof. Corson ranks very high." It also stated that "Prof. Corson will always be heartily welcomed in Trenton."

The Trenton *Daily True American*, however, might not have agreed with the high praise of the other papers. The edition for February 8, 1864, ran a parody on Corson's lecture entitled, "For the True American, A Course-on American Poets. By Professor Porson." The article took issue with Corson's having labeled Longfellow a plagiarist. It read in part:

That Professor Longfellow is the Prince of Plagiarists has long been held as an undisputed fact, from the time of Poe, most truculent of critics, to this our own day, when poetical appropriators tremble before the trenchant scissors of one, than whom not even the "Raven Bard" himself was more formidable. It may seem, therefore, somewhat superfluous to offer further aid towards unmasking The Great Literary Humbug of the age—the Barnum of Bards; but our zeal for the interests of Letters and of truth must be our apology.... Let us commence with the "Psalm of Life," which a depraved literary taste has pronounced the master song of the American Lyre; yet on a careful examination it will be found that this over-rated effusion is only a glittering piece of mosaic set with stolen gems. And it may be shown that every stanza, nay, every line is borrowed.... But it is needless to enumerate.... We might go on to show how Moses and Mother Goose are made the subjects of his poetic larcenies, how the Acts are introduced in the sixth stanza and R. Crusoe in the seventh—but we forbear. We have seen enough to prove to us that of the piece but little is the property of Professor Longfellow besides the title. Nor are his other poems more free from this blemish. In his somewhat admired lyric "Excelsior," the reader will be amazed to learn that the refrain, which constitutes the chief beauty of the poem, is stolen from the coat of arms of the State of New York!
The fact that Corson clipped this article for his personal scrapbook indicates that he was possibly more amused and pleased by the publicity than he was affronted by the criticism.

Not only did Corson lecture and read in 1864, but he also published two books. The first was an annotated edition of Chaucer's *Legende of Goode Women*, and the second was *An Elocutionary Manual*. His publisher, Frederick Leypoldt, in whose reading rooms he had been lecturing, sent complimentary copies of *The Legende of Goode Women* to a number of prominent literary figures, whose responses were published as an advertisement for the book. Oliver Wendell Holmes mentioned "the interesting and rich annotations of Mr. Corson," and he promised to "place it among the choice treasures" of his library, "to be often taken down and read with grateful thoughts of editor and publisher." 23

Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote of his gratitude for the gift and expressed his admiration of the editing. He wrote: "The Introduction and Notes are copious in such instruction as the beginner in old English absolutely needs, at the same time . . . a most useful companion to the most proficient." He added the wish that the work might be well-received and might stimulate a call for an American edition

23 Letter from Oliver Wendell Holmes to Frederick Leypoldt, Boston, Massachusetts, January 27, 1864.
of the Canterbury Pilgrims.24

And Edward Everett wrote directly to Hiram Corson, informing him: "I find your Introduction judicious and instructive, evincing careful study of the topics treated, and the notes well calculated to aid those" who wish to read Chaucer. He added, "Altogether, you have given us a very attractive little volume . . . ."25

James Jennison, Tutor in Elocution at Harvard University, expressed a desire to praise the author professionally that "he has not been afraid to discard the loose and vague phraseology of the grammarians, and to adopt instead the expressive technical terms employed in phonology."26

The other book that Hiram Corson had published in 1864 was An Elocutionary Manual, which was reviewed in the "Literary Notices" column of the North American and United States Gazette, Philadelphia, October 1, 1864. The notice read:

An Elocutionary Manual, consisting of choice selections from English and American literature, adapted to every
variety of vocal expression. Designed for the higher classes in schools and seminaries, and for private and social reading. With an introductory essay on the study of literature and on vocal culture as indispensable to an aesthetic appreciation of poetry. By Hiram Corson, A. M., editor of "Chaucer's Legende of Goode Women." Philadelphia: Charles Desilver, 1865. 12 mo., pp. 432. Professor Corson's "Elocutionary Manual" is one of those exceptional books that advance their ends while they adapt themselves to them. The work does not set forth any system of elocution, or pander to the popular abuse of reading by pretending to give, in a few introductory pages, what can be gained only by long special study. It is a collection from English and American literature of such extracts as are at the same time gems in themselves and adapted to every form of vocal expression; and prefixed is an essay on the study of literature and on vocal culture. The thanks of all who are interested in the subject are due to Professor Corson for the book as a whole; but scholars must be particularly grateful for the introductory essay. The philosophy of literary study has never been set forth with such delicate and thorough insight. The separate functions which the intellectual and the emotional perform in this study are defined exactly, yet emphasis is everywhere laid upon their proper blending. No prejudice or bias of mind seems to sacrifice any element that appears in the question; the correlative between analysis and synthesis is developed and insisted on, and human anatomy and growth are not confounded with manikin dissection and reconstruction.

Professor Corson's protest against the mouthing elocutionists who do continual outrage to literature by their so-called 'reading,' is founded upon a proof that while a good elocution is necessary to an aesthetic appreciation of literary products, it is itself dependent for all that gives it value upon a cultivated poetic sense . . . certainly the cause of literature will take a long stride forward when this interdependence is recognized and practically acted upon. We would have vocal interpreters instead of mere 'readers,' and reverential scholars instead of pretentious sciolists.

During the same period that he was preparing books for publication, he also introduced a new series of lectures on a topic his repertoire had never before included. The North American and U.S. Gazette of
Philadelphia reported on March 14, 1864, that Corson would deliver some lectures on Hebrew poetry:

Professor Hiram Corson, of this city, one of our most erudite and accomplished scholars, and an elocutionist of rare power, proposes to deliver a course of lectures on Hebrew poetry. The lectures will embrace an exposition both of the universal characteristics of poetry, and of those peculiar to the Hebrew poetry—especially the various forms of parallelism which appear throughout the Sacred Scriptures, and those features growing out of geographical position, climate, social life, religion, &c. Readings from the poetical books will be introduced into each lecture.

Presumably, Corson continued reading, lecturing, and writing, but the year following the Hebrew poetry reading, he realized one of his other ambitions. Two Trenton, New Jersey, papers informed their readers that Mr. Hiram Corson had been appointed to a Professorship at Girard College in Philadelphia. The Trenton Daily Monitor, March 27, 1865, said in the course of the article on the appointment that Corson's "elocutionary entertainments have made him well known to the citizens of Trenton," and the Daily True American, March 29, 1865, reported that "Professor Corson is favorably known among us as a writer of rare ability and elocutionary power. His lectures have always been well received . . . ."

Professor Corson delivered an address at Girard College, March 29, 1865, "on the occasion of his induction as Professor of Moral Science, History, Rhetoric, and the
Constitution of the United States." The text of the address reveals that Girard College was a coeducational institution established for the education of orphans in Philadelphia. After a few introductory remarks, Professor Corson expressed his opinion toward educational theories:

Whatever theories an educator may, in the course of his experience, have been led to adopt, he will find it necessary, if not to change, at least greatly to modify, in every new field of labors into which he may enter. Minds must not so much be made to conform to theories as theories to minds. It is only by a careful observation and study of the constitution and peculiarities of individual minds that any theory, however sound it may be in the abstract, can be practised with good results; for its efficacy will depend much upon the modifications which the judicious teacher causes it to undergo in order to adapt it to the minds he is dealing with.

I shall, however, make brief allusion to one principle which I regard as cardinal, and which I think is not sufficiently recognized and acted upon in the prevailing system of education—namely, that while the whole nature is flexible, elementary instruction should aim chiefly after forming and establishing habits, and the cultivation of expertness and skill in the performance of certain mental processes, independent of the principles underlying these processes, and should avoid a premature exercise of the reasoning faculties .... Memory, imitation, imagination, and the faculty of acquiring skill, and of forming mental and moral habits, are most active in early life; while the powers of abstraction of rationalization, and of judgment, reveal themselves at a later period. Now any course of instruction that tends in any way or degree to reverse this order of development .... runs counter to nature, and does violence to her tendencies.


28 Corson, pp. 6-7.
He then continued by discussing what he considered to be the aim of education:

When a boy, I once heard a learned German professor, in a lecture define education to be, a transition from a state of passivity to a state of spontaneity. I was struck at the time only with what seemed to be the bombast of the definition, but I have since learned how profoundly true it was. The ultimate aim of all education, of all culture, should be spontaneity. The intellectual and moral faculties depend for their early growth upon the practice of certain processes, and rules, and principles. This practice must be continued until it becomes a fixed habit, and the faculties become self-acting, in a certain direction. Education can create nothing. It can only develop what exists potentially and in germ. All the faculties which we exercise, moral, intellectual, and physical, are more or less undeveloped and shackled, and education aims, or should aim, to remove the shackles, and to elevate our whole being into an atmosphere of freedom and spontaneity. Rules and principles must, by the constant practice of them, be worked into the texture of the mind and heart. Growth of every kind, I repeat, proceeds from the passive to the active and spontaneous. Man is passive to the degree that he is undeveloped. As he develops, he becomes more and more a law to himself. The law that was at first written upon tables of stone is gradually transferred to his mind and his heart—he becomes its living, acting embodiment.  

To the students in the audience, he emphasized the value of hard work, and he took occasion to read some bits of poetry in addition to his advice:

the condition of all improvement and usefulness and happiness is industry—the habit of hard work. Nothing is of any real value that is not purchased by toil—by the sweat of the brow, or the sweat of the brain. To work is every man's greatest privilege in this world, and happy is he who thinks so, who has found his true work, and does it with all his might.

'Get leave to work
In this world—'tis the best you get at all

29Corson, Address, pp. 9-10.
For God, in cursing, gives us better gifts
Than men in benediction . . .
The great object of your lives within these walls, my young friends, is to fit yourselves for your future work—to gird yourselves for action—to burnish 'The brand, the buckler, and the spear'—that you may be prepared
'to strive a happy strife,
To war with falsehood to the knife,
And not to lose the good of life.'

He also stressed that the aim of work was to build character.

If you are temperate and industrious, you will always be sure of a respectable and comfortable living, in a country so highly favored as ours; but if your work brings you nothing more than this, if it does not contribute to the building up and strengthening that greatest of all things in this world—CHARACTER—if you do not work with an eye to the good of your fellow-men, and with a heart single to the glory of God and the advancement of Christ's Kingdom, your work, be assured, will not pay, however rich it may make you in dollars, in houses, and in lands.

It is not what we have, but what we are; it is not our outward, but our inward possessions, that entitle us to be called rich.

It will be, I repeat, the spirit which you will carry into your work, and the aims with which you will work, that will elevate or degrade your occupations and honor or dishonor yourselves.

To emphasize his ideas on work, he quoted a section from "On the Study of Words" by "the present Archdeacon of Dublin" concerning the derivation of the word "vocation" from the Anglo-Saxon for "calling." Corson agreed with the Archdeacon that the true vocation was God's calling man to work. He closed his address by thanking President

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31 Corson, Address, p. 18.
Smith and the Board of Directors for his appointment and by assuring them that he would devote his fullest capacities to "the service and interest of Girard College."  

When Corson left Girard College after only one year, Mr. R. H. Chase from Cambridge wrote to him concerning the position he was vacating. The correspondence indicated that among his other duties Corson "had been much engaged in teaching Elocution." He assumed the same duty in his new professorship at St. John's College, Annapolis, Maryland. St. John's had suffered from lack of enrollment and of endowments during the war years, but the state of Maryland took over the financial burdens after the war. The college reopened with an entirely new faculty, renovated buildings, and even a new system of instruction. As part of the new faculty, Hiram Corson was appointed Professor of the English Language, Literature, and History, and Rhetoric, Including Vocal Culture. Also on the faculty was S. S. Haldeman, Professor of Natural History. The renovated buildings were designed to house "at least three hundred students." The system of instruction had been

32 Corson, Address, p. 20.
34 Washington, D. C. National Intelligence, Friday, September 28, 1866.
35 Ibid.
changed to follow the plan of the University of Virginia, "in which the course to be pursued is to a considerable degree determined by the talents and tastes of the individual student." 36

Corson wasted little time settling into his new location by initiating the extracurricular lectures that had been so much a part of his life in Philadelphia. On October 5, 1866, he gave a lecture in Annapolis entitled "Tennyson's delineation of Womanhood," under the sponsorship of the Annapolis Lyceum and Institute. 37 The proceeds from the sale of tickets was to be used "in the purchase of a Library, which it was hoped in a short time would be of sufficient size to be opened to the citizens of Annapolis." 38 These were the words of William T. Iglehart in his introduction of the speaker.

The reviewer for the Annapolis Gazette provided an account of the subject matter covered in the lecture. The reviewer's report of the lecture can be summarized:

1. Tennyson was never directly didactic; whatever moral any poem of his might contain was distributed throughout the structure of the poem.
2. The lives of intellect and emotion are inter-

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36 *National Intelligence*, Friday, September 28, 1866.
37 *The Gazette* [Annapolis, Maryland], October 11, 1866.
dependent upon one another, and woman is "the chief nourisher of the emotional and spiritual side of humanity."

3. Tennyson's "The Princess" was the poetic embodiment of the "distinctiveness" of woman; however, in "the onward progress of civilization and christianity, men would partake more of the nature of woman, and woman more of the nature of man." (The following lines from "The Princess" were quoted to substantiate the preceding statement:

"He gain in sweetness and in moral height,  
Nor lose the wrestling thews that throw the world;  
She, mental breadth, nor fail in childward care,  
Nor lose the childlike in the larger mind.")

At this point in the lecture, Corson read to his audience from "Idylls of the King,"

the lyrics which are introduced after the several sections of the poems. Each, he said, was a sort of chorus, designed, like the chorus of the Greek tragedy, to guide and interpret the sympathies of the reader and to keep prominently before the mind of the reader the leading idea of the poem, namely, that however much woman may gain in mental breadth, she must not fail in childward care, nor lose the childlike in the larger mind. The reading of those exquisite lyrics, was listened to with fixed attention and interest.

4. The Idyll of Enid exhibits spiritual power "acting with a pure unconsciousness and therefore with its fullest effect."

(Here the reviewer remarked: "Having consumed a large portion of the hour . . . the lecturer was obliged to make a hasty exposition of the ideas of the other Idylls.")
5. The Idyll of Vivien is the perversion of Enid's power to save, and this perversion is equally as powerful in its destructiveness.

6. The Idyll of Elaine is the embodiment of the highest fact in regard to the nature of woman, who must be "an ever flowing fountain of love and sympathy."

7. Guinevere illustrates the consequences of unfaithfulness to the marriage vows. "Upon the sanctity of the marriage tie depend the virtues of the world and the success of all man's efforts for its elevation."

The reviewer announced that Professor Corson would deliver another lecture the following evening, Friday, October 12, on "Longfellow and His Poetry." He closed the review by mentioning that the lecturer would read "a number of Longfellow's most popular poems" in the course of the evening.

Hiram Corson's stay at St. John's in Annapolis lasted from 1866 to 1870. It was from there that he came to Cornell. As early as 1867 he was corresponding with Andrew D. White, Cornell University's influential first President, concerning the possibilities of Corson's being appointed to the Cornell faculty. White and Corson first met when both their families were vacationing at Gloucester,

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39 PBD, p. 4.
Massachusetts, in the summer of 1867. In June of that year, Corson received a letter from White informing him: "No person is yet decided upon for the place you mention and it will give me pleasure to lay your credentials before the Board of Trustees."41

The next week George Allen of the University of Pennsylvania wrote a letter recommending Hiram Corson to Andrew D. White. The letter was explicit concerning Corson's reading style:

As a Reader and Speaker--the best I have ever heard--his style is as remote as possible from anything affected and theatrical: he aims simply to be (and he always succeeds in being) the sufficient interpreter of the work, which he undertakes to present.42

The following February Corson wrote White in confidence that he planned to leave St. John's College the next fall, and he informed White that he would "await with some anxiety" the results of elections to the Cornell faculty.43 White replied:

If we have a Resident Professorship of English Literature--pure and simple I have seen no one

40 Letter from Hiram Corson to Andrew D. White, Annapolis, Maryland, February 16, 1868.

41 Letter from Andrew D. White to Hiram Corson, Syracuse, New York, June 22, 1867.

42 Letter from George Allen to Andrew D. White, University of Pennsylvania, June 27, 1867.

43 Letter from Hiram Corson to Andrew D. White, St. John's College, Annapolis, Maryland, February 16, 1868.
and heard of no one who seems so admirably fitted for it as yourself. Whether this will be so, at the outset is uncertain. I have, however, strong hope that it may be brought about.

Nothing will be decided regarding it before the 15th of July when I hope to be back from Europe.44

The news of White's leaving the country could easily have concerned Mrs. Corson, who was worried about her husband's health; consequently, she was interested in his leaving Annapolis for a new job. In response to a letter from her, S. A. Haldeman, their family friend and Hiram's colleague at St. John's, expressed his own concern:

Having Professor Corson's delicate constitution in view, I begin to distrust the effects of the next season on him and on your poor little daughter, and the reflex action of the attendant anxieties upon yourself. I wish I could learn that you have a prospect of a better locality . . . .45

Haldeman attempted to aid the Corsons by writing to the Peabody Institution in Baltimore, Maryland, suggesting Hiram Corson as a suitable lecturer for the Peabody courses in English Literature. He praised Corson as "a fine scholar" and he asserted: "He lectured to large classes in Philadelphia, and I believe he would give satisfaction both in manner and matter . . . ."46

44Letter from Andrew D. White to Hiram Corson, Syracuse, New York, March 9, 1868.

45Letter from S. S. Haldeman to Caroline Corson, headed only "April 1868."

46Letter from S. S. Haldeman to Peabody Institution, Baltimore, Maryland. Chickies Lane, Pennsylvania, June 3, 1868.
evidence, however, does not indicate that Corson every went to work for the Peabody Institution. A week after Haldeman had posted his letter to that institution, George Allen wrote Hiram Corson, offering him $1000 a year for one hour a day teaching elocution and correcting compositions in Philadelphia. On June 16, 1868, he wrote Corson, "I'm glad you accept."

Although the Cornell faculty biographer does not indicate that Corson resigned his position at St. John's College for the 1868-1869 school year, Corson does seem to have worked in Philadelphia that year. Another letter from Haldeman seems to substantiate the Philadelphia connection:

I had seen a notice in the newspapers of the changes at Phila. and of course thought of you, but looking doubtfully upon the surroundings. I am gratified therefore that you were not forgotten and that you will be likely to return to a place where you can expect to have your health, and with it your energy. I did not know that you had been offered a situation at P. and once installed, I think your advancement secured, and I hope it will end in English Literature.

Corson's days as a part-time elocution teacher and

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47 PBD, p. 4.

48 Letter from S. S. Haldeman to Hiram Corson, Chickies Lane, Pennsylvania, July 20, 1868. Although the initial "P." in the letter could stand for "Peabody," it is assumed that it stands rather for "Pennsylvania," the University where George Allen worked. Haldeman refers to Corson's "returning," obviously to a place where he had lived before. He had lived in Philadelphia; it is unlikely that he had lived in Baltimore.
paper grader, if indeed he ever worked at the job, were to be few. He soon received encouraging news from the secretary to President White at Cornell, who wrote that the matter of the professorship at Cornell had not been settled at the meeting of the trustees, but that it would be within two weeks. White asked that Corson avoid entering into another engagement, because the prospect for his appointment to the position was very favorable. 49

Finally, on May 27, 1870, Corson received a letter from White informing him of his appointment to the Cornell faculty. Ten days later he received a more-detailed personal letter from President White, discussing such matters as housing, marketing, and a topic that would in future give Hiram Corson much concern—the weather in Ithaca.

Your letter was duly received and rejoiced me with its favorable response . . . . The salary does not include a house. The rooms of which I spoke are at our large building 'Cascadilla Place' where several of our Professors live with their families. It is a large Hotel like establishment—near the university—and, in all seasons except winter, attractive.

It is very difficult to obtain a house here at present—owing to the influx of so many professors and students, but it will become less difficult as time goes on. The question of household servants is also a troublesome one. Mrs. White solved it by bringing hers with her from Syracuse.

In thinking over your letter and remembering that you are now in a fine climate—and many comforts—it has occurred to me that I ought to state to you that

49 Letter from Secretary Hicks to Hiram Corson, Cornell University, August 3, 1868.
a certain amount of discomfort is inseparable from the beginning of our enterprise here. Our climate in winter leaves us on our own indoor resources very much. Besides this, although our market is considered a very good one for an interior town in this state, I suppose that you would miss many luxuries which I have been accustomed to associate with life in your part of the world. These are the drawbacks and I have felt bound to state them fully.

On the other hand, things are rapidly accommodating themselves to us and those who have learned to labor and wait do not find life here very difficult . . . .

I expect to present you here unless this letter decides you against it at an approaching meeting of the trustees—we should wish to see you at latest in time for the entrance examinations offered in September. 50

Hiram Corson must have wanted the professorship at Cornell even more than he wanted a warm climate for his health, for President's White's letter did not dissuade him. With the September session of 1870, Hiram Corson joined the faculty of The Cornell University.

By the time that Corson moved to Cornell he had established a pattern for his life that was to continue. He was teaching literature, giving public lectures and readings, and exercising his scholarship in his publications. No later than 1856, and possibly as early as 1854, he began his teaching career. He served first as principal of a school for young women, and later he was on the faculties of Girard College and St. John's College.

50 Letter from Andrew D. White to Hiram Corson, Cornell, June 6, 1870.
His first known association with oral reading was in 1858, when he was advertised as an elocutionist. He gave his first known public reading in 1860 from Longfellow. He also began to lecture on literature and to read from other literary works. Typical selections were from Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, the English Romantics, Tennyson, and the Brownings, with emphasis on Elizabeth rather than on Robert. Longfellow and Poe were the only Americans who were favored, and Corson appears to have given negative criticism of the former. He added a program on Hebrew Poetry in the Bible to his repertoire in 1864.

During this period he published an annotated edition of Chaucer's *Legende of Goode Women* in addition to *An Elocutionary Manual*. His reputation as an English teacher, an interpretative reader, and a literary scholar was established by 1870.
Chapter 3

THE FIRST DECADE AT CORNELL: 1870-1879

Cornell University was five years old when Hiram Corson began his teaching career there, September 12, 1870. His position was Resident Professor of Rhetoric, Oratory, and English Literature at a salary of two thousand dollars a year.\(^1\) He replaced Colonel Homer Sprague, Professor of Rhetoric, Oratory, and Vocal Culture.\(^2\) Sprague had also taught English literature, but Corson was the first official instructor of that subject in the university.

The professor and his son, Eugene, travelled to Ithaca in late summer to secure housing for the family.\(^3\) Caroline and their daughter, Pauline, went first to visit friends at Chickies, Pennsylvania, and then to Girard College. Mrs. Corson wrote her husband for permission to stay there for a week to take some free art lessons and to

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\(^1\)Contract letter from Andrew D. White to Hiram Corson, Ithaca, New York, July 1, 1870.


\(^3\)Letter from Hiram Corson to Andrew D. White, July 5, 1870.
spend two days in New York "just to see pictures." 4
Seemingly reluctant to leave for Ithaca, but fearing for her husband's health in her absence, she advised, "This night air business is a bad thing: one might get accustomed to it but it does not suit either of us, and you had better keep your windows down." 5 Mrs. Corson was also concerned about her own health. Suffering from the ague and fatigue, she dreaded meeting the people of Ithaca when she felt so ill. 6 Presumably her request to stay at Girard was granted, and the two women came to Cornell in the late fall. Her husband had secured rooms for them in Cascadilla, a faculty dormitory on campus. As the apartment contained no closets, Caroline planned to buy chintz to cover their trunks for seats and storage. 7

Corson wrote his wife that he had begun his classes, using "the extempore way of lecturing." 8 He offered a course in Anglo-Saxon during the first session, but it was delayed until the textbook could arrive from the publishers. He had chosen his own book Handbook of Anglo-Saxon and Early English. 9 The Shakespeare course was most popular. The school paper, The Cornell Era,

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4Letter from Caroline Corson to Hiram Corson, Girard College, September 20, 1870.
5Letter from Caroline Corson to Hiram Corson, Girard College, September 21, 1870.
6Ibid. 7Ibid. 8Ibid.
9The Cornell Era, September 30, 1870, p. 21.
reported that the Junior Class had become interested in Portia and Jessica, and through Professor Corson's reading were "showing signs of sentiment with regard to Nerissa. Now that would flatter Shakespeare."\(^1\)

His work was not without problems, however. The school paper carried an announcement that Professor Corson was "much annoyed" by students other than his own who entered the recitation room while his class was in progress. Other students were disturbing him by whistling, singing, and "breaking in" their books outside the classroom. The notice requested, "Please to be more quiet in future, and accept the thanks of the Professor and his class."\(^1\)

The first extant copy of his course syllabus is dated 1873. He undoubtedly used one in his first term at Cornell, however. A note in *The Cornell Era* reported, "Freshman dodging in and out of the printing office, when asked what he wanted, replied, 'Prof. Corson's Sibyllis.'"\(^1\)

During their first year in Ithaca, the Corsons established a school similar to the one they had founded in Washington. There are three possible explanations for

\(^{1}\) *The Cornell Era*, October 21, 1870, p. 44.

\(^{11}\) *The Cornell Era*, October 20, 1870, p. 53.

\(^{12}\) *The Cornell Era*, December 9, 1870, p. 74.
this venture. First, Corson's salary was insufficient to repay old debts and provide a comfortable living. Second, by living in the place that housed their school, they could pay the rent with part of the tuition and also have more spacious accommodations. Third, it was important for Caroline to have intellectual stimulation that teaching provided.

The old debt was to H. O. Apthorpe, the elocutionist. Apparently Caroline wrote him that they would be able to pay him through the school proceeds, for he replied:

There was a pretty long interval of time between our communications from the moment of your appointment to Cornell up to this winter when Madame's letter came speaking of setting up a school . . . . Write a page or two very soon, and say not a word about money.13

Concerning the new living quarters, Professor Goldwin Smith wrote, "The house you propose to take is a pleasant abode in itself, but at a terrible distance from us who are at the heart of Ithaca civilization . . . ."14 Smith, also a resident of Cascadilla, began there a friendship with the Corsons that lasted throughout their lives. When they wanted a letter of recommendation for their school, he wrote:

13Letter from H. O. Apthorpe to Hiram Corson, March 6, 1871.

14Letter from Goldwin Smith to Caroline Corson, January 20, 1871.
Being the colleague of Professor Corson in Cornell University and being well acquainted with Mrs. Corson I have pleasure in my conviction that any pupil entrusted to their care would be placed under most accomplished and excellent instructors, and would enjoy the further advantage of intercourse with such highly cultivated minds.  

Mrs. Corson must have done most of the teaching in their private school, for the professor had a full schedule at the university. His teaching methods from the first were controversial among students and fellow faculty members. Like most popular professors in small schools, Corson was subjected to congenial ribbing in the university press. An edition of "Shoo Fly," a humorous publication, was dedicated to him. In keeping with his reputation, he received it with "a profound nod." The newspaper reported that his buggy had been washed and remarked, "It is a good thing that the tax on valuable buggies has been repealed, or our Professor would have to come down heavily on internal revenue." Some of his students were not fond of him. William H. French, a member of the Junior English class, wrote in his diary, "Prof. Corson spouted today and as usual he was not appreciated, and a shoe was thrown over the banister from
below and came up near the desk."  

Professor W. C. Russel, one of his colleagues, complained to Cornell's President that Corson was not teaching writing, and that the English Department was on a level with the University farm. He recommended systematic hard work but predicted: "Corson will never do this. No man who loves to read aloud as much as he does can do such work."  

Russel decided to reprimand him personally. Of Corson's reaction to the incident, he said, "He seemed to me half crazy."  

There also appear to have been managerial problems in the department. In answer to Caroline Corson's plea for assistance, Goldwin Smith assured her:

My information . . . is that . . . the storm has blown over. Mr. Corson's predecessor, Colonel Sprague, who is certainly a man of great ability, had the same difficulty in managing the department; a strong proof that the organization is at fault rather than the teacher.  

The worst trouble of all came at the end of the first school year, 1870-1871. Corson and Professor Wheeler

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19 Letter from W. C. Russel to Andrew D. White, April 4, 1871, in A History of Cornell, p. 117.
20 Letter from W. C. Russel to Andrew D. White, May 1, 1871, in A History of Cornell, p. 117.
21 Note from Goldwin Smith to Caroline Corson, Cascadilla, May 2, 1871.
of the Latin Department became intoxicated one morning in the Clinton House in Ithaca and created "a public scene of which details have been successfully buried in oblivion."²² Because of the incident, Corson sent a letter of resignation to the trustees in which he explained that he had been working very hard rehearsing the Commencement speakers, that he had gone breakfastless, that he was troubled by dyspepsia and unaccustomed to strong drink. He had taken two or three beers, with surprising effect.²³

At first the trustees accepted his resignation. Later they had a change of heart and substituted a year's leave of absence.²⁴

Professor Smith, a native Canadian, consoled Mrs. Corson with the information that in his country public opinion was more lenient on the subject. He also had discovered that the "informant was someone in the village."²⁵ Smith continued to commiserate with Carrie, to whom he expressed concern for the other party in disgrace. "What you tell me about poor Professor Wheeler," he wrote, "falls in with my own fears. I shall be glad to hear from you that he is safe."²⁶ Professor Wheeler had refused to apologize to the university and had been

²²Bishop, p. 116. ²³Ibid. ²⁴Ibid. ²⁵Letter from Goldwin Smith to Caroline Corson, written between June 30 and July 6, 1871. ²⁶Letter from Goldwin Smith to Caroline Corson, July 6, 1871.
dismissed. He later became an instructor in German at Sheffield Scientific School "and seems to have led there an exemplary life."\(^{27}\)

That Corson was devastated by the incident is shown in a note from a former student. Mr. Cluck hoped he had "recovered from the rude shock which had prostrated" him at the end of the term.\(^ {28}\)

Since Corson could not teach at Cornell for the 1871-1872 school year, he decided to seek employment elsewhere. Mrs. Corson and the children remained in Ithaca, where she supported them by continuing their school. The family correspondence is scanty for that period, although such separation usually meant weekly mail. Perhaps they intentionally destroyed their letters to obliterate the incident from the family history. Corson did keep fragments of letters from his wife that shed light on his activities that year. It appears that he travelled to Boston, New York, and Philadelphia looking for employment as a lecturer. Frequently homesick, he would return to Ithaca for a time and then go back in search of work. Carrie chided, "How feeble and childish this constant fretting for home! And when you are home how restless and

\(^{27}\)Bishop, p. 116.

\(^{28}\)Letter from James G. Cluck to Hiram Corson, Niagara Falls, August 2, 1871.
dissatisfied." Once he failed to fulfill a lecturing commitment. His wife wrote, in bolder ink than usual,

I know what it is to be in a strange place and make no engagements; that would never distress me; but to leave from here with the intention to deliver a lecture the next evening, to arrive well . . . and neglect that lecture from a slight feeling of indisposition . . . this is what takes all hope and faith away!

She had her own theory concerning what had happened. Her remarks indicate that Corson possibly was better acquainted with alcohol than he had led the trustees to believe.

On hearing the news that Monachesi a young good for nothing fellow, a drunkard and God knows what else, brought you to Leypoldt, the natural inference was that you went on a spree with him (for I have never yet known any of these sudden sicknesses of yours that could not be traced to drinking.)

She continued with a warning and a challenge.

There is a strict watch on you and you will never come back to this university if you do not change--but change radically--not only in your habits, but in feelings also . . . Only think what you might not be with a little bravery! Everything that you write or do is appreciated and noticed, and . . . you could give us peace and comfort and be honored, and the children and I would feel so proud of you!

In a later note she advised that his friends in Philadelphia and Professor Child in Boston might help him but that he should leave New York. Returning home to write would be difficult "in all this bustle and noise of a

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29 Letter from Caroline Corson to Hiram Corson, October, 1871.

30 Letter from Caroline Corson to Hiram Corson, undated.
school."\(^{31}\) She visited President White in his behalf, but with grave misgivings. She wrote,

> I am afraid, if they find you unable to help yourself, even when relieved of all responsibility of providing for us, you will sink deeper in their esteem, and may prove an obstacle to your returning to the university. It were better to conceal failures. Don't, for heaven's sake, appear crestfallen, unhappy, hesitating, anxious. Be deceitful if necessary and lie to this heartless world.\(^{32}\)

Despite her anxiety she visited President White again. He assured her that her husband would be reinstated the next year. As a result of their talk he sent letters to Julia Ward Howe, Edward Everett Hale, and William Dean Howells, introducing Corson and asking them to assist him.

> The bearer Professor Corson visits Boston in the intention of giving a series of lectures on various periods in the history of English Literature. Both as reader and lecturer Professor Corson has, I think, extraordinary talent. He cannot fail to please the best audiences your city can give. Any advice or aid in getting Professor Corson under way in such courses as he proposes will be most worthily bestowed and cannot fail to be recognized as a favor to the community at large.\(^{33}\)

Although the year was a hardship for the family, they endured it. Corson returned to Ithaca to begin the school year in September, 1872. The Cornell Era printed a

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\(^{31}\)Letter from Caroline Corson to Hiram Corson, 1871.

\(^{32}\)Letter from Caroline Corson to Hiram Corson, October 17, 1871.

\(^{33}\)Form letter from Andrew D. White for Hiram Corson to present to Julia Ward Howe, Edward E. Hale, D. D., and Wm. D. Howells, October 17, 1871.
brief notice: "The many friends of Professor Corson will be gratified to learn that he has again become a member of the faculty."\(^{34}\) The students and administrators must have decided that he had been punished for his misconduct; consequently, "the episode did no injury to Corson's popularity."\(^{35}\)

The Cornell Era provides the only record of Corson's classroom activity in the school term following his suspension. He planned to read twelve of Shakespeare's plays for the Junior class. The readings were scheduled for 10:15 a.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays and were open to the public. A reporter advised that anyone who was idle during that hour "would be amply repaid by attending the readings."\(^{36}\)

After the Christmas holidays the professor decided to give the Junior class "extra elocutionary exercises... in Library Hall on Friday afternoons at three o'clock."\(^{37}\) At the first meeting Corson assigned selections from Shakespeare as material for declamation. The rest of the exercises were to "consist of declamation and reading by the class."\(^{38}\)

\(^{34}\)The Cornell Era, September 13, 1872, p. 8.


\(^{36}\)The Cornell Era, November 8, 1872, p. 70.

\(^{37}\)The Cornell Era, January 24, 1873, p. 93.

\(^{38}\)The Cornell Era, January 31, 1873, p. 126.
In February he moved his regular class in elocution to the room of the Curtis Literary Society. The reporter, who seems to have been Corson's student, reviewed the first elocutionary exercise, which "was entered into heartily and greatly enjoyed" by the class. He expressed the opinion that the course would be "both pleasant and profitable." Later in the term he reiterated his estimation of Corson's teaching methods.

Prof. Corson, in his latest plan of calling upon individual members of the class for elocutionary exercises, is doing more good than he could possibly do in any other way. We hope that he will continue the trial.

At the end of the term, the Juniors practiced orations under Corson's guidance. He expressed his pleasure that they had "done better than he had anticipated." The reporter hoped the opinion would "not prove a check upon progress," for he feared the class might become "stationary in its present condition." He did agree, however, that he had never seen "oratory more simple and unaffected."

For the term that began in September, 1873, Corson published a course syllabus for English Language and

39 The Cornell Era, February 14, 1873, p. 141.
40 The Cornell Era, April 18, 1873, p. 160.
41 The Cornell Era, May 9, 1873, p. 206.
42 The Cornell Era, June 6, 1873, p. 238.
Literature. In his introductory remarks he listed three purposes for the brochure.

1. "to present to the student the leading heads of each lecture, and the order of their treatment, which, if well fixed in the mind, in advance of the Lecture, will enable him the better to take it in as a whole."

2. "to designate the best editions of an author's works, or of parts of them, that are generally accessible."

3. "to guide the student to such sources, philosophical, historical, biographical, critical, etc., as will enable him to read to the best advantage." 43

He did not expect the student to read everything in the syllabus but to use it as a guide to later independent study of the material. Corson advised against reading criticism before the work itself. "To read any one good production of an author, even superficially, is far better than to read all that has been written on and around and about it." This position, held steadfastly throughout his career, was to be the basis for an extended controversy among university teachers of literature. He explained it further:

These criticisms, the result often of profound study and deep aesthetic appreciation, must not, by any means, be disparaged; but they are not for the tyro in Literary study. It is time enough when the student has got some direct and independent impressions from the works themselves, to know what other students have

43Hiram Corson, "Remarks," Syllabus of a Course of Lectures on the English Language and Literature (Ithaca: Andrus, McChain, and Lyons, 1873.)
thought and felt about them.\textsuperscript{44} The student should "keep his mind virgin of the . . . 'Moral' of a play, to which German students like Ulrici have especially applied their critical nostrils."\textsuperscript{45} Such considerations should come after a careful reading of the works. The only assistance he allowed was in determining meanings "of obsolete words or uses of words, and of obscure allusions."\textsuperscript{46}

Two courses of lectures were described. The first, a special course, was given during the spring term to students who had studied Anglo-Saxon, Semi-Saxon and Early English literature through the middle of that century. The second, the general course, consisted of forty-two lectures.

1-2: Introduction to the course. Among the topics the professor discussed was "ultimate aims of literary culture . . . relations of vocal culture thereunto . . . ."

3-4: The Vision of William concerning Piers Plowman
5-6: Wycliffe and the Wycliffite Versions of the Scriptures
7-9: Chaucer, his language and poetry
10: Gower's Confessio Amantis
11-12: On the period of English literature between Chaucer and Spenser
13-14: Spenser's Faerie Queene
15-16: The Rise and Progress of the English Drama
17: Marlowe's Edward II, read, with comments
18-19: Shakespeare. "Plays that will be read, in parts to the class, during the year, with the requisite explanation of the development of their plots: The Winters Tale, Midsummer

\textsuperscript{44}Corson, "Remarks." \textsuperscript{45}Ibid. \textsuperscript{46}Ibid.
Nights Dream, Much Ado About Nothing, Merchant of Venice, King John, Romeo and Juliet, Julius Caesar, Macbeth, Hamlet, Lear, Othello, Antony and Cleopatra

20-21: Ben Jonson's "Every Man out of His Humour" read to the class

22-23: The English Bible

24-26: Milton. "... the perfection of Milton's verse and the conformity of its movement with a proper elocution, due somewhat to his blindness and to his having dictated it."

27-28: Dryden and the rise of the classical school of English poetry--the drama of the Restoration

29-30: Readings, with comments, from Dryden's satirical writings

31-32: The Comic Drama

33-35: Pope. "The Rape of the Lock will be read entire to the class, with comments, and the Dunciad in parts


37-38: Gray's "Progress of Poesy" and "The Bard" read, with critical and explanatory remarks

39-40: Goldsmith's "Good Nutured Man" and "She Stoops to Conquer" read

41-42: The Revival in English Poetry; Macpherson's Ossian; The Ossian Controversy; Bishop Percy's Reliques of Ancient English Poetry; Burns, Cowper

An extra course was also offered in the spring term on the literature of the nineteenth century, including Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Keats, Browning, and Tennyson.

Several observations should be made in summary. Corson's first approach to teaching English literature at Cornell was chronological. He presented the literary masters through their works rather than through biographical details. The teaching technique of oral reading for his classes was employed for much of the lecture time. Many other readings were held outside class to supplement
his lectures. When he wrote this syllabus, he had already begun to preach his doctrine of the relationship between vocal and literary culture.

Corson sent a copy of the syllabus to J. Parker Norris in Philadelphia, who responded that it made him wish he lived in Ithaca. "I should beg of the college authorities the permission to attend your lectures. I know that I should like them and furthermore that they would do me much good." 47

The same plan of courses appears to have been followed during the next school year. The system was changed in the 1875-1876 term, however. Corson explained to his wife, "Next year my course of study will be put upon a new basis and I shall be able to reconstruct it." Previously he had taught special courses for the freshmen in their second and third terms and the juniors in the second term. He was pleased that this schedule would change.

Hereafter, the official course in English Philology and English Literature will begin the second term of the Freshman year and continue on uninterruptedly to the end of the Senior year. This will allow me to construct a splendid course. 48

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47 Letter from J. Parker Norris to Hiram Corson, Philadelphia, September 14, 1873. Norris was the American affiliate to the Shakespeare Memorial Library in Birmingham, England.

48 Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, July, 1874.
He confided to Caroline one desirable change: "namely, to get rid of the Elocution."49

His new and "splendid" course notwithstanding, he was still annoyed by tardy students. The matter was serious enough for the campus paper to discuss:

Professor Corson and his class were very much annoyed, at his last reading, by the arrival of a great number of students coming in late. He spoke of the matter at the time, and we hope in future that visitors coming to hear his readings, or the usual tardy members of his class, will be more punctual. Almost ten minutes had expired before the reading could be commenced. Although this is not the first time that the thing has happened it should be the last. He will continue his reading, next Tuesday morning, on portions of Julius Caesar.50

The Tuesday morning Shakespeare studies were continued in the 1876-1877 term. The review of his lecture on Macbeth called it "more than usually interesting." Corson spent the hour on the murder scene and the porter's monologue. He first read the murder scene and then reviewed it, "criticising and explaining." Then followed an excerpt from DeQuincey's essay, "Upon the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth." The reviewer commented: "This was a pleasant diversion and was attentively heard and thoroughly appreciated. The Professor then read the speech of the porter in a manner which made us feel that he was veritably the Porter himself." The lectures were

49 Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, July, 1874.
open, and the critic recommended that anyone unoccupied at 10:00 o'clock on Tuesday mornings should attend, for the readings were "specially valuable to those who admire Shakespeare but who are not able to see his plays enacted."51

The spring term of 1878 saw a continuation of the Shakespeare readings. His performance of King Lear for the Senior special literature class was "admirable, perhaps surpassing that of any other play of Shakespeare," and all students were urged to "try to hear him."52 Later in that same term one of his lectures was advertised:

Prof. Corson's lecture next Tuesday promises to be unusually interesting. He will first give a review of the reaction against the sentimental drama which sprung up soon after Dryden's time. The remainder of the hour will be devoted to a consideration of "The Rivals" . . . after which will be read passages from "The Good Natured Man" and "She Stoops to Conquer."53

Following the school term Corson was despondent. He wrote his wife, "I wish the university work went on through the year without any interruption. Daily labor is my only refuge from myself."54 During the summer he had planned to give elocution lessons to Mr. Titus, Ithaca's

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51 The Cornell Era, November 16, 1877, p. 7.
52 The Cornell Era, March 22, 1878, p. 8.
53 The Cornell Era, May 3, 1878, p. 28.
54 Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, August 21, 1878.
Baptist minister. These plans were delayed when the clergymen became ill with typhoid. However, he found another activity to occupy his free time. While his wife was on vacation he decided to move back into their rooms in Cascadilla. The professor wrote of his difficulty in moving his extensive book collection. Mr. Burr, his favorite student from the year before, helped in the packing and moving venture. They spent from eight a.m. to five p.m. taking the books from the boxes and arranging them on shelves.

During the 1878-1879 term his required teaching hours were lessened. Possibly he was given release time for his outside readings. He told Caroline, "Two days I have nothing before 10 o'clock, and three days nothing before 11; and I shall have fewer hours . . . only eight."

Entrance examinations were held Tuesday, September 17, and registration was the following Thursday.

55Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, August 21, 1878.

56The school seems to have been discontinued. Perhaps Mrs. Corson had found it necessary to devote most of her time to nursing their daughter, Pauline, who died in July, 1874. Eugene, who had been a student at Cornell, entered medical school in the fall of 1878.

57Letters from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, September 6 and 17, 1878.

58Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, August 21, 1878.
After that, Corson wrote, "the big machine will move uninterrupted on until Christmas." His next letter to his wife spoke of his first class meetings and of his estimation of the incoming freshmen.

The exercises at the University begin today. I've had two classes before me this morning. The new class now number about 160—20 of whom are ladies. They don't appear to be a very promising set. I called last evening on the Shackfords, and the Prof. gave me specimens of their spelling. It's discouraging to have such material, but so it is. The more experience I have in teaching the more I feel how hopelessly stupid the great majority of mankind are. With all the facilities for learning, in these days, how little the mass learn. All the real thinking of the world is done by a few scores of minds.

As usual, he was depressed by the beginning of a new term as well as by the conclusion of an old one. "I almost wish there were no terms, but that we could go uninterrupted on, even without a vacation."

In November he wrote to Eugene that he was trying to free himself "from the bondage of books" and that he "read next to nothing" except what his teaching required. He stopped reading the school publications and told his son, "I would send you the Era regularly, but everybody

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59Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, September 17, 1878.

60Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, September 20, 1878.

61Ibid.

62Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, November 19, 1878.
is disgusted with it this year. The Review doesn't amount
to much, either." Of his work he stated:

My lectures are the best attended in the University. Last night I read "Julius Caesar"--and though the weather was as bad as it could be--rainy, foggy, and muddy, there was no diminution in the audience. The room was filled and all standing places occupied. Julius Caesar is an extremely hard play to read; there are so many heavy characters, and it's hard to differentiate them with the voice. I was so tired when I got through that I sank back in my chair. While reading the opening scene I got chilled by a draft and was affected by it throughout. Read 2./4 hours. Dr. and Mrs. Wilder invited me to visit their house after the reading and we had a good lunch together. Major and Mrs. Burbank came in--They are regular attendants on my lectures. This has been the most triumphantly successful course of readings I've ever given.

At the beginning of the winter term, he had succumbed to his usual winter cold and sore throat, which persisted five weeks. He continued with his lectures, although he feared that his "voice might be spoiled for reading for some time." For his lecture on Hamlet in January, however, he found his voice "almost in its usual condition." He was also happier with his students. The members of his large Anglo-Saxon class were "somewhat superior" to those of former classes.

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63 Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, November 19, 1878.
64 Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, November 19, 1878.
65 Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, January 15, 1879.
66 Ibid.
He was also pleased to learn in February that he had been a Doctor of Laws since July 4, 1878. St. John's College had conferred the honorary degree upon him without his knowledge.67

At the end of his first decade at Cornell he had established the pattern of his classroom activity for the rest of his career. He would lecture and read to classes from the works of the great English and American writers, and he would supplement the class work with readings that were open to the public and the student body. He believed that the best way for a tyro to be introduced to literature was to hear a vocal interpretation of it, and he dedicated himself to the task. In addition to his classroom work, he also read and lectured to audiences in Ithaca and was a guest lecturer in other American and English cities.

EXTRACURRICULAR READING IN ITHACA

During his first year of residence Corson read on Tuesday evenings to the members of the Cascadilla Literary Club. Meetings were held in the parlor of Cascadilla, where the Corsons and several other faculty families resided. The readings were open "to all who may wish to

67 Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, February 7, 1879.
The club met frequently, and members seem to have shared the lecture duties. In the absence of President White and Professor Smith, Corson was called upon to substitute. From January through March, 1871, he gave at least twenty-six readings.

January 16, 17, 19, 23, 24, and 26 he lectured and read from Tennyson's poetry.

On January 30, 31, and February 2 and 6 the subject was Coleridge. He read from "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," "Christabel," "Kubla Khan," and "Ode on Dejection."

February 7 and 9 were spent on Hood's "Haunted House," "Dream of Eugene Aram," "Elm Tree," "Bridge of Sighs," and "Song of the Shirt."

February 13, 14, 16, 20, and 21 were devoted to Mrs. Browning's "Aurora Leigh" and "Sonnets from the Portuguese."

February 23, 27, and 28 he read from Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*, *The Scarlet Letter*, and *The Marble Faun*.

March 2, 6, and 7 were spent on Longfellow.

On March 9, 13, and 14 he read Poe.

If time allowed after March 14, he planned to concentrate on English literature of the nineteenth century,

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including Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, and Keats.69

The readings must have been well attended, for
the professor moved them from Cascadilla parlor to the
large Library Hall early in February. In addition to the
club lectures, he continued his regular Tuesday evening
readings also at Library Hall. His performance of The
Merchant of Venice received a highly complimentary review.

All were highly pleased with the rendering of the
play. We had supposed that we knew most of the fine
points and meaning expressions of the play, but were
soon convinced that we were perfect heathens in our
acquaintance with it, and though it is mortifying
to find how ignorant one is . . . we did not
selfishly occupy our position alone. The reader
truly proved to what a degree the flexibility of the
human voice can be cultivated. His voice was mod­
ulated, seemingly with little effort, to suit the
different characters in the play, and one could
hardly imagine that the deep tones of Bassanio, the
shrill nasal-voice of Launcelot Gobbo, and the weak,
cracked tones of Old Gobbo were all modulations of
the same voice. We hope many will take advantage of
this fine chance to hear reading.70

Following his year's leave of absence, the pro­
fessor gave at least two lecture-readings in Ithaca in
the 1872-1873 term. He delivered his lecture on literary
culture to the Teachers Institute, and "the hall was well
filled with a large and appreciative audience."71 The

69 The Cornell Era, January 20, 1871, p. 117.
70 The Cornell Era, February 10, 1871, p. 139.
71 The Cornell Era, October 4, 1872, p. 31.
next month he gave a "most excellent" private reading of Tennyson's "Gareth and Lynette" to an invited audience of professors and students.\footnote{The Cornell Era, November 29, 1872, p. 95.}

In the 1873-1874 term Corson gave two lectures "for the benefit of the Cornell Navy." The first one in December was well advertised, and it was reported that the tickets were "selling quite lively."\footnote{The Cornell Era, December 5, 1873, p. 102.} The Era encouraged students to attend, promising that the selections would be "read with that rare insight into their hidden meaning, that delicate appreciation of their beauties, which the Professor always brings to his task."\footnote{Ibid.} The first part of the program was from Bret Harte: "Tennessee's Partner," "Plain Language from Truthful James," "Chiquita," "Dow's Flat," "Jim," and "Luke." Part two was from DeQuincey, Holmes, Hood, and Tennyson. The writer urged: "It is so seldom that Professor Corson reads in public that the students should unite in giving him the enthusiastic reception he deserves."\footnote{Ibid.} Either the many readings Corson gave on campus for classes and clubs were not regarded as "public," or the announcement was satirical. Possibly, a public reading was one to which an admission fee was charged.

The reading was so successful that the directors of...
the Cornell Navy requested a second one in January. This time the reception was disappointing. Cause of the poor attendance "by only about fifty students" was attributed to lack of advertising. 76

In addition to Corson, Ithaca audiences in the 1874-1875 term saw Charlotte Cushman, Mrs. Scott-Siddons, and Bret Harte. The professor reviewed their performances for the Ithaca Daily Journal and The Cornell Review.

Mrs. Scott-Siddons initiated the Adelphi Lecture Association season on December 8, 1874. Her program, "dramatic and other readings," was in Library Hall at eight p. m. The audience was filled "by the most cultivated and appreciative" Ithacans and Cornellians. Mrs. Siddons wore a dress of "corn-colored silk, trimmed with maroon velvet and white lace." Corson revealed that her health was poor and her voice failed to show the power of a previous visit. He theorized that she was "over-exerting herself, as many artists are apt to do whose services are much in demand by the public." The audience and reviewer were displeased by the program. The selections were "poorly adapted for an effective public reading." The review, which was overwhelmingly negative, criticized each piece in turn. About her performance of Marmion's "The Condemnation of Constance de Beverly,"

76 The Cornell Era, January 30, 1874, p. 133.
Corson wrote:

What we would say of the rendering of this piece is, perhaps, largely applicable to much of Mrs. Siddons' reading. In the first place, her voice hasn't enough, nor a range of pitch sufficiently wide, especially below the median key, to allow of the requisite modulation; and her reading, consequently, is wanting in perspective, to use a term from the art of painting. In her reading of verse, the rhythm too much over-rides the expression; the groups of thought are not presented with sufficient distinctness of outline, but are jumbled together by a rapidity of utterance that makes it difficult to follow her . . . . There is not the impression conveyed, which should always be conveyed, in effective reading, of the mind resting on the thought which is being expressed; the impression is rather that of the mind stretching forward to what is to come . . . . her abrupt breath-catching conveys the impression of a certain degree of affectedness, and, apart from that, it is not particularly agreeable.77

In the next reading, Lever's "Charles O'Malley," the speakers were "not kept sufficiently distinct."

Whittier's "too familiar Maud Muller" was next:

In the rendering of this we would notice another marked fault . . . in Mrs. Siddons' reading of rhymed verse . . . we allude to the similarity of the cadences, and of the intonation of the rhyming words. Her voice comes down upon them in the same way, and the effect of the rhyme, instead of being, as in most cases it should be, a sub-consciousness, is forced disagreeably upon the consciousness of the hearer. Her reading of this poem could not have pleased people of taste.78

The third selection, "The Story of the Faithful Soul," was unfamiliar to Corson, who "couldn't follow it."

Mrs. Siddons closed the first half of her program with

77Ithaca Daily Journal, December 9, 1874.
78Ibid.
"The Maniac." Corson wrote that if it "be ever again read in this place, on a public stage, may we not be there to hear!"

Part two opened with "A Senator Entangled." "This piece, in its dramatic presentation, was probably the best of the evening." However, "The Bridge of Sighs," her next selection, "was the worst rendered piece of the evening."

Corson criticized its performance at length.

It was read with the reader's characteristic dash and strain, and without a particle of feeling. Of this latter, Mrs. Siddons doesn't seem to have a superabundance. . . . The poem demands throughout a quiet reflective, and deeply sympathetic tone, of which there wasn't the faintest trace . . . the first verse "One more unfortunate," was read as though "more" qualified "unfortunate," and formed with it a comparative. The two words should be separated in reading, with a long pause, "more" being prolonged by the use of the downward wave, and the voice dropping lightly on "unfortunate."79

Of the closing selection from "School for Scandal," Corson said, "The piece is too much hackneyed to afford much entertainment." Corson closed with an invitation for anyone who wished to disagree with his review, but he added one further attack:

Mrs. Siddons has many and grave faults to correct before she can lay claim to being a great artist reader. If she were an ugly woman, and had to depend altogether upon her vocalization, her faults would no doubt be considered less venial than they are; but her beauty and grace cover a multitude of elocutionary

79Ithaca Daily Journal, December 9, 1874.
In his article written for *The Cornell Review* he was even less kind, calling her program "balderdash and claptrap." He proposed that the time had come to set a standard of excellence in elocution beyond the measure of audience appreciation. "The fact that certain kinds of audiences enjoy certain things, is of no consideration; the question should be, ought they to enjoy them?" He suggested that their pleasure came from "an imperfectly cultivated or depraved taste."82

Corson was as enthusiastic over Charlotte Cushman as he had been critical of Mrs. Siddons. Cushman read in Library Hall on December 17, 1874.83 Her audience was "the most select, most cultivated, and, as was clearly shown, the most appreciative" ever assembled in the Hall. They had been drawn by "the full assurance of a rare intellectual entertainment" which was "fully realized." For the first part of the program, she chose scenes from *Henry VIII*. Her impersonation of Catherine

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80Ithaca Daily Journal, December 9, 1874.

81*The Cornell Review* (January, 1875), p. 186. The articles in the *Daily Journal* and the *Review* carried no bylines. However, Corson identified them as his work in his scrapbooks. The content is obviously Corson's, as it echoes and quotes from his other works on the theory of vocal culture.


83Ithaca Daily Journal, December 18, 1874.
had been "for years without a rival" on stage. Of the Council-chamber scene, her reviewer said that "it was worth more, as an interpretation of the principal characters . . . than a volume of learned commentary."

The second half opened with Lord Macaulay's "The Battle of Ivry." Corson found this reading least successful, calling it "somewhat stagey, especially in the strong rolling of the r with which it was characterized." "The Death of the Old Squire," "Honest Poverty," and "Miss Maloney's Speech on the Chinese Question" completed the highly successful program. Corson found her delivery of the refrain "a man's a man for a' that," to be "simply delicious." In reading the final selection, Miss Cushman "gave the Irish brogue with all its subtle richness and humor." The audience's enjoyment "seemed to be derived from the reader's hearty enjoyment of it." The reviewer concluded, "And so closed an entertainment which will long be remembered . . . by all whose great privilege it was to be present on the occasion."84

Corson's article in The Cornell Review was equally laudatory, and he used it to compare a reading performance with the staging of a play.

There are certain disadvantages attending the mere reading of a play, which no reader, whatever be his power, can entirely overcome by variety and flex-

84Ithaca Daily Journal, December 18, 1874.
ibility of voice, mobility of face, and suitableness of accompanying gesture; but, on the other hand, there are certain, to some extent, compensating advantages. In the first place, a greater harmony and propriety of expression of the speeches of the several characters introduced, can be secured, than is always possible on the stage, where there is a mixture of good, bad and indifferent actors. Each part can be better read, by a reader with the requisite power and appreciation, and in better keeping with the whole scene, than is usual on the stage . . . . In the second place, the hearer's imagination of the situations, especially when they are so explicitly explained in advance, as they were by Miss Cushman, is often preferable to their actual representation, with its many unavoidable drawbacks and frequent incongruities; and in the third place, a rigid adherence to the letter as well as the spirit of the text, can be better secured—an important consideration with a scholarly audience. 85

He reported that Cushman read only what was "set down for her." Sometimes she omitted passages, "as is of course necessary in a public reading," but she did not change the script "to make a point, as is too often done on the stage to a 'villainous' extent." The review concluded with a generalization on the need for vocal culture in literary education.

It is hardly necessary to say that good readers are rare; but it is unfortunate that reading is so much regarded as a gift that takes care of itself. It does of course depend much on natural aptitude; but it depends quite as much on long and careful cultivation, and such cultivation is but seldom bestowed . . . . The benefits that might be derived, in the way of

literary culture and of the noblest intellectual entertainment, through an effective interpretative rendering of our great authors, are, at present, little suspected. If, instead of learning about authors, we could, in this way, be brought face to face with their works, how infinitely superior would be the results to the studying of histories of literature! But for this to be done, we must first get out of the mere knowledge-mongery of our courses of so-called literary education.86

Bret Harte lectured on "The Progress of American Humor," April 15, 1875, as the third entry in the Adelphi Lecture Series. Corson opened his review with a reprimand to the audience members who entered late. He also noted that those who thought they would hear "illustrations of American humor rather than a history" were disappointed. Corson approved of the lecture's content, but he compared it unfavorably to Harte's lecture in Ithaca the preceding year. "He was evidently, last evening, very much fatigued, and the weather was not particularly inspiriting."87

Soon after Harte's lecture, Corson gave a public reading at Library Hall, Tuesday evening, April 20. He


87 Ithaca Daily Journal, April 16, 1875. Corson and Harte had met in 1874. A letter from the author after his visit to Ithaca that year detailed his suffering with inflammation of the eyes. It also praised a book Corson sent him. "I am fearful that I never shall be able to criticize fairly the admirable and patient research shown in your Chaucer. I only know it is of a kind that a lazy, impatient, unmethodical worker like myself looks upon with respectful awe and shameless envy." Letter from Bret Harte to Hiram Corson, Morristown, New Jersey, April 25, 1874.
selected excerpts from *Henry IV*, "Lady of Shalott," and Bayard Taylor's "The Pennsylvania Farmer." The critic for *The Ithaca Democrat*, indignant at Corson's criticism of Mrs. Scott-Siddons, gave one of the few negative reviews Corson ever received. The reviewer "highly regretted" that Siddons was not present to hear "her merciless critic," for "a retaliatory opinion of his elocution would have avenged her wrongs." Since it was impossible to "read Siddons upon Corson," the critic, acting as her second, wrote, "as a Shakesperian reader he is too monotonous," and "the tone assumed by Bayard Taylor's 'Old Farmer' was distressing."88

Other reviews failed to substantiate a bad performance. *The Weekly Ithacan* reported, "The selections gave the best satisfaction, particularly the reading of Shakespeare's Scene between 'Prince Hal' and Jack Falstaff, and 'The Lady of Shalott.'"89 *The Era* reviewed each selection. Calling the Shakespearean reading "most happy," the critic continued, "It was one of the easiest things in the world to close the eyes and imagine oneself listening to that unwieldy mountain of flesh, Falstaff." Corson read "Lady of Shallott" with "great tenderness and pathos," and "seemed to be

88 *The Ithaca Democrat*, Thursday, April 22, 1875.
89 *The Weekly Ithacan*, Friday, April 23, 1875.
completely filled with the spirit of the poem." During the reading "a universal, almost painful stillness pervaded the audience." In "The Pennsylvania Farmer," the reader "imitated, in a most perfect manner, the cracked, squeaky voice of a very old man." Although effective, his reading "was less pleasing than in the other selections," but on the whole Corson "created a most favorable impression with the audience."  

The Daily Journal concurred. Corson's reading of Shakespeare "may have been inferior to Miss Cushman's -- but to hers only . . . ." As for the rest of the program, "In the poetry of sentiment and description especially Professor Corson . . . stands without a rival. His reading of Tennyson is perfection." The review stressed the educational value of the performance. Rather than a general criticism, the review purposed "to induce our readers to more generally patronize the readings of this accomplished elocutionist and litterateur" for "the instruction to be gained."  

The Cornell Review also gave favorable comments and defended Corson against the Democrat. Its "natural penchant for 'sweet things,'" said the Review, "has betrayed it into a barbaric use of school-boy criticism."  

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90 The Cornell Era, April 23, 1875.

91 Ithaca Daily Journal, April 24, 1875.
The "unanimous prayer" was that Mrs. Siddons "may never return to these classical shades . . . while . . . Prof. Corson will probably favor us again . . . with choice selections read in his own inimitable way."\textsuperscript{92}

The Library Hall performance was given "at the request of his town class in reading and elocution," which he taught through paid subscriptions. The class wanted "to express in some substantial manner their appreciation of his painstaking labors in their behalf."\textsuperscript{93} Tickets for the reading were fifty cents, the proceeds going to the professor.\textsuperscript{94}

Because of his prowess in delivery, Corson was chosen to pronounce the words for two spelling matches. The first, on April 13, 1875, was sponsored by the Baptist Church. Corson "propounded the tongue-twisters with so clear and musical an enunciation that they did not sound nearly so hard as they were."\textsuperscript{95} The second, known as "The Great Spelling Match," came later that term. The contestants were from the university and the town, or as the \textit{Journal} advertised, "Town and Gown." The students and professors were victorious.

\textsuperscript{92}The Cornell Review, May, 1875.
\textsuperscript{93}Ithaca Daily Journal, April 20, 1875.
\textsuperscript{94}Ithaca Daily Journal, April 19, 1875.
\textsuperscript{95}Ithaca Daily Journal, April 14, 1875.
The results of the first match were disputed, for the woman who spelled "filigree" "fillagree" was counted incorrect even though she had "Websterian authority." In a letter to the editor of the Journal, Corson admitted his error and remarked:

But there's no telling what may, or may not, be found in Webster. I do wish I had a copy of the "Unabridged." If I have anything more to do with these spelling-matches, I shall be getting constantly into trouble, and what is worse, shall lose my reputation for infallibility.\(^96\)

Corson gave one other reading in town during the term. His program, for the Irving Society, consisted of "Autocrat of the Breakfast Table," Bret Harte's poems "Chiquita" and "Dow's Flat," and selections from Tennyson. They "were read in that pleasing style which has made the professor such a favorite."\(^97\)

In the 1875-1876 school term, Corson continued his practice of lecturing and reading in the town. He lectured in October for the Teachers Association on "Dryden, the Restoration Drama, and the Bishop Collier Controversy." He had a "fine audience of from four or six hundred." Teachers were admitted free; all others paid ten cents. "Quite a little sum was realized."\(^98\)

\(^{96}\)Ithaca Daily Journal, April 15, 1875.

\(^{97}\)The Cornell Era, March 5, 1875.

\(^{98}\)Ithaca Daily Journal, October 8, 1875.
In December the professor read from Tennyson in the botanical lecture room of Sage College at 7:30 on a Saturday evening.\textsuperscript{99} The venture must have been successful, for in January an announcement appeared that he would give a reading every Saturday of the term at Sage.\textsuperscript{100}

Discussing one performance in the series, the \textit{Era} said the readings were "very well attended; more than a hundred listened very attentively . . . when he completed 'Aurora Leigh.'" Some audience members brought copies of the poem "and kept along with him, thus deriving more benefit than the mere listener."\textsuperscript{101} Other readings in February included \textit{King Lear} and Bret Harte's prose.\textsuperscript{102}

These Sage College readings continued through March. At the final performance Corson "was presented a very fine easy chair by the ladies, for whom the readings were especially given."\textsuperscript{103}

The professor gave a public reading for the sixth anniversary of the Adelphi Literary Society. Students, professors, and their families were invited to attend on February 22 at Library Hall. Tickets were available

\textsuperscript{99}The \textit{Cornell Era}, December 3, 1875, p. 94.
\textsuperscript{100}The \textit{Cornell Era}, January 21, 1876, p. 110.
\textsuperscript{101}The \textit{Cornell Era}, February 11, 1876, p. 133.
\textsuperscript{102}The \textit{Cornell Era}, February 18, 1876, p. 142.
\textsuperscript{103}The \textit{Cornell Era}, March 31, 1876, p. 173.
"without expense at the bookstores"; the society provided the reader's fee. Corson read Thomas Hood's "Miss Kilmansegg and Her Precious Leg." The Journal held that "the gentlemen enjoyed the matter with much keener relish than the ladies." Of the "manner," however, it reported:

We don't think we ever before heard him read a selection that called forth so fully his consummate skill and great power as a reader--the nice and sudden transitions of voice, the perfect inflections, the significant emphasis, and the clear, distinct, and ringing accent and enunciation--all was admirable, most marvelous.  

The Review revealed that "he kept his audience in an extremely happy state of mind from the beginning to the end." Of the Journal's implication that the selection had offended the women, the critic responded, "This may be true, although we saw no symptoms of it, but we think such feelings were both prudish and uncalled for, for there is nothing in the poem to offend any person of good taste."  

Corson ended his public performances for the school year by reading "The Blue and the Gray" in the park as a part of the Decoration Day program. He "was very well received."  

When school resumed in 1876, so did Corson's Sage  

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104Ithaca Daily Journal, February 23, 1876.  
105The Cornell Review, March, 1876, p. 280.  
106The Cornell Era, June 2, 1876, p. 247.
College readings. He began the series with Tennyson's "Maud" on October 27, 1876, at seven o'clock, again in the botanical lecture room. "The Professor's wonderful voice was never in better condition or more ably wielded," reported the Journal; "the rare beauties and strangely moving depths of passion of this wondrous work of poetic art were never more clearly or admirably interpreted by a reader." His next scheduled reading was to be some "Sonnets from the Protuguese." This performance had to be postponed because of "an accident to the radiator which caused the steam to escape with a hissing sound and fill the room," making it impossible for him to proceed. The reading was rescheduled for the following Friday evening.

Eugene, responding with pleasure to his father's news of appreciative audiences, expressed concern as well. "I only trust you may be sufficiently repaid for your trouble and anxiety for they must be a great strain upon you in addition to your University work." Corson must have felt that the rewards were greater than the trouble, for he decided to give a series of seven lectures on English Literature at Wells College. He also found

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108The Cornell Era, November 17, 1876, p. 79.
109Letter from Eugene Corson to Hiram Corson, December 16, 1876.
time to lecture at Library Hall on poetic form, quoting from English poets from Chaucer to Tennyson.\(^{111}\) The evening's entertainment was for the benefit of the public drinking fountain fund.\(^{112}\)

The following season he gave public readings for the Baptist and Unitarian Churches.\(^{113}\) He also read at Sage College.\(^{114}\) During the summer of 1878 he amused himself and his friends by private readings both at his house and at theirs. He wrote his wife about a "grand breakfast" he had given for friends. "After breakfast we looked over pictures, took a stroll to the reservoir, and I read to the company." Upon leaving at one o'clock the guests were "highly delighted with the morning's entertainment."\(^{115}\)

On a visit to tea at Professor Russel's Corson and the other guests, Professors Flagg and McCoon and Mr. Halsey, discussed Greek verse and verse in general. Corson and Flagg disagreed about oral reading.

Flagg has very mechanical views about poetic forms. He read some Greek to us which I didn't particularly enjoy. I don't believe in his theories, and I don't

\(^{111}\)Ithaca Daily Journal, January 13, 1877.

\(^{112}\)Ithaca Daily Journal, January 14, 1877.

\(^{113}\)Letter from Caroline Corson to Eugene Corson, April 22, 1878, and The Cornell Era, November 23, 1877.

\(^{114}\)The Cornell Era, February 1, 1878, p. 6.

\(^{115}\)Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, July 13, 1878.
think he convinced the rest of the company. He doesn't certainly understand the true principles and secrets of melody. I read some selections from Tennyson, in illustration of my own theories, which he insisted were wrong; but the rest were with me. He has Prof. Apthorpe's notions about the reading of verse. After my reading of "Sweet after showers" he read it according to his notion of marking metre and rhyme, and then I knew that my own theories were fully felt by the rest.\textsuperscript{116}

President White, always an ardent supporter of Corson, asked him to renew his readings at the Sage in 1878. He agreed and began the series with Tennyson's "Aylmer's Field."\textsuperscript{117} Other readings from Browning and Shakespeare followed.

Corson wrote his wife that his class in the town was to be reorganized. "The old members are all eager for another course of readings." He planned to start them "when there are fifty subscribers at $2 apiece for 10 readings."\textsuperscript{118}

On October 21 he read Browning at the Sage "to a large audience," including President and Mrs. White.\textsuperscript{119} Later he described his interpretative reading from Shakespeare at the Sage.

There was another rush to my reading on Monday evening. There is such a demand for seats, that the

\textsuperscript{116}Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, July 30, 1878.
\textsuperscript{117}Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, October 6, 1878.
\textsuperscript{118}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{119}Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, October 22, 1878.
students are complaining about the townspeople coming. But as I read for nothing, I shall claim the right to invite all my friends from the town. I never made so much of the Merchant of Venice; everybody that spoke to me afterwards, said that I quite surpassed myself. Even Prof. Flagg and his wife were there! Mrs. Bird invited me to tea on Monday evening and gave me coffee, which affected my breathing during the reading of the first Act; and I swore inwardly. But from seeming evil, good was educed. I started, in consequence, with a deliberate style which added to the effect of the whole reading. I'm apt, in reading a play, to make the pauses between the speeches too short. But I shall not drink coffee again before a reading. The Whites all attended. Mrs. White said she never before enjoyed the Merchant of Venice so much.\footnote{Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, November 6, 1878, Corson's fiftieth birthday.}

The next day Room K, his lecture room, was crowded for his discussion of "The Faerie Queene." Women from the town filled all one side of the room. Corson suggested that the coachman, Mr. Lamkin, should allow him to ride free, "for my readings and lectures double his business. He brought up two loads on Monday evening. He gets double pay for the evenings."\footnote{Ibid.}

In October Corson was making plans for a private Browning class, "consisting of 4 ladies and 2 gentlemen," who would pay him five dollars a lesson. They were to meet in Corson's rooms at Cascadilla every Tuesday evening. He wrote Caroline that his study was "the admiration of all who come into it. The books fill all the four walls,
and the windows are filled with plants and vines."

The class actually began on a Saturday evening, November 9, 1878. Corson initiated their study of "The Ring and the Book" by reading them "an Essay on the poem as an introduction to the study of it." By November 18 the class was "doing nicely." The women were "well prepared" and all showed "a great quickness of comprehension, especially Miss Hicks." He wrote further to his son about the class activity and his star pupil.

We read almost a thousand lines of the Ring and the Book of an evening. The Class are all enthusiastic over it, and wonder at the easiness of the language. I have quite lost the idea, myself, that Browning is hard to understand. All that's necessary is to get the hang of his diction, and it's a diction one grows fond of. Miss Hicks of Syracuse . . . is very sagacious in the matter of involved constructions. But she has had a classical training, and there's nothing equal to that for giving one a nice insight into the contriving spirit of the higher forms of language.

His Sage College readings continued on November 11 with Macbeth. The room was so crowded for each reading that "a large number" had to stand. His reading for

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122 Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, November 6, 1878.

123 Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, November 10, 1878.

124 Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, November 18, 1878.

125 Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, November 27, 1878.

126 Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, November 10, 1878.
November 18 was *Julius Caesar*.\(^{127}\)

He seemed to feel obligated to continue these performances. "We need amusements here. There are none. I do the most toward the entertainment of the people." The physical strain was great: I expend a vast deal of nervous energy every time I read." Nor was he paid for the work. He hoped that the town class would soon be formed so he would be able "to turn a penny."\(^{128}\) After his "hard readings," however, he slept "like a log."

By November 27 he had read from Tennyson and Browning as well as *King Lear*, *Merchant of Venice*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Midsummer Night's Dream* and was preparing to read *King John*. He told his son, "My voice is better than it ever was."\(^{129}\) The latter reading was cancelled because of his chronic sore throat.

Mr. Reed and his friend stayed over to hear me read *King John* last evening, but they were disappointed. There seemed to be a general disappointment--but I couldn't help it. I have been reading very faithfully all the term. When Mrs. White heard that I shouldn't read, she sent Fred down to know what was the matter. They have come to look upon my readings as indispensible. I give no more this term.\(^{130}\)

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\(^{127}\)Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, November 18, 1878.

\(^{128}\)Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, November 21, 1878.

\(^{129}\)Ibid.

\(^{130}\)Letters from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, December 10 and December 12, 1878.
The Sage readings were resumed in January. "I was distrustful of my voice," he wrote Eugene, "and did not take any pains to announce the reading, not wishing to have a large audience, in case I should fail." They came anyway, despite cold weather and deep snow. "I acquitted myself beyond expectation," he reported. He read Mark Twain's "The Recent Great French Duel" that had just appeared in the February Atlantic Monthly. It's of course extravagant, as everything he writes is, but it's extremely funny. The audience enjoyed it hugely." He also read the Sunday School chapter from Tom Sawyer and Harte's "John Chinaman." He had announced a reading of King John but did not "feel equal" to it; consequently he substituted the American authors.

In February Charles Dudley Warner, author of My Summer in a Garden, came to Cornell to lecture for the benefit of the Navy. He and the professor visited together, and he attended one of Corson's readings at the Sage. Corson confided to his wife:

He's a pleasant man in private, but as a lecturer he's a failure. His lecture was very dreary. The students all expected to be amused—many were pre-

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131 Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, January 21, 1879.
132 Ibid. Corson and Twain might well have been personally acquainted. Twain's parents-in-law lived in nearby Elmira, New York, and Twain spent much time there. He also visited for a week in Ithaca in 1877 with his friend, Dean Sage, Jr. The Cornell Era, October 12, 1877.
pared to crack their sides with laughter, but they all left with their sides intact. He gave a supremely dull lecture on Egypt. He hasn't a single qualification of a successful lecturer--he hasn't voice, manner, matter, nor magnetism, and he knows it. It's the custom, nowadays, for successful literary men to be invited on the lecture platform, and they are generally failures there. Joaquin Miller is now lecturing. He says himself that he never lectures a second time in a place, but that as there are a great many growing villages he hopes to continue the business for some time.\textsuperscript{133}

Earlier in the school year President White had introduced him to another author, James Parton. The latter suggested that rather than always having a guest minister at Sage Chapel, Corson should "read sometimes a sermon or something else appropriate in connection with a choral service."\textsuperscript{134} The professor thought it "an odd idea" telling Caroline, "I don't like it much, and I'm sure that if it be carried out, it will be laughed at by some, and others will denounce it." President White, however, was "full of it." Corson suggested Bible readings as an alternative.\textsuperscript{135} By December the plan was "not altogether given up." He planned a course of Bible readings for Sunday afternoons during the next term. Professor Fuertes arranged for Professor Piutti from Wells College to play

\textsuperscript{133}Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, February 4, 1879.

\textsuperscript{134}Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, November 10, 1878.

\textsuperscript{135}Ibid.
the organ when he read.  

In addition to the Bible readings, the Sage College performances continued in the 1879-1880 term. He read Hood's "Elm Tree" and "The Haunted House" as well as Much Ado about Nothing, Romeo and Juliet, King John, and other plays of Shakespeare. The Era recommended the series.

As an adjunct to the course in English Literature, and as a means of literary culture, these are almost invaluable. His rendering of any piece, whether of prose or poetry, is such as to bring out its full force and meaning. He endeavors to make every person feel what the author says, for it is only by such means that true literary culture can be attained. Although our course in English Literature has been increased one hour each week, yet there are still many things which have to be omitted for lack of time. The criticisms of the authors, and the history of their influence upon the different nations, necessarily deprives us of hearing much that the authors themselves have said . . . . The readings at Sage Chapel are not intended to give us literary knowledge, but rather literary culture, and no student can afford not to attend them.

OTHER READINGS AND LECTURES IN AMERICA

In addition to his full schedule at home, Corson somehow found time to appear in other American cities as a guest reader and lecturer. In 1875 he travelled to Annapolis and to Philadelphia. At the former, he delivered the commencement speech at St. John's College on July 7.

136 Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, December 14, 1878.

137 The Cornell Era, October 24, 1879, p. 67.
Entitled "The University of the Future," the address was later printed for distribution by order of the visitors and governors and at the request of the alumni association.138

John S. Wirt, an acquaintance from Baltimore, wrote that the topic would be of special interest, since plans were under way to start the Johns Hopkins University, "at least as soon as we get a definite idea what sort of a university it shall be about which there is a great difference of opinion."139

The Literary World, reviewing the pamphlet prepared from the address, responded favorably to all Corson's points with the exception of his advocacy of coeducation. The critic found his arguments here to be "less satisfactory than in other departments" but "well worth reading." Corson described the plight of women in his day: "woman has duties that she must fulfill, but her rights depend on the arbitrary will of man." His critic called this accusation "unfounded and unjust."140

On September 27 he lectured at the Hahnemann Medical College of Philadelphia on "The Claims of Literary

138Hiram Corson, "The University of the Future," (Cornell University Press, 1875), Title page of the pamphlet.

139Letter from John S. Wirt to Hiram Corson, Baltimore, May 1, 1875.

140Literary World, Boston, October 1, 1875.
Culture upon the Medical Profession." Notices of the lecture appeared in several papers, including two in New York, the Herald and the Evening Telegraph. The latter reported, "The power of correct and attractive expression is invaluable to the physician who has discoveries to announce or new theories to explain." Because of Corson's reputation as teacher and writer, "the medical profession will find in this lecture suggestions of permanent value." 141

During the ensuing year a group in Syracuse organized a Canterbury Club with the intention of studying the times and works of Chaucer. To inaugurate the club, Corson gave a parlor reading at the home of Miss Hicks, his favorite Browning student. "A large number of Syracusans were present, among whom were professors of the University and Clergymen of the city." 142 The club members were "good classical German and French scholars." 143

Eugene, in medical college in Philadelphia, was amused by his father's account of the visit to Syracuse.

I think taking it all together your Syracuse trip was a great success. Although I was grieved to hear of your uncomfortable night there was something so very ridiculous about it that I could not help but

141 Evening Telegraph [New York], September 28, 1875.
142 The Cornell Era, October 27, 1876.
143 Ibid.
laugh. Yesterday, during one of the lectures, I thought of you, in that elegantly furnished room with all the lights of the chandelier in full blast, between the mattresses trying to keep warm, and I laughed out right. Surely the Canterbury Club treats you in a princely way.\textsuperscript{144}

Mrs. Corson told Eugene of another trip to Syracuse her husband made on November 3. "He goes in the true presidential style," she wrote. "Isaac hitches the little sorrel to the buggy and drives him to the depot." Members of the club met him at the station, and Mrs. Corson "wondered at their heroism . . . . The thermometer at 7, all the creeks frozen, and a keen biting wind."\textsuperscript{145}

These lectures were so successful that the Canterbury Club invited Corson to present a course in English literature to be given November 17, December 1, December 15, and January 5. Again the parlors of Mrs. Mary D. Hicks, 83 James Street, Syracuse, were used. Tickets for the course were two dollars.\textsuperscript{146} Samuel Thurber, principal of Syracuse High School and member of the club, wrote the professor that 350 copies of the invitation would be issued, "hoping to get responses in sufficient number to justify us in going on."\textsuperscript{147}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{144}Letter from Eugene Corson to Hiram Corson, Philadelphia, October 27, 1876.
\item \textsuperscript{145}Letter from Caroline Corson to Eugene Corson, November 4, 1876.
\item \textsuperscript{146}Invitation of the Canterbury Club to the public, Syracuse, November 6, 1876. Hiram Corson Papers.
\item \textsuperscript{147}Letter from Samuel Thurber to Hiram Corson, Syracuse, November 5, 1876.
\end{itemize}
The club members were all in class when Corson arrived in Syracuse for the first lecture in the series, so Thurber invited him to come directly to the school after which someone from the club would take the professor home with him. The lectures were well received, as Eugene's letter home indicates: "I am greatly delighted of the success of Pa's Syracuse Lectures." He also revealed one of Corson's motives in making the appearance. "They will certainly open the way to a wider reputation and may prove to be of great benefit pecuniarily." 148

A Syracuse paper called the December 15 lecture a "literary treat" that was "fraught with comprehensive and exhaustive knowledge." The lecture, on Shakespeare, was illustrated by the interpretative reading of the first act of Othello. The readings "were in tone and emphasis in a correct reflex of the text." Corson's voice was described as "rich, full, and resonant," and in his performance "he evinced the same rare appreciation, earnestness, and discretion that characterized his lecture." 149

Another Syracuse paper, reporting on the final lecture of the series, revealed that he had discussed and read from Spenser, Coleridge, Shelley, and Tennyson, as

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148Letter from Eugene Corson to Caroline Corson, Philadelphia, December 7, 1876.

149Daily Courier [Syracuse], December 16, 1876.
well as Shakespeare. The reporter wrote that he "brought to these lectures the thorough mastery of ripe scholarship and perfect familiarity with his subject." The readings were given "in the Professor's rich voice with the nicest sense of melody and with an appreciation of poetic form that could not but find expression."\(^{150}\)

Cortland was the scene of the next series in March and April, 1877. Corson delivered his lecture readings at the Y.M.C.A. rooms, "sitting at a desk or table which had been placed for his accommodation."\(^{151}\)

The lecture began with an analysis of English poetry and a discussion of the course. The reviewer commented, "If a barometer had been hung up in the room where Professor Corson commenced his remarks, the mercury would have risen to 'dry.'" When he began to illustrate his lecture by reading selections from English poetry, however, he "could not have asked for a more attentive or appreciative audience." His voice was described as "finely cultivated, clear, rich, and sweet," and he read "with that expression which can only come from a familiar acquaintance with, and a sympathetic appreciation of, the gems of thought and language which he selects." Citizens of Cortland were encouraged to attend the lectures, for

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\(^{150}\)Daily Journal [Syracuse], January 6, 1877.

\(^{151}\)Cortland Standard and Journal, March 21, 1877.
"they will be richly worth the time and money it will cost to hear them."152

In his second lecture he began by discussing the "monosyllabic element in English poetry," illustrating his points with readings from the Bible and Tennyson. Next followed comments on alliteration, with examples from Shakespeare and Byron. Finally he traced the Spenserian stanza through a number of writers, ending with an "exquisite" reading of "To a Skylark."153

Tennyson's verse, the subject of lecture three, was illustrated by readings of "Maud," "Palace of Art," "The Two Voices," "The Daisy," and "In Memoriam." The audience was "in doubt as to which gave the greater pleasure, the beauty of the selections or the melody of voice and intonation with which they were rendered."154 Corson closed his series at the Cortland Y.M.C.A. with a lecture entitled "Helps to the Study of Shakespeare."155

Sometimes Corson went to nearby Wells College, a school for women in Aurora, New York, to teach a course. In January of 1878 he gave six lectures there on nineteenth century literature. He followed this series with

152Cortland Standard and Journal, March 21, 1877.
154Cortland Standard and Journal, April 4, 1877.
155Ibid.
ten lectures in Syracuse, sponsored by the Portfolio Club.  

An exchange of correspondence between Corson and Richard Grant White indicates that the professor went to New York in 1878 or 1879 for two lectures on Spenser and Milton. They discussed a fee of five hundred dollars, "clear of all expenses."  

In his first decade at Cornell Hiram Corson began a practice that he was to continue for the remainder of his career. He frequently travelled to engagements as a reader-lecturer away from home. He appears to have done so for two reasons: first, he was enabled thereby to augment his salary, and second, he wanted to establish a reputation as a scholar beyond the confines of the university. The latter reason also sent him to England, and the former enabled him to finance his journey.

**CORSON IN EUROPE**

As a professor of English literature, Hiram Corson was involved in the critical study of Shakespeare through classroom lectures and readings of the plays for a variety of audiences. In addition, he wrote a critical column for *The Cornell Review* entitled "Shakespeariana."

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157 Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, July 18, 1878.
Through all this work he achieved a scholarly reputation enhanced by his friendships with other respected critics. One of his oldest and best friends, Horace Howard Furness, was instrumental in introducing him to the exclusive circle of British and American Shakespearian critics. In 1874, on the recommendation of Furness, Corson was made a vice president of the New Shakspere Society in London.\footnote{Letter from F. J. Furnivall to Hiram Corson, London, February 16, 1874. The spelling of Shakespeare's name was controversial. Furnivall, as founder of the New Shakspere Society, dictated that the organization would adopt that spelling. However, most of the scholars, including Corson, preferred and continued to use the spelling "Shakespeare." See Hiram Corson, Introduction to Shakespeare (Boston: D. C. Heath and Co.,), 1889, pp. 358-360 for a discussion of the controversy. A letter to Corson from J. Parker Norris, April 6, 1874, and one from H. H. Furness, February 17, 1874, are also enlightening on the matter of Furnivall's dogmatism.}

The Society invited Corson to lecture on "Shakespeare's Versification" the second Friday in June, 1877, at their regular meeting. The \textit{Ithaca Daily Journal} voiced the opinion of many by responding to the announcement:

> Every American must be proud of this testimony from a people not inclined to over-estimate American scholarship, and every one who has heard the Professor will applaud their choice and wish him the pleasantest and most satisfactory conclusion to his labors.\footnote{January 11, 1877.}

Since the professor had to finance his trip to Europe, he decided to spend the entire summer there. He
sailed on May 19 aboard the *S.S. England* and returned in September for the beginning of the fall term. With him he took letters of introduction from J. Parker Norris and H. H. Furness to many Shakespeare scholars, including Halliwell-Phillipps, Samuel Timmins, and C. M. Ingleby. Leaving Ithaca May 17, he arrived in Jersey City the next day. Eugene met him, and they rode a boat together to New York, where Eugene was completing his medical internship on Ward's Island.

From aboard ship Corson wrote his wife of his expectations from the experience. "I know the benefits I shall derive in various ways, will be felt all the rest of my life."  

Soon after his arrival in Liverpool, he went on to London, where he called on Furnivall. Together they went to the Philological Society of London. Corson was introduced to "Mr. Ellis, the author of the great book on Early English pronunciation, and Mr. Skeat, the Anglo-Saxon scholar."

During his first Saturday in London, he visited the British Museum, the enormity of which caused him to

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160 *The Cornell Era*, May 4, 1877.
161 Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, May 18, 1877, New York.
162 Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, May, 1877.
163 Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, June 2, 1877.
say he felt that he had been spending his life nibbling at a little corner of a vast book. Later that day he went to the Houses of Parliament and Westminster Abbey, devoting most of his time to Poets' Corner.  

Furnivall read over Corson's paper on versification and criticized it, saying that some of his points "had not been sufficiently worked out." Corson wrote, "I trust he will think better of it when I read it." To him, the sense could be communicated best through oral reading. He found that "Mr. Furnivall doesn't appreciate interpretative rendering, apart from an intellectual definition of things."  

The professor had been staying at the Arundel Private Hotel since his arrival in London. He was preparing to move to a boardinghouse when he received a note from C. M. Ingleby, inviting him to the British scholar's estate in Ilford, fifteen miles from London. He left immediately for the country, returning on June 9 for his lecture at London University. Mrs. Corson received the following account of the proceedings:  

There was a full attendance, and all Shakespearians. Tom Taylor presided. I was introduced and began my paper. I had understood that the papers generally do not exceed half an hour in length. Accordingly, at the end of the first half hour, I

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164Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, June 2, 1877.

165Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, June, 1877.
addressed the Prest. and asked whether I should stop. There was a general voice to go on. I continued another half hour, and another half hour—This was the longest reading they have yet had, and I felt that my success was far beyond all expectation. At the close, a vote of thanks was presented me on the motion of one of the members, and the President then made a speech in which he reviewed my paper and pronounced it the most valuable they had yet had on the subject of Shakespeare's verse. . . . Mr. Furnivall then made a short speech—raised an objection or two, to some of the theories I presented, to which some other members responded in my favor. . . . I left feeling that my paper was more than a success, it was a triumph.166

Corson referred to the day as the most eventful in his life and said he would "always look back upon it with deep satisfaction."167

Members of the Society were also complimentary of his delivery, apparently surprised by an American who did not "speak through his nose . . . use slang words . . . and have his speech interlarded with Americanisms." The Secretary said to him "Your English is not in the least distinguishable from ours."168

Caroline, who had been anxiously awaiting news of the meeting in Ithaca, wrote of her concern and subsequent joy:

the world and you and I and Eugene would have gone on just the same, but for the effect on you: I prayed as I never prayed, that . . . you may be saved too bitter disappointment. . . . So you may judge of

166Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, June 9, 1877. Valentines, Ilford.
167Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, June 9, 1877.
168Ibid.
my joy in learning of a "triumph" when I scarcely dared hope for success. Not that I did not feel confident that your paper was all it should be, but because the world at large knows so little of what is really good.169

Following the meeting Corson went back to Valentines, the Ingleby estate, where he and his host discussed their common interest in spiritualism and toured the doctor's huge landed estate. "The Central Park in New York is far inferior to Dr. Ingleby's private grounds."170

From there he went to Birmingham, where Samuel Timmins, founder of the Shakespeare Memorial Library in that city, took him to his room at the Queen's and North Western Hotel. As Timmins' guest at the Liberal Club, he met "a wealthy solicitor," Mr. Matthews, who owned "the completest set of editions of Tennyson outside the British Museum."

Matthews invited Corson to his villa to see the collection, and he had "the great pleasure of turning over all the earliest editions."171 Possibly Corson met the poet during his visit, for he wrote home, "Mr. Tennyson visits the Furnivalls sometimes. I hope to meet him there."172

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169Letter from Caroline Corson to Hiram Corson, June 21, 1877.
170Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, June 6, 1877.
171Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, June 12, 1877.
172Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, June 6, 1877.
From Birmingham, Corson went to Stratford for a week of sightseeing. There he visited Edgar Flower, who had also "entertained Emerson, Lowell, Longfellow, Fields, Bryant, William Lloyd Garrison, Hawthorne, and others." After dinner he read aloud to the family from Chaucer's Prologue.173

He also visited Warwick Castle. "One room contained an exhaustive Bibliotheca Shakespeariana, so exhaustive that I discovered my 'Jottings on the Text of Hamlet,'" he wrote his wife.174 Next he went to Oxford, where a letter from Goldwin Smith admitted him to the Bodleian Library. He spent one day there, examining the collection of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts. He met the Dean of Trinity College while he was strolling on campus, and together they went along Addison's Walk and discussed American authors. Corson summarized their talk:

The Dean said he had once asked Goldwin Smith his opinion of Walt Whitman, and that he had said he was "a wallowing hog." The admiration I find everywhere, for Longfellow, surprises me. Bret Harte is not appreciated in England; but with everyone, the Bigelow Papers of James Russell Lowell is a favorite.175

On Saturday evening he went with James Parker, "the Publisher," to the Victoria Theatre in Oxford to see

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173 Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, June 19, 1877.

174 Ibid.

175 Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, June 19, 1877.
Charles Matthews in "My Awful Dad." He found the entertainment "fourth rate" in comparison with New York theatres.  

By this time, the professor had become exhausted by his demanding schedule. Delaying his planned trip to Paris, he went at Furnivall's recommendation to Ilkley, in order to rest, "meet with pleasant people, and get the best air in England."  

At Ilkley, he met a "choice companion," John William Watson, who was there with his mother from Liverpool. Corson wrote, "I have never in my life met a young man with such a remarkable knowledge of English and American poetry, and with such subtle critical taste." Watson, who later dropped "John" from his name, was to have a brilliant career in literature. He was "the poet who after Tennyson was able to command the largest following and the widest respect among the critics and reading public of the 1890's." In addition, he was a respected literary critic. When Tennyson died in 1892,  

176 Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, June 25, 1877.  
177 Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, June 30, 1877.  
178 Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, July 4, 1877.  
Watson was among the leading candidates for the laureateship, and on June 4, 1917, he was knighted to become Sir William. He and Corson corresponded in the years following the professor's return to America, and they shared their writing with each other. Corson recognized the young man's talent and encouraged him to continue writing poetry, offering to have some of his sonnets published in the Cornell periodicals.

On January 2, 1878, Watson wrote his old friend that he was sending

a transcript of Part First of a poem which I began a little while ago, after much plotting and deliberation. It is little more than a Fairy Tale, and altogether fanciful and unrealistic both in structure and style. My friends here pronounce it "a success," considering it immeasurably in advance of anything I have essayed before, which goodness knows it may well be, without being anything very prodigious. I will send it to you when I get it copied out, feeling assured that if there by any goodness in it you will not fail to find it.

The untitled poem, sent on January 5, is in thirteen pages of the poet's handwriting. According to Watson's biographer,

Although little is known about his activities during the two years prior to the publication of his first volume in 1880, there can be little doubt that he was hard at work on a long narrative poem, "The City of Youth: A Faery Romance," later to be called "The Prince's Quest."

180Nelson, p. ii.
182Nelson, p. 35.
The work that he sent to Corson is definitely an early draft of his only long narrative poem, "The Prince's Quest." He must have begun working on it after Corson left him in 1877, for his references to it indicate that the professor had not been introduced to it before. In April of 1880 it became the central work of his first volume, The Prince's Quest and Other Poems.183

When Corson met him at Ilkley in July of 1877, Watson was approaching his nineteenth birthday on August 2. Despite the difference in their ages, they became immediate friends and enjoyed the vacation together. Guests at the Craiglands, where Corson and the Watsons were staying, amused themselves in the evenings by taking turns at entertainment. The professor wrote to his wife about his contributions.

Monday evening, I read a scene from the "Merchant of Venice," which was much applauded. There were about 70 guests present—among them the Viscountess Ashbrooke, a pretty but silly woman, no not silly, but shallow. Last evening, I read Bret Harte's "Tennessee's Partner" which fell perfectly flat. It wasn't understood at all, no more than if it had been Sanskrit. And yet I read my best. I was aware, in less than two minutes after I began, that it would be a failure, and of course it was an ordeal. Before I began, I made a few remarks on the strange relationship which existed in the early days of California life . . . for the purpose of putting the audience somewhat au fait as to the story, but it was to no avail. My Liverpool friend was the only one who appreciated it . . . . But the attention was most respectful; yet if everyone had come forward after

183 Nelson, p. 36.
the reading and expressed his or her pleasure, I should have been sure they lied.184 Together with his "Liverpool friend" he walked the next day to Haworth to see the Bronte memorabilia. The Watsons invited him to go back to Liverpool with them; John promised to guide him through the Lake District. His desire to see Windermere, Rydal Mount, Wordsworth's home, and Grasmere, where the poet lived and where he and his family are buried and where De Quincey also lived, caused him to delay his trip to the continent. As a guest of young Watson he also went to York, where he was impressed by the Minster, that city's great cathedral.185

During his Liverpool visit, he entertained the Watson family by readings from Harte, Poe, and Tennyson. Their appreciation was atypical for Englishmen, by Corson's observation. "People here don't seem to care much about reading—the reading, too, in the Churches is so damnable, that the general taste is so vitiated by it that good reading impresses them as very bad."186 He also found the average Englishman inferior to the American in "literary acquaintance and taste." He told Carrie that her favorite, Browning, did not seem to be read at all,

184 Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, July 4, 1877.
185 Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, July 8, 1877.
186 Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, July 18, 1877.
and that Tennyson was read more in the United States than in Britain.\footnote{187}

While Corson was his guest, Watson invited James Ashcroft Noble, a Liverpool essayist and critic of some fame, to meet him.\footnote{188} Watson's first published poem had appeared in Noble's journal, the Liverpool Argus, under the name "John Wilson Maitlaw," an anagram of William Watson.\footnote{189} On July 19 Corson planned a reading from Harte and Tennyson for the Watsons and Noble.\footnote{190}

From Liverpool Corson went to Paris, July 26, where he had letters of introduction from President White to diplomatic figures in that city. He visited the Grand Opera and the Louvre, where he felt the need for at least three days "merely to glance at all the pictures."\footnote{191}

The next stop on the tour was Switzerland, where he was most taken with Lucerne, Interlaken, and Geneva. He took a boat trip to the castle of Chillon and read Byron's "Prisoner of Chillon" in "the dim light of the dungeon."\footnote{192} At Geneva he and Mrs. Bennett, a friend

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\item \footnote{187}{Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, July 17, 1877.}
\item \footnote{188}{Nelson, p. 28.}
\item \footnote{189}{Nelson, p. 31.}
\item \footnote{190}{Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, July 18, 1877.}
\item \footnote{191}{Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, August 3, 1877.}
\item \footnote{192}{Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, August 20, 1877.}
\end{itemize}
from Ithaca whose party he had joined, went to the English Episcopal Church. The guest minister happened to be Mr. Parks, one of Corson's former students at St. Johns. "Mrs. Bennett thought he read the service better than she had heard it for a long time. I told her I had taught the young man how to read!!!"  

On September 5 he sailed for home on the Spain. He wrote Eugene to expect him in New York September 15. "I shall rejoice to set foot again on American soil," he vowed. Although his first trip to Europe had been triumphant, and he had made many literary acquaintances, he was ready to return to his teaching duties at Cornell. 

Corson's trip to lecture for the New Shakspere Society in 1877 was the first of many voyages that he was to make to Europe. During this first visit he met several British literary figures, among them the young poet William Watson. The friendships begun in that summer vacation were to endure. 

In the decade of the 1870's Hiram Corson established the lifestyle he was to follow throughout his career at Cornell University. His literature classes heard lectures and readings from both American and English 

193Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, August 20, 1877. 

194Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, August 17, 1877.
authors, supplemented by Corson's reading performances that were open to the public. His philosophy that interpretative reading was the best method of literary instruction was practiced from his first days at Cornell. He was also a popular guest lecturer, travelling to perform for groups in Pennsylvania and Maryland as well as in New York communities. By the end of the decade he had achieved acclaim at home and abroad as a literary scholar, an interpretative reader, and an English professor.
Chapter 4

THE BROWNING YEARS: 1880-1889

Although Hiram Corson spent much of his time throughout his life at Cornell University in the interpretation and performance of Robert Browning's poetry, the time of his most intense concentration in that study can be limited to the decade from 1881 to 1889, the last ten years of the poet's life. During that time, Corson continued the Ithaca Browning Club that he had begun several years earlier. He also was instrumental in the formation of other Browning Clubs in several American cities and on other university campuses. When the London Browning Society was formed in 1881, Corson became a charter member. That membership led him to make several European visits during which he met his favorite poet and a number of other literary figures in England and other countries. As a result of his concentration on Browning, Corson wrote An Introduction to the Study of Robert Browning's Poetry, a critical work that stood for years as the best in Browning criticism.

Corson did not spend the entire decade concentrating solely on the study of Browning. He was active both in Ithaca and in other cities in America as a lecturer and
performer of literature. He also wrote another well-respected critical work, *Introduction to the Study of Shakespeare*. His primary consideration during the decade, however, was the poetry of Browning.

CORSON AND AMERICAN BROWNING CLUBS

A few days before Hiram Corson first met Robert Browning in July, 1881, he had a conversation with Dr. Frederick James Furnivall, the noted British literary scholar, concerning the Browning Club that Corson had begun in Ithaca, New York. Of the conversation Corson said, "I told him of what I had done at Cornell University, the previous four or five years, in a Browning Club composed of Professors and their wives, and in my University classes."¹ This organization, begun on November 9, 1878, was the first Browning Club ever established. Dr. Corson, Hiram's uncle, mentioned the significance of the club in his account of the family history:

He has probably done more to promote the study of the poet than anyone else in the country. He had conducted a club in the University . . . for some years before . . . 1881. Up to that time the general reader had hardly looked into the poet's works, which had the undeserved reputation of being "wilfully

¹Hiram Corson, "A Few Reminiscences of Robert Browning," *The Cornell Era*, XL (April, 1908), 295-96. See also Chapter 3 of the present study.
obscure, unconscientiously careless and perversely harsh."²

Browning's earliest poem, Pauline, was published in 1833.³ Although Hiram Corson was reading Browning's poetry as early as 1862 when he delivered his second course of lectures in Philadelphia, Caroline Corson began reading the poet first.⁴ In Corson's early lectures, he emphasized the poetry of Elizabeth Barrett Browning. He probably came to study Robert Browning's work as the result of the respect he had for Mrs. Browning's writing and the regard he had for his own wife's literary recommendations. Whatever his reasons, Hiram Corson was among the first scholars in America to recognize the significant place in English literature that the poetry of Robert Browning deserved. In order to share his enthusiasm for Browning study with his colleagues, he formed the Browning Club at Cornell.

In addition to establishing this club in Ithaca, Corson was instrumental in the formation of other American Browning clubs and discussion groups. In


³The Corsons' daughter, born in 1857, was named Pauline, and Eugene, their son, named his own daughter Pauline for his sister, who died at the age of seventeen.

⁴Pauline Corson Coad, "Hiram Corson's Friendship with Browning," The Georgia Review, VI (Winter, 1952), 413.
February, 1882, he went to Philadelphia both to lecture and to inaugurate the study of Browning in the Century Club of that city. The Century Club had been established in 1876 and had confined its studies to Tennyson and Chaucer before the visit of Professor Corson. During that visit he gave three presentations on the poetry of Robert Browning.  

The Corsons had lived in Philadelphia for a number of years before they moved to New York, and Hiram had maintained a lively correspondence with Horace Howard Furness, a noted literary scholar in Philadelphia. Most likely Furness was responsible for Corson's invitation to initiate the Browning study there. Hiram Corson was already well known in literary circles in Philadelphia, for he had been a charter member of their Shakespeare Society, inaugurated in the 1850's, the oldest literary club in America.  

Boston was the next city in which Corson lectured on Browning. An article, "The Study of Browning," in which the critic discussed the obstacles to Browning study in that city, appeared in the Boston Evening Transcript, March 25, 1882. He stated, "Years ago the American public nibbled at Browning, pronounced him

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5 The Cornell Sun, March 1, 1882.
6 Ibid.
impossible of assimilation, and dropped him in puzzled despair." Nor did he have much hope for Browning's ever being the poet of the people. "Popularity Browning cannot have in our century, because most people will remain too busy or too dull to understand him." However, the critic prophesied that "Browning will probably remain the poet of an intellectual aristocracy. But what his disciples lack in numbers will be made up in quality."

The reporter referred to an article in Literary World in which F. J. Furnivall, founder of the newly-formed London Browning Society, had requested that American admirers of Browning join the London Society.

There must be countrymen of Lincoln and Garfield who know that 'poet' means 'maker,' 'creator' of men and women who shall live in the brain and heart of all readers, and does not mean writer of sugar-sweet inanities with perfect rhymes. These are the folk we want for our Browning Society. Let them step forward and join us.7

The critic further reported that the Browning Society prospectus in no way pledged members to "indiscriminate admiration of Browning." The papers that the society planned to publish used "frankness of expression."

Furnivall's request met with the Transcript critic's favor, but he lamented:

7Evening Transcript [Boston], March 25, 1882.
with our acknowledgement of it must be coupled the humiliating admission that we have hardly the material or the enthusiasm for the formation of a similar society at home.

He also held that the founding of a "serious and earnest Browning club is at present a psychological impossibility in Boston." He felt that there were some hopeful signs, citing in particular an increase in attendance at local Browning readings "and an evident absorption on the part of the audiences." He asserted that this interest implied "a conscientious wish to do justice to unappreciated genius."

Such was the attitude toward Browning that prevailed in Boston when Corson came a month later to read and lecture. His invitation was signed by Col. T. W. Higginson, H. E. Scudder, Arthur Gilman, Rev. H. W. Foote, Rev. Edward Abbott (editor of the Literary World), Rev. Edward Everett Hale, Levi Thaxter, Rev. O. B. Frothingham, Dr. H. I. Bowditch, and others.8 Corson accepted the invitation in a printed announcement that read:

The invitation I have the honor to receive from you to deliver a selection from my lectures on the poetry of Robert Browning, during my visit to Boston, it gives me great pleasure to accept.

I shall present a lecture on each of two cardinal ideas of Browning's poetry; namely, Personality, as

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8From the addressees of Corson's printed acceptance of the invitation to speak in Boston. Ithaca, N. Y., March 28, 1882.
the ultimate source of soul-quickening and regeneration, and Art, as a vice-agent of Personality.

Following the lectures, the Literary World reported that

The only criticism we have heard of the lectures was directed toward their titles, which one friend at our elbow complained of as being almost obscure as some of Mr. Browning's poetry itself. A lecturer on Browning, it was held, should of all things aim at simplicity of terms.9

The lectures in the parlors of the Boston Woman's Club "were listened to by audiences not as large as they should have been, but of notable quality; and evidently made a profound impression." In the opinion of the Literary World, "they should be asked for elsewhere."10

Whether or not Corson's two lectures in Boston led to the formation of organized Browning clubs in that city is uncertain. However, the lectures seem to have met with a response as favorable as the critic for the Boston Evening Transcript had believed possible.

Corson met with success in establishing a Browning club in Syracuse, New York. In a letter to the editor of the Chicago Unity, Mr. Charles D. B. Mills, a member of the Syracuse Browning Club, acknowledged his organization's debt to Corson.

This Club owed much to Prof. Hiram Corson, of Cornell University, one of the really profound scholars in English literature in our country, and a very warm

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9Literary World [Boston], April 22, 1882.
10Ibid.
admirer, as he is an acquaintance and personal friend of Browning. He has interested himself deeply in the establishment of clubs devoted to the study of this poetry, and I think there are quite flourishing ones in several of the Eastern cities.11 Mills gave an account of the activity of his organization, which possibly was representative of the other clubs that Corson helped initiate. He asserted that the club had a large membership—"indeed, more have applied for admission than it was practicable to receive." Since the formation of the club, October 21, 1882, interest had grown from all religious groups.

We have Catholics, the orthodox Protestant denominations are liberally represented, and there are naturally Unitarians, Universalists, and the Free Religious. Leading orthodox clergymen of the city, particularly Presbyterian and Episcopalian, are members, and freely participate.12

The club's members represented the best minds of Syracuse. "And together we sit to the consideration of this eminently gifted and powerful mind."

Mills was specific concerning the work of the club. Through conversation and discussion, the members analyzed the poetry for "possession of the frequently deep-lying thought." They also sought to explicate the poetic allusions "to things unknown to most." The task was performed by "careful division of labor." Presumably

11Unity [Chicago], December 1, 1883.
12Ibid.
assignments from the poems were made to specific members of the group who then read their selections to the others and led discussion. The first year of the Syracuse Browning Club the members read and discussed The Ring and the Book. Of the second year's study that they were undertaking at the time of his writing to Unity, Mills explained:

the volume Men and Women is the one upon which we have begun, taking from that what may seem the most significant selections. At the last reading, 'By the Fireside' and 'The Experience of Karshish' were considered, and very much enjoyed.13

According to Mills, everything the Syracuse Browning Club had accomplished could be duplicated in "almost any city or town in the country, by a little resolute effort."14

Further evidence that Corson was intimately affiliated with the Syracuse Browning Club is supplied by a letter to him from Mr. Furnivall, founder of the London Society. The letter also reveals that the Browning scholars went to great lengths to make sure that Browning's books were put into print.

The welcome constitution of the Syracuse Browning Club has just been sent me by Miss Hickey. You have evidently been the cause of its founding and we all feel grateful to you. As the club is reading The Ring and the Book, I've sent a card to Mrs. Bage, asking her if the members will help to print the Book. Whatever is raised in the USA I'll try to match with a like amount here. Have you yet asked

13Unity [Chicago], December 1, 1883.
14Ibid.
any of your rich friends about this Reprint? As soon as 50 pounds is paid, I shall ask B.[rowing] to let me send the Book to press, as that will pay for Part I of it.15

On the day that Furnivall wrote this letter, Hiram Corson was lecturing at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. In fact, in the winter terms of three years—1883, 1884, and 1885—he was at Johns Hopkins as a special lecturer on English literature.

Corson's friend and correspondent C. M. Ingleby suggested that he might have been responsible for the appointment to Johns Hopkins. He wrote that he "had the pleasure of giving your name as the worthiest of all Columbia's sons for the purpose of such lectures as those you describe."16 Corson entered the engagement with the approval of an unidentified committee at Cornell. Eugene established this fact in a letter to his mother that read, "I most sincerely trust that the committee may permit father's dividing his time between Cornell and the Johns Hopkins."17 The committee obviously did approve, for Corson received a letter from President Gilman of Johns Hopkins informing him that "there is a great eagerness to hear you beyond the limits


16Letter from C. M. Ingleby to Corson, Valentines, Ilford, May 7, 1885.

17Letter from Eugene Corson to Caroline Corson, Savannah, Georgia, February 17, 1883.
of our own company."18

In 1883 in his first course he gave five lectures on the aesthetics of English verse and five lectures on nineteenth century poetry, with emphasis on Tennyson, Robert Browning, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. The twenty lectures in 1884 were on the poetry and drama of the Restoration and on Sheridan; the twenty lectures in 1885 were on Shakespeare.19

Before leaving Ithaca for Baltimore, Corson received a letter from the Office of the President, Johns Hopkins, explaining the reasons that his lecture periods would be limited to an hour.

In regard to the time of delivery, I am sorry to say that all our usages require the lecturer to close within the hour. Ladies depend on escorts, many people govern their dinner hour by our arrangement, and there are evening engagements with which we cannot interfere. Pleasant therefore as it would be to hear you for a longer time, I do not think we can ask you to go beyond the hour. While in Baltimore, if you feel disposed to give an extra hour for readings, I am sure it would be welcome.20

This letter also indicated that the audience was to be composed of other Baltimore residents in addition to students regularly enrolled in Johns Hopkins University. Corson referred to the audience in a letter to his wife.

18Letter from Gilman to Corson, Baltimore, December 17, 1883.

19The Corson Family, p. 102.

20Letter from Gilman to Corson, Baltimore, December 18, 1882.
The demand for admission to my lecture this afternoon was such that a large number of people were unable to get tickets. A gentleman called on me, at my boarding house, about an hour before the time for the lectures to begin, to know how he could get admittance—he had applied for a ticket at the University office, and the registrar would not give out anymore. Every seat was occupied; and what is unusual, a large number of the resident and non-resident professors were present. Dr. Gilman told me of one professor who said he was going to cut two engagements in order to hear me.21

The lectures were also open to students, as the letter indicates:

Dr. Gilman told me of one student who spent a great part of last night over Spenser preparing himself for my lecture today. Such interest inspires me.22

Corson also reported that two of the morning papers carried notices of his first lecture, but he seemed to be dissatisfied with the intellectual capacity of the reporter. "Of course, they are very unsatisfactory notices—they represent what the reporter could get hold of and understand. But they are favorable."23 The second group of lectures would be even better attended than the first, he wrote, for they "will have a more general interest than the first group on verse, so that I can count on a more than sustained interest." Corson took seriously Dr. Gilman's suggestion of an extra hour of readings. "My special talk on Browning and the Reading

21Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, Baltimore, July 11, 1883.
22Ibid.
23Ibid.
are to take place next Tuesday." Browning was still foremost in Corson's attention, although the course of lectures for which he had been engaged was not so specialized. He discussed the interest in Browning in Baltimore.

As we started for the Lecture Room yesterday, Dr. Gilman said, you've got hold of the students, even those whose lines of work are not literary. He is full now of the idea of a Browning Club; and yesterday he asked me whether I couldn't give them an extra hour, to talk about the Browning Society of London, its aims and what it has already done, etc., and to give a Browning Reading. The students have seen him about it. So I shall probably be the organizer of 'The Johns Hopkins University Browning Club.'

Corson spent much of his free time in Baltimore being entertained by a number of people connected with the university. He told Caroline that on the evening of January 11 he had dined at the home of Dr. Wood, Professor of Anglo Saxon and English Literature. Dr. Wood had invited several members of the faculty in addition to some of the "literary students" to meet him. During the evening he was asked to perform, and he did not decline.

I spent a delightful evening. I was asked to read some Anglo Saxon poetry (Beowulf). There were three Anglo Saxon scholars present, and some Chaucer. This was in the Library, after dinner. We then met the ladies in the parlor, where we had a charming talk

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24 Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, 132 West Madison Street, Baltimore, Maryland, January 13, 1883.

25 Ibid.
and some Browning Reading.26

The scholars at Johns Hopkins were full of praise for Corson's lectures, and he reported their comments to his wife.

Dr. Wood also said that my lectures on verse surpassed anything they had had on the subject . . . . President Gilman said to me, yesterday, that he had considered them the best lectures they had had, in the university, and, he added, the most scholastic and the most carefully prepared. He repeated this to Dr. Thomas in my hearing, and the Dr. said they had had no lectures since the founding of the University like them.27

Corson's letter included a request:

Please don't repeat this. If you do, it'll be paraded in one of the Cornell papers. I should not like what such men say to me, or in my hearing, to be put in a newspaper.28

Either the professor was a modest person or he did not want to appear immodest by being the reporter of criticism filled with praise for his work.

Corson also told Caroline that the room was crowded for his lecture on January 12, and "a large number couldn't obtain seats." The audience, he said, was quite enthusiastic over his analysis and illustrations of the stanza of Tennyson's "Palace of Art."29

On the afternoon that he completed the first half of his lectures he wrote home, pleased with the favorable

26Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, January 13, 1883.
27Ibid. 28Ibid. 29Ibid.
response. Twice as many people as could be seated in Hopkins Hall had requested tickets. Supreme Court Justice Brown called the talks the best he had ever heard there. Indicating that reading was an integral part of his method of delivery, Corson made some observations concerning his satisfaction with his performance.

I never lectured with more satisfaction nor was made to feel, so deeply, the interest of the audiences. My voice has been in perfect condition, and I don't think I ever read better. I haven't had the slightest cold, although the weather has been most unfavorable to keeping the voice in good condition. Corson seems to have had an impact on the social life of Baltimore, for he reported that Mrs. Egerton, owner of the boarding house where he stayed during his course, had told him that people had changed their "reception hour" on account of the series.

Corson was not the only source of intellectual stimulation or entertainment in Baltimore. He was particularly interested to learn that Salvini would be in town the coming week to play Othello, Hamlet, and Lear. Corson confided to his wife, "I want to see his Othello."

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30Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, Baltimore, January 18, 1883.

31Ibid.

32Ibid.

33Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, Baltimore, January 18, 1883.
Corson's earlier prophecy that he would be the organizer of the Johns Hopkins University Browning Club was fulfilled. A letter to Caroline on January 25, 1883, described the circumstances of the organizational meeting of the club.

I wrote you in my morning's letter that there was to be a special meeting at the University at one o'clock today, to take into consideration the organization of a Browning Club. I went over a little before the time and saw President Gilman, in his office, and talked over matters which it was thought best to present, and then started for the hall, which is in the same building. On the way, Dr. Gilman said, 'Now, I don't know what sort of a company we shall find in the hall, but there'll probably be enough there to make a beginning.' When we entered, he was startled—the hall was nearly full! And of the best people in the city! I said, 'Why, here's enough for half a dozen clubs.' He laughed.

I was expecting a familiar conference with ten or a dozen; but I saw I was 'in for it.' Pres't Gilman stated the object of the meeting, and then informed the audience that I'd acquaint them with the history of Browning study in England and America, and present my views on the best modes and aims of that study. I talked about an hour and then there was some general talk, and the company dispersed. Such enthusiasm I haven't met with before. A large number said they would send their subscriptions at once to London, for last year and this. Mrs. Frick, who leads the fashions in Baltimore, and is regarded as the great patron of music, etc., was present. She gives me a reception next Tuesday from 4 to 6, where I shall meet the creme de la creme of Baltimore. I have been told that whatever she smiles upon, is sure of success. So I may consider Browning study well inaugurated here.

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33Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, Baltimore, January 18, 1883.
He closed the letter with a comment that he would deliver his ninth lecture at 5:00 o'clock that afternoon, and with the enthusiastic statement: "How wonderfully well everything has gone off thus far!"

Corson gave at least one more lecture in Baltimore during this visit. The University printed a flyer dated January 31, 1883, that contained a copy of Browning's "My Last Duchess." The poem was for the use of the audience at Professor Corson's lecture on "the constitution and characteristics of Browning's favorite art form, the dramatic monologue."

During the summer following Corson's Baltimore series, Dr. Gilman visited Europe. He took with him a letter of introduction from Hiram Corson to Robert Browning. According to Gilman, the letter led to a "pleasant interview" with Browning at the American Club in London. Gilman wrote Corson that Browning had spoken affectionately of him and admiringly of the work in the Baltimore Browning Clubs. Gilman also urged Browning to visit America, but the poet refused because he did not want to make an ocean voyage.34

The following January again saw Professor Corson lecturing successfully in Baltimore. The Johns Hopkins University circulated a notice advising the public that

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34Letter from D. C. Gilman to Hiram Corson, July 15, 1884.
"more tickets to Mr. Corson's course of lectures have been already issued to the public than the capacity of the hall warrants." Eugene Corson, a physician in Savannah, wrote his father, "I trust your Baltimore lectures are meeting with the success the first one promised."35

By the middle of February Corson was back in Ithaca, where he received a letter from President Gilman assuring him that he was "still a frequent inspirer of conversation" in Baltimore. Gilman also discussed the Baltimore Browning Societies. "The two clubs are going!! The Merc Library cannot meet the call for Browning literature!!"36 Corson returned to Baltimore for each of the next two winter terms, and he most likely continued to be involved in the Browning Clubs he had begun.

Corson's old friend, H. H. Furness, heard about the Johns Hopkins lectures and wrote: "I am delighted to learn that you have been regularly appointed a Lecturer in Baltimore, and envy all the Johns and Joans Hopkins who will sit under you."37 At the beginning of the 1885

35 Letter from Eugene Corson to Hiram Corson, February 1, 1884.

36 Letter from D. C. Gilman to Hiram Corson, February 15, 1884.

37 Letter from H. H. Furness to Hiram Corson, September 15, 1884.
lecture series, Furness again wrote his friend: "I am glad to see that the Johns Hopkins folk appreciate the gift of God and are eagerly gathering the pearls and diamonds that fall from your lips."\(^{38}\)

Although Corson might have liked to continue his yearly lecture series in Baltimore, the series terminated in 1885. President Gilman wrote explaining the decision of the Johns Hopkins administration not to renew the lectures. Gilman thanked Corson for the three courses he had given and praised their success: "In all the courses, your ready command of abundant learning and your enthusiasm in the study of English literature have been inspiring to large numbers of students."\(^{39}\) Gilman also told Corson that the 1885 series had been "particularly appreciated by residents of Baltimore not formally connected with the University."\(^{40}\)

In reference to a renewal of the appointment, Gilman wrote:

> the committee wish me to say that they desire, if possible, to have a Professor of Literature permanently resident among us, and that they are not able to say on whom the choice will fall; consequently, they are not prepared to propose a

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\(^{38}\) Letter from H. H. Furness to Hiram Corson, January 4, 1885.

\(^{39}\) Letter from President Gilman to Hiram Corson, March 25, 1885.

\(^{40}\) Ibid.
renewal of your appointment.\textsuperscript{41}

This letter, handwritten by a secretary and signed by Gilman, was hardly as warm a farewell as Corson might have expected, considering the effusive praise Gilman had heaped on him in earlier years. However Gilman's annual report to the University in 1885 discussed the success Corson had with his lectures.

So large a number of persons desired to hear Professor Corson and Mr. Gosse (who gave a course of lectures on the rise of classical poetry in England from Shakespeare to Pope) that the authorities of the Peabody Institute kindly opened one of their large halls to the university, and these lectures were therefore announced as under the auspices of both foundations.\textsuperscript{42}

There is no evidence to indicate that Corson ended his association with Johns Hopkins University with any ill will.

Following the termination of his yearly lecture series in Baltimore, Corson appears to have turned his attention to one-night reading performances of Browning. In the second half of the 1880's, he saved three announcements of these readings with his personal papers.

The first announcement tells of a performance at Rutgers College, in Kirkpatrick Chapel. Billing the

\textsuperscript{41}Letter from President Gilman to Hiram Corson, March 25, 1885.

\textsuperscript{42}From the President's Annual Report to Johns Hopkins University, 1885, as reported in The Corson Family, p. 102.
program "An Evening with Browning," the announcement stated:

The following programme is somewhat provisional:
1. Wanting is—What?
2. My Star
3. Prospice
4. Fra Lippo Lippi
5. A Toccata of Galuppi's
6. Abt Vogler
7. Memorabilia
8. How it Strikes a Contemporary
9. An Epistle Containing the Strange Medical Experience of Karshish, the Arab Physician
10. Donald from Jacoseria

Tickets to the performance could be bought for fifty cents at Kilmers drug store and at Shivler's book store in New Brunswick.

Another Browning performance, given on March 16, 1888, was announced by a printed bulletin that stated:

'Subtlest Assertor of the Soul in Song.' Selected Readings, with introduction and critical comment, from poems of Robert Browning. To be given by Prof. Hiram Corson, of Cornell University, Ithaca, at Chapel of High School, Albany, on Friday Evening, March 16th, 1888. The selections to be presented will be from the following poems:
1. How it strikes a contemporary.
2. Popularity.
3. My Last Duchess.
5. A Toccata of Galuppi's.
7. Up at a Villa, Down in the City.
8. Memorabilia.

44Ibid.
11. Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister.
13. Meeting at Night.
14. Parting at Morning.
15. Home Thoughts from Abroad.
16. Home Thoughts from the Sea.
17. My Star.
18. Wanting is—What?
20. Donald.

This Programme is somewhat provisional, and order of selections may be slightly varied.

The fact that the program was advertised as being "provisional" seems to indicate that it was a stock program from which Corson made specific selections for each engagement. The very existence of a stock program indicates that he was in demand in performing the poetry of Robert Browning.

Another printed bulletin that Corson saved with his important papers announced:

The twentieth meeting of the Browning Society will be held at The Brunswick, on Tuesday, March 27th, at 3 p.m. Professor Corson, of Cornell University, will read Selected Poems, with Comments. Guest tickets, at fifty cents each, can be procured at the cashier's desk of the Prang Educational Company, No. 7 Park Street. Also at the door on the afternoon of the reading. It is requested that membership as well as guest tickets be presented at the door.

Throughout the decade of the 1880's Hiram Corson was active in disseminating the poetry of Browning, or at least an appreciation of that poetry, throughout the northeastern United States.

His association with American Browning Clubs was extensive. The first such club was established at Cornell
University in 1878. Hiram Corson founded it in order for professors and their wives to discuss the complexities of Browning's poetry as well as to read it aloud to each other.

In 1882 he established another Browning club in Philadelphia. Later that same year he went to Boston to lecture and read from Browning, although an organization did not result from his visit. He had more success in Syracuse, New York. The Browning Club there was organized in October, 1882, following Corson's guest lecture. Both the recording secretary and F. J. Furnivall credited Corson with its founding.

In 1883, 1884, and 1885, Corson lectured at Johns Hopkins University, where he was responsible for the establishment of another Browning club. The club was supported not only by students and faculty of the university but also by Baltimore society.

Following his successful reading series in Baltimore, Corson turned to single performances of Browning for the remainder of the decade. He is known to have performed at Rutgers College and also in Albany, New York. The time that he spent in America in the 1880's was devoted to the poetry of Robert Browning.

CORSON'S ASSOCIATION WITH BROWNING IN EUROPE

In addition to his work with Browning clubs in America, Corson was instrumental in the study of Browning
in Europe. In the 1880's he and his wife travelled extensively, and Corson established himself as a Browning scholar on the continent as well as in England. In July, 1881, he and Caroline were in London where he met Robert Browning. Years later Corson recalled their visit for The Cornell Era. The tone of Browning's invitation implies that the poet made an appointment at Corson's request for an interview. Browning wrote:

I shall be happy to see you if it can suit your arrangements to call here on Sunday morning at any time before noon, when I have an engagement. I wish I were able to dispose of my time more liberally, but the crowded 'end of the season' presses heavily on us all.

Corson sacrificed his plan to go up the Thames with his wife and the Furnivalls that Sunday morning in order to comply with Browning's request. After the appointment Corson joined the picnickers in the afternoon at "a pretty place across the river from Hampton Court."

In the hansom ride to the Browning residence at 19 Warwick Crescent, West, Corson tried to think of what he might "say to the great poet. I had fancied that his talk would be of a 'high argument,' and I desired to be

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46Letter to Hiram Corson from Robert Browning, July 14, 1881.

up to 'the height' of it."48 Browning received Corson in the drawing room on the second floor of his house "with great cordiality,"49 and the tone of their conversation was at once "charming and chatty."50 The poet maintained "a rapid and meandering current of talk."51 Corson mentioned "the Book," and Browning took him to the library to see it. "The Book" was "a square old yellow book with crumpled vellum covers"52 that Browning had bought from a man in Florence for eight pence. It had led to the composition of The Ring and the Book, Browning's masterpiece in Corson's view.53 On their way to the library, Browning pleased Corson by draping his arm over his guest's shoulder "as if I were a younger brother." In this manner they descended the stairs, Browning "talking all the while at his usual rapid rate."54

Browning read some of the Latin passages in "The Book" aloud to Corson, who was "struck with the way in which he translated them, the rapid and close recasting of the thought in English, a rare gift, even with the best

48"Reminiscences," p. 296. 49Ibid.  
Latin scholars." When Corson asked him about a particular passage in The Ring and the Book, Browning replied, "I don't remember the passage. It has been some time since I read the poem, and I haven't a copy of it in my house."  

Corson was particularly interested in a copy of Bartoli's "Simboli," for on the fly leaves the poet had written "How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix," one of the poems in Corson's Browning repertoire.

He told me he wrote the poem when on his voyage in a merchantman, he being the only passenger, to Venice, in 1838. The ship was then in the Mediterranean, and the voyage had become very monotonous, as he had no fellow passengers to spend time with, and he longed to be on the back of his favorite horse which he had left at home; and to have a good gallop in imagination, he wrote the poem when the ship was off the coast of Africa.

Corson also asked the poet if he were interested in Chaucer's work. Browning said, "When I was a young man, I read all of Chaucer's poetry, and got out of it all that I wanted, and haven't looked into it since."  

Corson stated that this attitude was typical of Browning's personality: "He always moved on; didn't rest at all in anything he had done; rarely gave a backward glance to his past work."  

56Ibid. 
59"Reminiscences," p. 299.
In addition to this eventful and enlightening visit with Browning, Corson had another experience in London that was to prove important to him. The Inns of Court Hotel, where he and his wife were staying, had private gardens for the guests. After entertaining Furnivall at dinner, Corson walked with his friend in the gardens. Furnivall discussed the society that he and Emily Henriette Hickey, the poet, had been contemplating, and Corson talked of the work of his Browning Club at Cornell. They decided that the London Browning Society should be organized in October and that Corson would return to England the following June to read a paper before the society. Corson not only participated in the founding of the London society but was also a charter member.

In its first year the London Browning Society acquired over one hundred members. One of the Americans to join was Levi Thaxter of Boston, but Corson was the only American professor to become a member of the Browning club in its early years. It was indeed an

60 "Reminiscences," p. 296.
61 Evening Transcript [Boston], March 25, 1882.
62 Ibid.
honor that he was selected to present a paper on the
British poet to an audience composed almost totally of
Browning's own countrymen.

Meetings of the Society were held regularly on
the fourth Friday of every month from October to June,
except in December, "a time when 'Merrie England' is
doubtless too exultant with domestic reunions to allow
any severity of study."64

The Rev. J. Kirkman presented the first address
to the London Browning Society at its inaugural meeting,
held at University College, London, October 28, 1881.65
In his address, entitled "Browning Made Easy," he drew
up a graduated list of poems that "lead any intelligent
person by short and natural steps into the deep heart
of the Browning literature."66 He recommended first
"Rabbi Ben Ezra," to be followed by "Childe Roland,
"Abt-Vogler," Christmas Eve," "Easter Day," "Pocchio-
rotto," and finally The Ring and the Book. The Society
activities during the first year included printing a
bibliography, preparing a primer and concordance, and
issuing a series of photographs depicting scenes that
had inspired some of the poems.67

64Evening Transcript [Boston], March 25, 1882.
65Ibid.
66Ibid.
67Ibid.
Hiram Corson went to London to deliver the last lecture of the Browning Society's first year. His subject was "The Idea of Personality as embodied in Robert Browning's Poetry, and of Art as an intermediate Agency of Personality." Mrs. Corson accompanied him on the voyage, as did Moses Coit Tyler, a friend and colleague from Cornell. His diary recorded an impression of Corson during the trip:

I have never travelled with a more delightful companion. He is an inexhaustible source of entertainment. His mind is a magazine of anecdotes and literary quotations; his wit is brilliant; he has been in gay spirits most of the time; and I have had some of the finest talks with him I ever had with anybody. He quotes Shakespeare or Tennyson by the hour; you mention a word and he has a passage of poetry to quote in which the word occurs; and in critical and speculative thought his conversation is as rich as it is in literary reminiscence. Occasionally he gets out of patience with somebody or something on the ship; but his spurts of anger are also brilliant and amusing.

Naturally one of the first people whom Corson visited upon his arrival in London was Robert Browning. On the day before his Society address he received the following letter from the poet:

I was unfortunately away from home all yesterday and prevented from acknowledging your very kind and


69Letter to Hiram Corson from Eugene Corson, Savannah, April 27, 1882.

70Jessica Tyler Austen, Moses Coit Tyler (New York, 1911), p. 133.
welcome note. Could Mrs. Corson and yourself do my sister and me the great pleasure of taking luncheon with us and nobody else--next Tuesday (27th) at 1 o'clock?71

In his "Reminiscences" Corson wrote of the conversation at this luncheon:

It was what plain, familiar, off-hand talk ought to be, and always is, in the case of a person utterly free, as Browning was, of self-consciousness and intellectual vanity. Never a brilliant thought crystallized in a single sentence. His talk was especially characterized by its cordiality and rapid flow. The 'member of society' and the poet seemed to be quite distinct.72

A few days after Corson's meeting with Browning James Russell Lowell sent the only extant correspondence between the two men. Writing from the Legation of the United States in London, he told Corson a ticket had been reserved for him to visit the House of Commons on Friday, June 30.73 Corson was also invited to visit Matthew Arnold on Tuesday, July 4.74

The professor paid a final call on Browning before leaving London for the island of Guernsey75


72"Reminiscences," pp. 300-301.

73Letter addressed to Professor Corson, 50 Guilford Street, W. C., from James Russell Lowell, London, June 26, 1882.

74Letter to Hiram Corson from Matthew Arnold, June 30, 1882.

75"Reminiscences," p. 302.
where the Corsons spent the rest of the summer. The poet displayed "with great, even boy-like delight" his birthday present from the Browning Societies of London, Oxford, Cambridge, Bradford, Cornell, Cheltenham, and Philadelphia. These clubs had given Browning a set of his own works, "bound in dark olive morocco, in a beautifully carved oak case, space being left for three or more volumes to take the place of the dummies inserted to fill the space." Corson was instrumental in the selection of this gift, for he discovered on his first visit with the poet that Browning had given away all personal copies of his poetry.

During this trip to England Corson seems to have been in some demand as a reader in the British literary circle. Two letters from C. M. Ingleby, whom Corson met during the visit, indicate that he had heard Corson perform. The first letter concerns a performance of American poetry:

Since I had the pleasure of meeting you I have been 'tasting' Bryant. Thus far I have not had a satisfactory piece . . . . May I ask which poem you recited from? . . . Also, did you mention a poem of Wordsworth's called The Yews? 78

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77 Ibid.

78 Letter to Hiram Corson from C. M. Ingleby, Malvernbury, July 7, 1882.
The second letter gives Ingleby's impression of Corson as a performer of Hood:

Halliwell-Phillips paid me a great compliment upon my reciting a poem of Hoods to him and George Wright. He said it reminded him of your recitation. You may be sure I was pleased; but I know that my delivery had not the weight of poise, any more than the depth of tone, which gives such a charm to yours. I shall not readily forget your delivery of Hood's Sonnet on Silence.79

Pauline Corson Coad reported that her grandparents made "annual pilgrimages to England"80 throughout the 1880's, meeting not only with Browning but also with Edmund Gosse, an associate from the lecture days at Johns Hopkins, and with Edward Dowden, a biographer of Browning.81 Hiram Corson wrote of another visit with Browning in 1885, when Joseph Milsand, to whom he dedicated "Sordello," was his houseguest. The poet told his company a story to illustrate his attitude toward critics who thought his work was enigmatical. This attitude was to Browning a "good joke."82 Corson quoted him as having said,

I was visited by the Chinese minister and his attaches, without having been previously informed of their coming. Before they entered, I had noticed

79 Letter to Hiram Corson from C. M. Ingleby, Valentines Ilford, March 15, 1883.
80 Coad, p. 416. 81 Ibid.
82 The Cornell Era (May, 1908), p. 359.
from my window a crowd in the street, which had been attracted by the celestials in their national rigs, who were just then getting out of their carriages, I not knowing then what manner of visitors I was to have. Soon the interpreter announced at the drawing-room door, 'His Excellency, the Chinese Minister and his attaches.' As they entered, the interpreter presented them individually, first, of course, His Excellency, the Minister, and then the rest in order of rank. It was quite an impressive occasion. Recovering myself I said to the interpreter, to what am I indebted for this great honor? He replied: 'You are a distinguished poet in your country, and so is his Excellency in his.' We did obeisance to each other. I then asked the character of his Excellency's poetry. The interpreter replied, 'Chiefly poetical enigmas.' Grasping his Excellency's hand, I said, 'I salute you as a brother.'

When Cornell granted Corson a sabbatical leave for the year 1889-1890, he and his wife decided to spend that time in Italy. They were in Venice from October 27 to November 7. Robert Browning and his sister, Sara Anna Browning, arrived there on November 1, and the professor called on the poet the next day at the Palazzo Rezzonico. Corson observed: "His voice was clear and strong as ever. I thought he had ten years more of good work in him." Corson wrote to Eugene:

Mr. Browning is now in his seventy-eighth year, and is as wonderful a man physically as he is in all

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83The Cornell Era (May, 1908), p. 359.
84Browning's son, Barrett, had bought the Palace on the Grand Canal, once occupied by Clement XIII, and was in the process of restoring it at the time Corson visited Browning there. See also Lilian Whiting, The Brownings, Their Life and Art (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1911), for accounts of Corson's relationship with the poet.
85The Cornell Era, p. 362.
other respects. I walked with him day before yesterday in the Piazza of St. Mark's, and had to accelerate my usual gait to keep up with him. And the vigor and quickness of his mind, one feels while conversing with him, will be proof against time.  

Browning visited the Corsons at the Hotel d'Angleterre on November 7 between ten and eleven o'clock, remaining until time for their departure for Bologna. During this last visit

He told us much about himself; about Asolo . . . the scene of his 'Pippa Passes,' published in 1841. He told us of Pisa . . . and said, 'when you go to Pisa, you must look up at the house and think of us;' told us that one morning, after breakfast, he was standing alone at the window, looking out on the street, when Mrs. Browning stole up behind him, held him by the shoulder to keep him from turning around, slipped a package into his sackcoat pocket, and then hastened out of the room. The package proved to contain the MS. of the (afterwards entitled) 'Sonnets from the Portuguese.' She had kept their composition a secret from him . . . Shelley's poetry, which he much read and loved as a boy, was one of the subjects of our talk. . . . The talk turned from Shelley to Shakespeare. . . . A servant announcing that the gondola had come to take us to the railway station, he rose from his chair, and said, 'Now be sure to visit me next May, in London. You'll remember where my little house is in De Vere Gardens;' and bidding us a cordial good-bye, with a 'God bless you both,' he hastened away. We little thought, full of life as he then was, that we should see him no more in this world.  

Robert Browning died on December 12, 1889. The news of his death reached the Corsons in Florence. Caroline wrote to Eugene in Savannah:

86Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, November 6, 1889.

We have been very much shocked and saddened by the sudden death of Robert Browning. I suppose you have already heard. He died on the 12th. He had, (writes his son to Prof. Villari,) been troubled with his liver, and took pills to that effect; then he took cold—bronchitis declared itself. A few days before his death (he must have felt that his time was drawing near) he wrote to Villari to secure from the Italian Government, the permission to be buried by the side of his wife. We learned the news from Mrs. Villari on the 13th. Papa was out when she called and told me, and I dreaded his return. I knew he had no friend whose loss he would deplore more. 88

At the time appointed for Browning's funeral in Westminster Abbey, the Corsons and a few friends gathered in Florence at the tomb of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and "in solemn thought united husband and wife whose mortal remains are separated in their last resting places." 89

In June, 1890, Corson was in London, where he visited with Barrett Browning's wife. This meeting appears to be the last face-to-face encounter between Hiram Corson and the Browning family, but Corson's respect and zealous popularizing of the poet continued throughout the remainder of his own life. 90

Although the most memorable events of Corson's sabbatical year revolved around his association with Robert Browning, the professor made an extensive European tour in which he met many other distinguished

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88 Letter from Caroline Corson to Eugene Corson, erroneously dated December 10, 1889.

89 Coad, p. 418.

90 Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, travelling separately in Europe, June 7, 1890.
literary figures. Letters to his son reveal his activities as he visited in Germany, Switzerland, Italy, and England.

In July of 1889, the Corsons were in Germany. Eugene was notified from Berlin that his parents would be leaving the afternoon of the 24th for Dresden, where they were to spend a week or more. Corson played the role of tourist in Berlin. His favorite spot in the city was the Thiergarten, which he called "the finest public park in Europe." He also visited palaces and museums: "the former are dreary and the latter induce a chaotic state of mind." He told Eugene of his preference for old places "like Nuremberg, which tell of the past." He looked forward to "taking tramps" at Lausanne.

His chief problem in Germany was the language. He was most distressed that Dr. Hroebler, Librarian of the Berlin library, "was not able to speak a dozen words of English." Mrs. Corson had to act as their interpreter. Hiram vowed that it was too late now for him to trouble himself with foreign languages.92

Following the visit to Dresden, Corson went to Munich, where he became acquainted with Dr. Michael

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91 Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, Berlin, July 24, 1889.

92 Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, Lausanne, September 1889.
Bernays, a professor at the University of Munich. Fortunately for Corson, Dr. Bernays spoke fluent English, "with a strong accent, of course." He also surprised and enchanted Corson with his knowledge of English literature. "Shakespeare he appears to know by heart." What surprised Corson most was his knowledge of and appreciation for Wordsworth, "a poet foreigners don't often take to." Corson found that he and Bernays also shared the opinion that literature should be read aloud in order to be appreciated.

Our views of literary study are very similar; and he, as I do, attaches the highest importance to the vocal rendering of literature. In this respect, he stands quite alone among German professors. I must say that I don't like his Elocution--there's too much strain of expression. But he must be a very inspiring lecturer.

Dr. Bernays had been a friend of Wagner. Corson was surprised to learn from him that the composer also was "a great philosopher and a voluminous author." Bernays promised Corson that he would write a notice of Introduction to Shakespeare for the Anglia. Disillusioned by Munich, Corson confided:

Munich is a great art city--but its art doesn't appear to have had its influence on the people. I haven't visited a city in Europe where I was so impressed with the bad taste of things--especially

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93 Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, Lausanne, September 1889.
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid.
96 Ibid.
in color. In some of the public buildings, the colors on the walls and ceilings curse and swear at each other awfully.97

He had a different impression of Lausanne, however. His admiration for the countryside inspired him to write for his son a poetic description of his impressions.

We mean to make a long stay here—two months or more. I shall visit, while here, Vevay, perhaps stop there a couple of weeks. Chillon, Clarens, Montreux, Villeneuve, and Bouveret, these are all lovely places, particularly so, at this time of year when the vineyards are jolly with their grapes. All the way from Lausanne to Villeneuve, on this side of the lake, is glad with vineyards. The roads, the whole way, are wonderfully fine— with moss covered stone walls on either side. The mountains on the Savoy side of the Lake are spiritualized with a dreamy haze. Verily a lovely land.98

Corson happily reported his record weight of 144 pounds. The preceding winter he had been at 129 pounds "with a heavy overcoat on." He was also able to walk ten miles a day without tiring.

The next stop on Corson's tour was Genoa, where he visited with Mrs. Mary Cowden-Clarke, who was then in her eighty-first year. She allowed him the use of her extensive library, which had a sixty-mile view of the Mediterranean.99 In Corson's honor, Mary Cowden-Clarke

97Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, Lausanne, September 1889.
98Ibid.
99Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, Genoa, Villa Novello, October 17, 1889.
presented to Cornell University the manuscript of the
_Shakespeare Key_, written by her husband, Charles. He is
also remembered as the owner of Chapman's Homer immortal­
ized by Keats.

Leaving Genoa, Corson proceeded to Venice, where
he rejoined Caroline and celebrated his sixty-second
birthday. From Venice the Corsons travelled to Bologna
and then on to Florence, where Hiram had a "very
flattering letter" of introduction of himself from
President White of Cornell to Count Gubernatis, "the
most prominent literary man of the city."100

While in Florence, Corson received copies of the
notices _The Nation_ and _The Evening Post_ gave to his
latest book, _Introduction to Shakespeare_. He was
pleased with the review:101 "it is such an article as
rarely appears on a book. The writer understood and
appreciated the attitude and spirit of the book . . . ."
Evidently, the book attracted some attention in America,
for Corson received a letter from the Bureau of Press
Cuttings in New York asking him to subscribe so as to
receive the reviews that would appear on the book.

_Introduction to Shakespeare_ was immediately adopted for

100Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson,
Venice, November 6, 1859.

101The review from the _Post_ and _The Nation_ was
the same one; _The Nation_ had bought the _Post_. (Letter
from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, Florence, Italy,
December 3, 1889.)
class texts in Wellesley College and at Cornell. Corson had high hopes for the book's success:

Altogether, the book will add to my reputation, and, I trust, to my purse. It will certainly have a larger sale than the Browning book, and that has already yielded me more than anything I ever published.102

Memories of the stark solitude in Ithaca were oppressive in comparison with the reality of Florence. "After having been shut up in Ithaca for nineteen years, it is to me a rare privilege to be in this cultivated atmosphere."103

In Florence Corson befriended Senator and Mrs. Villari. The Senator, a Neapolitan, had "done more for the regeneration of Naples than any other man living." The Senator's wife, "an English lady," had written "many pleasant books" and had translated a number of her husband's works into English. Corson visited the Villaris at home and found Mrs. Villari to be "wonderfully familiar" with Shakespearean criticism. He was impressed that she had read Halliwell-Phillipps' Outline of the Life of Shakespeare.104 She had been acquainted with Browning whom she had heard read aloud from his own work

102Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, Florence, Italy, December 3, 1889.

103Ibid.

104All references to Senator and Mrs. Villari from letter, Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, Florence, December 3, 1889.
many times. The Villaris invited Corson to give a Browning reading in their home for a "large circle of highly cultivated English literary friends."

On Sunday, December 22, the Corsons breakfasted with the Count and Countess Reese at their villa. Hiram wrote his son that the place was an "earthly paradise."

It inspired him to daydream:

To have a beautiful villa on any one of the heights around Florence, and to have the means to live elegantly, and to associate with the best people here, would, I think, add to the terrors of death. And so, no villa for me!

The Corsons had planned to go to Naples from Florence, but Mrs. Villari advised against going there in January. Instead the Corsons went to Rome for a few months, planning to visit Naples in March or early April.105

In June Hiram went on to London without Caroline, to whom he wrote a detailed account of his final visit with Barrett Browning's wife. The two had a long talk "over tea and bread and butter" during which she delighted Corson by allowing him to peruse the manuscripts of "Aurora Leigh" and "Asolando." Labeling the Sharp biography of her father-in-law "full of mistakes," she reported that Browning had destroyed much of his personal correspondence. Corson wrote, "She said that

105Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, Florence, December 22, 1889.
Mr. Browning spoke repeatedly of what I had done for the reading of his work in America, and expressed his gratitude for my efforts." \(^{106}\)

Following the visit he walked all the way back to his hotel, "three or four miles." The London correspondence is the last mention of personal meetings between Corson and the Browning family. The decade of intense concentration on Robert Browning's life and work was over.

**ADDITIONAL LITERARY INVOLVEMENTS**

Although Hiram Corson concentrated on Browning study in the 1880's, he continued to devote attention to his other professional activities as well as to his family. He began the decade with a visit to his son in Savannah. How Eugene came to be in that city is interesting. After finishing his medical degree, he and his mother went on a tour of Europe, during which he became seriously ill with a lung infection. Following his long convalescence the Corsons returned to America. On the voyage they met two Savannah women who befriended the young doctor, insisting that the Southern climate was what he needed to be restored to health. As a consequence of this chance

\(^{106}\)The visit with Mrs. Barrett "Pen" Browning was reported in a letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, London, Inns of Court Hotel, Saturday, June 7, 1890.
meeting, Eugene moved to the Georgia city where he established a medical practice, pioneered in x-ray study, wrote articles for professional journals, and generally became a respected and influential citizen.107

The Corsons were a close-knit family, and Eugene looked forward to the times they could be together. On June 4, 1880, Corson sent his son word that he was attempting to make an engagement for lecturing during the summer. The one course he had in view was at Auburn, New York, but he was not certain that it would come about. Perhaps because of his father's uncertainty, Eugene began to coax him to come to Savannah for a visit. This Corson did, but he managed to make it a business trip as well as a pleasure.

The Savannah Herald reported that Corson's lectures had been "highly spoken of and much admired." It issued a resolution for the Y.M.C.A. members thanking their lecture committee for "the splendid result of their efforts in securing the able service" of the professor. Tennyson's poetry had been the subject of the lectures.108

Savannah still felt his influence after the return to Ithaca, for in March of 1881, Eugene wrote home

107Information gathered from scattered references in family correspondence.

108The Herald, Savannah, Georgia, publication of the Young Men's Christian Association, January, 1881.
concerning a reading class that was being held in Savannah under the leadership of a Mrs. Lawton. She had told Eugene that she had opened the previous class with an abstract of his father's lecture, "The Claims of Literary Culture."

In November of 1881, following Hiram Corson's London meetings inaugurating the Browning Society, he received from Horace Howard Furness, old friend and fellow scholar, a copy of a recommendation to Rev. D. Barnard, President, Columbia College. Whether or not Corson solicited the letter from his friend, its importance is that it provides a description of his reading voice. Furness wrote, "nor should his sonorous, musical voice and exquisite English be disregarded in the enumeration of his unusual qualifications." Nothing came of the job, however, and Corson remained at Cornell.109

A printed card announced his plans for his Shakespeare classes for the school year 1882-1883. As a supplement to the regular classroom activity, Corson read aloud the plays of Shakespeare in "the approximate order of their production" as presented in the Leopold Shakespeare, namely: *Merchant of Venice*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *King John*, *Henry IV Part One*, *Henry IV Part Two*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *As You Like It*, *Hamlet*, *Julius*

109Letter from Horace Howard Furness to President Barnard of Columbia College, November 28, 1881.
Caesar, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth, Antony and Cleopatra, Coriolanus, Winter's Tale, Cymbeline, The Tempest, Henry VIII. The readings were given once a week on Monday evenings "beginning punctually at 8 o'clock" in the Sage College Botanical Lecture Room. The circular advised, "It is hoped that all students attending the course will read carefully each play in advance."
The readings were open to the public.

Throughout his life Corson was interested in contemporary poets such as Browning and Whitman as well as the acknowledged literary masters. Corson was "one of the first to recognize Walt Whitman's genius."110 The professor had at least one meeting with the American poet. On a proof sheet of Whitman's "What Lurks behind Shakespeare's Historical Plays?" appears Corson's handwritten notation: "This proof sheet was given me by Walt Whitman, when I visited him at his home in Camden, New Jersey, March 14, 1885." Corson had stopped in Camden on his way home from Johns Hopkins, carrying with him a letter of introduction from Furness.111 Their conversation centered on Browning, Whitman having read


only Paracelsus and The Ring and the Book. In some later remarks on Browning he reported the discussion with Corson.

My impression [of Browning] has not been that he was not for anybody but that he was not for me, though Professor Corson, who has been here to pay me a visit, says that I am mistaken, that Browning is my man, only that I have not so far got at him the right way. I do not assent to that--Corson does not know my appetite and my capacity as well as I know it myself.112

Traubel reported another conversation between himself and Whitman concerning the professor.

We talked some about college men. I had kicked something on the floor. Stooped and picked it up. W. asked: "What is that?" I passed it over to him. It proved to be two letters tied in a string--both from Corson, of Cornell. "College men as a rule would rather get along without me," he said: "they go so far, the best of them--then stop: some of them don't go at all. Corson seems to have signal abilities--accepts me in a general way, without vehemence. . . . W. read the Corson notes quietly, then handed them over to me. "I wonder," said W. "if Corson knew how significant that last sentence or two may be taken to be?--'the tendency toward impassioned prose, which I feel will be the poetic form of the future.' Do you suppose Corson advertises that?--tells it to his classes? I don't say no--I only wonder--only wonder. I am sometimes mystified, having them say flattering things to me, here, in letters--then in their public capacities talking in a qualified or opposite strain."

His letter is friendly but he has the excessive caution of the university man.113

Whitman continued:

"I started off with no one to say a kind word for me--hardly a soul--and now, when people are saying kind things, I look for enthusiasm. I think Corson

112Traubel, p. 146.

113Traubel, p. 286. Corson's quoted remarks were in reference to Leaves of Grass.
is judicial—probably that is what ails him. I
like the outright person—the hater, the lover—
the unmistakable yes or no: the street 'damn you!'
or 'how are you me boy?'

This account reveals that Whitman did not share the same
enthusiasm for Corson that the professor had for the poet.
Although Corson not only championed Whitman in his classes
but also to his peers in literary scholarship, the elderly
poet unfortunately was not assured of Corson's sincerity.

Inside a book belonging to Corson was tucked this
note in the poet's handwriting:

Mr. Dear Professor Corson, Yours rec'd--The copy of
John Burrough's Notes I send to you by same mail
with this. The price is $1 which you may just enclose
in envelope & mail to me here--I too enjoy'd the
young man, Woodruff's, visit to me & talk. I
hoped to have seen you--I am abt the same in health
(nothing at all to brag of)--I read publically my
Death of Abraham Lincoln next Thursday in Phila.

Corson's respect for Whitman was shared by Edward
Dowden, a professor of English Literature in Dublin
University. Dowden asked Corson for a letter recom­
mending him for the Clark Lectureship in English
Literature at Trinity College, Cambridge. He wrote

114Traubel, p. 288.

115Letter from Walt Whitman to Hiram Corson, April
13, 1886. Contained in Corson's copy of John Burroughs,
Walt Whitman as Poet and Person (New York: J. S. Redfield,
1871).

116Elizabeth D. Dowden and Hilda M. Dowden, Letters
of Edward Dowden and His Correspondents (London: J. M. Dent
and Sons, Ltd., 1914), pp. 195-96. Leslie Stephen was
chosen for the lectureship.
Corson: "Your letter came in good time and goes off printed today, with a strong body of testimony which you shall see, to the Master of Trinity." He thanked Corson for what he had written about Dowden's "non-Shakesperian work" on Browning, but perhaps what you say of my paper on Whitman pleased me still more, for I have had a fight here on behalf of Walt, though every year I see how his genius catches hold of some fine young mind. This paragraph of your letter I, however, omitted not thro' cowardice for I have done some vigorous fighting, but because I think it prudent with a board of electors mainly clerical to let Whitman's time wait (Here in Dublin they turned his book out of the University Library--which contains all sorts of stuff,--on my presenting a copy).117

Corson must have written Dowden soon after the visit with Whitman, for the Britisher responded:

What you tell me of Whitman is good to hear. I hope his lack of worldly goods never reaches a point which causes him trouble or anxiety. If not, there is no cause to regret it. No one is more wholesomely fed and clothed and housed by this breathing universe than Whitman. I rejoice that his elder years have come to complete his fulness of life and experience and to spiritualise it all (tho' it was never lacking in what is spiritual.)118

Another literary acquaintance was John Greenleaf Whittier, from whom he received a letter introducing his "young friend Miss Stella L. Lilly of Portland, Me.," who planned to enter Cornell for a teaching degree.119

\[117\] Letter from Edward Dowden to Hiram Corson, Dublin, Ireland, April 19, 1885.

\[118\] Letter from Edward Dowden to Hiram Corson, April 30, 1885.
complimentary closing, "I am very respectfully thy friend," indicates some possible connection between the men through their religions; both were Quakers, reserving the "plain language" pronoun "thy" for their brothers in faith.

As previously discussed, the Corsons visited the British Isles in 1885. In addition to meeting with Browning, they also renewed friendships with other literary figures they had met on previous visits. Their correspondence indicates the 1885 itinerary.

Dowden wrote from Dublin that he would be pleased to welcome them to Ireland. He promised a guided tour of Dublin, the Wicklow hills, and "the ruins of the seven Churches with an Irish Round Tower at Glendalough." He apologized that his wife's illness would prevent his inviting the Corsons to stay in his home. He advised that they visit Killarney on their way from Cork, and he told Corson about his Life of Shelley, which was then in progress. On July 3, 1885, he wrote, "we shall expect to see you and Mrs. Corson at 2 o'clock on Sunday." Presumably, the proposed tour took place.

From Mr. Furnivall, the London Browning Society President, they received an invitation dated July 9, 1885: "will tea here on Friday at 1/4 to 8 suit

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120 Letter from Edward Dowden to Hiram Corson Dublin, Ireland, April 30, 1885.
you?" And a note from Halliwell-Phillipps written from Hollingbury Copse, Brighton, on July 12, proposed to "welcome you both here at the end of the week." This visit seems to have aroused some professional jealousy in C. M. Ingleby, who had expected them to "come to King's Lynn before going to Cambridge" as his letter on July 11, 1885, requested. Ingleby and Halliwell-Phillipps were both distinguished scholars in Great Britain. Halliwell-Phillipps had, in 1841, formed the old Shakespeare Society, and he had gained a reputation as an editor of Shakespeare and for his *Life of William Shakespeare*. He was also employed as scholar and librarian of Jesus College, Cambridge. In 1863 he initiated the movement for purchase of the site of New Place, Shakespeare's Stratford residence.\(^{121}\) Clement Mansfield Ingleby was also a Shakespearean critic, author, and vice-president of the Royal Society of Literature.\(^{122}\)

The frustration of competition with Halliwell-Phillipps must have prompted Ingleby to write Corson:

> Your letter dated Aug. 9th only reached me this morning and it has, to speak candidly, caused me indescribable disappointment. It is better to be

\(^{121}\)George Smith, ed., *Concise Dictionary of National Biography to 1900*, Oxford University Press.

\(^{122}\)Ibid.
quite outspoken and frank with you. You led me to suppose that your stay at Brighton was restricted by your having to visit many other places before your departure from our shores. Accordingly when you yielded to Halliwell Phillipps' pressure and arranged to prolong your stay at The Copse I regret you did not inform me of this change in your plans that I might have taken the earliest opportunity of telling you our engagements with other visitors. Had you known the facts you would doubtless have come here before going to Cambridge, for on Friday, the 14th, every bed in this house will be occupied by visitors of long-standing invitation.123

Another invitation, also dated August 11, came from W. W. Skeat asking them to "come to tea on Thursday at 6 p. m." His house was in Salisbury Villas, Station Road. The Corsons also went to Scotland, where they were invited to visit a friend at the University of St. Andrews. The writer told Corson:

I have a very clear recollection of you, of your wise mildness, of your delightful laugh, and a great many other good things about you. From time to time I read your name and some of your doings . . . and was glad to think that you had become a famous man. In fact you are a great swell.124

These invitations, in addition to helping to establish where the Corsons went on their tour, indicate that Corson was well-respected in English literary circles and was personally acquainted with a number of British scholars in 1885.

123 Letter from C. M. Ingleby to Hiram Corson, Heacham Hall, Kings Lynn, August 11, 1885.

124 Fragment of a letter to Hiram Corson, signature missing, August 11, 1885, University, St. Andrews, A. B.
A few miscellaneous items refer throughout the decade to other reading activities. A letter with missing signature from Baltimore, December 27, 1883, indicates that Corson had agreed to do an evening with Tennyson for the W. C. T. U. there, but that he had asked to change the program, possibly to include Browning. The correspondent left the matter to him although the organization had already printed a program. She also indicated plans for "some social afternoons with the Poets."

Corson appears to have mentioned the possibility of his reading and lecturing when he wrote to friends, thereby acting as his own booking agent. Joseph Crosby, a Zanesville, Ohio, acquaintance who sometimes borrowed money from Corson, wrote:

You ask me how Zanesville takes to literary lectures. The folks here are rather slow to appreciate such matters . . . it is very possible that your prestige might attract enough appreciative folks to repay you. I could secure you a fine Hall for $10 a night; and that, with a little advertising, would be all.125

Whether or not he ever lectured in Zanesville, the professor did deliver an address on "The True Scholar" at a dinner of the New York Alumni Society in 1886. He sent a copy to Cornell's president, Andrew D. White, who was travelling in Switzerland. White responded that it

125 Letter from Joseph Crosby to Hiram Corson, April 6, 1884.
seemed "admirable, and it must have done much to raise the character of the celebration." He expressed his pleasure that Corson had quoted him in the address.126

White was among those in Corson's Ithaca audiences who had come to expect him to perform for them. A typical reading performance took place on November 19, 1887, in Sage Chapel. The program, "Readings from Milton and Wordsworth, with Organ Accompaniments," included:

Music: Andante—Mozart

Reading from Milton:
"I did but prompt the age to quit their clogs"
"To the Lord General Cromwell"
"On His Blindness"
"To Cyriac Skinner"
"On the Late Massacre in Piedmont"

Music: Largo—Handel

Reading from Milton: "Ode on the Nativity"

Music: Fugue—Bach

Reading from Wordsworth: Sonnets

Music: Duo—Rossini

Reading from Wordsworth:
"Ode to Duty"
"The Happy Warrior"
"Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood"

Music: Theme and Variations—Hesse

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126Letter from Andrew D. White to Hiram Corson, July 8, 1886.
All readings were performed by Professor Corson, and the music was played by Mr. Ogden. A program note advised the audience: "Exercises will begin punctually at 8 o'clock. No admission after this hour except during intervals between Readings and Music."

One more literary involvement of this decade is worthy of mention. Corson was also in demand as a critical writer and literary source for *Shakespeariana* and *Poet-Lore*. Charlotte Porter, editor of the former magazine, published three of his lectures on *King John* in the February issue for 1887.127

In the summer of 1888, editor and professor met in East Gloucester, and Corson promised to send her a "letter of personal expression as to what the love of Shakespeare" meant to him. Because he had not done so by October, Porter wrote to encourage him by appealing to his vanity:

> it is very desirable that a later number should have a letter from one who has carried a marked individual note of his own into the interpretation of Shakespeare. It is just because your approach differs so much from that of the others that it would be of especial use to the public to have you tell us of it.128

In December, 1888, Porter left the editorship of

127 Letter from Charlotte Porter to Hiram Corson, Philadelphia, January 24, 1887.

Shakespeariana, and with Helen A. Clarke began the publication of Poet-Lore: A Journal of Comparative Literature, concentrated on Shakespeare and Browning. Their first issue contained a news item calling for the publication of Professor Corson's Index to the Canterbury Tales. They held that "only the original MS. is bound, and at present---'a unique copy'---rests in the possession of its compiler." The same issue carried the notice of Halliwell-Phillipps' death. Helen A. Clarke wrote to ask Corson to write for the February issue an account of Halliwell-Phillipps. The editors wanted to follow the death notice with "such a paper as you could give us if you would consent." Perhaps Corson was too busy with plans for his sabbatical leave to write the desired article. The tribute to Halliwell-Phillipps in the February issue was written by J. Parker Norris, one of Corson's old friends.

The years between 1880 and 1889 were busy ones for Hiram Corson, who dedicated most of his time to the study and advancement of Robert Browning's poetry. In this endeavor he travelled widely in America and Europe, where he became acquainted with leading scholars and

129 Poet-Lore, I (January, 1889), 54.

130 Letter from Helen A. Clarke to Hiram Corson, January 17, 1889.
writers. He established American Browning clubs, participated as a charter member of the London Browning Society, and achieved fame as a reader, lecturer, and critic. In addition, he continued to interpret Shakespeare, Milton, Tennyson, Chaucer, Wordsworth, and Whitman, to write literary criticism, and to carry out his duties as a professor at Cornell University.
Chapter 5

THE REFLECTIVE YEARS: 1890-1899

During the years between 1890 and 1900 the pattern that Hiram Corson had established for his life continued. He divided his professional time among his teaching duties, his performances as a reader-lecturer, and his scholarly writing. But he seemed to be slowing down, and his years were beset with poor health. He had begun the decade in his sixty-second year, while he was still in Europe on his sabbatical leave.

Early in 1890 he received in London a letter from Goldwin Smith, the noted literary scholar, who had been the Corsons' close friend from their first Cornell days. Smith enclosed a letter of introduction to Thomas Arnold, Matthew's brother, a professor at Oxford. Corson was informed that he would find Thomas different from Matthew: "He has little of his brother's genius, but on the other hand he has a good deal of his father's earnestness, from which Matthew's time seems to be a reaction." ¹

Eugene joined his parents in England for the summer

¹Letter from Goldwin Smith to Hiram Corson, February 12, 1890.
before they returned to America.\(^2\) When the Corsons
returned to Ithaca for the fall term, they found that the
books and papers they had left in their house, Cascadilla
Cottage, were in "chaos."\(^3\) Furness responded to their
distress with a joking attempt to cheer them:

> Under similar circumstances I should have sat down
> on the steps and had a real good cry. After all I'm
> not sure that the victims of a conflagration wherein
> every scrap of their papers and notes are consumed,
> deserve unalloyed commiseration. The Deluge wasn't
> a bad idea, it must have cleared up many a mess, bad
> though in that line it was itself.--\(^4\)

Whether the damage to the contents of the house were
done by vandals or by natural forces, Corson was able to
recover from the disaster in time to be back in his
teaching routine at the beginning of the semester.

In addition to his classroom activities, he gave
a series of "Saturday Evening Readings" from American
Literature in Barnes Hall, on the Cornell campus,
beginning October 18, 1890. The Saturday preceding the
series, the professor gave one of his famous Shakespeare
performances, although the course he was about to initiate
was to be American, not English. He read "in his own

\(^2\)Information taken from a fragment of a letter
dated July 13, 1890, signature missing.

\(^3\)Letter from Horace Howard Furness to Hiram Cor-
son, November 2, 1890. (Although Wellesley College had
invited Corson to present the Horace Howard Furness Fund
Lecture on Shakespeare in May of 1890, he had been pre-
vented from doing so by his sabbatical tour of Europe.)
The Cornell Era, XXI (March, 1889), 218.

\(^4\)Ibid.
inimitable way selections from *The Merchant of Venice*, closing the reading of one hour and a half with the trial scene." He had "an unusually large and appreciative audience" for his performance; indeed, "at 8 o'clock the west lecture room was filled, and so many were left standing in the hallway that it was found necessary to go into the main audience room." Corson had intended to read from Act V, but the lateness of the hour caused him to cut the program short, although "many would gladly have said, 'go on.'" The student reporter for *The Cornell Era* remarked in his review that

The generosity of Prof. Corson in giving these readings will certainly be appreciated by those who have taken his course, or have had the privilege of hearing him read before. Others will need to attend but once to understand the value of these unusually interesting interpretations of some of the best pieces of our literature.5

The following "Saturday Evening Reading" was the first in the series of American literature performances. The opening night, October 18, was devoted to the death theme in William Cullen Bryant's poetry. Corson, however, "endeavored to make selections in which the death feature was not so prominent as it is in so many of his poems," a difficult task with Bryant's poetry, the

5Quotations and references to the Shakespeare reading are taken from *The Cornell Era*, XXIII (October, 1890), 31.
reviewer held. 6 The professor began with "Thanatopsis" and continued with "To a Waterfowl," "Inscription for the Entrance to a Wood," "A Forest Hymn," "The Death of the Flowers," "The Land of Dreams," "The Burial of Love," "The Planting of the Apple-Tree," and "Waiting by the Gate." 7 The audience consisted of "the usual large number of listeners," 8 and his audience, not depressed by his dwelling upon death, found the evening "one of true delight." 9 However, some negative criticism of the performance surfaced: "Many expressed themselves as wishing Professor Corson had taken the opportunity to remark upon the pieces he read, or in some way had signified his own impressions of them." 10 Professor Corson apparently read the poetry program without commentary. The audience either was bored by the procedure, or likely, they were accustomed to his combining lectures with readings and were disturbed by the break with tradition.

The following Saturday's performance was from the works of John Greenleaf Whittier. Again Corson had

6 The Cornell Era, XXIII (October, 1890), 44.

7 Information taken from a circular announcing Professor Corson's Saturday Evening Readings.

8 The Cornell Era, XXIII (October, 1890), 44.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.
"a large and appreciative audience."\textsuperscript{11} The student reporter referred to the series as "entertainment."\textsuperscript{12} Student attendance appears to have been voluntary, and the audience was filled with townspeople as well as members of the university community. This particular audience "thoroughly enjoyed"\textsuperscript{13} the Whittier selections: "The Voices," "My Playmate," "The Shadow and the Light," "The Over-Heart," "The Eternal Goodness," "Our Master," "Among the Hills," and "The Clear Vision."\textsuperscript{14} Corson preceded the performance with his analysis of "the position of Bryant as an American man of letters."\textsuperscript{15} Possibly he did so in order to unify the series by referring to the previous occasion. Since this practice did not continue through the remaining programs, he most likely was responding to the negative criticism given him by the Bryant audience.

The reviewer announced additions to the program for the next reading, from the works of Edgar Allan Poe. Corson was to read "The Sleeper," "The Haunted Palace," "Annabel Lee," and the essay "The Philosophy of Composition." Formerly announced were "The Raven," "The

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{11}\textit{The Cornell Era}, XXIII (November, 1890), 54.
\item \textsuperscript{12}\textit{Ibid.}
\item \textsuperscript{13}\textit{Ibid.}
\item \textsuperscript{14}Information taken from a circular announcing Professor Corson's Saturday Evening Readings.
\item \textsuperscript{15}\textit{The Cornell Era}, XXIII (November, 1890), 54.
\end{itemize}
Bells," and "Ulalume." The reporter stated that these three "have long been favorites with readers, affording as they do opportunities for effective vocalization as but few other poems afford."\textsuperscript{16} The Cornell Era urged all students who could "avail themselves"\textsuperscript{17} to attend the evening of Poe. Obviously many of them did, for the performance "called out a larger number of listeners than any of the previous readings by Professor Corson."\textsuperscript{18}

Concerning "The Philosophy of Composition," which Corson had naturally read along with "The Raven," the Era reporter remarked: "that 'The Raven' was constructed in this square and level manner seems hardly probable."\textsuperscript{19} Whether the student was echoing the professor's belief is unknown; however, Corson's own poetic theory took a spiritual rather than a scientific approach to poetic construction. Commenting directly on the performance, the reviewer noted:

After "The Raven" Professor Corson read "Ulalume," which he considers the most difficult to render of those given. The reading of "The Bells" perhaps gave most satisfaction to the audience but all were most acceptably received and an unusual warmth of demonstration which is not given by a Cornell audience to anything but the best was manifested.\textsuperscript{20}

"A gratifyingly large audience" assembled to hear

\textsuperscript{16}The Cornell Era, XXIII (November, 1890), 54.

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{18}The Cornell Era, XXIII (November, 1890), 68.

\textsuperscript{19}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{20}Ibid.
the November 8 reading from Longfellow, "the most popular of our poets," according to The Cornell Era. Corson chose to read "The Skeleton in Armor," "The Goblet of Life," "Sonnets prefixed to the Divine Comedy," selections from "Hiawatha," and two that "elicited warm applause," "Endymion" and "Pegasus in Pound."22

The following week, "in spite of the inclement weather the audience was almost as large as ever before and even more liberal with applause." Corson read Chapters Seventeen and Eighteen of The Scarlet Letter. They were rendered in a manner which revealed equally the beauty of the passages and the power of the reader. These are chapters that lend themselves admirably to the highest powers of the reader. Especially beautiful was the treatment of the forest scene in Chapter 17. The general verdict was that Professor Corson favored us with one of the most pleasant programs of the term.24

The Hawthorne reading was so popular that Corson decided to give another one the next Saturday, November 22, rather than the Lowell reading that he had planned. The substitution "proved very satisfactory, as it gave the professor opportunity to read from The House of the Seven Gables that finest description of Governor Penchant's

21The Cornell Era, XXIII (November, 1890), 78.
22Ibid.
23The Cornell Era, XXIII (November, 1890), 90.
24Ibid.
Corson prepared his audience for the setting of the chapter "by a clear, concise outline." Because of a "social" that was scheduled to follow the reading, Corson was "not able to give all the reading he wanted to." He closed with the description of Praxiteles' statue from The Marble Faun.27

Corson had been scheduled to read Lowell's "A Fable for Critics" on November 22, for which he substituted the second Hawthorne performance. The Cornell Era did not report the remainder of the series. According to the program, the Lowell reading scheduled for November 29, was to include "The Vision of Sir Launfal," "To a Pine Tree," "On a Portrait of Dante by Giotto," "Masaccio," and "Ode recited at the Harvard Commemoration, July 21, 1865."

For December 6 he was scheduled to read passages from Oliver Wendell Holmes' "The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table" and "The Professor at the Breakfast Table." The final reading for the semester, planned for December 13, was to be from Walt Whitman with selections from Leaves of Grass, "Specimen Days," and "Collect."28

During the time that he was presenting the

25The Cornell Era, XXIII (November, 1890), 102.
26Ibid. 27Ibid.
28Information obtained from a circular announcing the Saturday Evening Lectures.
American literature series, Corson also gave in the Unitarian Church, by invitation of the pastor, three lecture-readings on the poetry of the Bible. These talks occurred on consecutive Sunday evenings, November 2, 9, and 16, 1890. The Cornell reporter wrote the following account of the first in the series:

A very large audience was present at the Unitarian Church last Sunday evening to hear Professor Corson's opening lecture on the poetry of the Bible. Every seat was filled and chairs brought in lined the aisles. A most instructive lecture was given inter-spersed with readings which revealed to all beauty and meaning in Bible poetry never known before. Prof. Corson declared the central idea of Hebrew poetry to be the conception of the Unity of God. The lecture was in large part devoted to giving a general survey of the subject by way of introduction.

The second Sunday evening reading "was quite as largely attended as the first." Corson began by discussing the difference between prose and poetry, which "he showed to consist chiefly in the greater richness of the latter in the concrete."

The professor was "again greeted by a large audience" for his last lecture at the Unitarian Church. He read selections illustrating allegory,

29The Cornell Era, XXIII (November, 1890), 54.
30The Cornell Era, XXIII (November, 1890), 66.
31The Cornell Era, XXIII (November, 1890), 78.
32Ibid.
33The Cornell Era, XXIII (November, 1890), 90.
parable, and personification that "were the most enjoyable of the many beautiful passages" Corson had "rendered with effect" during the series.34

The Ithaca audiences were treated to two lecture series in Corson's first semester at home following his sabbatical year. The first, a series on American literature, included the works of Bryant, Whittier, Poe, Hawthorne, Lowell, Holmes, and Whitman. The performances were well attended and warmly received.

Comments from The Cornell Era indicate that Professor Corson's lectures and readings were highly sought after at home as well as on tour. The second series, composed of three lecture-readings on the poetry of the Bible, was given before the Unitarian Church in Ithaca. Like the campus performances these were popular with the consistently overflowing audiences. Corson talked about and read selections to illustrate the general nature of Hebrew poetry, the difference between prose and poetry in the Bible, and the use of allegory, parable, and personification in Biblical literature. Corson sought to entertain as well as to instruct, and he seems to have achieved these desired effects with little difficulty.

Some members of the audience were so pleased by the Saturday evening lectures that they presented Pro-

34The Cornell Era, XXIII (November, 1890), 90.
fessor and Mrs. Corson with "an elegant piano lamp and a pitcher of Royal Worcester" on Christmas Day, a week after the lecture series ended.35

Corson was also the subject of a bust made by two members of the Cornell Art Department, Professor Williams and Instructor Willis. The statue was placed across from the armory, where it was "the object of admiration." The likeness was said to be "even better than that of Shakespeare which Mr. Williams made two years ago."36

The second semester of that school term Corson continued the readings in Barnes Hall, changing them from Saturday to Monday nights. This time he selected materials "with reference to the Junior and Senior course of lectures, reading such compositions as time will not allow to be presented at the regular lecture hours."37 His plan was to make "the readings serviceable alternately" to the two courses in English literature.38 The series was discontinued in February for the rest of the year. Possibly the bad weather combined with Corson's poor health made the action advisable. Only four performances were actually given in the course, during January and February of 1891.

35The Cornell Era, XXIII (January, 1891), 129.
36Ibid. 37Ibid.
38The Cornell Era, XXIII (January, 1891), 150.
The first performance was of Tennyson's *Maud* on Monday, January 12. It occurred at 7:30 in Barnes Hall but was not reviewed.\(^{39}\) The next reading, January 19, was from Marlowe's *Edward II*. Corson chose "the most significant and suitable" parts of the play, connected by "an interesting commentary on the progress of the plot and the author's treatment of theme."\(^{40}\) His voice for this performance was reported to have been "in splendid condition," and the performance of the prison and murder scene was especially powerful.\(^{41}\)

For January 26 Corson had planned to read Tennyson's "The Two Voices," and "Palace of Art,"\(^{42}\) but the "unfavorable condition of his voice induced him to read from Ruskin and DeQuincey instead."\(^{43}\) Corson knew that the reading of Tennyson's verse required more flexibility of the voice than did the selections he chose, a chapter from Ruskin's *Modern Painters* and portions of DeQuincey's essay, "On the Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*."\(^{44}\) At the close of the reading, he announced that he would not read on Monday, February 2, but would resume the series the following week.\(^{45}\) The reporter

\(^{39}\) *The Cornell Era*, XXIII (January, 1891), 129.
\(^{40}\) Ibid.
\(^{41}\) Ibid.
\(^{42}\) Ibid.
\(^{43}\) *The Cornell Era*, XXIII (January, 1891), 158.
\(^{44}\) Ibid.
\(^{45}\) Ibid.
commented that "interest in the series of literary entertainment continues unabated and promises to remain so."

The weather was detrimental to the size of Corson's audience for the February 9 reading of Mrs. Browning's "The Rime of the Duchess May." This performance also proved to be the last one for the semester, although "the professor's voice was in prime condition and the audience was delighted with his perfect rendering of the piece."46

The reading of "The Rime of the Duchess May" was prefaced with an introduction that gave information on the subject matter and style of the poem. The reviewer reported:

It is one of Mrs. Browning's greatest poems. The rare artistic completeness of the poem is not less remarkable than the quality of the detailed drawing and local coloring.47

Although Corson had intended to give a full semester of weekly readings as a complement to the Junior and Senior English courses, he actually gave only four. The writers covered in the spring semester of 1891 were Tennyson, Marlowe, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Like the fall semester series, these evening readings were viewed as entertainment as well as educational lectures.

46 The Cornell Era, XXIII (February, 1891), 179.
47 Ibid.
They were well-attended, with the exception of the one on Mrs. Browning, which took place during inclement weather. The winters in Ithaca were a source of complaint for Corson who frequently wrote to his correspondents about the difficulties of maneuvering through the steep, icy streets. Most likely the weather was a contributing factor in the decision to discontinue the readings. The professor might also have suffered physically from the cold winter, as the reference to his changing the topic for one night because of trouble with his voice would indicate. The two sets of readings for his Ithaca audience were typical of the performances Corson traditionally gave at Cornell. These readings took place yearly when he was in residence.

In addition to his public performances, at times he gave private readings as well, both in the homes of friends and in his own Cascadilla Cottage. Charlotte Porter heard that Mrs. Andrew D. White, wife of Cornell's President, had asked Corson to read Browning's "Caliban" to a gathering in her house. Porter chided: "This is the one you would never read us!"^8

As for the readings to his own guests, the following account is typical:

Professor and Mrs. Corson gave a delightful reception last Monday evening to the members of the English literature classes, the occasion being the celebration

^8Letter from Charlotte Porter to Hiram Corson, March 18, 1891.
of Professor Corson's sixty-fifth birthday. He entertained his guests by reading Bret Harte's "Tale of a Pony." Miss Meyers rendered a very pleasing solo on the violin, and Mr. O'Hagan read one of his own poems, "The Song My Mother Sings."\(^{49}\)

In the 1890's Corson continued the practice of reading and lecturing outside Ithaca. During Cornell's spring holiday for 1891, he delivered nine lectures for the women at Ogontz College, near Philadelphia, on "The Aesthetics of English Verse."\(^{50}\) The student magazine printed the following reaction to his visit:

As a general rule, the lecturers comes and go as it were in the dark, and we know little or nothing of them besides what is heard in the lecture room. But in Professor Corson was experienced a new relationship, entering effectually into our daily life. One recognized in him the true teacher, before whom the most timid was not abashed and yet who seemed so infinitely higher and superior, as to transport us quite out of the humdrum, school girl existence and into the boundless paths of literature where we followed, at a distance, his leadership. Not a few are the delightful memories and impressions the Professor has left us, for at almost any period of the day, he might be seen, ensconced in some one of the Ogontz nooks, surrounded by eager girls and reading or talking as fancy prompted. Thus were we introduced to "Saul" and thus to Browning in his private character, Professor Corson's intimate connection with the poet making all that he said of new and double interest.\(^{51}\)

As further evidence of his popularity at Ogontz, the graduating class invited him to deliver their commencement address, June 9, 1891. In his speech,

\(^{49}\)The Cornell Era, XXVI (November, 1893), 81.

\(^{50}\)The Cornell Era, XXIII (April, 1891), 63.

\(^{51}\)The Ogontz Mosaic, Elmira, New York, April, 1891. Corson collection.
entitled "What Does, What Knows, What Is," Corson delineated many of his theories concerning the value of interpretative reading in literary analysis.52

One of Corson's favorite writers, Lord Tennyson, died in 1892. On the occasion of his burial in Westminster Abbey, Wednesday evening, October 12, Corson gave a performance in Sage Chapel at Cornell. It was entitled "In Memoriam" Readings, with organ accompaniments. The program advised that the exercises would begin punctually at 8:00 o'clock, and that there would be no admission after that time except during intervals between the readings and the music.53

This emphasis on punctuality was most important with Corson. Never late himself, he could not abide tardiness in others. Particularly did he dislike being interrupted once he had begun a performance. One of the many stories that circulated among Cornell students reported that a student named Ralph Hemstreet always arrived three minutes after the bell for classes had rung. One day Corson had been reading from King John for three minutes when Mr. Hemstreet entered the classroom.

Corson stopped reading and fastened his piercing eyes on the student. The entire class watched the unfortunate in tense silence. Corson returned to

52 This speech is analyzed in Chapter 7.

53 Program note announcing Corson's performance of "In Memoriam" Readings, October 12, 1892.
his text, deftly flipped a couple of pages, and resumed, "Enter the Bastard."  

The Unitarian Church officials must have known of Corson's desire for promptness, but they continued to invite him to perform. In the month following the program in honor of Tennyson, Corson performed for the church "Browning's Christian Poems" in a lecture-reading on November 20, 1892.  

His policy of punctuality was carried on in his evening performances as well. Although The Cornell Era stopped reviewing them, they were continued in 1893. Mrs. Lang sent him a bouquet of violets as a token of her gratitude for his Monday readings. She expressed deepest pleasure in his performance of "Saul."  

The professor branched beyond his own Department of Rhetoric in his university. Because of his popularity he was invited in March of 1894 and again in the spring of the following year to lecture before the Cornell school of Law on "Milton's Idea of Liberty."  

Corson possibly read before the Century Club of

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54 Bishop, A History of Cornell, p. 118.  
55 The Cornell Era, XXV (November, 1892), 95.  
56 Notice affixed to several programs and circulars announcing Professor Corson's readings.  
57 Letter from Rosa Christine Lang to Hiram Corson, Sage College, March 22, 1893.  
58 The Cornell Era, XXVI (March, 1894), 261.
Philadelphia in late 1894. That organization was one in which Corson had helped initiate Browning study during the previous decade. Annie, Corson's favorite niece, mentioned in a letter that he was scheduled to read there.59 It is certain that he read for the Contemporary Club of Philadelphia on January 14, 1896. Professor Edmund J. James, the club's president, wrote on official club stationery one of the first typed letters that Corson received. It stated that Professor John H. Wright of Harvard College would present a paper on "The Permanent and Comparative Value of Greek and Modern Poetry" and asked Corson to present "the other side of the question."
The club had first formulated the topic, "Have We Moderns Gained in Sentiment What We Have Lost in Form as Compared with the Greeks in the Sphere of Poetics?" Professor Wright suggested the former statement as alternative.
Dr. James gave the organization's credentials--it was as important in Philadelphia as the Nineteenth Century Club was in New York"--and sent a copy of their latest report so that he could see the "programmes" that the Club had already heard. Apologizing for the inability to offer a fair payment for his participation, the president assured him, "I should be glad to send you a check for fifty dollars to cover the expenses, traveling and others, and

59Letter from Anna McClure Sholl to Hiram Corson, November 31, 1894.
we should be glad to entertain you while here."  

To insure that Corson would accept the invitation, Mary A. Burnham, Recording Secretary of The Contemporary Club, wrote to enlist the persuasive aid of Miss Bennett, who enclosed the letter in one of her own to Corson. From the tone of the former, the two women were friends, and Miss Bennett was familiar with the work of the Club. The secretary wrote:

We can think of no one so able as Professor Hiram Corson to answer Professor Wright, taking the side of modern poetry and we want you to put the matter to him persuasively for us. You know the Club offers no honorarium but pays all the expenses of its speaker-guests. The time allowed is twenty minutes. Will you in the interest of the club do this for us—we shall be much indebted and with Professor Corson the evening would be a brilliant one.  

Another lecture occurred in New York City in 1896. Corson's niece, Anna McClure Sholl, who worked as a free-lance writer there, wrote of her delight that he would be in Carnegie Hall. It "is a fine place for a lecture—I have often been there."  

60 Letter from Edmund J. James, Ph.D., The Contemporary Club, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, December 12, 1895.  

61 Letter from Mary A. Burnham to Miss Bennett, 3401 Powelton Avenue, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, December 4, 1895. Miss Bennett taught at Ogontz College; Corson had dinner with her when he visited Philadelphia for Thanksgiving. (Letter from Hiram to Caroline, November 29, 1892).  

62 Letter from Anna McClure Sholl to Hiram Corson, 14 East 16th Street, New York City, December 12, 1895.
at the invitation of the American Society for the Improvement of Speech. The society office was in Carnegie Music Hall, 7th Avenue and 57th Street, New York, New York. The officers were Richard E. Mayne, M. A., Director; Miss Viola D. Waring, Treasurer; and Justin L. Barnes, M. D., Secretary. The latter wrote that while they would be pleased "to listen to anything" from the professor, it had occurred to him that Corson might "prefer to be told something about which we would very much like to hear." Consequently, he suggested the topic, "The Vocal Side of Literature," but he added that the organization wanted him to follow his "own inclinations." A second letter from Dr. Barnes confirmed the date as January 18, 1896, a Saturday night. The topic as announced was "Vocal Culture: Its Relation to Literary and General Culture."

A letter from Eugene wished him success and indicated that the timing was "a good way to 'open the ball'" for his new book. Eugene wondered whether the lecture might have been the idea of his father's publisher, The MacMillan Company. In commenting on that

63 Information from official stationery of American Society for the Improvement of Speech used for a letter from Justin Barnes to Hiram Corson, December 17, 1895.

64 Letter from Justin Barnes to Hiram Corson, December 17, 1895.

65 Times [New York], Saturday, January 18, 1896, p. 3.
book he wrote:

What you say about the elocutionists and the general notion of what good reading means struck me as very apt and direct, and I firmly believe that you soon will have the favor of those whose opinions are worth something. The ordinary elocutionist certainly makes me 'very tired,' and to hear a young woman get up and recite as an entertainment is too much for any sane mortal.66

While in New York for the lecture Corson possibly was able to visit with his old friend and Cornell's former president, who was staying at the Savoy Hotel. Andrew D. White was then serving as a representative on the Venezuelan Boundary Commission. Had they decided to attend the theatre for the evening, they could have seen Sarah Bernhardt who was appearing at Abbey's Theatre in Izeyl by Arman Sylvestic.67 Eugene wrote his father, "I rejoiced over your New York success." Even though the papers did not review him Corson must have been satisfied with his own performance.68

No written text of the speech given in New York can be found. It was possibly a variation of an article Corson had published some months before entitled, "Vocal Culture in its Relation to Literary Culture."69 Of that


68Letter from Eugene Corson to Hiram Corson, February 16, 1896.

article, Annie wrote her uncle, "It is a gospel much needed in the so-called schools of elocution."  

In summary, Hiram Corson gave at least three lecture-readings outside of Ithaca during the 1890's. In 1891 he gave a series of lectures and the commencement address at Ogontz College. In 1894 he engaged in a literary debate before the Contemporary Club of Philadelphia. In 1896 he spoke in Carnegie Hall before the American Society for the Improvement of Speech. Although it is possible that he read and lectured in other places as well, he retained no other references to his performances away from home. His own poor health may have been a factor in his determining to make fewer commitments elsewhere. During that decade he was frequently unable to meet his classes because of illness. However, his responsibilities at Cornell grew increasingly. His classes in English literature were so popular that the enrollment doubled between 1895 and 1897. An assistant, Miss Brownell, was appointed to help him with his teaching load. When he went "South for his health" in 1899, most of his work was carried on in his absence.

70Letter from Anna McClure Sholl to Hiram Corson, New York, New York, June 10, 1895.

71See The Cornell Era, XXIV (October, 1891); XXIV (March, 1892), 252; XXVII (January, 1895), 152.

72The Evening Post [New York], May 22, 1897.
by Miss Brownell.73

Caroline, always an important influence on her husband, advised him to slow down the pace of his life:

Do not ever (you are inclined to do so) make yourself older than you are. Age has really less to do with years than we think. I feel just now about thirty, and expect to feel even less when I shall come home. I have just now all sorts of vigorous intentions of making up the house and shaking it into youth. You and I must not get old. If you husband your time, and are not too prodigal with your literary riches in giving extra work in nerve-exhausting readings, you will find that the actual engagements, with your never-giving-out-well of knowledge, will not much tell on you as yet. Everything lies in the husbanding of these forces—in not giving too much and thereby weakening attention already weak. I know from experience how the most interesting reading or lecture loses half of its value by its too-much. Another great secret of youth is to run along with the runners; not to lag too far behind them. Our feelings and thoughts, lose nothing of their robustness and depth by being elastic; they must stretch and hitch themselves to the younger and fresher thoughts and feelings. Conservatism is not worth a straw unless it does that. So darling, if you have a mind to mind your far off wife, you will tune your lyre a little to the galloping thoughts and feelings of the little world around you, and above all keep them on their appetite. People do not appreciate a stream that comes too abundantly.74

Another reason for Corson's remaining in Ithaca was his sense of responsibility to Anna McClure Sholl, his sister Clara's daughter, who stayed with the Corsons in Ithaca while she was attending Cornell University. Caroline travelled extensively during those years, and Annie would have been left alone had Hiram gone on the road as

73The Cornell Era, XXXI (April, 1899), 262.

74Letter from Caroline Corson to Hiram Corson, Hotel de Paris, Seville, Spain, November 23, 1892.
well. He wrote to his wife about the "intellectual greed" that he saw among students of the day, and of his fatherly concern for Annie's involvement with it in her education:

And there's nothing so fatal to true education as this intellectual greed. Constitutions are broken down by the effort to gobble up all the small details of this little planet of ours. Annie has the prevailing intellectual disease. She's always over her books. She is never disposed to give a moment of talk or to anything else but the acquisition of knowledge. As Milton says in the P. L., "Knowledge is as food, and needs no less her temperance over appetite, to know in measure what the mind may well contain; oppresses else with surfeit, and soon turns wisdom to folly, as nourishment to wind."75

This letter, to Caroline in Spain, also spoke of how happy and busy he was at school.

I have never had a finer voice than I've had since the term began. The University work goes smoothly and I am enjoying it. Am never more happy than when I am before my classes. I am glad, too, that I have a Saturday morning exercise. Shall have two Seminaries a week.76

Possibly on the advice of his wife and son, he refused some engagements. Eugene wrote, "I was glad to get your letter announcing your determination to decline the New Orleans invitation to lecture."77 However, he did travel in the decade for purposes other than performance.

75Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, Ithaca, Saturday, November 12, 1892.
76Ibid.
77Letter from Eugene Corson to Hiram Corson, April 25, 1897.
The longest trip that Corson took during this time was to Dublin, Ireland. He was chosen by the Executive Committee of Cornell as a delegate to the Dublin University Tercentenary Celebration. Cornell's Treasurer advised him that the committee had "appropriated one hundred dollars, or so much thereof as may be necessary, to defray any extra expenses as a delegate." Corson saw the opportunity to renew old acquaintances and to visit points of interest in the British Isles; consequently, he chose to spend the summer there rather than to make a hurried trip for the celebration. In planning his vacation, he corresponded with a number of friends he had made on past visits. Of Edward Dowden he requested assistance in obtaining a Doctor's gown for the celebration. At Cornell graduations he frequently appeared wearing several hoods at once, in a "striking burst of color," although "all his degrees were honorary ones." Naturally he would be interested in his costume for the Tercentenary. Dowden tried to get a Doctor's gown for his friend, but "succeeded in getting a promise

78 Letter from C. L. Williams, Treasurer, to Hiram Corson, February 25, 1892.

79 Letter from C. L. Williams to Hiram Corson, May 19, 1892.

80 Letter from Lawrence Bennett to the Cornell Archives, Stoneposts, Jacksonville, New York, November 17, 1956.

81 Ibid.
of an LL.D. hood and a black gown: no red gown was to be had.\textsuperscript{82} He explained that "there was not the least chance of securing" a red gown, and that he would also be wearing a black gown with a Doctor of Letters hood.\textsuperscript{83}

Although the Corsons and Dowdens had been long acquainted, the Henry J. Dudgeon family housed them during their stay in Dublin.\textsuperscript{84} Perhaps Mrs. Dowden was still not well enough to entertain company, this having been the case during Hiram's previous visit. At any rate, Corson attended the Celebration on Thursday, July 7, 1892, at 11:30 a. m. at Leinster Hall representing Cornell University. Other Americans represented Johns Hopkins (Professor Newcomb and Dr. D. C. Gilman, one of Corson's oldest academic acquaintances), The University of California, Columbia, Harvard, The College of New Jersey, The University of Pennsylvania, Yale, and the Smithsonian Institution.\textsuperscript{85} Eugene joined his parents for the celebration. He had been in Paris.\textsuperscript{86}

\textsuperscript{82}Letter from Edward Dowden to Hiram Corson, Dublin, Ireland, June 20, 1892.

\textsuperscript{83}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{84}Letter from Henry J. Dudgeon to Hiram Corson, Dublin, Ireland, May 7, 1892.

\textsuperscript{85}Information taken from Hiram Corson's copy of the Dublin Tercentenary souvenir program.

\textsuperscript{86}Letter from Eugene Corson to his parents, Paris, June 29, 1892.
A letter from Professor Meiklejohn at the University of St. Andrews indicates that the Corsons planned to visit Edinburgh. If so, they went there before the celebration, for they left Dublin to go to London. Corson stayed again at the Inns of Court Hotel and visited the Reading Room of the British Museum in order to study the letters of Cowper.

Rev. Canon Benham wrote a letter of introduction to the Dean of Winchester, explaining that Corson was making "a pilgrimage" there, "partly to see Jane Austen's grave." Benham himself promised to show the professor "the room in which Paradise Regained is said to have been written." Canon Benham was central to a story concerning Corson and Tennyson. The Canon wrote:

Now let me tell you, at once, about my visit to Lord Tennyson. I found him looking very ill, but he was nevertheless cheerful and bright in manner. After a little talk, I said to him, 'I have brought a book which the author has asked me to present to you.' His reply, brusque enough, was "Is it poetry? If it is, I won't have it, I have had three already today." I told him it was not poetry, though it was a criticism on poetry. He gave a sort of satisfied grunt, and I went on to tell him what it was. And I read him the headings of some of the sections.

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87 Letter from I. M. D. Meiklejohn to Hiram Corson, Edinburgh, Scotland, undated.


89 Letter from Rev. Canon Benham to the Dean of Winchester, August 2, 1892.

90 Letter from Canon Benham to Hiram Corson, August 21, 1892.
"What does he say of me?" came after a little while, and I read him a page. He was much delighted, and took it out of my hand. To cut the story short, he spent the whole afternoon reading that book. It was almost the last book he did read. He was very much interested over the metre of In Memoriam, and the lengthening out of the ideas. I am sure you will be glad to know this, and to know that he thoroughly appreciated and enjoyed your criticisms.91

In September Hiram arrived in Antwerp, "aboard the ship Woodland."92 By October he was back in Ithaca without Caroline, who remained in Europe to chaperone Grace Caldwell, a young woman from Ithaca who was touring Europe.93 Lonely in Ithaca without his wife, Hiram decided to spend Thanksgiving holidays with friends in Pennsylvania and Christmas holidays in Savannah with Eugene.94 He left Annie in the care of her father, who was on vacation in Ithaca, and her mother, who also was living with the Corsons.95

Eugene had come home from abroad to marry a Jewish widow who was much older than he. The families were opposed to the wedding; but Eugene, after much soul-searching, decided to marry anyway. The woman, referred

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91 Letter from Canon Benham to Hiram Corson as quoted by Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, Ithaca, November 29, 1892.

92 Letter from Caroline Corson to Hiram Corson, September 21, 1892.

93 Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, Ithaca, November 12, 1892. Mrs. Corson financed her trips by chaperoning young women from Ithaca.

94 Ibid.

95 Ibid.
to as "Eugene's wife" in his parents' letters, died soon after the marriage, and in 1894 Eugene remarried. His second wife was Cora Wirt Baker. The wedding occurred at Christ Church Cathedral, New Orleans, Tuesday, September 4, at 3:00 p. m., the Rev. A. G. Bakewell officiating. 96

It was the first wife who entertained her father-in-law in Savannah, in the house her husband had bought for $6500 with money borrowed from his father. Hiram approved of the house and appeared impressed by his son's successful medical practice. Although one of the South's attractions for Corson was the mild winter, Savannah surprised him with one of her infrequent ice storms. Corson exclaimed that it was "the first ice, Eugene said, he had seen since I was here before, eleven years ago!" 97

Hiram told his wife that he would leave Savannah on Monday, January 2, and his first lecture would begin on the following Wednesday. 98 The return to Ithaca brought to a close two of the three long trips he made in the 1890's: one to Great Britain and two to Savannah. He went to Eugene's house once more, in 1899, on a trip South for his health.

96 Information gleaned from a series of letters among the Corson family and from a clipping from a New Orleans, Louisiana, newspaper among Hiram Corson's papers in the Cornell Archives.

97 Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, Savannah, Georgia, December 27, 1892.

98 Ibid.
Hiram and Caroline Corson were major influences upon each other's lives; they shared most of the same interests, particularly in literature. Their philosophies, insofar as Mrs. Corson's can be determined, seem inextricably mingled. Therefore, it comes as no real surprise that Caroline should undertake a lecture tour of her own. As early as 1884 she had published a warning against allusion-hunting in Browning;99 and following her return from Europe in 1893, she hit upon a "new interpretation of a Browning poem."100 One year later she was traveling west to give a series of lecture-readings on Browning.101

She lectured in Madison, Wisconsin, on "Childe Roland" early in November of 1894.102 On November 7, 1894, she wrote to her husband from Madison that she had read her Roland to an invited audience in Mrs. Adams' parlors and had been paid twenty-five dollars. Mrs. Moore, Caroline wrote, had arranged for another paid performance in town.

Her letter for November 10 told Hiram that she was to begin a Browning class in Madison like the one he had taught the preceding summer. Twelve people joined her

102. Letter from Caroline Corson to Hiram Corson, Madison, November 3, 1894.
class, "each paying $5.00 for a series of five explanations." The reading tour lasted through December 10 and took her to Bay City and Chicago, where she presented successful reading-lectures and conducted classes. Her letter for November 9 from Madison, in which she apologized for forgetting her husband's birthday because her "thoughts had been so fixed on" her work, was effervescent from her success as a reader:

My Child Roland was a great success yesterday: I never knew Prest. Adams so enthusiastic! He praised the style, the treatment of the subject; the reading! Sat up last night to pour over Browning. After the reading, I shook hands with over 80 people I believe--some extravagant compliments! It is my strong piece. I have prepared "In a Balcony" and some half dozen of the longer poems of Browning in the same way: these elucidations are helpful to even students of Browning and made converts of others.

While Caroline was on tour, the Rev. Jenkin Lloyd Jones of Chicago delivered a sermon in Sage Chapel, in which he paid "poetic tributes to chemistry." Jones was a Unitarian minister who had as one of his many interests the study of Browning. In fact, Jones, Corson, and Levi Lincoln Thaxter are credited with initiating the study of Browning in American literary clubs. Although

103Letter from Caroline Corson to Hiram Corson, Bay City, December 3, 1894.

104The Cornell Era, XXVII (November, 1894), 69.

no record exists of a meeting, it is certain that were
Corson in Ithaca and well enough to walk over to Sage, he
would have heard Jones' sermon. Most likely he would
have invited the minister over to Cascadilla Cottage for
a long Browning chat and reading session.

Two other lectures that Corson certainly would have
wanted to hear were Russell H. Conwell's famous sermon, 106
"Acres of Diamonds," given in Sage Chapel in April, and
Colonel Robert G. Ingersoll's "Oration on Shakespeare" at
the Lyceum on May 3. 107

During the 1890's Corson received a number of
letters that indicate how widespread his reputation had
become. He continued to correspond with William Watson,
the British poet he had befriended on an early European
tour. Watson wrote that his volume, "Wordsworth's Grave
and Other Poems," had been "favorably reviewed" in America.
When Tennyson died, Corson had expected Watson to be
named poet laureate. He told Caroline:

By the way, it seems that my prophesy about William
Watson, made 17 or 18 years ago, may possibly come
ture. Even the Prince of Wales it is said favors
Watson for the laureateship. And he is Gladstone's
favorite. 108

Curiously, just seventeen days earlier he had

106 The Cornell Era, XXVI (April, 1894), 232.
107 The Cornell Era, XXVI (April, 1894), 220.
108 Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, November 29, 1892.
written Caroline that it seemed likely no laureate would be appointed and that the office would cease to be. And he added, "It is just as well."109 Although the laureate-ship was not discontinued, it did not go to Watson. Corson, however, continued to respect his friend's poetry.

A letter from a former student then teaching at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, is a testimonial to Corson's influence on his classroom methods. Mr. Langdon informed his professor that he had been trying to work "along the lines upon which your influence started me while at Cornell," and to Corson he attributed "whatever good work" he had done there. "English poetry," he wrote, "is not and has not been taught at Brown as you and I (through you) believe it can and should be." In trying to break with the traditional method, he followed Corson's own teaching format: "My lectures," Langdon stated, "have consisted of conversational talks interspersed with interpretative readings of the poem." He used few notes but he had no trouble in holding his audience "for an hour and a half each time."

He continued with praise for his former teacher:

My dear sir, I want you to excuse all this apparent self-praise and attribute it entirely to my enthusiasm and the joy I feel in finding myself instrumental in proving the success and superiority of the attitude toward poetry in which you taught me to believe. What I want to do next year is to give a couple

109Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, November 12, 1892.
of courses in English poetry to the students and lecture outside to popular audiences and then be instrumental in spreading a vital assimilation of the truth as it is in Shakespeare and Browning. If by a letter to Pres. Andrews, who is feeling his way toward what I want, and who is in perfection sympathy with what I can do, you can help me along a little, I know you will be glad to do it.110

From East Avon, New York, came a letter from William P. McKenzie, a minister and teacher. He enclosed the following unidentified clipping:

What we are, fixes the limit of what we do. Our words and our acts are measured by our personality. Our teaching is conditioned on our characters, rather than on our knowledge. Indeed, as Professor Corson says, "Being is teaching, the highest, the only quickening mode of teaching; the only mode which secures that unconscious following of a superior spirit by an inferior spirit, of a kindled soul by an unkindled soul, 'as the water follows the moon, silently, with fluid steps, around the globe."111

McKenzie said that he had been trying to live by the same principles, and he looked forward to meeting Corson in Ithaca and attending some of his lectures.

Corson discovered through Miss Thomas, the Dean of Bryn Mawr, that his Aesthetics of English Verse had been introduced there and that the students found it deeply interesting. Corson's private response was, "Well, it is in advance of anything that has yet been published and

110Letter from C. Langdon to Hiram Corson, 38 Barnes Street, Providence, Rhode Island, February 27, 1892.

goes far beyond mere scholarship."\textsuperscript{112}

Edwin Mims, an English professor at Trinity College, Durham, North Carolina, wrote to ask Corson about the possibility of his coming to Ithaca to study under his guidance and to thank him for writing \textit{The Aims of Literary Study}.

I have used your books on Shakespeare and Browning. This last one is in the nature of an inspiration to me. For the past two years I have been teaching English in accordance with your ideas; in doing so I have had to face a good deal of opposition on the part of those brought up under the old regime. In my humble way I have been trying to give my students the inspiration of the lofty spiritual thought and life of our great authors, and find that when they get hold of ideas, and feel the inspiration of the awakened life, they can write, if it is in them at all. It has been an encouraging thing in my life to read your book, and find that I was endorsed by such authority. I got it one morning before breakfast, and finished it at one sitting.

On account of the ideas you express in that book, as well as your general reputation for scholarly work, I am anxious to come under your instruction.\textsuperscript{113}

Old students frequently sent the professor their creative writing to get his comments. His opinion was valued. Langdon's letter thanked him for his kindness toward some sonnets, and Aubertine Moore wrote her "good teacher of the elder time" that she always felt it was to him she owed her "best literary impulses." She wanted him to see her "Songs from the North," saying, "I shall be

\textsuperscript{112}Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, Ithaca, November 29, 1892.

\textsuperscript{113}Letter from Edwin Mims to Hiram Corson, Durham, North Carolina, April 21, 1895.
very proud of whatever you can write me about them."114

Thanks came from Washington, D. C., for the article on "Vocal Culture and Its Relation to General Culture." This teacher, too, found that Corson had expressed what had been in his own mind for some time. He wrote of his disillusionment with current methods of teaching reading:

I am myself a teacher of reading and physical culture, although I have almost given up the former because so few people of intelligence pay any attention to the subject. My experience has been that it is only persons of a limited degree of intelligence who wish to study "elocution"—perish the word!—and the idea of seriously developing the voice for the purpose of giving expression to the best thoughts of ourselves and others seems never to occur even to the principals of really good schools. I teach a literature class in a Friends school in which not one of the girls can read lucidly the simplest poem.

I hope to work a reformation but I have no encouragement from the head of the school. As far as possible I shall circulate this article hoping I may do real missionary work, for the cultivation of the speaking and reading voice seems to me one of the crying needs of this generation, and I believe that, as you have said, this must be commenced at home.

The writer went on to state his own theory of good reading: he believed that good reading came "by instinct rather than by cultivation," and that "good readers are born, not made."115

From as far away as Madras, India, came a request

114Card from Mrs. Samuel Moore to Hiram Corson, August 12, 1895.

115Letter from Era Whitcomb Olney to Hiram Corson, 939 Rhode Island Avenue, Washington, D. C., October 13, 1895.
for permission to include some of Corson's writings in a series of English readers in prose and poetry, adapted for use in the Indian high schools. The proposal was that the readers would serve "as a connecting link between the renowned authors of the West and the rising generation of the East, and to immortalize the names of the former in the Orient." The writer also asked for a recent, signed photograph of Professor Corson. 116

An interesting note from Eugene indicates that father and son held critical discussions of literature, and that the latter respected and remembered the former's opinion.

I heard you express a criticism about Kipling, namely, that his poetry is only phenomenal, and all he has written might be styled "chooses vues"—things seen—a acute observer, but dealing only with what is transient and of temporary interest. 117 (Feb. 25, 1898)

In summary, the years between 1890 and 1900 for Hiram Corson were spent in attention to his duties as a professor of English at Cornell University. His longest trip was to the British Isles, and that was as Cornell's official representative to the Tercentenary Celebration of the University of Dublin. The other long journeys that he

116 Letter from M. S. Purnalingam Pillai, B. A., to Hiram Corson, 99/2 Linghee Chetty Street, Madras, India, February 15, 1898.

117 Letter from Eugene Corson to Hiram Corson, February 25, 1898.
took were for the double purposes of visiting his son and restoring his health. He visited Eugene in Savannah, Georgia, in 1892 and again in 1899. He did make a few short trips for the purposes of performing and visiting friends. In this connection he went to Ogontz, Philadelphia, and New York City.

Most of his lecture readings, however, were for his students, faculty, and townspeople of Ithaca. During the decade he continued to perform the works of the writers he held to be representative of English and American literature: the Brownings, Shakespeare, Tennyson, Marlowe, Ruskin, and Milton; and Bryant, Whittier, Poe, Hawthorne, Lowell, Holmes, and Whitman. He also read and lectured on the poetry of the Bible for the Unitarian Church in Ithaca.

The years were also ones of influence. Letters from family, former students, and people who knew him only through his writing attest to his influence on the oral study of literature. He gained widespread recognition through his writing. His ideas on vocal literary study were printed in articles and books. The years saw the publication of *A Primer of English Verse* (1892), *The Aims of Literary Study* (1895), and *The Voice and Spiritual Education* (1896). Articles that echoed the philosophy of these books also appeared during that time: "The Aim of Literary Study" in *Poet-Lore* (September and
October, 1894); and "Vocal Culture in Its Relation to Literary Culture" in the June, 1895, Atlantic.

The decade of the 1890's was for Hiram Corson a time to reflect, to perform, and to write. Through these occupations his influence became even more widespread than it had been in previous years. At the turn of the century he was seventy-two years old and at the height of his popularity and renown.
Chapter 6

THE YEARS OF SPIRITUALISM: 1900-1911

The last eleven years of his life were productive ones for Hiram Corson. He continued to teach, to write, and to perform even after his retirement to Professor Emeritus in 1903. These years were lonely, for Caroline Rollin Corson died in 1901. After her death her husband became increasingly involved in spiritualism in an attempt to communicate with her. Corson continued to perform literature on tour and in Ithaca during his last years. He also sought correlation between his belief in spiritualism and his literary philosophy. After his death friends, students, servants, and family shared their memories of his life and work.

TOUR PERFORMANCES

Corson returned to Baltimore, Maryland, to deliver two lecture series at the Woman's College, the first in 1902, the second in 1907. Plans for the former were begun in 1901, when Charles W. Hodell, a professor at the college and a former Cornellian, was corresponding with his former teacher. Hodell wrote that Dr. Goucher,
the President, usually paid only "the nominal honorarium of $25 per lecture," but he had authorized Hodell to offer Corson $100 if he would come there at his own expense and give two lectures. Hodell assured his professor that he would have no local expenses since he was expected to stay at the Hodell residence near the college. As further enticement Hodell stated that "many men of considerable fame" had lectured there without compensation.¹ The letter must have been effective persuasion, for Hodell wrote again on December 16 to give Corson possible dates for the lecture from which he was to choose. The two subjects for lectures were also left to Corson's discretion.

By January 2, 1902, plans for the series were firm. The first would be on January 20 at five o'clock, the topic being, "What Is Literature?" It was to be followed on Tuesday evening by "The Ring and the Book." Cards of invitation and admission to the first lecture were to be sent to teachers and "literary people" in the city; the audience for the second was to be "two hundred and fifty students in the department of English with a few chosen guests."²

Hodell and Miss Conant, another of Corson's former

¹Letter from Charles W. Hodell to Hiram Corson, Baltimore, December 5, 1901.

²Letter from Charles W. Hodell to Hiram Corson, Baltimore, January 2, 1902.
students teaching at the Woman's College, planned to have their one o'clock classes on Monday and their nine o'clock classes on Tuesday unite as audience to hear Corson read whatever he felt "moved to give." Hodell continued: "It gives me so much pleasure to think that I shall soon be able to show you my place of work and to introduce you to my students, your grand-students."³

At the completion of a week in Baltimore, Corson wrote Eugene:

I've had a splendid time. My lectures and readings at the Woman's College have been received with a warm enthusiasm. They have been pronounced the most successful ever given at the College. Have given three lectures and five readings, all to large audiences.⁴

The third lecture to which he referred was on The Merchant of Venice, in which he offered "a new interpretation of the fifth act."⁵ His readings to the students were from Browning, Tennyson, Whitman, Longfellow, Lowell, Holmes, Emerson, Whittier, and Ruskin. From the latter he performed "The Two Boyhoods" from Modern Painters. The student reviewer said: "His interpretation of Ruskin was a revelation in prose reading; words and thought stood out

³Letter from Charles W. Hodell to Hiram Corson, Baltimore, January 2, 1902.

⁴Letter to Eugene Corson from Hiram Corson, January 27, 1902, Baltimore.

in new and poetic power." The critic was obviously moved by the entire series, and especially by the personality of the lecturer, which, she reported, "seemed to stir every department of the College." She continued, "It is something to know a great man through his books and by reputation; it is infinitely more to be with the man, and to hear a great soul speak." In addition to praise, she gave the following eyewitness account of the professor's performance style and personal appearance:

Dr. Corson is venerable and distinguished in appearance, old in years, seventy-four—he tells it proudly—but with the light of youth, the fire of undying energy in his eyes. His voice is rich and melodious, a full-toned instrument under perfect control. If he reads a familiar poem, you realize that you never truly knew it before, and when he discovers to you a new one, you are eager to return to it to explore the mines of wealth he has opened to your understanding. His interpretation of a piece of literature is largely through his voice, but he gives sometimes a telling sentence of explanation here and there which helps to illuminate the meaning. As he reads he has a way of pausing and looking into the eyes of his hearers, in a manner that sends the thought home. He is genial in manner, and through all that he says and does sparkles a rich humor, which seems an essential part of the man. 

She closed the review with the following assessment of Corson's influence on his audiences at the Baltimore Woman's College:

Dr. Corson has left behind him an influence that will last through the years to come. It seems as though we have had a visit from a divine messenger, one who lives in touch with things eternal, and we

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6 The Kalends, pp. 131-32.  
7 Ibid.
have sat at his feet and learned truth. He is a living exponent of the new education, for which he so ardently pleads—the education of the soul. He is not a light-bearer; he radiates light from his own soul, and illuminates others, not by design, but of necessity; for where light is, there will be life and blessing.  

Corson was so impressed by the column that he wrote Hodell to determine its authorship. The reply was that it had been written by Miss Catherine M. Gees. Frances Pang-born, whose name appeared above the column, was "merely the editor of that department of The Kalends, the student paper in which the review appeared." No doubt Miss Gees received a letter of thanks from the Professor whose visit had so moved her.

During his visit Corson was "luncheoned and dined" to his "fullest capacity," and he wrote to his son, "Baltimore is famed for its hospitality, and more could not have been shown me if I had been a great one of the world." From Baltimore he travelled on for a two-day visit in Washington. In the snowstorm that greeted him, he trudged around the city where he had lived so much earlier, taking notice of the progress and of the changes that had occurred. He found everything gone in the old

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8 The Kalends, pp. 131-32.
9 Letter from Charles Hodell to Hiram Corson, Baltimore, March 10, 1902.
10 Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, Baltimore, January 27, 1902.
neighborhood except the house "on Pennsylvania Avenue above 19th" where Eugene was born. He wrote, "The house in which Dr. Cushman had his school and where I first met dear Ma, is gone. All is gone." His trip to Washington had been delayed, and thereby:

I lost an experience that I should have valued very much. Dr. Suisher had informed Mrs. Roosevelt that I should be in Washington on Saturday, and an invitation was sent to me to her reception and tea.12

The White House tea to which he referred was given by Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt, whose husband had been President since the preceding year.

Dr. Suisher, who appears to have been his Washington host, took him to the Cosmos Club, where he met "a large number of interesting and distinguished people." He compared the Club with the Athenaeum in London.13

From Washington he went on to Philadelphia to visit friends whom he found to be old and ill. Professor Holden at 85 was deaf and had to be supported to walk, and Professor Becker at 86 was even worse: "His mind is gone, and he has to be taken care of by nurses."14

Undoubtedly, Corson at seventy-four was made painfully aware of what the approaching years might hold for him, and his work bears testimony to his determination to

11Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, Ithaca, February 10, 1902.
12Ibid.
13Ibid.
14Ibid.
remain active throughout his life. Before returning to Ithaca he went on to New York City, where he visited with his sister Clara and her daughter Annie, both of whom had lived with the Corsons in Ithaca in the 1890's.\(^{15}\)

Eugene had expressed his desire that his father visit the new Congressional library and the Smithsonian Institution, which had been constructed since Corson had been in Washington. He felt that "the city itself had become a great city, perhaps the most interesting in the country."\(^{16}\) If Corson visited these places, he did not mention them to Eugene. However, their letters bypassed one another in the mail; possibly Corson did go to the Smithsonian and to the Library of Congress, where he had worked during his bachelor days in Washington.

Corson returned to Baltimore for another series of lectures in the winter of 1907. By then he was approaching his eightieth birthday. On this visit he stayed at the Hotel Belvedere on Charles and Chase Streets. He wrote his family in Savannah that he was having "a very good time," and the letter listing a busy itinerary.\(^{17}\) January 22 he dined with the German professor

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\(^{15}\)Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, Ithaca, February 10, 1902.

\(^{16}\)Letter from Eugene Corson to Hiram Corson, January 31, 1902.

\(^{17}\)Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, Baltimore, January 24, 1907.
at the Woman's College, Dr. Froelicher, whose wife had been Corson's student at Cornell thirty years before.

In Munich, the professor of German had been a student of Dr. Bernays, whom Corson had known and enjoyed during his visit there. On January 23 he had dinner with the Professor of Greek at Johns Hopkins, Dr. Gildersleeve, and his wife. The next day he dined at the home of a Woman's College professor with the faculty. Dr. and Mrs. Gilman invited him to dinner on Sunday and to read on Monday "in their parlors to a company of 25 or 30 people who . . . knew me and attended my lectures at the Johns Hopkins 25 years ago!"\(^{17}\)

In addition to being entertained, Corson also performed, as his account to Eugene illuminates:

On Sunday . . . at 4 1/2 p. m. gave a Bible reading of an hour and a quarter in the Woman's College Chapel. Yesterday dined at Mr. Machen's, I being the guest of honor, and read from 9 1/2 to 11 p. m. Mrs. M. is the most prominent Browning woman of the city. They have an elegant house on Monument Street, near the Washington monument. This morning I have read at the Woman's College, and tomorrow I shall read at the Ladies Club near the Hotel. It is quite a palatial place.\(^{18}\)

In 1902 Corson travelled to Rochester, New York, for a Browning reading at the Unitarian Church.\(^{19}\) One of

\(^{17}\)Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, Baltimore, January 24, 1907.

\(^{18}\)Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, Baltimore, February 5, 1907.

\(^{19}\)Post Express [Rochester], July 5, 1902.
his former students from that city, a teacher of "oratory, voice, and physical culture," wrote him of her disappointment in his not visiting her at her summer cottage on the Irondequoit Bay. She had wanted to take her "Proffie" out in their "large safe rowboat," which she told him, "I knew when you saw it you would not have been a bit afraid to have jumped in and have me row you around." Although she had "missed her kind old friend" and had not heard him read, she did praise his Primer of English Verse, telling him:

It is a revelation to me! Until now—why— all the subtle beauties of poetry seem to have been lost to me. I thank you so heartily for opening my eyes and ears. Yes, its both! Have committed most of the choice bits of gathered verse and now I want the title of the book you showed me about which I said I understood nothing, for with your guidance, everything seems to be made so easy, comprehensive and interesting.

This letter provides insight into the attitudes of his favorite students toward him. Flora Stoll, however, used a more familiar tone in her letter than did other students who wrote to their former professor.

The critic for the Rochester Post Express was more fortunate than Miss Stoll, for he heard the Browning Reading. His review discussed the manner in which Corson

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20From the printed stationery of Miss Flora Stoll.

21Letter from Flora Stoll to Hiram Corson, Rochester, July 21, 1902.
read and the necessity for good oral performance if listeners were to understand Browning.

The readings from Browning, given by Professor Corson of Cornell on Thursday evening, at the chapel of the Unitarian Church, were very interesting. He has a voice of great power, finely cultivated; he reads under the full influence of the poet's thought and emotion; and he has the faculty of making the meaning clear, so that a passage which seems difficult or obscure to the student becomes simple and natural under his interpretation. This capacity of suggesting the meaning, which is a mere matter of course qualification in ordinary literature, is the essential thing in reading Browning, because of the strange allusions, the subtle distinctions, the shifting phases of thought, the oddity of method amounting sometimes almost to freakishness.22

This reviewer recognized the power of good oral interpretation as an aid to audience understanding and appreciation of poetry. Corson seems not to have lost his power as a Browning interpreter through the years.

In 1903 Princeton university presented Corson with the degree of Litt.D. at the June 10 Commencement exercises. The circumstances surrounding this honorary degree are of interest. Charles W. McAlpin, Princeton's Secretary, noticed Corson's name in an issue of Princeton People in Western New York as a member of the Class of 1864. Upon a routine examination of the General Catalogue, he could not find a record of Corson's ever having been a student.23 Corson had never attended Princeton, and he

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22Post Express [Rochester], July 5, 1902.

23Letter from Charles W. McAlpin, Secretary, Princeton University, to Hiram Corson, Princeton, New Jersey, December 10, 1902.
must have made the fact clear to McAlpin, for within three months he was offered the recognition of an honorary doctorate from that institution. Naturally, Corson was pleased to accept a doctorate since he had never graduated from a university. He responded to the offer:

It will give me much pleasure to accept the invitation from the Trustees and Faculty of Princeton University to be present at the annual commencement, on Wednesday, June tenth, and I shall deeply appreciate the honor of receiving, on that occasion, the degree of Doctor of Letters.24

He soon received from the Commencement Committee the directions for his participation in the graduation ceremonies. He would meet Mr. Libbey, Secretary of the Committee, in the Chancellor Green Library at 10:15 that morning, where he would be provided with a cap and gown. The procession would form shortly thereafter for Alexander Hall, where the degree would be conferred. At that time the hood for the degree, presented by the University, was to be placed upon his shoulders.25

Corson wrote his family in Georgia that the only people he knew at Princeton were the wife of the President and her brother, a Princeton professor, whom he had met at Atlantic City a few years before during the Easter

24Letter from Hiram Corson to the Trustees and Faculty of Princeton University, Ithaca, March 14, 1903.

recess. The President of Princeton at that time was Woodrow Wilson, who wrote Corson on the same day he had sent his own letter to Eugene:

We are looking forward with pleasure to seeing you here at Commencement, and Mrs. Wilson joins me in begging that you will be our guest during your stay here.

If you will be kind enough to let me know at what time to expect you, I will see to it that you are met at the train and your luggage brought direct to Prospect.26

By June 1 Corson was looking forward to his visit with the Wilsons and his trip to Princeton. He hoped to be through with his university work before he left. Classes were over on June 3, and the only papers he had to read were the theses for advanced degrees. His assistant and his Fellow graded all the class papers. Following the trip to Princeton, he would have a four-week vacation before summer school classes began.27

After he received the degree, Corson went on to New York. From the "absolutely fire proof" Hoffman House Hotel in Madison Square, he wrote his son about the festivities. He and Professor Crane, who also had been awarded an honorary degree, were introduced by Henry Van Dyke, who spoke of Corson's thirty-three years at Cornell and of his status as a "Browning and a Shakespeare


27Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, June 1, 1903, Ithaca.
authority, etc. etc."28 At his right on the platform was former President Grover Cleveland, who also wore an LL.D. gown. Corson wrote admiringly of the Princeton campus, and of his hosts he said:

We were splendidly entertained by Dr. Woodrow Wilson, the President. His house is quite palatial. . . . Dr. Wilson is a charming man, and perhaps the ablest President in the country. Although but 46 years of age, he is quite a voluminous author.29

The following year Corson's seventy-fifth birthday was celebrated at Cornell, and he received a second letter from Princeton's President Wilson:

Mrs. Wilson and I have read with the greatest interest of the celebration at Cornell of your seventy-fifth birthday, and have been very much gratified to think that you have thus been assured of the warm appreciation which your colleagues and all who are interested in the more ideal side of education feel for your long and successful work. Pray let us add our own congratulations and the warmest expressions of the hope that you may be spared for many years to enjoy the powers which have brought you eminence and fame.30

In receiving the honorary degree Corson did not make a speech or give a performance, but he was quite proud of the Doctor of Letters hood from Princeton. He wore it thereafter for special reading engagements when the

28Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, New York, June 11, 1903.
29Ibid.
30Letter from Woodrow Wilson to Hiram Corson, November 18, 1903, Princeton, New Jersey.
occasion called for ceremony.\textsuperscript{31} One such time was during a lecture tour in Toronto, Canada, where he made at least four extended visits as a guest reader-lecturer, one in each year from 1902 through 1905.

The first lecture trip in 1902 occurred in April. On receiving the notice of the lectures, Eugene complimented it by saying it was "no perfunctory piece of work but a genuine expression of affection."\textsuperscript{32}

Corson returned to Toronto in 1903, and this lecture series received full newspaper coverage. He left Ithaca on April 1, planning to visit the Round Table Club of Toronto for a lecture on Ruskin and DeQuincey on April 2 and for a reading the following day of Macbeth "by request."\textsuperscript{33} Actually, the programs as presented were more complex than Corson's letter had indicated. In the morning of April 3 he read to members of the Round Table Club from Shelley, Coleridge, Browning, and Whitman. He concluded with the fourth chapter of St. John's gospel, which he told the assembly had been "rarely surpassed" as a piece of literature.\textsuperscript{34} The Club met at the Conservatory

\textsuperscript{31}Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, Toronto, Canada, February 1, 1904.

\textsuperscript{32}Letter from Eugene Corson to Hiram Corson, June 5, 1902.

\textsuperscript{33}Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, March 20, 1903, Ithaca, New York.

\textsuperscript{34}Globe [Toronto], April 3, 1903.
of Music hall, and that same evening Corson returned to the hall for a public performance to a full house composed of "about one hundred and fifty women and seventy-five men." The audience applauded warmly when he appeared on the platform. The head of the English department at the University of Toronto, Professor Alexander, introduced him to the assembly, crediting Corson's readings with leading him to a study of Browning as a student at Johns Hopkins. Alexander "declared that in twenty years that had elapsed since he had sat as a pupil under Professor Corson, he had never heard a more soulful or apter reader of the English Classics."  

Corson gave "a cultured and finely appreciative reading" of selections from Browning, Ruskin, and DeQuincey. He called Ruskin "the prose poet of the last century," and Browning "the strongest, richest voice of modern poetry." The selection for Ruskin's Modern Painters he described as "a remarkable bit of poetic prose--poetry in solution." A reviewer commented that "it was certainly read in a way to bring out all its beauty and richness." Another reviewer concurred that

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35 News [Toronto], April 3, 1903.
36 Globe [Toronto], April 3, 1903.
37 News [Toronto], April 3, 1903.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 Globe [Toronto].
41 Ibid.
the selections

were read with illuminative comment and with an expression and intonation of voice so apt that the mere reading of the text unfolded new beauties of language and of thought unseen before. 42

The Toronto Globe reviewer was not so much impressed by the performance of "Saul," however. He felt, "It was rather long for the occasion, and perhaps was not followed with the attention to make it intelligible throughout."

The third selection was DeQuincey's essay "On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth." Like the other selections in the program, Corson had read it aloud many times before. The Globe reviewer said that it "was not only interesting in itself, but read in a way which was thoroughly appreciated by all." It was given in preparation for the next night's performance of Macbeth.

Corson's voice on this occasion was described as being "rich and mellow," modulated "perfectly to bring out the music and the meaning of the selections he reads." 43 Although his readings were accompanied by commentary, "His manner of reading made comment largely unnecessary. But the comments he did make were remarkable for chaste and cultured diction, and for wonderfully pregnant suggestiveness." 44

As was the usual practice for his performances in Ithaca, Corson insisted that the program begin promptly.

42 News [Toronto]. 43 Ibid. 44 Ibid.
at eight o'clock. Both reviews stated that the doors would be closed to prevent disturbance by latecomers.

The News reporter continued:

Some late-comers last night, who came shortly after 8 o'clock, were made painfully aware of the fact by being forced to wait in the lobby until 9 o'clock. Prof. Corson is a very punctual man. He remarked last night: "I never was late in my life." The hint may be valuable to those who intend hearing his reading of Macbeth tonight.

The Macbeth performance of the following night was similarly reviewed. He again appeared at the Conservatory Music Hall under the sponsorship of the Round Table Club. The reading included critical commentary on the play's structure. Corson revealed that the text was mutilated, and he reported the debate that some of Macbeth's lines in the play might belong more accurately to Lady Macbeth. Salvini thought the sleepwalking scene was written for Macbeth rather than his wife, Corson said, but his view probably resulted from the natural desire of an actor to play the scene. The reviewer said of the performance:

Although Dr. Corson has not the actor's mode of speech, he brings to the interpretation of Shakespeare a ripe and discriminating intelligence .... Sitting on the platform, Dr. Corson, bearded, grave, and aged, with the student's lamp lighting his face, looked like nothing more than the theatrical representation of Faust just before Mephistopheles appears to him. Since we cannot have Shakespeare on the stage nowadays, it is a delight to hear the music of his words chanted to us. Dr. Corson has the knack of giving significance to every line he utters, and from his readings one gets the meaning if not the music of Shakespeare. .... The general impression of the recital was to deepen one's realization of the mar-
vellous beauty with which Sheakespeare has invested the sordid tale of bloodshed.\textsuperscript{45}

During his stay in Toronto, Corson had been the guest of the Rev. Dr. Armstrong Black.\textsuperscript{46} He must have given Black copies of his latest books as a parting gift, for the Toronto minister wrote him that he had been "daily turning to the joy of those books" that seemed to hold the tone of his voice and his gestures in addition to his "rare, rich thought."\textsuperscript{47} He told Corson that his visit had awakened "new veneration and finer sympathies" in the young women of Mrs. Cutter's class. Black continued: "Beyond that circle you were a succourer of many and of myself also," and he testified to Corson's influence on the whole city: "Toronto has intellectually and spiritually only opaque vision, but 'she darkly feels him great and wise.'"\textsuperscript{48}

Corson returned to Toronto in 1904 for thirty days. His letters to Eugene were filled with news of these lectures and readings that he felt were the most successful of his long life.\textsuperscript{49} During this series he was

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\textsuperscript{45}\textit{News [Toronto]}, April 4, 1903.
\textsuperscript{46}\textit{News, [Toronto], Society Column, April 4, 1903.}
\textsuperscript{47}Letter from Armstrong Black to Hiram Corson, Toronto, June 13, 1903.
\textsuperscript{48}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{49}Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, Toronto, February 1, 1904.
\end{flushleft}
in good voice, but he had to turn down many invitations to clubs and dinners in order to keep himself "in good vocal condition" for his lectures and readings. At the time of his letter he had twenty-six more performances planned.50

He was pleased with his audiences as well as with his voice. He found Toronto "a very literary city," and its residents "markedly different from the usual run of Americans (U. S. people). More civilized! No swagger! They belong to a limited monarchy!"51 He said that he had never met so many cultivated people in the same length of time, nor had he ever been so honored before.52 One lady of the city's aristocracy invited him to dinner at her house and then to the theatre to see Sir Henry Irving in The Bells and "some other play." Corson confessed:

I accepted the invitation with reluctance, as I fear to take cold in the theatre, and I don't care for Henry Irving. He's a much overestimated actor. I have to take great care of my voice. It has been, all these three weeks, at its best, and I wish to end my course of lectures and readings without any falling off.53

50Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, The Queens Hotel, Toronto, January 17, 1904.
51Ibid.
52Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, Toronto, February 1, 1904.
53Ibid.
Goldwin Smith, one of Corson's oldest Cornell friends, had for many years been a professor at the University of Toronto. He "gave a grand dinner" in honor of Corson and Professor Moulton, who was also in the city. Corson believed his own talent to be far superior to that of Moulton. He confided to Eugene:

I was disappointed in Professor Moulton. He has a bad voice, and worse gestures. He is a knowledge man, without spirituality. He has no power of vocal interpretation. In that, the people have recognized my superiority.54

Corson's series of lectures was at the Conservatory of Music, and his expenses were paid by the Agnes Smith Residence School in the Conservatory. Although the weather was quite cold, he did not suffer; he was driven to the Conservatory and back to the hotel several times a day in a closed sleigh, which he found delightful.55

In addition to the course of lectures, he also gave readings for public enjoyment and for charity. He gave Eugene this account:

The course of lectures and readings ends next Saturday, the 6th. I shall stay here, however, until the 9th, as I am engaged to read Tennyson's "Maud" in St. Andrew's Church on Monday the 8th for the benefit of St. Andrew's Hospital Service. My reading of "Maud" in the Conservatory of Music made such an impression that it is called for again. Already 500 tickets, at 50 cents each, have been sold.

54 Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, Toronto, February 1, 1904.

55 Ibid.
I have large audiences every day, although my lectures and readings are at 11-1/2 o'clock. At my reading of the Book of Job, in St. Andrew's Church, the last evening, there was an audience of about 1700, so Dr. Armstrong Black said, the rector. The seating capacity of the Church is for 1650. Every seat was occupied, and there were many without seats. St. Andrews is the largest church in Toronto. The elite of the city were present, professors from the University and the Colleges here. This is a city of colleges. I wore Dr. Goldwin Smith's Oxford gown of Doctor of Laws, and the Princeton Doctor of Letters Hood. My voice was never better--it was stentorian.56

Having taken great pains to avoid vocal problems, the seventy-six year-old Corson was quite well throughout the month's stay in wintery Toronto. However, the condition was not to last, as he reported to his son: "On my way home from Buffalo, the car was hellishly hot, and in consequence I took a cold and have now a sore throat, and am too hoarse to begin my readings in the University Chapel."57

In 1905 he went for the last time to Toronto. This lecture series lasted for two weeks. Eugene responded to the reviews of his work: "No more complimentary or gratifying notice could have been written. You have been placed with the elect, and I am proud and thankful for it."58 Corson was also invited to lecture in North

56 Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, Toronto, February 1, 1904.

57 Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, February 15, 1904.

58 Letter from Eugene Corson to Hiram Corson, April, 1905.
Carolina that year, but he turned it down with Eugene's advice: "It would be a very long trip, and probably over rough roads, and the compensation so slight."^59

Although trains were Corson's most frequent means of transportation, he was sometimes annoyed by their inconvenience, particularly because of his inability to select his travelling companions. Returning from his lecture at the Ogontz reunion in Philadelphia in 1906, his ride to Ithaca was "marred by the football brutes" who accompanied him.^60

In his last eleven years Hiram Corson remained determined to lead a fully active professional life. Lonely in Ithaca following the death of his wife, he sought to ease the emotional strain by travelling frequently to read and lecture, delighting in the affection he received through the applause of his audiences and through his reverential treatment by his hosts in the cities he visited. His tours took him to Baltimore, Washington, Philadelphia, New York City, Rochester, Princeton, and Toronto. He performed with his usual standard of excellence, refusing to succumb to his age. He numbered among his acquaintances in those years not only the elite

^59Letter from Eugene Corson to Hiram Corson, April 11, 1905.

^60Letter from Eugene Corson to Hiram Corson, November 24, 1906.
of the literary and academic worlds but also past and future Presidents of the United States and their families.

PERFORMANCES IN ITHACA

Corson did not spend all his time on tour during his last years. On the contrary, he continued to read and lecture to his Ithaca audiences. Even after his retirement in 1903 he taught classes at Cornell, continuing to read the literature aloud. He also gave public readings on campus and in town, as well as in Cascadilla Cottage and the houses of his friends.

He continued to receive praise and acclaim from his audiences. Andrew D. White, the President of Cornell who had hired Corson, was a close friend and an ardent supporter of his reading activities in teaching. Following his own career at Cornell, White went into diplomatic service in various capacities. In 1900 when he was in Berlin, he wrote Corson of his fond memories of Cornell days:

I rejoice whenever I think of the beautiful work that you are doing and have done at Cornell, and at times there comes over me a great longing to be back in the midst of it all, to see you and hear you. We have indeed splendid entertainment of various sorts in this capital, but I told a friend the other day that in all my life I had never known anything of the kind more impressive and better done than your readings from In Memoriam, Wordsworth, Milton, etc., in the University Chapel with appropriate music from the
organ. I hope that they have been and will be from time to time repeated.  

White was by no means lacking in opportunity for the finest entertainment of his day, having travelled to and lived in many of the world's major capitals. Such praise was certainly sincere and sincerely appreciated by its recipient. White not only told Corson of his appreciation for his old friend's performances but also included the same kind of praise in his memoirs for the world to see.  

As White wished, Corson did continue his Cornell activities. Since the beginning of the academic year 1890-1891, his professorship had been confined in English literature, a separate chair having been established in English philology and rhetoric. As chairman of the department of English literature, he continued to offer the courses that he most enjoyed teaching. The Cornell University catalog listed the courses offered by the professor in 1901-1902 and discussed the course content as follows:

English 50. Lectures on English Literature from Tennyson and the Brownings to Milton, inclusive, the chronological order being reversed. Throughout year. M W F 10 Barnes Hall. Professor Corson.

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English 51. Shakespeare Readings. The following plays will be read by the Professor, with comments on their dramatic situations, their moral spirit as exhibited in the dramatic movement, their perspective, and the subserviency thereto of the told element, and other features of Shakespeare's dramatic art: Romeo and Juliet, The Merchant of Venice, A Midsummer Night's Dream, King John, Much Ado About Nothing, Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth, Antony and Cleopatra, The Winters' Tale, The Tempest. Each play must be read by the members of the class, carefully and entirely, in advance of its reading by the Professor. Five readings will be devoted to each Play, each reading being confined to one act. Throughout year. T Th 10. Barnes Hall. Professor Corson.


A student in English 51, which met on Tuesdays and Thursdays in Barnes Hall at 10:00 a.m., donated his class notebook to the Cornell archives. This student, Herbert D. A. Donovan, appended to the notes the information that at the time he heard the lectures, Corson was "at the height of his fame as one of the leading if not the very leading Shakespeare scholar in America." Donovan stated that while his professor was "complete master" of the writings of other Shakespeare scholars, he was "positive and outright" in giving his own interpretation to the plays. As reason for Corson's success in teaching, Donovan stated: "It was not his personal peculiarities notable as they were, but his undoubted sincerity and impressiveness that crowded his lectures and kept the
Cornell community in awe of him."64

From Donovan's notebook one can isolate Corson's theories in effective interpretation of Shakespeare.

1. "Well to read 37 plays in 37 consecutive days . . . . Must read with enjoyment." Corson advised that studying Shakespeare was to be enjoyed. Students should try to understand the plays on their own before consulting commentaries.

2. "Evolution of blank verse. Read aloud, to feel this, plays in chronological order." Later, he repeated the concept: "One important feature of S. study, viz., the evolution of blank verse, may be presented at the outset. Let it be read aloud."

Corson demonstrated that Shakespeare's blank verse was varied; the early blank verse was couplet verse, but it matured as the chronology of his plays developed. The only way to recognize this fact was through oral reading.

3. "'Doing-up' of characters in the play is a thing to be condemned . . . . Know S. great characters as living men & women. We do not take notes of our friends." To Corson, Shakespearian characters were living beings whose complexities could best be understood by listening to what they had to say. He felt that "com-

64Herbert D. A. Donovan, remarks in notebook taken in Hiram Corson's class in Shakespeare Readings, 1901-1902. In Cornell University Archives.
parison of characters is overdone in our schools." He also held that the characters could be known through "pure spiritual nature" that "has no affinity for the abstract."

4. "As a great passion is evolved, its subject loses more and more his power of self-assertion. Herein lies the greatest educative value of the plays." The most important element to study in Shakespeare is the dramatic movement. Shakespeare set out to work a moral spirit when he established a direction for the intellectual and spiritual forces of the characters. Although his plays contain no "ethical didacticism," they move in "moral proportion" with the "eternal fitness of things." Shakespeare differed from his contemporaries by exhibiting the "fatalism of passion."

5. "The moral of a poem or drama is in its vitality." Another lecture stated the principle: "The vitality of the play is the literary moral." Shakespeare did not preach; his plays exhibited the natural consequences that can come to men who allow their passions to rule. But all Shakespeare's characters are "free agents" who make moral choices that affect their lives and the progress of the play. All the elements in Shakespeare's drama are organic; nothing is ever superimposed. For example, "dramatic interest centers in the man Hamlet. People don't go to the theatre to see concrete psychology."
These few comments lifted from his lecture notes explain the reasons that Corson used the oral method of presenting the literature he taught. Through effective oral reading by a teacher who had assimilated the characters, students could visualize the vitality of the characters in their interactions and could relate the characters' moral choices to their own lives.

During the last few years of his teaching career before retirement, Corson's correspondence indicates both his involvement with readings and his physical and mental state. To Caroline, who was in a nursing home in 1901, he wrote that he had completed his two hours of lecturing "with good voice" and with his "usual vigor" that day and expressed thanks that he could hold up and do his work so well. He also was working at night, his seminar meeting at his house from seven to nine.65

Several months later he wrote Eugene of another full day's work. He had given his regular lecture in the morning; at three in the afternoon he lectured to a club in the town; and in the evening his graduate students met at his house for "a long reading from Emerson."66

Before the winter semester of 1903 he wrote his son that if he did not take cold again before the term

65Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, May 14, 1901.

66Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, February 10, 1902.
began, he would be "in very good trim" for his lectures. He also gave special lecture-readings during that time. On February 2, 1903, he spoke at the Ithaca High School at 8:00 p. m. In March he gave a lecture reading on Poe.

The particular feature of this lecture and one well worthy of note, was the interpretation of the selection entitled "The Bells" in which Professor Corson gave an excellent rendition of the sounds of the different bells by simple intonations of the voice.

If the writer is not mistaken, the selection is one upon which Professor Corson was highly commended when he rendered it before the members of the royal families of Europe.

Incidentally, the reference to Corson's having read before royalty is the only one to such an event. Most likely the reporter was in error. However, Corson did participate in the one-hundredth-birthday celebration held in honor of Ralph Waldo Emerson at Cornell in Barnes Hall, May 24, 1903, at 7:30 p. m. Corson gave readings from Emerson as part of the festivities. As had been his practice, he continued to lecture for other departments in the University. An interesting note from the chairman of the physics department gives the par-

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67 Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, January 1, 1903.

68 Information from printed invitation to the Corson lecture.

69 Cornell Daily Sun, March 5, 1903.

70 Ithaca Daily Journal, May 23, 1903.
ticulars of one such performance.

I shall call for you on next Sunday about 11:30 a. m. on my way down to the students' class, where you are to read. I fear that I cannot arrange so you will be perfectly free from annoying noises at that time. We shall be in a separate room behind sliding doors. There will be little disturbance for 30-35 minutes. We shall remain in session about 45 minutes. It's very kind of you, indeed, to give the boys such a treat, and I am only too sorry that you cannot have every convenience. the best reading desk I can give you will be a music stand such as violinists use.71

Corson was also a generous man with his money as well as with his time. In 1902 he gave Cornell two thousand dollars for the establishment of a Dante prize and a Robert Browning prize for deserving Cornell students.72 Soon after the prize money was donated, Corson received notice of his approaching retirement. Although the Cornell Sun reviewer just quoted had expressed the sentiment that "Those who hear Professor Corson in his readings this year are exceedingly fortunate and it is to be hoped that he will not give up his chair in June as has been stated," the desire was not to be fulfilled. The retirement action came from the executive committee of Cornell University, November 4, 1902. A resolution presented by the President and unanimously accepted by the committee assured that the professors

71 Letter from G. W. Stewart to Hiram Corson, December 12, 1903.

72 Letter from C. L. Williams, Secretary of Cornell University, to Hiram Corson, September 24, 1902.
whose terms of service expired in June and who had reached the mandatory age limit established by the Board of Trustees would be appointed Professor Emeritus. Each professor was also appointed Lecturer in his department for five years, from June 19, 1903, to June 19, 1908. The salary for the first year would be the same as the salary for the last year of his professorship. Thereafter, he would receive fifteen hundred dollars a year, his duties being assigned by the President of Cornell.73

Although Corson officially retired June 19, 1903, he continued to be involved in the performance of literature through teaching and through lecture-readings. Dr. Shurman, Cornell's President, talked with him about the duties of the Lectureship. He wanted Corson's work to be "in the form of interpretative reading," and he promised to arrange that the readings be given in the Chapel and open to all the students of the University.74 Corson proposed that he give one reading a week for six months, "made up of periods separated by intervals of absence."75 He obviously intended to enjoy the freedom from confinement to duty that the retirement offered. As he prepared for his retirement date he continued to

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73 Letter from C. L. Williams, Secretary of Cornell, to Hiram Corson, November 5, 1902.
74 Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, March 20, 1903.
work actively. Tu Eugene he wrote that he had been lecturing more in the 1902-1903 school year than usual by giving twelve lectures a week. He also gave a lecture on Bible elocution in Barnes Hall in March, 1903. He wrote of his retirement plans to A. D. White and told him of the proposed activities for his Lectureship.

I have not prepared any regular programme of Lectures and Readings. I shall announce from week to week what I shall read and lecture on.

I shall read selections from Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, Byron, Arnold, Tennyson, and the Brownings.

Of Shakespeare's plays I shall read, during the year, King John, Merchant of Venice, Midsummer Night's Dream, King Lear, Julius Caesar, Antony and Cleopatra, Hamlet. I shall give one reading only to each, of an hour and a half.

I shall also give some Bible Readings. It has been decided to leave the Readings and Lectures in Barnes Hall, except the Bible Readings, which will be given in the Chapel.

Along with his regular duties, he was appointed to lecture in the summer schools of 1905 and 1906. Eugene wrote that he was glad his father had the summer school work: "It is indeed evidence of appreciation as well as dissatisfaction with the present department of literature." His class for the 1906 summer session

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76 Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, April 27, 1903.

77 Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, March 20, 1903.

78 Letter from Hiram Corson to Andrew D. White, October 11, 1904.

79 Letter from Eugene Corson to Hiram Corson, July 25, 1905.
was the largest one in the school.80

Hiram wrote his son of his summer school work and also of plans to teach in Connecticut for the summer.

I receive $400, lecturing or reading once a day, five days in the week; I'm engaged to lecture and read at the Summer Camp School, West Chester, Connecticut, beginning 18th of August. It is kept by Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Lanier, the son of the poet.81

A month later he wrote to tell Eugene that he had decided not to go to Connecticut after all.82 Although he offered no explanation for his decision, he could have been tired from his strenuous schedule.

Whatever financial burdens he might have had were substantially eased in 1906 when he became one of the first group of "prominent educators to be invited to enjoy the benefits of the Carnegie Pension Fund."83 The pension, along with royalties from his books and his regular retirement pay, enabled him to live comfortably for the rest of his life in Cascadilla Cottage. However, financial security did not halt his reading and lecturing. His account of one such performance in 1909 indicates his

80Letter from Eugene Corson to Hiram Corson, July 13, 1906.

81Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, June 20, 1906.

82Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, July 24, 1906.

83Letter from Charles D. Francis to Hiram Corson, American Embassy, Vienna, July 1, 1906.
dissatisfaction with the Cornell audiences and his feeling that he had not received the appreciation he deserved throughout his career.

I was greeted last night (Sunday) by the largest audience which ever assembled in the University to hear a lecture from me. I lectured on Bible elocution (the slighting of speech, assertive interrogatives, and the various forms of parallelisms in the Psalms, Proverbs, etc., with illustration). The main auditorium of Barnes Hall was packed, altho' the night was rainy. I had not expected more than fifty. This is such a disintegrated University, that it's a rare thing for any lecturer, whatever his subject, to have a large hearing .... I was made to feel that I was beginning, in my old age, to be popular.

Although this comment might have been Corson's wry humor at work, he was appreciated by friends and literary acquaintances. In January of 1909 he was invited to dinner by Mrs. Olive Brown Saere, who had as house guests John Burroughs and his wife. Burroughs was the friend of Walt Whitman who had written what Corson felt to be the best book on the poet. He wrote that Burroughs' books were "live books" because they were "the outgrowth from his own inner life and from the harvest which his eyes have reaped from the outer life of Nature." After dinner he was asked to read Whitman's "Song of the Open Road" for Burroughs and some of Browning's poetry for Mrs. Burroughs. Burroughs told him a moving story about Walt Whitman.

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84Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, March, 1909.
He was in Washington, in the Treasury Department, from 1863 to '72. He told me he was, one day, standing at a street corner, with Walt, the time of the war, when a procession of soldiers who had been released from the hospitals, went by, and that one after another left the procession and ran to Walt and kissed him. He had been ministering to them in the hospitals.  

In Corson's last years his performances were subject to the condition of his health. For many years he had been troubled by toothache. During the last year of his life he had his upper teeth replaced with false ones. Wearing his new false teeth, he read in a memorial service for William Wordsworth. In describing the event to his son, he also remarked on the lack of spiritual emphasis among the Cornell professors of literature who had replaced him.

This evening, Mrs. Cynthia Morgan St. John celebrates, in her house, the anniversary of Wordsworth's birth. The anniversary, however, will be on the 7th--the 141st--I am asked to read Matthew Arnold's "Memorial Verses, April 1850." I've had a husky voice ever since I've been up. It will be only a ten minutes' reading. All the professors and assistants in the English Literature department will be there. I shall read with a husky voice better than any of them. There isn't a reader in the department now--Students don't get any of the spiritual element in poetry, now--

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85Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, January 23, 1909.

86Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, January 5, 1911.

87Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, April 5, 1911.
Still in possession of his talent and his ego, Corson made ready for the celebration at Mrs. Morgan's house. The performance there appears to have been his last, for Hiram Corson died June 15, 1911, after a life that had spanned eighty-three years.

Nearly half that time he had spent at Cornell University as a professor, trying to instill in his students and in anyone else who would listen his doctrine of the spiritual nature of poetry. He had devoted a lifetime to the interpretative reading of what he considered to be the works best exhibiting this spiritual nature. The poet among his contemporaries whom he considered to be most in tune with the spiritual realm was Robert Browning; consequently, he championed Browning to such an extent that the poet's reputation was altered. Much of the respect Browning's work received in his lifetime and immediately afterward he owed to his interpreter, Hiram Corson.

CORSON AND SPIRITUALISM

One of the greatest influences on Hiram Corson was his wife, Caroline Rollin Corson. An intelligent, talented woman, she was born in France and educated both there and in Germany. She came to America as a governess and taught private school for a time in Washington, where she met Hiram. After their marriage, she continued to teach with him. Even after the family
moved to Ithaca, she continued to teach in private schools in the area. She was a writer of articles for literary magazines, a translator, and a skillful interpretive reader. Whatever her husband did, she shared. The tone of her letters indicates that she was not only charming and accomplished but also ambitious and resourceful. She cultivated friendships that proved helpful to her husband's career, and she encouraged him to set high goals for his life. Most likely, Corson would not have achieved the stature he did had his wife not expected it of him. Theirs was a marriage firmly based in mutual love, trust, and respect. Because of their travels they were physically separated throughout much of their marriage, but no matter how far away from each other they travelled, they were united by a spiritual bond that transcended space. Both believed strongly in the art of communication; gifted correspondents, they wrote to each other faithfully, fretting when the mails were interrupted for any reason. One of the tenderest letters Caroline every sent her husband was from Spain two months after their thirty-eighth wedding anniversary. She addressed her "dearest husband":

My little talks with you, wellnigh every day, make no inconsiderate figure in my account book; but you are a well to do man, and I dare say, will not grumble at my stamp expenses; in the mean time, it is all the heart-comfort I have, to slip away
from Spanish sights, and cuddle myself up by you.88

At this one indicates, a letter was more to the Corsons than a message on paper: it was the physical manifestation of the writer's spirit. Their correspondence united them in separations and drew them together without regard for time and place. And for Hiram and Caroline death was a long journey without benefit of the mail service. Their granddaughter said of them, "The Corsons were as sure of immortality as they were of waking up in the morning and having breakfast."89 And they were just as certain of the possibility of communication between loved ones after death.

Caroline Corson was to linger only a few months before she died. In April of 1901 she became ill, perhaps suffering a stroke. Although her husband was of Quaker origins, she was Roman Catholic; therefore, he took her to the Nazareth Convent in Rochester, New York, hoping that the sisters could aid in her recovery.90 During her stay there, he frequently made the two-hundred-mile round trip to visit with her, sometimes staying overnight. When he was not visiting, he was writing to

88Letter from Caroline Corson to Hiram Corson, Spain, 1892.
89Taped interview with Pauline Corson Coad, Cornell Archives.
90Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, April 27, 1901.
assure her that everything was well at Cascadilla Cottage. He begged her, "keep your mind perfectly at ease. The latter will be the condition of your getting well." He also told her that he had made the decision to quit teaching after the Christmas holidays of 1901, for he did not think either of them could spend another winter in Ithaca. Since he was to spend the remainder of his winters there, he obviously was thinking of his wife's health as a condition of his decision.

While Caroline was in the convent in Rochester, Father Lapham of St. Bernards came to visit her daily. Wanting to do something for the priest, Corson agreed to perform for the young men at St. Bernard's School. He told Caroline that he would do for Father Lapham what he could. If he were not "in good reading trim," he would deliver a lecture. The latter, he said, would "perhaps be the most profitable to them." The plan was that he come to Rochester on Friday morning, May 17, on the 7:15 train, arriving about 10:00 and then staying overnight. Most likely the lecture-reading did not take

91 Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, April 27, 1901.

92 Letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, May 8, 1901.

93 All information about the reading for Father Lapham taken from a letter from Hiram Corson to Caroline Corson, May 9, 1901.
place, however, for Caroline's condition worsened and Eugene was summoned. He wired his father on May 17 that he would be arriving in Rochester and to meet him at the train.⁹⁴ A short time later, Caroline Rollin Corson died.

Eugene's wife, Cora, and their children joined them in Ithaca for the funeral and they stayed there with Hiram for several weeks. All the adult Corsons, Caroline, Hiram, Eugene, and Cora, had been intrigued by Spiritualism and had attended seances before Caroline's death. After Caroline died, her family naturally returned to Spiritualism in order to communicate with her.

A wave of Spiritualism had arisen in America around the middle of the nineteenth century, enthusiastically endorsed by Elizabeth Barrett Browning,⁹⁵ whose life and work both Corsons followed and admired. Perhaps in an effort to understand the spiritual nature of her poetry they had begun to investigate the movement for themselves. Mrs. Browning reported to her sister that "the great new music Hall at Boston . . . is filled every Sunday with from five hundred to a thousand persons-- mediums in a state of trance and otherwise ministering to them," and that "four hundred thousand families in America have given their names lately as believers and as actually

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⁹⁴Telegram from Eugene Corson to Hiram Corson, May 17, 1901.

⁹⁵Greer, Browning and America, p. 6.
in enjoyment of spiritual intercourse." 96 Mr. Browning never accepted his wife's beliefs concerning spiritualism, 97 and it seems reasonable to assume that he and Corson never discussed the matter. However, Spiritualism was practiced by many prominent people of the day, and the practice was socially accepted by many. As for Corson, he had always believed in the world of the spirit. Two years after his wife's death he gave the following account of his interest:

At fifteen I read the writings of Andrew Jackson Davis; and I've ever since believed in spiritual relationships. I've had no doubts, and have never been an "investigator." It hasn't been necessary. The spiritual world has always been a reality to me, and all my success as a teacher, and my "methods" have been due to those early experiences. My reputation as a Professor of English Literature has been due to that! I have not cared for the "methods" of the educational world. I early saw that the true object of literary education was spiritual illumination. 98

Corson believed in the world of the spirit and in the immortal soul, and he believed that true poetry was infused with the spiritual world. The world of poetry was a real world. Through experiencing the spiritual reality of that world the student could shed illumination


97 Greer, p. 60.

98 Fragment of a letter from Hiram Corson, possibly to Eugene Corson, April 29, 1903.
upon the world of his own spirit. The letter continues:

I also early saw that the only means of Spiritual illumination was interpretative reading which would bring the student into direct spiritual sympathy with the informing life of a work of genius—which informing life is indefinite to the intellect. Here is the secret of my success.99

The best way for a student's spirit to be brought into sympathy with the spirit of the poet was through the medium of an interpretative reader. He regarded his career at Cornell as something of a spiritual ministry to combat the scientific age, but he did not feel that he had been entirely successful in his mission:

I have done a work in the Cornell University which no other man could have done. But I have regarded myself as a sort of Lorelei, endeavoring to fascinate those who were floating along in the Scientific current. A few have cocked their eyes up at me, and comparatively, a few have stopped to hear my message!100

Belief in Spiritualism was not an insane idea to Hiram Corson, who had spent his life involved in the spiritual world and in communication from that world through poetry to hundreds of audiences. Although belief that communication with individual spirits in that world was not far removed from his poetic philosophy, he did not preach a gospel of mediums and seances. After Caroline's death his experience with Spiritualism was private, but he did confide in some few friends who he thought would

99Fragment of a letter from Hiram Corson, possibly to Eugene Corson, April 29, 1903.

100Ibid.
understand. 101 His attempts to communicate with his dead wife were never far from his consciousness, yet he continued to lead a sane, active professional life. His letters to Eugene were filled with accounts of his "communications." Eugene, a medical doctor and a scientist, also participated in seances along with his wife and encouraged his father's participation. 102 One of the favorite mediums they shared was Mrs. Mayer in New York. Luckily for Corson, he need not travel all the way to the city for a sitting. Soon after Caroline died, their Swedish housekeeper, Mrs. Sjoegren, decided that she was a medium. Naturally, this unlikely occurrence served Corson well, for he could have as many sittings as he desired in his own house.

Mrs. Sjoegren's daughter, Signe, lived in Corson's house with her mother. In an interview with the Cornell Archivist, Signe did not discuss her mother's peculiar powers, but she did remark on the situation:

He got a great deal of comfort from seances. That poor man would have been so much more lonesome if he hadn't believed that his wife and daughter and little sons came to him. He had two smaller sons who died in infancy. 103

102 Letter from Eugene Corson to Hiram Corson, October 2, 1902.
103 Sjoegren tape.
She indicated that Corson seemed self-sufficient and content with his own inner resources. "He had enough within himself to be happy without the hustle and bustle that other people seem to need. I never heard him say he was lonely."\(^{104}\)

For Corson, ordinary seances could have been a bit dull. At any rate, he decided on a unique way to make them interesting and entertaining. He called forth the spirits of those poets he had known who had passed before him into the spiritual realm: the Brownings, Tennyson, Longfellow, and Whitman. Once he had received their rappings, he decided that spirits might be in want of entertainment; so he began to read aloud to them through his housekeeper-medium. How surprised the Rev. Jenkin Lloyd Jones must have been to receive the following postscript on a letter from Corson, whom he considered to be "the most perfect student of Browning in the country":\(^{105}\)

> Are you a believer in spiritualism? I have been, all my life. I have had communications, in my own house, from Robert Browning the past four years—surprising ones!\(^{106}\)

\(^{104}\)joegren tape.

\(^{105}\)From an article, "Chautauqua's Perplexity," March 6, 1886, Jones Scrapbrook, p. 95. Armstrong Browning Library, Baylor University. Information supplied by Kay Mason LaCaze.

\(^{106}\)Letter from Hiram Corson to Jenkin Lloyd Jones, December 17, 1906.
Jones' reply might have been most informative; but if he made one either it was lost or Corson did not see fit to keep it with his treasured correspondence.

Eugene was a staunch ally in his father's activity. Suggesting that Corson ask Browning to write a poem from the spiritual world, he held that it would be the first "thing of the kind in the history of Spiritualism."\footnote{Letter from Eugene Corson to Hiram Corson, August 19, 1905.} Corson obviously attempted to fulfill this request, but to no avail. Eugene rationalized the failure:

> however much we may retain our identity after death with many of our characteristics, characteristics which in the physical body form our personality as we see it now, there is a change, a great change probably, in the modes of intellectual activity and expression . . . . I have therefore been very dubious of Browning's ability to give you a characteristic poem, however much he might wish it or however hard he might try to accomplish it.\footnote{Letter from Eugene Corson to Hiram Corson, September 1, 1905.}

Eugene offered an alternative to the poem by suggesting that his father prepare a paper on the Browning, Tennyson, and Longfellow communications, "which would be of great value."\footnote{Letter from Eugene Corson to Hiram Corson, September 5, 1905.} Rather than a paper, Corson decided that he had enough material for a book, *Spirit Messages*, his last published work.

At first the spirits' communications were made
through rappings, but by 1905 Corson was hearing the voices of Caroline, his daughter Pauline, Browning, and Whitman.  

Although they promised that someday they would appear to him, they never did; Mrs. Sjoegren, however, frequently reported seeing Mrs. Corson materialized in the house.  

The following account of one of their sittings is typical: Corson wrote

There had been no speaking for the first twenty minutes, perhaps half hour, of the sitting, and I had remarked that I found it difficult to keep up the talk, saying something to each one. Browning then said, "If we cannot speak at the sitting, please don't get discouraged. Sometimes the air is not favorable." I spoke of the nice conditions required for communications, and Whitman said, "We are very sensitive to any little thing!" Browning then said, "Mrs. S. worries that she cannot deliver the message aright." I hadn't got the previous one until I asked to have it repeated. Ma: "Yes, darling, we all wish you to go to New York." Whitman: "When you go down to N.Y. You will not shut me out, as you did before." When Whitman first spoke in N. Y. he said he had tried to come before, but they shut him out, using the same expression "shut me out" as he did at this sitting. I said he was not shut out, but that others had got ahead of him. He replied: "I always was a little slow." I said to Browning that I should read next Friday, in Barnes Hall, Selections from Mrs. B's "Aurora Leigh," and hoped all my spirit friends would come to the reading. He replied, "Dear friend, which do you prefer, for us to go to the reading, or to have the sitting Friday evening?" It was decided that we do not have the sitting Friday evening, as I inferred from what he said that they could not come to both. I expressed the hope that Mrs. B. would come to the reading of her own great poem. Browning replied, "I'll bring her." He then said, addressing Mrs. S.,

110 Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, November 30, 1905.

111 Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, March 21, 1906.
Mrs. S. we all wish you to sit right before him, so that we get the voice direct." That, I think, is a very remarkable communication. I said in reply: "Then spirits need the vibrations as we do, in the body." Answer, "Yes." I think that shows that they don't hear thro' the medium, but that the medium gives them the power to hear directly from the reader. Whitman: "We'll come about twenty." I said, that'll be a goodly spiritual audience.112

Corson believed that the "spiritual visitors" came to his performances; later, they would give critiques in sittings, and Corson would relay them to Eugene. Upon hearing that Tennyson had approved of a reading of his "Maud," Eugene said that seemed "very characteristic." He remembered in Tennyson's biography by his son, "Maud" had been mentioned as his favorite poem for reading.113

In addition to being present for some of Corson's public performances, the spirits were also treated to private readings. On one occasion Corson read aloud to them from his article "Some Reminiscences of Robert Browning." He wrote to Eugene an account of the performance:

There were present, Ma, Pauline and the boys, Browning, Tennyson, Whitman, Longfellow, J. W. H. Myers, Mrs. Browning, and Mrs. White—eleven in all. I read for an hour and a quarter. Mrs. Sjoegren was seated in the closet and I read with a shaded electric light, in order to keep the closet sufficiently dark. Browning did the rapping during the reading, except that Ma rapped two or three times when she was

112Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, March 21, 1906.

113Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, January 31, 1906.
mentioned in connection with the reminiscences. Browning's raps were very loud, and sometimes there was a rapid succession of them which I took to signify a special approval of what I was reading at the time. The most remarkable thing of the evening to be recorded was when I spoke of the painting on the ceiling of the room which Browning occupied in the Palazzo Rezzonico—the painting by his son of an eagle . . . . I said it was circular and about six feet in diameter. So I had it in my mind when I wrote. Browning said it was not circular, but eight feet square! If I don't find any description of it which gives its form and size, I shall write to Barrett Browning. It would be extremely interesting to have Browning's correction verified. At the close of the reading there were loud raps by Browning which I took to signify his approval of the paper.

Mrs. S. came out of the closet quite exhausted. She said she had never been so drawn on—that the drawing was constant. At our usual sittings it is not so. On this occasion, I read all the time (with the exception of the short interruption when Browning corrected me), the number present was larger than usual, and all, it appears, gave sustained attention, and consequently, there was a sustained and an unusually strong drawing upon the medium. This is my explanation of her unusual exhaustion. We have no sitting this evening. It was thought best to skip a regular evening.

I wonder whether a great author, or any other, ever before heard reminiscences of himself read, more than 16 years after he had passed out of the body.114

Browning's correction was verified for Corson soon after by a woman visitor who had been to the Palazzo Rezzonico.

The New York trip to which the spirits referred in the first quoted sitting was for a lecture to the Vedanta Society. A companion interest to the one in Spiritualism

114Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, February 16, 1906.
was Corson's participation in the Society activities. Led by Swami Abhedavanda, it had regular meetings in which the members studied the Hindu philosophy and heard guest lecturers. One of these guests was Hiram Corson, who was made an honorary and regular member in January, 1904. Corson seems to have read before the Vedanta Society on two occasions, once in 1904 and again in 1906. The first was to be either a lecture on Browning's "Ring and the Book," or a reading, with commentary, of Whitman's "Song of the Open Road." Eugene saw the trip as being multipurposed: not only could his father speak before the Vedanta Society, but also he could talk with his editors and visit with the medium Mrs. Mayer again. This visit with Mrs. Mayer seems to be the first visitation of Walt Whitman, who had referred in the 1906 seance to having been "shut out."

The next lecture for the Society in 1906 was delivered on Monday, April 9. It was held in the Vedanta Society rooms, 62 West 71st Street, which held "nearly two

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115 Letter from Swami Abhedavanda to Hiram Corson, January 8, 1904.

116 Letters from Swami Abhedavanda to Hiram Corson, February 28, 1904, and from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, February 28, 1904.

117 Letter from Eugene Corson to Hiram Corson, March 19, 1904.
hundred people." Corson believed that he would have a few more in the audience than could be counted by the casual observer; he expected spiritual attendance by his wife and daughter, the Brownings, and Walt Whitman.

In March of 1906 the Solicitor-General of Ceylon, the Hon. Ponnambalam Ramanathat, lectured in Barnes Hall on the Cornell campus on "the Spirit of the East Contrasted with the Spirit of the West." Corson looked forward to meeting him at an afternoon tea by invitation of Mrs. Schurman, wife of Cornell's President. Corson wrote:

He is a Hindu, and probably acquainted with the Vedanta philosophy. I hope I shall have an opportunity of talking with him on the subject. How the world is coming together.

Eugene seems also to have been investigating the Hindu religion, for on one occasion he wrote his father, "your good voice means that your general health must be perfect. You must have the voice of a Yogi." Corson had suggested earlier the same idea, giving a rare account of his physical training for his career as an inter-

118 Letter from Swami Abhedavanda to Hiram Corson, April 3, 1906.

119 Letter from Eugene Corson to Hiram Corson, October 17, 1906.

120 Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, March 21, 1906.

121 Letter from Eugene Corson to Hiram Corson, July 26, 1904.
pretative reader.

By the way, I think I must have been a Yogi, in a former existence. When I read "How to be a Yogi," it seems all so familiar to me . . . . Even in the matter of breathing. For fifty years I have gone through different modes of breathing, according as those modes were demanded for different qualities of voice and expression. All this Vedanta philosophy has been as plain to me as a pike-staff. Even the physical training, I went through all the different postures of the body, for two or three years during my residence in Washington. There was a porch in the third story of the Gadsby Building where we last lived, where I practiced these postures! There were parallel bars on the porch, where I practiced them! I attained a great flexibility of body. I could roll myself into a ball, and do all kinds of involutions (in-rollings). Dear Ms thought I had no bones! I remember she said so. In my breathings, I first used a quill—and afterwards they were determined by my readings.122

By far the most illustrious Spiritualist with whom Corson was associated was Madame Blavatsky, who was later to be friend and confidante to William Butler Yeats. How she and Corson met is uncertain; perhaps they became acquainted during one of his visits to New York. Blavatsky came to Ithaca on several occasions as the guest of her friend. Corson found her to be extremely intelligent and interesting company, but he could not adjust to her brand of cigars. He solved the problem by taking her for buggy rides in the country where she could smoke while he enjoyed her conversation. On one such visit to Cascadilla Cottage she completed writing Isis Unveiled, in which she

122Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, April 29, 1903.
refers to one of Corson's lectures. She over stayed her welcome, however, and in October, 1875, the Corsons asked her to leave.

Hiram Corson was open to all possibilities of the spirit. His readings, his writings, and his very life testify to his belief in the immortality of the soul and in the possibility of correspondence through a medium between the physical world and the spiritual world. Ever pursuant of knowledge, in his later years he investigated the mysticism of Spiritualism and the Eastern philosophies. Perhaps he was attempting to understand the world to which he believed his own spirit would soon belong. But whatever his reasons, his participation in Spiritualism eased the burden of a lonely old man whose wife had died and whose only living child was hundreds of miles away. His seances with the spirits, like his correspondence with Eugene were ways of maintaining communication with his loved ones. Although Corson could have been senile, the belief in Spiritualism and the participation in seances and the investigation of Hinduism were all compatible with the philosophy by which he had

123 Coad taped interview; various letters from Corson to Eugene and between Corson and Madame Blavatsky.

always lived. "The spiritual world," he wrote, "has always been a reality to me."

HONORS AND REMINISCENCES

On November 2, 1909, Hiram Corson wrote his son Eugene that he would celebrate his eighty-first birthday, but that he did not feel any older than he had five years before. He owed his good condition, he said, "to raw eggs. I rarely eat any meat." Already he had lived a year past his eightieth birthday, which had been royally celebrated. Members of the University planned a surprise party for the whole day. From 10:00 a. m. to 6:00 p. m. over sixty people called to pay their respects. At 8:00 p. m. "over a hundred came in, Professors, and their wives, and city friends."\(^{125}\) Corson still "did not know what was up."\(^{126}\) But he was asked to come into his parlor, where the visitors were silently gathered. Dr. Andrew White was holding a manuscript which he began to read upon Corson's entrance. Corson quoted the entire manuscript in a letter to his son; it said in part:

For forty years your professor's chair has been a centre of ennobling ideas, and for more than thirty years of this period there have radiated from your lecture room at Cornell University influences which have bettered and strengthened your students, your

\(^{125}\)Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, November, 1908.

\(^{126}\)Ibid.
colleagues, and the community at large.

Nor has your work been merely academic. Your teachings have wrought profoundly at other centers of thought; wherever earnest men and women have gathered to study the most precious treasures of our literature, whether in the mother country or our own, you, by your voice or your writings, have been a power for good. . . . I cannot forbear expressing my joy as I reflect upon your influence as a scholar, a teacher, a public reader . . . you have never favored pedantry. Your interpretations of the great masters of our literature have made them not mere dried specimens to be buried in note books, but vitalizing forces . . . Your commentaries have resulted not merely from minute studies of verbal niceties, but far more from broad surveys of general literature . . . living studies for living men and women.127

The speech concluded with the presentation of a Loving Cup, which Corson later discovered had been bought by contributions from all over the Cornell Community.128

Corson wrote Eugene of his immediate reaction:

While listening to this, my reply was running through my head. I had, of course, to be entirely extempore, as I had not had the least inkling of what was coming. But it appeared from what was said about it that my reply was a fitting one. I extended it by setting forth my ideas of literary education, making a special feature of it, that the modern research, in literary study, into the possible influences that have gone to the making of a great work of genius serves only to obscure, to torpify, the essential spiritual element, which constitutes its informing life. It should be allowed to make its own independent impression. Sources and influences and relationships to time and place, are only the adventitious features of a work of genius. Its real life is timeless, and comes from the spiritual life of the poet. etc. etc. The great joy the occasion afforded me went to my head, and I thought

127Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, November, 1908.

128Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson. As dated, November 7, 1909; possibly 1908.
afterward of several nice things I might have said. That's generally the case in extempore speaking.\textsuperscript{129}

Along with hosts of flowers and "letters of congratulation from all over the land," he received a letter from Lilian Whiting, informing him that the "Authors Club" rooms in Boston would be opened for the first time on his birthday. She asked for a photograph of himself to be framed and "hung on the walls along with portraits of Emerson, Longfellow, Whittier, Lowell, Dr. Edward Everett Hale, and others!"\textsuperscript{130}

On his next birthday, Lilian Whiting was his house guest and had breakfast with him. For an hour after the meal Corson read aloud to her from Chaucer, "and talked of the poets and of poetry and the great things of life." He also talked with her about his poetic theory. She quoted him:

The forms of poetry should be, not the dress, but the incarnation of its spiritualized thought. The word of the poet, so to speak, should become flesh, to secure a response of the spirit of the reader. Spirit does not respond to the abstract.\textsuperscript{131}

Although Corson was involved in poetry and the world of the spirit to the last, this did not prevent his enjoying the luxuries that the scientific age produced.

\textsuperscript{129}Letter from Hiram Corson to Eugene Corson, November, 1908.

\textsuperscript{130}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{131}Lilian Whiting, Special correspondence to the Boston \textit{Times Democrat}, November 9, 1909. Corson collection.
His granddaughter remembered his playing the music of Chopin on his phonograph;\textsuperscript{132} the housekeeper's daughter revealed that he frequently used the telephone;\textsuperscript{133} and in 1908 he went for his first ride in an automobile. The excursion was enough to report to Eugene, who responded that he was glad his father had taken the ride. He continued, "This is a delightful sensation to me. The world will soon be flying. The Wright brothers of Ohio have solved the problem."\textsuperscript{134}

But progress in the fashions of the day did not deter him from seeking comfort. Pauline Corson Coad told one of the family stories about him that illustrates this point. Since her grandfather stood to lecture and to read, his feet frequently hurt him; consequently, to be comfortable, he wore "Congress Gator" shoes with elastic in the sides. These served him well until he had worn them out. He set out to buy a new pair, but by this time they had gone out of style. The shoe salesman looked at him with disdain when he requested the shoes and said, "They ain't wearin' 'em." Promptly Corson replied, "They ain't gonna wear 'em!"\textsuperscript{135} Although he enjoyed the con-

\textsuperscript{132}Coad tape.
\textsuperscript{133}Sjoegren tape.
\textsuperscript{134}Letter from Eugene Corson to Hiram Corson, October 3, 1908.
\textsuperscript{135}Coad tape.
veniences that were being manufactured in his day, he still said, "I belong to the other world, you know."
Signe Sjoegren took this statement to mean that he had lived too long for the new world that was coming in.136

In May of 1911, just before his death, Corson was visited by the faculty and seniors of Wallcourt, a school for women. Signe Sjoegren said of him that "he preferred the company of young ladies. They responded more."137 So he must have been in his element for their visit. They talked of the poets and of former Cornell students of whom he was proud, and he read to them "in that wonderfully resonant and expressive voice"138 from Tennyson. Later, he quoted for them "the embodiment of his idea of spirituality,"139 Swami Vivekananda's "My Master."

"Do not care for doctrines, do not care for dogmas, or sects, or churches, or temples; they count for little compared with the essence of existence in each man, which is spirituality, and the more that this is developed in a man, the more powerful is he for good. Earn that first, acquire that and criticise no one, for all doctrines and creeds have some good in them. Show by your lives that religion does not mean words, nor names, nor sects, but that it means spiritual realization. Only those who have attained to spirituality can communicate it to others, can be great teachers of mankind. They alone are the power of light."140

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136Sjoegren tape.  
137Ibid.  
139Ibid.  
140Ibid.
Corson's reputation as a scholar continued to grow in those last years of his life. Henry Van Dyke autographed a copy of his Poems of Tennyson and presented it as a gift to Corson. He wrote: "To Hiram Corson, lover and best interpreter of Robert Browning. HVD" Inside the book Corson tucked a letter he later received from Van Dyke which indicates the latter believed Corson planned to leave his Anglo-Saxon books to Princeton. According to Corson's will, they went to Cornell instead. Van Dyke referred in the letter to Corson as "the dean of all of us who are trying to teach reading."141 In addition to acclaim by his peers, he was recognized through his books. In 1906 he received word that his Browning book had been selected in still another foreign school. This time it was chosen by Hagnendth College, Cape of Good Hope.142

Also in 1906 Eugene Corson was chosen by Cornell's President to represent his alma mater at the celebration of the University of Alabama's seventy-fifty anniversary. He appears to have been one of the few Cornellians living in the South. He wrote, "Of course, the University of Alabama does not amount to much, I imagine, still I

141 Letter from Henry Van Dyke to Hiram Corson, October 22, 1905.

142 Letter from Eugene Corson to Hiram Corson, November 13, 1906.
consider it an honor to represent Cornell on any occasion." His opinion changed in his report of his visit, however. He was impressed that the academic community there had heard of Hiram Corson. He told his father:

One of the greatest pleasures of my trip was to hear from many expressions of esteem and affection for you. I was the son of my father which was perhaps better than being somebody myself.

When Corson died on June 15, 1911, expressions of sympathy came to Eugene through letters and telegrams from all over the country. The Board of Trustees at Cornell expressed their sense of loss in a resolution, which said in part:

Gifted with a voice of wonderful sweetness and power, and with a dramatic instinct of the highest order, he was one of the greatest public readers ever heard in this country. Through his marvelous power of vocal expression he made literature interpret itself and convey its message to the heart and mind . . . . In an age whose material interests were increasing with alarming rapidity he stood as a representative of a higher order of things--things unseen and immaterial, the spiritual elements in the nature of man . . . .

The Dean of the University of Missouri wrote:

His death will be deeply mourned, not only by the many students who have had the privilege of his instruction, but by all persons who are interested

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143 Letter from Eugene Corson to Hiram Corson, April 18, 1906.

144 Letter from Eugene Corson to Hiram Corson, June 7, 1906.

145 Letter from C. L. Williams, Secretary of Cornell, to Eugene Corson, July 3, 1911.
in the advancement of American scholarship.\textsuperscript{146}

The Cornell Alumni Association prepared a resolution for their minutes, a copy of which was sent to Eugene at Cascadilla Cottage:

No other had numbered among his hearers so large a proportion of all who had studied at Cornell. His person and his voice, familiar to us all, have grown to be, and will remain an inseparable part of our university memories. We rejoice that to such fulness of years his life was spared us, and we here record our lasting gratitude for all we owe him as interpreter and inspirer.\textsuperscript{147}

In their annual report the Cornell Trustees summarized Corson's philosophy of teaching poetry as part of their statement of sorrow at his death.

As a teacher his object was always to stimulate and develop the student, and by bringing him into sympathetic touch with the masterpieces of the world's literature to quicken within him the spirituality that he believed every human being to possess. And so perfect was his art that he seemed, not so much a teacher, as a medium through whom poetry revealed itself and became incarnate in the lives of his pupils as an inspiring power, an ennobling influence, a message of comfort and cheer. Through his books, too, Professor Corson profoundly impressed a wide circle of readers and showed himself one of the greatest interpreters of literature this country has produced.

But perhaps nothing will remain so strongly fixed in the minds of those who knew him as the strong, virile personality of the man and moral independence of his judgment. Not Emerson himself was a mightier preacher of the gospel of Individuality. A man of Professor Corson's powers and attainments and insight and outlook, not only Cornell University, but this

\textsuperscript{146}Letter from J. C. Jones to Eugene Corson, Columbia, Missouri, June 23, 1911.

\textsuperscript{147}Letter from W. W. Rowlee, Recording Secretary, Cornell Alumni Association, to Eugene Corson, Ithaca, June 27, 1911.
Lilian Whiting wired Eugene specific instructions for the burial service: "Please have the Browning poem 'Sleep' sung as at funeral of both Brownings." It was Corson's own wish, included in his will, that his body "be kept until the fifth day after my decease before it be committed to the earth." On June 20, 1911, he was buried beside his wife and daughter, in a grassy, shaded plot on one of Ithaca's hilltops. The site was marked by a simple stone with his name and the dates of his life and by a large stone cross bearing the emblem that he had designed for his stationery: an encircled snake with its tail in its mouth, signifying eternity, and the Greek letters inside for "Light" and "Life."

In 1915, Thomas O'Hagan, who had recited one of his own sonnets at his professor's sixty-fifth birthday celebration, recalled for the Cornell Alumni News some memories of Dr. Corson. O'Hagan recalled that he had come from the principalship of a high school in Ontario for graduate study at Cornell, because he was "desirous of coming under the influence of Dr. Corson." In their first meeting, Corson was displeased to find that O'Hagan's

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students preferred Tennyson to Wordsworth; Corson's opinion
was that "a study of Wordsworth resulted in more soul
culture than did a study of Tennyson." But the first
Corson lecture O'Hagan was to hear was on Tennyson's "The
Lady of Shalott." The student said of the lecture:

It fired my mind in a judgment that has since
endured: that there cannot be truly a great teacher
or interpreter of literature in the highest sense of
the word unless the capacity and gift be there to
voice the inner spirit of the poem.

O'Hagan remembered that the students looked upon Corson's
"side talks as more interesting and more valuable than
even his organized and prepared lectures." He also
reported that Corson was the best professor he had ever
known at squelching a student "who desired to show off."
On such an occasion "his remarks were withering." Nor
did he care for the writings of Byron and Pope. When
he came to them "he usually put on his boxing gloves."
Of the lectures he heard, O'Hagan was impressed by this
dominant attitude: "Poetry is not only a reflection of
life but a reflection of life as the poet sees it." Thus,
Corson taught, "the student may at times well forget that
this is but a partial view of the whole."

As Kristin Krum Marshall quoted O'Hagan in her

150 O'Hagan.
151 Ibid.
152 Ibid.
153 Ibid.
study of Corson's teaching methods, the professor gave his students "big chunks of Browning," but O'Hagan continued, "He was disposed to give us still bigger chunks of Shakespeare." He recalled Corson's performance of Hamlet as a highlight:

Without any action he laid bare by his splendid voice alone the very temper and soul of each character. It was a marvel how he could pass from the interpretation of the complex and subtly human Hamlet to the gravediggers and create for you the very atmosphere of the cemetery Falstaffs.

O'Hagan had heard Booth, Irving, and Kean as Hamlet, but he felt that none of them could "surpass Dr. Corson in his searching revelation of the character of Hamlet." Bertha Wilder Reed, daughter of Cornell's Professor Burt G. Wilder, recalled that Corson sometimes used a falsetto voice for Shakespeare's "female lines which usually provoked a few giggles." But her information was only hearsay, for she also wrote, "I'm sorry I never heard him."

However, Signe Sjoegren did hear him read Shakespeare. She reported:

He was dramatic in his way, when he started the Shakespeare you could just hear them shout out--the

characters. It was a gift, you know, just a gift.\(^{159}\)

Pauline Corson Coad did not hear her grandfather read Shakespeare, but she gave the following account of his performance of "Soliloquy in a Spanish Cloister."

I remember my mother said to me, "Now we're going to take you and Rollin up to hear your grandfather tonight because he's going to read Browning and you may never again able to hear your grandfather read Browning." I remember when he comes to the point, "Water your damned flower pots do. If hate would kill, Brother Lawrence, would not mine kill you." I remember the intense feeling that he got into that. Oh, it made your blood curdle . . . . I can hear his voice now. His voice was thrilling beyond words.\(^{160}\)

Although she never heard him read Shakespeare, she knew of his reputation. She related the family story that her grandfather had been friends in Philadelphia with Mrs. John Drew, and the actress had based her interpretation of Lady Macbeth on Corson's interpretation. Her grandfather told his family that he once had asked Mrs. Drew, "How can you go on with the Lady Macbeth scene?" She replied, "They hand me porter."\(^ {161}\) Mrs. Coad believed her grandfather should have been an actor because he had all the qualifications of a great actor, and had he been of a different sort of background, he would have gone on the stage. I don't think it was religious prejudice--the Corsons were very liberal. Maybe it was the Quaker.\(^ {162}\)

Mrs. Reed and Miss Sjoegren recalled Corson's

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\(^ {159}\)Sjoegren tape.  
\(^ {160}\)Coad tape.  
\(^ {161}\)Ibid.  
\(^ {162}\)Ibid.
physical appearance. The former had known him only slightly in her childhood, and she recalled that "he was rather tall, slender, with wonderful dark eyes and a stately walk." His housekeeper's daughter, who grew up under his supervision, remembered him quite differently: "He was a small man, not so tall as myself. He had fine features—eyes that were very wonderful, large blue—and a smile you couldn't forget." And she spoke of a mannerism: "When he got interested in something, he would take the forefinger of his left hand and wind the beard around it and then smile."

The women also recalled other readings. Sjoegren said that he went once a week to a Mr. Lord's house in Ithaca, because Lord was too old to come to Cascadilla Cottage. The old man would invite people in to hear the Professor read. She also reported that when Andrew White had guests "who would appreciate such a thing, he would read to them on Sunday afternoons. And he made a picture." Reed remembered that he was "locally famous" for his reading of the Book of Job.

Coad recalled that Corson had a photographic memory. She said that he believed memory should be visual. "When he would seem to be reciting plays from memory, he was actually reading them from his mind. He

163 Reed.  164 Sjoegren tape.  165 Reed.
told us he could see the page in his mind."166

She also remembered her grandfather's handling of his letters from Robert Browning. He kept them in a safe, and when he took them out, "something happened to his fingers. He handled them so reverently. He would take them out and open them very gently, and read them."167

She told her favorite story concerning Hiram Corson, whom many people in Ithaca considered to be eccentric. An Ithaca woman, Mrs. Prentiss, was having a party for some friends of hers to meet Mr. Corson. When he arrived a bit early, as was his custom, a new maid met him at the door. She went back to Mrs. Prentiss and said, "There's a queer looking old man at the door." Mrs. Prentiss told the maid to go back and ask him what was his name and what did he want. This the maid did, to which Corson replied, "My name is Hiram Corson, and I want to go home."168

Many people remembered Hiram Corson with respect and affection for years after his death, and hundreds more were to become acquainted with him through his writing. He lived his entire life in dedication to the principle that each person has a spiritual nature which can be cultivated through poetry. He believed that the best way to comprehend the spiritual world of poetry was through

166Coad tape.  
167Ibid.  
168Ibid.
interpretative reading, and to this end he spent his life not only in teaching but also in performing both at home and on tour. Afraid of utilitarianism and the scientific age, he sought to present an alternative lifestyle: the life of the spirit. His philosophy led him to investigate spiritualism and the religions of the East toward the end of his life. His last eleven years were overshadowed by mystical experiences, but he continued to the end to lead an active professional life as a teacher and an oral reader. Surely many people who knew him would agree with his granddaughter when they remembered the "old-fashioned, grand old man" who had lived so long in Ithaca. Pauline said of her visits there, "I used to think that the magic of those visits was in the house. And it wasn't until after my grandfather died that I realized he had made the magic in Cascadilla Cottage."
Chapter 7

THE ORIGIN, DEVELOPMENT, AND INFLUENCE OF CORSON'S LITERARY THEORY

Hiram Corson developed a comprehensive theory of literary study that he practiced throughout his life. His two general recommendations to the literary scholar were interrelated. He suggested that the student of literature should first train his voice until he had complete mastery of it. "Vocal culture," as Corson designated the end product of such training, was a prerequisite to "literary culture," the second element of his philosophy. Corson's theories of literary study were fundamentally original, although he was influenced by Dr. James Rush, by some of the prominent Romantic writers, and by philosophers. He developed his theories through personal example in his teaching and interpretative reading as well as through numerous books and articles. Many of his contemporary English professors, influenced by the system of higher education in Germany, insisted upon a philosological approach to literary instruction. Consequently they disagreed with Corson's advocacy of interpretative reading as the best method of studying literature. Most of his peers looked upon literary study as a science, whereas
Corson regarded it as an art. His theories, however, influenced the teachers of English in American high schools as well as teachers of oral interpretation. The history of English instruction and of oral interpretation in the nineteenth century is incomplete without an investigation of the origin, development, and influence of Corson's philosophy.

THE ORIGIN OF CORSON'S LITERARY THEORY

In an article written for The Atlantic Monthly in 1895, Corson summarized his literary philosophy. The primary elements of that philosophy were revealed in the title, "Vocal Culture in Its Relation to Literary Culture." According to Corson both vocal and literary culture should begin in childhood and should be taught in the home as well as in school. He recommended "careful, honest reading, with no attempt at make-believe of feeling" as the best approach to early vocal training. Literary culture should begin by the parents assisting the child to attune his feelings to good literature through "the influence and atmosphere of his home." The child should then "have an inward impulsion to vocalize whatever he specially enjoyed in his reading." Corson held that it

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1Hiram Corson, "Vocal Culture in Its Relation to Literary Culture," The Atlantic Monthly, LXXV (June, 1895), 810. Hereafter cited as Atlantic.

2Atlantic, p. 811.

3Ibid.
was "quite superfluous to say that a reader should have a perfect articulation . . . pitch . . . force . . . every variety of inflection . . . not to name numerous other vocal functions." He abhorred "the benumbing technical instruction of the schools." The teaching of oratory caused him particular concern.

People go to schools of oratory with nothing within themselves which is clamorous for expression; not even a very "still small voice" urging them to express something. Many who desire, or think they do, to be readers . . . evidently believe that if they be trained in technique they can be readers . . . .

But suppose some one is impelled to cultivate vocal power because of his desire to express what he has sympathetically and lovingly assimilated of a work of genius: if he endeavor to give an honest expression, so far as in him lies, to what he feels, and avoid trying to express what he does not feel, and if he persevere in his endeavor, with always some ideal behind his reading, he may in time, he certainly will, become a better reader than another could if he should set out, with malice pretense, to be an elocutionist, and with that malicious purpose, were to employ a mere voice-trainer who should teach him to make faces and to gesticulate when reading what does not need any gesture.

In Corson's view, vocal culture and literary culture should develop simultaneously; as the "student advances to the higher literature, he should be trained in the higher, more complex vocal function demanded for its interpretation." Advancement to the higher literature would be achieved by the student's continued development of his own spiritual nature and of his capacity to respond

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4Atlantic, p. 814.  
5Atlantic, p. 811.  
6Atlantic, p. 816.  
7Atlantic, p. 813.
to the spiritual life "of a poem, or any other form of literature." Corson summarized the essence of his literary theory on the relationship between vocal culture and literary culture:

Without that interior life which can respond to the indefinite life (life indefinite to the intellect) of works of genius, a trained voice can do nothing of itself in the way of real interpretation. It may bring out the definite articulating thought, but the electric aura in which the thought is enveloped will not be conducted to its hearers.

According to Corson, a cultivated voice was an asset to the interpreter of literature. His ideas on vocal culture were expressed as early as 1865 in An Elocutionary Manual, his first publication on interpretative reading. Corson recommended no system of elocutionary training, but he advised the serious scholar to investigate The Philosophy of the Human Voice. Its author, Dr. James Rush, was the most significant influence on Corson's theory of vocal culture. Many of Corson's suggestions for training the voice can be traced to the work of Rush.

Readers of An Elocutionary Manual were directed to Rush's book if they could not find a living teacher able to meet their wants, because all writers on elocution had added "little or nothing of importance" to it. Corson recommended a "reverential study" of Rush, who presented in his Philosophy of the Human Voice what Corson held to be "the high ideal of vocal culture."

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8Atlantic, p. 812. 9Atlantic, p. 816.
His recommendation that the student read Dr. Rush for a history of his voice is similar to a statement by Rush: "I leave it therefore for the service of him who may in future desire to read the history of his voice."\(^{10}\)

Other similarities between the language of Rush and Corson can be noted. In a speech made at Ogontz College in 1891 Corson contrasted vocal training with methods employed in a Conservatorio of music. The same statement is made in An Elocutionary Manual in which Corson cited the fifth edition of Philosophy of the Human Voice as his source.\(^{11}\) Corson's manual also quoted Rush in his praise of Mrs. Siddons.

All that is smooth and flexible, and various in intonation, all that is impressive in force, and in long-drawn time, all that is apt upon the countenance, and consonant in gesture, gave their united energy, gracefulness, grandeur, and truth, to this one great model of Ideal Elocution.\(^{12}\)

Corson also used the philosophy of Rush in his early lectures on elocution in his English literature class at Cornell. A student recorded in his notebook Corson's definition of "the grouping of speech."

Grouping is a term derived from the art of painting and means when applied to elocution the presentation of involved and successive thoughts of discourse with

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\(^{12}\)Rush, p. 396, and An Elocutionary Manual, p. 32.
distinctness of outline and with various degrees of prominence according to their relative values.\textsuperscript{13}

This quotation can be compared with Rush's explanation for using the phrase, "of the grouping of speech." He wrote:

I have adopted a term from the art of painting, to designate the instrumentality of pauses, and of certain affections of the voice, in uniting the related ideas of discourse, and separating those which are unrelated to each other.\textsuperscript{14}

Rush listed "the means by which deviations from the simple construction of sentences may be rendered perspicuous in delivery":

Pauses, which are here to be regarded merely as divisional agents.

The Phrases of melody.

The reduction of the pitch and force of the voice, for which I use the term Abatement.

A quickness of utterance, that I here call the Flight of the voice.

A mode of indicating grammatical connection, which may be named the Emphatic Tie.\textsuperscript{15}

Corson's lecture referred to "four principal modes of grouping."

By the agency of pause.

By a reduction of pitch and force termed Abatement.

By a mode of emphasis to denote grammatical connection. Termed emphatic tie.

\textsuperscript{13}Donovan Notebook, September 29, 1870, Corson Collection.

\textsuperscript{14}Rush, p. 155.

\textsuperscript{15}Rush, p. 156.
By a rapid utterance termed flight.\textsuperscript{16}

Both Rush and Corson discussed the principles of melody and referred to the significance of monotone. According to Rush, "A predominance of the monotone in melody, is suited to feelings of dignity, grief, tenderness, solemnity, and serious admonition."\textsuperscript{17} Corson held that "there should never be in reading a non-significant departure from a pure monotony."\textsuperscript{18}

Another principle from Rush that Corson developed in his own work was the concept of the wave. Rush defined the wave as "the junction of the upward and downward movement in continuous utterance." He further explained that the vocal principle was understood by the Greeks and that Joshua Steele and others had referred to the same movement "under the term, Circumflex accent."\textsuperscript{19} Rush extended the concept to cover all possible complexities of vocalization. Corson's definition of the wave is reminiscent of Rush:

upward waves being a combination of downward and upward inflections, or bends, and downward waves the reverse, and double waves being a combination of upward and downward waves, or the reverse.\textsuperscript{20}

Hiram Corson did not advocate a specific system of

\textsuperscript{16}Donovan, September 29, 1870. \textsuperscript{17}Rush, p. 180.

\textsuperscript{18}Hiram Corson, \textit{The Voice and Spiritual Education} (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1896), p. 78. Hereafter cited as \textit{The Voice}.

elocutionary training. However, he advised the student of literature to achieve complete understanding and mastery of his voice, and he recommended *The Philosophy of the Human Voice* as an aid to those purposes. He incorporated several ideas from Dr. James Rush in his own theory of vocal culture.

Corson's theory of literary culture was of primary concern to him, however. His philosophy on the study of literature was influenced by the writing of many authors he chose to perform. Corson was a romantic in the tradition of William Wordsworth, sharing with the poet a philosophical emphasis on the artist and his expression of genuine emotion through poetry. He also agreed with Wordsworth's insistence that "Poets do not write for Poets alone, but for Men."\(^{21}\) Corson took upon himself the formulation of a literary theory that would encompass man's best response to the poems that were written for him. In his view, the response in itself was an expressive art.

The debt to Wordsworth becomes clear upon investigation of the manuscript for Corson's lecture on *Wordsworth's Nature Philosophy*.\(^{22}\) Unfortunately, the work was never published, although the many revisions in the manuscript indicate that Corson at least considered


\(^{22}\)Corson Collection.
preparing it for publication. It should be noted that the manuscript contains several pages marked for oral performance. Assumedly, Corson marked them himself. Every mark used in the lecture script can be found in *Reasonable Elocution*, the only book of its kind that ever received Corson's favor. Perhaps Mrs. F. Taverner Graham, its author, was related to J. W. Taverner, Corson's partner in elocution in the early Philadelphia days. Corson freely uses Mrs. Graham's marking for the "fluctuating inflection" or "wave," which is a circumflex attached to an inverted circumflex. This mark is not to be found in the standard books of elocution by Alexander M. Bell, Ebenezer Porter; nor is it in McGuffey's Readers. The concept of the wave is discussed at length by Dr. Rush, but Mrs. Graham appears to be alone in providing a marking for the sequence of sounds known as the wave.\(^2\)

Of even more interest than the markings is the content of the manuscript. The introductory paragraph reveals Corson's interpretation of Wordsworth's views on the spirit.

Wordsworth's poetry exhibits, throughout, the mutual and absolute relationship of Nature and the human spirit. He did not study Nature, as the word "study" is generally understood. He realized within himself the oneness of the omnipresent spirit in Nature and his own spirit. He had none of the relationship to Nature of a scientist.

The summary of Wordsworth's philosophy could also be written of Corson:

The universe was to him an unbroken whole. He did not divide nor analyse it. His society with Nature was not study, but communion; not a notation of experiences, but an intercourse of spirit; he did not examine it in its laws, but felt it in its life.

Since Wordsworth was influenced by Rousseau, Kant, Fichte, and Schelling, among others,\textsuperscript{24} Corson felt their influence through the poet's work. The professor's most intense concentration, however, was not in philosophy but in literature.

The one philosopher to whose thought Corson is known to have been attracted was Baruch Spinoza. In his library he had numerous editions of the philosopher, whose portraits adorned several of the walls at Cascadilla Cottage. Professor C. M. Tyler asserted that Corson disagreed with Spinoza's "doctrine of two infinite attributes, thought and extension." Corson also believed in the immortality of the person, in contrast with Spinoza's idea of the undying consciousness.\textsuperscript{25}

Professor Tyler assumed that Corson looked to Spinoza for religious reasons; he did not consider the


\textsuperscript{25}Hiram Corson Papers, C. M. Tyler, manuscript of a eulogy to Hiram Corson, June, 1911.
possibility that the philosopher influenced his literary theory. However, Corson's doctrine of the "What Is, What Knows, What Does," albeit attributable to Browning, is significantly similar to Spinoza's theory of the three levels of knowledge.26

The philosopher held that we refine our knowledge by moving from imagination to reason to intuition. The level of imagination, corresponding to Corson's "What Does," derives ideas from sensation. On this level we see an object, but we cannot know its essential nature through our senses. Therefore, our knowledge at this point is vague. From imagination, we go to the second level of reason, similar to Corson's "What Knows." On this level of scientific knowledge "man's mind can rise above immediate and particular things and deal with abstract ideas."27 The highest level is intuition, like Corson's "What Is." Through it, man is enabled to understand the whole system of nature.

At this level we can understand the particular things we encountered on the first level in a new way, for . . . we saw other bodies in a disconnected way, and now we see them as part of the whole scheme.28

26See pp. 318-333 of the present study for an analysis of Corson's doctrine of the "What Is, What Knows, What Does."


28Stumpf, p. 266.
On the plane of intuition, we see our place in the full order of nature.

Hiram Corson was indebted to Dr. James Rush for his study of the voice. He was also indebted to the writers he studied for their influence on the crystallization of his theory, particularly to Wordsworth, Browning, Shakespeare, Milton, Chaucer, Tennyson, Ruskin, and DeQuincey. Among philosophers, Spinoza appears to have exerted the most influence on his thinking.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CORSON'S LITERARY THEORY

Hiram Corson discussed his literary philosophy in books, articles, and speeches as well as in the classroom. He wrote or edited eleven books, each contributing to his stature as a literary scholar. When he joined the faculty of Cornell University, he had already published two books.

For his first publication Corson edited Chaucer's *Legende of Goode Women*, adding his own introduction and notes.29 His second book, *An Elocutionary Manual*, was accepted for publication and previewed in 1864. Dedicated to "My Pupils," the manual consisted of "Choice Selections from English and American Literature, Adapted to Every Variety of Vocal Expression." Designed for private and social reading as well as for higher classes in schools and

seminaries, its special purpose was "the furnishing only of good material for vocal expression. Corson's own contribution was an introductory essay. He offered no exercises in the tradition of texts on elocution for mechanical training of either the voice or the body. Rather, he proposed that the voice be cultivated from an early age so that the adult reader would have full control over the instrument he would use to communicate poetry. He offered this summary for his essay:

> every literary art-product, especially every true poem must be at first received in as passive a state as possible . . . the feelings must ever be the pioneers of judgment, and . . . to them must be committed the gathering of material for the discursive understanding . . . . It follows that the reading of a poem which would not only mirror, but amplify and complete the poetic feeling of the hearer, would be the best preparation that could be afforded for the after-work of analysis, and its ultimate purpose, a higher and more comprehensive synthesis of thought and feeling.

Thirty years later in the first volume of Expression, S. S. Curry reviewed the book and asserted that "The School of Expression agrees with Professor Corson in everything except his advocacy of the Rush System." He admitted, however, that "Professor Corson's ideas and instinct transcend any such system."

30 An Elocutionary Manual, p. 47.
31 An Elocutionary Manual, p. 45.
32 S. S. Curry, "Professor Corson on Literary Study and Vocal Expression," Expression, I (June, 1895), 24-25.
33 Curry, p. 25. The relationship of Curry and Cor-
Corson held that vocal training should begin in childhood in order for the adult reader to have cultivated the ability to communicate poetry in its spiritual complexity. He advised that a student study Rush only to understand "the history of his voice." It was not his purpose "to set forth any principles and rules, or to give any special exercises." Indeed, "the grand science of the human voice cannot be compressed into the limits of a nutshell."

Corson prepared his third volume after the Civil War "for the use of the Southern freedmen." This booklet was his revised edition of Jaundon's English Orthographical Expositor. His third volume of literary scholarship appeared soon after he moved to Ithaca. Entitled Handbook of Anglo-Saxon and Early English, it met with critical acclaim.

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35An Elocutionary Manual, p. 47. 36Ibid.
In the 1880's Professor Corson wrote two books that were to add greatly to his stature among literary men of his day. The first was *Introduction to the Study of Robert Browning's Poetry*. One of his most widely read and respected books, it was used by students of Browning, particularly by members of the Browning Clubs in America and England. The poet responded to the first edition with a letter to the author, a facsimile of which appeared in the later editions. Browning wrote in part:

You "hope I shall not find too much to disapprove of": what I ought to protest against, is a load to sink a navy--too much honor . . . . Let it remain as an assurance to younger poets that, after fifty years work unattended by any conspicuous recognition, an over-payment may be made, if there be such another munificent appreciator as I have been privileged to find, in which case let them, even if more deserving be equally grateful.

In the Preface to the third edition, Corson commented on the "vain discussions" of the Browning Clubs about minute points not in "the range of the artistic motive of a composition." To him all that was necessary in the study of poetry was the understanding of "the artistic or spiritual motive." To prove his point, he reported on a conversation that he had had with Browning

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40Letter from Robert Browning to Hiram Corson, December 28, 1886. Original in the Hiram Corson Papers, Department of Manuscripts and University Archives, Cornell University.
concerning the death of "My Last Duchess," an issue frequently discussed in the clubs. Corson had had to defend himself against those critics who refused to agree with him that the Duke had not ordered her death. Even Horace Howard Furness wrote to take exception to Corson's interpretation. Corson asserted that "'I gave commands' certainly must not be understood to mean commands for her death . . . ."41 As proof, Corson reported Browning's answer when asked what he had meant:

He made no reply, for a moment, and then said, meditatively, "Yes, I meant that the commands were that she should be put to death." And then, after a pause he added, with a characteristic dash of expression, and as if the thought had just started in his mind, "Or he might have had her shut up in a convent." This was to me very significant. When he wrote the expression, "I gave commands," etc., he may not have thought definitely what the commands were, more than that they put a stop to the smiles of the sweet Duchess, which provoked the contemptible jealousy of the Duke. This was all his art purpose required, and his mind did not go beyond it.42

The book contained a five-chapter introduction in which Corson discussed "The Spiritual Ebb and Flow Exhibited in English Poetry from Chaucer to Tennyson and Browning," "The Idea of Personality and of Art as an Intermediate Agency of Personality, as Embodied in Browning's Poetry," "Browning's Obscurity," "Browning's Verse," and "Arguments of the Poems." The rest of the book was an anthology of Browning's poetry for study. It contained few footnotes, in keeping with Corson's phil-

41Browning, p. 87. 42Browning, p. viii.
osophy that the work of art was more important than any criticism of it. The volume concluded with a bibliography of critical articles on Browning should the student wish to pursue them after reading the poems.

Another scholarly work from the 1880's added to his stature among literary men of his day. An Introduction to the Study of Shakespeare aimed to "indicate to the student some lines of Shakespearean thought which may serve to introduce him to a more appreciative study" of the plays of Shakespeare. An advertisement flyer slipped into the 1909 edition stated that Professor Corson was regarded by many as America's foremost Shakespearean scholar.

He discussed the controversy over authorship. Corson was convinced that Bacon could not have written the plays, calling him "the coldest of mankind." Other chapters discussed the authenticity of the First Folio, the chronological order of the plays, Shakespeare's verse, the language of the plays, and notes on Romeo and Juliet, King John, Much Ado about Nothing, Hamlet, Macbeth, and Antony and Cleopatra.

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44Shakespeare, p. 30.
Although he did not aim to provide a treatise on oral reading, Corson included commentary of interest to the oral interpreter. His ideas on imagination foreshadow modern trends in readers theatre. His description of the theatre in Shakespeare's day indicates that he desired a return to the days when stage trappings were in the imaginations of the audience:

It is not improbable that the people who attended the Globe Theatre, even the inferior sort, were more susceptible, got more of the real thing, than the ordinary attendants of theatres in our days, when so much, too, is addressed to the eye which was not so addressed in Shakespeare's time, but had to be imagined. Now our stage carpentry leaves nothing to be imagined. We shut off imagination in earliest childhood, in having our children's dolls made to squeak when they are squeezed, and to say mamma, and to creep along the floor, moved by a wound-up spring in the stomach. The rag doll was much better, as it gave scope to a child's imagination, and children loved it more on that very account.45

He suggested that the student should also be attentive to "all that is told or described by the characters in the Plays, instead of being scenically or dramatically represented to the audience."46 According to Corson, Shakespeare's genius lay in knowing what to dramatize and what action would best be narrated. The professor encouraged the student to regard the plays as drama rather than as embodiments of philosophical ideas:

They should not be studied as closet plays, but as plays written expressly for representation on the stage. When we read them, we should read them with

45Shakespeare, p. 11. 46Shakespeare, p. 19.
the stage before the mind's eye; otherwise we read them from a standpoint other than the artist's own. If we regard them as arenas for philosophical disquisition, as some commentators have done, we do not treat them fairly, because we lose sight of their real character.47

Later, Corson used oral reading as a tool for practical criticism of the dramatic literature.

Anyone who will read aloud two or three of the earliest plays, and two or three of the latest . . . will find the former asks a quite different elocution from that of the latter. The elocution of the former, whatever may be any one's habits as a reader, will naturally run more or less into the recitative style of expression—will be such as a reader is apt to give to matter previously prepared; the elocution of the latter will, as naturally, dwell more upon the thought, as if it, the thought, were having its genesis in the mind, at the time of its expression.48

So convinced was Corson of the instructional assistance that could be gained from oral reading of Shakespeare's plays that he read many of them each semester both to aid his students in their study and to provide entertainment for the faculty, townspeople, and other students who gave him enthusiastic support.

In 1884 he contributed an Index to Proper Names and Subjects to Chaucer's Canterbury Tales to the Chaucer Society of London. Referred to as "The Chaucer Concordance," its publication by the society added to his scholarly reputation.

In the 1890's Corson published three books: The

47Shakespeare, p. 21. 48Shakespeare, p. 66.
Aims of Literary Study, The Voice and Spiritual Education, and An Introduction to the Prose and Poetical Works of John Milton. The first was a composite of articles under the same title previously contributed to Poet-Lore and an address to the graduating class of Ogontz School, "What Does, What Knows, What Is." In his review Edward Everett Hale, Jr., wrote:

Among all the teachers in America, I suppose Professor Corson is one of the few who are really men of genius. With all his eccentricities and mistakes (I speak with too much earnestness to have regard to conventionality), Professor Corson has a keenness of insight into the living meaning of things that I can compare only with the power of Mr. Ruskin, or possibly Professor Dowden, among those now living who have given thought and study to the interpretation of literature.

Despite these words of praise, Hale took issue with what he thought to be Corson's thesis: the teaching of literature should strengthen the student's spirit. "With his intellect, in and for itself, it would have nothing to do." Hale, who had studied in Germany, was in agreement with the philologists who would make literature what Corson called "a knowledge subject."

In 1896 Corson drew from his article on Vocal

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50Edward E. Hale, Jr., "Literature as a University Study," The Dial, XVIII (February, 1895), 109-11.

51Ibid.
Culture\textsuperscript{52} and an address, "The University of the Future,"\textsuperscript{53} to create \textit{The Voice} and \textit{Spiritual Education}.\textsuperscript{54} The preface denied that the book was intended "to impart elocutionary instruction," although he called attention "to a few features of the subject . . . which would contribute much to the technical part, at least, of good reading." He stressed spiritual education as the end of all education "and as an indispensable condition of interpretative reading."

The text began with the question, "Can reading be taught?" The professor answered:

Yes, much can be taught . . . . The organs of speech can be brought by intelligent training into a complete obedience to the will and the feelings; and without this obedience of his vocal organs, a reader, whatever be his other qualifications, cannot do his best.

Comparing the reader with the untrained voice to the musician whose instrument is out of tune, he continued:

A reader may have the fullest possible appreciation of the subject matter, intellectual and spiritual, of a poem, and a susceptibility to all the subtlest elements of effect involved in its form; but if he

\textsuperscript{52}Hiram Corson, "Vocal Culture in its Relation to Literary Culture," \textit{The Atlantic Monthly}, LXXV (June, 1895), 810-16.

\textsuperscript{53}Hiram Corson, "The University of the Future: An Address Delivered before the Alumni of St. John's College, at the Annual Commencement, July 7th, 1875" (Ithaca: The Cornell University Press, 1875).

\textsuperscript{54}Hiram Corson, \textit{The Voice} and \textit{Spiritual Education} (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1896). Hereafter cited as \textit{The Voice}. 
have not full control of his vocal faculties, he can but imperfectly reveal through his voice, his appreciation and susceptibility.

This control would come only through "long and intelligent training."55

He did not hold that training in the schools of elocution would necessarily achieve the trained voice. Nor did he subscribe to the philosophy, "Enter into the spirit of what you read, read naturally, and you will read well."56 He made light of this concept by saying:

Similar advice might with equal propriety be given to a clumsy, stiff-jointed clodhopper in regard to dancing. "Enter into the spirit of the dance, dance naturally, and you will dance well." The more he might enter into the spirit of the dance, the more he might emphasize his stiff-jointedness and his clodhopperishness.57

He debated with Whately on two of the Archbishop's main points:

1. That a reader or speaker can do with an untrained voice what his mind wills, or his feelings impel him, to do. Not one in a thousand can.

2. That all principles of Elocution which may be taught will continue in the consciousness of the reader.58

According to Corson, the latter point was inaccurate. It was his view that

All true culture, to be true, most be unconscious of the processes which induced it. But before it is attained, one must be more or less "under the law,"

57The Voice, pp. 13-14.
58The Voice, pp. 19-20.
until he become a law to himself, and do spontane­
ously and unconsciously what he once had to do
consciously, and with effort.59

A believer in vocal training for the young, Corson
described his own early training. As a boy in school he
had had to read aloud twice a day standing and toeing a
chalk line. His teacher's instruction was to "speak
distinctly and mind your stops." First, the teacher read
a verse from the New Testament or a paragraph from
Lindley Murray's English Reader, and the boys would take
turns reading after him. Corson also had to read aloud
at home, and when he did not understand what he was
reading, he was asked to read it again. He early developed
a habit in sight reading of allowing his eyes to read a
sentence or two ahead of his voice, so that he would know
what he was approaching and would not be stopped. Corson
said of those exercises, "nothing could have been better
at the time."60

There was no such thing as "speaking a piece," with
gesture, "limbs all going like a telegraph in motion,"
and straining after effect. It was simple, careful,
honest reading, with no attempt at make-believe of
feeling. No encouragement was given to any affec-
tation of that kind; but whatever impressed my
listeners as genuine feeling and appreciation on my
part, was duly praised; and I was very fond of praise,
and was stimulated by it to do my best.61

Professor Corson asserted that "we shall not have a true,

59 The Voice, p. 20.  
60 The Voice, p. 24.  
61 The Voice, pp. 24-25.
honest vocal interpretation of literature until we return to this early honest reading."62

Corson countered Professor Hale's argument from the review of *The Aims of Literary Study* by saying that it was important for a student to be able to pass an examination on Professor Hale's notes on grammatical construction, "but an examination confined to these would not be any test of his literary capacity, of his susceptibility to the poem as a poem."63

Professor Corson held it to be "quite superfluous to say that a reader should have full control over his voice, and that he should also have a complete knowledge of the language he was reading.

To him elocution was generally "a vocal and Delsartian display," not an "honest vocalization . . . of what has been intellectually and spiritually assimilated." In order to bring elocution into "good repute," he suggested that the reading should be freed "from all strain of expression--to reduce emphasis and attain to the greatest degree of simplicity compatible with the subject matter."64 He described an excellent reading as "truly melodious":

The design or figure, so to speak, is so arabesque that it is not taken in by the ear of the hearer, and

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62 *The Voice*, p. 32.  
63 *The Voice*, p. 59.  
64 *The Voice*, p. 96.
does not come to his consciousness, but it tells effectively on his feelings. And by "effectively" I specially mean that the feelings are brought into harmony with, into a state of elective attraction for, the contriving creative spirit which moulds the poetic form. Such reading of high poetry is the extreme merit of vocal expression. Some of its principles may be taught; but the vitality of it must be the result of the spiritual education of the reader, must be exhaled spontaneously from his being.65

In an ensuing section of the book, he offered a personal experience in contrast to the reading he respected:

I was once present, by accident, at a lecture given by a Delsarte-eloctionary woman, and in the course of the lecture, she presented what, she said, would be false gestures in reciting Whittier's Maud Muller. She then recited the poem, with, according to her notions, true gestures, which were more in number than Cicero made, perhaps, in his orations against Cataline, or Demosthenes, in his oration On the Crown. Every idea of the poem told outwardly on her body.

If a woman, in reading Maud Muller, has emotions which must find vent in gesture, and various physical contortions, she ought to be put under treatment that would tone up her system.66

Corson had heard of Delsarte as early as 1871. One of his friends wrote to him on May 3, 1871:

the theory of Dr. Rush (scientific intonation) is the counterpart and dramatic complement to MacKaye's course on expression by attitude, gesture, and countenance. Have you heard him? MacKaye has attracted much attention, and is raising money professedly for his master Delsarte.

Corson, who held that it was important to cultivate the speaking voice as well as the reading voice,

65The Voice, p. 98. 66The Voice, pp. 130-131.
quoted Shakespeare to substantiate his thesis. Later in the text he compared reading with acting, suggesting that when cultivated people wanted to see acting, they went to the theatre. When they wanted to listen to reading, they desired "serious interpretative vocalization":

nothing more is necessary, unless it be a spontaneous and graceful movement of the hands, occasionally, such as one makes in an animated conversation.

He preferred reading from a book rather than recitation. In fact, elocutionists recite in order to have their arms free to act—to illustrate the thought they are expressing. Thought should not be helped out by gesture. Gesture results, or should result, from emotion, and should, therefore, be indefinite. Mimetic gesture, or mimetic action of any kind, is rarely, if ever, in place.

The book closes with a discussion of "The University of the Future," in which spiritual education will take precedence over intellectual development. The Voice and Spiritual Education closes with an argument favoring co-education as a natural consequence of the kind of education that Corson wanted the future to hold. He advocated "the opening to women of all the avenues along which men only have hitherto gone." Co-education should begin in the family, with sons and daughters being educated together. Woman should be "reared and educated with the other sex, and allowed her full share in all the

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67 The Voice, p. 102.  
68 The Voice, p. 126.  
69 The Voice, p. 127.  
70 The Voice, p. 167.
great interested of human life, social, political, educational, moral, and religious."\textsuperscript{71}

Corson's third book in the 1890's, \textit{An Introduction to the Prose and Poetical Works of John Milton}, also contributed to his literary theory and to his reputation as a scholar.\textsuperscript{72} In the introductory essay he advised his readers concerning the best way to read prose by any great author, including Milton:

> With all the faculties alert upon the subject matter as of prime importance, with an openness of heart, and with an accompanying interest in the loftiness of their diction.\textsuperscript{73}

His position on education was intensified in the comparison of his own view with that of Milton:

> The view which Milton took of learning, and acted upon, is one which should be kept before the minds of students at the present day, when the tendency is so strong toward learning for its own sake. As well talk of beefsteak for its own sake. Learning was with Milton a means of enlarging his capacity—\textit{a means toward being and doing}.\textsuperscript{74}

He identified poets as the "truest historians of their times and the truest prophets" because they possess "spiritual sensitiveness" and a resultant "penetrating insight." It was Corson's view that whereas history reflects the "phenomenal life" of a people, dramatic and

\textsuperscript{71}\textit{The Voice}, p. 174.


\textsuperscript{73}\textit{Milton}, p. xiii. \textsuperscript{74}\textit{Milton}, pp. xvii-xviii.
poetic literature provide a mirror for their "real and essential life." He continued:

It is the essential spirit only of an age, the permanent, the absolute, in it, as assimilated and "married to immortal verse" by a great poet, that can retain a hold upon the interests and sympathies of future generations.75

In A Primer of English Verse Chiefly in its Aesthetic and Organic Character, Corson provided the student of literature with a basic handbook on structure.76 He held that form was organic in good poetry and that aesthetic evaluation of the poem could be based on the contribution of the form to the emotional sense of the work. In the primer he made practical application of his theory on "vocal rendering" as the best way to understand a poem. In the first chapter, "Poetic Unities and Their Origin," he stated:

Now as soon as feeling is embodied in speech, and to the degree to which it is embodied, we find that speech is worked up, more or less distinctly or emphatically, into unities of various kinds. The primal unit, the unit of measure, we call foot, which is made up of two or more vocal impulses, according to the nature of the feeling which evolves it. This primal unit is combined into a higher unity, which is called verse, and this, in its turn, is combined into a still higher unity, which is called stanza, and so on.77

75 Milton, p. xx.


77 Primer, p. 3.
To Corson, the origins of poetry were vocal. A prime requisite for poetry was melody, "the fusing or combining principle or agency of a verse." Mechanical verse he regarded as "cold-blooded" in that it contained no melody, only literary skill. "The writer had no song, no music in his soul, when he composed them." If he wrote at all, he should have written "in straight-forward prose." The attitude explained his distaste for Alexander Pope's work. It was Corson's view that verse in the eighteenth century went astray.

In the second chapter, "Enforcing, Fusing, and Combining Principles of Poetic Unities," he explained his appreciation for blank verse. He held that the poet could use rhyme to "cover a multitude of sins of melody and harmony." When he wrote blank verse, however, the poet had "to depend upon the melodious movement of the individual verses, pause-melody, and the general harmony of toning." The poet was successful with blank verse only when his feeling was "all embracing" and "sufficiently sustained."

Throughout the book Corson peppered the practical criticism with references to the voicing of the selections quoted. For example, in reference to lines from *Morte*
d'Arthur, "and flashing round and round, and whirled in an arch,/Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,"
Corson suggested:

The voice should move rapidly over "in an" and make a wide upward interval on "arch"; and then the exceptional ictus on the following word "shot" adds to the effect.82

Concerning regularity in verse, he held that it was more effective when there were no "logical nor aesthetic motives" for deviating from it. Regular verse made irregularities more effective when they were sufficiently motivated. All non-significant departures weakened significant ones. He applied the same principal to oral reading:

A reader must have a consciousness or sub-consciousness of a dead level, or a pure monotony, by which or from which to graduate all his departures; and it is only by avoiding all non-significant departures that he imparts in his hearer a consciousness or a sub-consciousness of his own standard. If, as many ambitious readers do, he indulge in variety for its own sake, there is little or no relativity of vocal effect—there is no vocal variety, properly speaking, but rather vocal chaos. There should never be in reading a non-significant departure from a pure monotony. But elocution is understood by some readers, especially professional readers, to mean cutting vocal capers, as good penmanship is thought by professional writing-masters to consist in an abundance of flourishes.83

His final book, Spirit Messages with an Introductory Essay on Spiritual Vitality, was published posthumously, Eugene Corson seeing it through publication

82Primer, p. 44. 83Primer, p. 49.
in accordance with his father's "dying wish that it be published as he left it." It is a report of a series of twenty-four daily sittings with the trance medium, Mrs. Minnie Meserve Soule, to whom he dedicated the volume. Caroline Corson reportedly assembled the Spirit Band who delivered messages to him at sittings first in New York City with the medium Mrs. Mayer, "the most powerful of the slate-writing kind." Messages later came to him through his Swedish housekeeper, Mrs. Matilda Sjoegren, who acted as his medium until his death. The Band included Caroline, Pauline, and two sons Emil and Joseph, who had died in infancy. It also consisted of the Brownings, Tennyson, Whitman, Longfellow, Phillips Brooks, Frances Bennett, Goldwin Smith, Hawthorne, Gladstone, and Valentine Mott. Corson wrote that in the nine years of his sittings with the Band, he never had occasion to question the identity of any member in it. "Identity is a thing which cannot be proved to unbelievers in spirit visitation . . . and it is not worth while to attempt proof to such."  

In his Introduction, Corson advanced the possibility that

85Spirit, Foreword. 86Spirit, p. xiii.
the indwelling universal spirit, the ultimate substance, comes to consciousness only through the individualizations of itself, and is constantly and forever passing into numberless millions of consciousnesses of incarnate beings; and there are numberless millions of consciousnesses of excarnate human beings in the spirit world.87

If one could prove the "unconsciousness of the universal spirit," the question would then arise, "What object of religious devotion is left for us?" Corson answered that man's object of worship would then be "the whole awful living universe."88 One will be "spontaneously religious" to the degree of his "harmony with the spiritual constitution of the universe." Poets, pantheists by birth, "have a sense of their kinship with the universal spirit by reason of their exceptional spiritual vitality." Poetry "is a revelation of this sense of kinship."89 Since mankind has an inborn love of nature, it becomes the obligation of the schools to impart spiritual education in addition to factual information. Corson especially found fault with the teaching of literature merely as an intellectual endeavor, and he continued his old argument:

Too much scholarship is mixed up with and intruded upon the study, so that a work of genius is not allowed to make its own independent spiritual impression, which would certainly interest most students more than unnecessarily obtruded scholarship.90

87Spirit, p. 15. 88Ibid. 89Spirit, p. 17. 90Spirit, pp. 18-19.
If the emphasis were on spiritual education, students would be able to draw from their unconscious selves in response. Corson reported that his experience had revealed the school system was "all putting in, not drawing out."\(^91\)

Corson wrote of "uprisings from the sub-self."

At times people were conscious of spiritual responses. The more of these uprisings they experienced the more they became part of the consciousness and the more they attained "oneness with the absolute being." The best way of inducing the uprisings was through "the sympathetic, assimilative reading of great poets."\(^92\)

Consequently, the teacher possessed certain qualities:

An indispensable requisite of a teacher of literature is a highly cultivated voice, a voice, too, whose intonation (the choral part of an interpretative voice) should be such as to evoke a response in his students to the spiritual element of the poem he is reading, along with the articulating thought which is received by their intellects. Abstract thought does not require to be vocally interpreted. It can be got through the eye. If it be read aloud, with proper grouping of the sections of sentences, any ordinary voice would serve.\(^93\)

Corson advised not only teachers but also students to cultivate their voices and to read much poetry aloud.\(^94\)

Thomas O'Hagan, one of Corson's graduate students in 1893, reported that his professor's "literary gospel"
was contained in a speech, "What Does, What Knows, What Is." O'Hagan wrote, "If I had had any doubts as to Dr. Corson's attitude toward the study of poetry, the reading of this admirable address, so pregnant with ripe wisdom, solved it." Much of the text of that speech became The Aims of Literary Study, published in 1894. The inclusion was a source of distress for a reviewer in The Nation, who complained,

At the outset the writer cumbers himself unduly with some of Browning's psychology as it appears in "A Death in the Desert," and there is danger that the reader will be discouraged in the porch with the iteration of such disagreeable circumlocutions as the "What Does" and "What Knows" and the "What Is"; but after the first few pages there is less of this, though in general a simpler terminology would be to the advantage of the doctrine which Prof. Corson has to preach.

The reader obviously did not appreciate what he held to be Browning's influence on Corson's writing. His review continued:

There is another drawback in his style, which, for one so thoroughly acquainted with the world's best literature, is singularly devoid of charm, and this suggests a doubt whether converse with good literature is the best way of learning how to write—or would, if Prof. Corson were not such an ardent devotee of Browning, like whom he dearly loves a parenthetic clause.

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95 Thomas O'Hagan, "Recollections of the Late Dr. Hiram Corson," Cornell Alumni News, (May 27, 1915), p. 412. The address had been given to the graduating class of the Ogontz Academy in Philadelphia, June 9, 1891.

96 Ibid.

97 The Nation, April 4, 1895, p. 263.

98 The Nation, p. 263.
The point was well taken, for Corson did manage to obfuscate his meaning when he changed from oral to written style. For example the statement, "There is but a very small part of us" in the speech text became "There is but an infinitesimally small part of our absolute being" in *The Aims of Literary Study*. The Ogontz Address expresses Corson's basic ideas on literature more intelligibly than does *The Aims*. It seems wise, therefore, to proceed from his original source when analyzing his theory.

In the speech Corson first discussed his philosophy of the state of being. He then applied this theory of existence to the aims of education. Next he introduced the concept of "what does, what knows, what is" and moved to a discussion of each in order. From there he applied the three concepts to a philosophy of education, followed by a specific theory of teaching poetry. From the theoretical he moved to the practical, criticizing the methods of teaching poetry generally employed by his contemporary English professors. Then he offered a superior method of poetic instruction, "fullest interpretative vocal rendering." Here he moved to a three-part definition of good reading, discussing each part in turn. He concluded with a brief summary, a return to generalities, and a prediction for the future of mankind should his educational philosophy be realized.

The speech began with a discussion of the conscious
and unconscious states of existence and their inter­relationships that determine our actions.

There is but a very small part of us which comes to consciousness in this life, however much we may be educated in the common acceptation of that word, and however extended our outward and our inward experiences may be. Back of our conscious and active powers, is a vast and mysterious domain of unconsciousness—but a domain which is, nevertheless, our true being, and which is unceasingly influencing our conscious and active powers, and more or less determining us to act according to absolute standards, or according to relative and expedient standards.99

In light of this concept, Corson directed that the highest aim of education should be "the rectification or adjustment of that which constitutes our true being" rather than the storing of knowledge or "sharpening of the intellect." In order for "souls" to "silently shape themselves" to what is "most shapely, outside ourselves, we must attain a 'wise passiveness.'"100 In other words, he said that we must develop "a spontaneous and even unconscious fealty, an unswerving loyalty, to what is spiritually above us."

'The eye, it cannot choose but see'; but it sees according to what we are; it is in the service of our essential selves. 'We cannot bid the ear be still'; but it hears according to what we are; it is in the service of our essential selves; and according as our essential selves are shapely or unshapely, the eye and the ear report of the


100Corson borrowed the phrase "wise passiveness" from William Wordsworth's "Expostulation and Reply."
Next Corson introduced the doctrine of the threefold nature of man, "What Does, What Knows, What Is," on which he based his own philosophy of education. The words and the doctrine were from Robert Browning's narrative poem "A Death in the Desert," a fictionalized account of the death of St. John of Patmos. Corson quoted the section of the poem in which Browning had one of his characters to discuss the "trinal nature of man" as the doctrine John "was wont to teach":

How divers persons witness in each man,
Three souls which make up one soul: first, to wit,
A soul of each and all the bodily parts,
Seated therein, which works, and is what Does,
And has the use of earth, and ends the man
Downward; but, tending upward for advice,
Grows into, and again is grown into
By the next soul, which, seated in the brain,
Useth the first with its collected use,
And feeleth, thinketh, willeth,—is what Knows:
Which, duly tending upward in its turn,
Grows into, and again is grown into
By the last soul, that uses both the first,
Subsisting whether they assist or no,
And, constituting man's self, is what Is—
And leans upon the former, makes it play,
As that played off the first: and, tending up,
Holds, is upheld by, God, and ends the man
Upward in that dread point of intercourse,
Nor needs a place, for it returns to Him.
What Does, what Knows, what Is; three souls, one man.102

101 The lines Corson quotes are from Wordsworth's "Expostulation and Reply."

102 The lines are quoted in their poetic form in The Aims. In the printing of the speech text they are incorporated as if they were a prose quotation. Corson's speech notes are unavailable. However, his concern for poetic form would probably have led him to treat the reading as poetry.
Corson had included "A Death in the Desert" in his An Introduction to the Study of Robert Browning's Poetry, first printed in 1886. In his extensive notes to the poem in his third edition of 1899 he quoted a paper by Mrs. M. G. Glazebrook on A Death in the Desert, read at the 48th meeting of the Browning Society, February 25th, 1887. Although Corson frowned upon paraphrase, he obviously believed that in this instance it would serve to elucidate the complex passage. According to Glazebrook:

"The first and lowest [soul] is that which has to do with earth and corporeal things, the animal soul, which receives primary sensations and is the immediate cause of action--'what Does.' The second is the intellect, and has its seat in the brain: it is superior to the first, but dependent on it, since it receives as material the actual experience which the animal soul supplies; it is the feeling, thinking, willing soul--'what Knows.' The third, the highest, is the spirit of man, the very principle of life, the divine element in man linking him to God, which is self-subsistent and therefore independent of sensation and knowledge, but nevertheless makes use of them, and gives them existence and energy--'What Is.'"

103 Hiram Corson, An Introduction to the Study of Robert Browning's Poetry (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1899) 3rd. ed., p. 337. The language Corson used in his own explication of "A Death in the Desert" reappeared in a slightly modified version in his Ogontz Address. It is typical of Corson's writing that he borrows from himself whenever possible. In Browning Corson wrote "The doctrine of the trinal unity of man (the what Does, what Knows, what Is) ascribed to John, and upon which his discourse may be said to proceed, leads up to the presentation of the final stage of the Christian life on earth—that stage when man has won his way to the kingdom of the "what Is" within himself, and when he no longer needs the outward supports to his faith which he needed before he
Corson held that the province of education was the realm of the "what Is," corresponding to man's highest spiritual development. He did not deny the importance of the "what Knows," including acquiring knowledge and cultivating science and philosophy; however, he held that the "rectification or adjustment of 'what Is' was most important. The "what Is" is "the determining power back of the intellect," and any attempt to reach the "what Does" or "what Knows" without going through the determining power would fail.

That all spirit is mutually attractive, as all matter is mutually attractive, is an ultimate fact, beyond which we cannot go, and which we must accept as a fact. And it is on this fact, that the rectification of 'what Is' must be based. Spirit to spirit . . . . And here we are at the very basal fact of Christianity . . . . When Christ said, 'Follow me,' he addressed the 'what Is' in human nature . . . . Follow me,--not from an intellectual apprehension of principals--involved in my life, but through deep sympathy, through the awakening, vitalizing, actuating power of incarnate Truth; through a response of your spiritual nature to mine; and in and by, and through that response, your essential passed from the "what Knows." Christianity is a religion which is only secondarily a doctrine addressed to the "what Knows." It is, first of all, a religion spiritually potential in man, was realized, and in responding to whom the soul of man is quickened and regenerated." (p. 142) The line "... it is, first of all, a religion whose fountain-head is a divine personality in whom all that is spiritually potential in man was realised" is used directly in the speech text. In The Aims the line appears again, with "fountain-head" changed to "impregnable fortress." (Aims, p. 15.)

The spelling was corrected to principles in The Aims.
life will be brought into harmony with, and carried along by, the spiritual forces of the world, and thus conducted by them to the kingdom of eternal truth within yourselves.\textsuperscript{105}

He stated that sharpening the intellect (what Knows) without developing the spirit (what Is) was dangerous both to the individual and to society.

The results of it we see every day, and read of in the newspapers, in the actions of smart men of our country—men who can falsify bank accounts, and appropriate large sums of other people's money to their own use; who use high political positions for purely selfish ends, and serve the prince of this world\textsuperscript{106} in various ways. These men have had a good education, as it is called; that is, they have been well stuffed in the schools with the small details of this planet.\textsuperscript{107} Many of them are graduates of Colleges, who have carried off the most coveted prizes. They have been, perhaps, instructed in the intellectual evidences of Christianity, which are no evidences at all; but we find that all this avails not for righteousness. The cause is not far to seek. The 'what Knows' is almost exclusively exercised in our schools, and the 'self-centered insolence of youth' is fostered thereby.\textsuperscript{108}

Mere knowledge, no matter how great or extensive, does not

\textsuperscript{105}Similarities of thought and construction appeared in "The University of the Future," the address Corson delivered to the Alumni of St. John's College, July 7, 1875. He said, "How deep the meaning wrapt up in the command of the Divine Master, "Follow me"! That is, do as I do, live as I live, not from an intellectual recognition of the principles involved in my life, but through deep sympathy, through the awakening, vitalizing, actuating power of the incarnate "Word."

\textsuperscript{106}Changed to "prince of darkness" in The Aims.

\textsuperscript{107}The clause, "that is, they have been well stuffed in the schools with the small details of this planet" is deleted in The Aims.

\textsuperscript{108}The last sentence quoted is deleted in The Aims.
"contribute to reverence," and an unbridled intellect "is arrogant and self-sufficient--Mephistophelian."

Corson moved next to a definition of teaching and to clarification of a true student-teacher relationship. "Being is teaching," he asserted, and it is fundamental for the effective teacher to be a "superior spirit" who could receive the "unconscious following" of a student, "an inferior spirit." Knowledge is important to the teacher, of course. It should be "as thorough as he can make it, well ordered, and perfectly at his command," but to be is indispensable. The teacher may be "painfully learned, and yet have an unkindled soul." If this is the case, students will sense in his teaching a lack of vitality. The "ultimate fact of spirit to spirit must be the basal principle of all education worthy of the name," not only in the humanities, but in all subjects. "Even mathematics should not be presented in a moral vacuum."

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109 Here Corson defines reverence as "an actuating sense of what is above us. Reverence must come from the 'what Is,' from the essential nature." He also discussed the word in "the university of the Future." Of it he said, "And there is a word in our language that has quite survived its usefulness, and if things continue to go on as they are now going, it will soon be a fit subject for an Archaic Dictionary--I mean the word REVERENCE. It still holds its place in our Dictionaries of living vocables, but the thing it represents, is a rara avis in terris, nigroque simillima cygno. Vain is the attempt to awaken the religious sentiment in a child, to cause it to feel the real significance of the words, as it utters them, "Our Father who art in heaven," in whom the filial and reverential sentiments are quite quenched."
In the study of poetry, however, the "basal principle of spirit to spirit must be all-controlling; to it, all other features of the study must be subordinated."

The nature of poetic study is such that

We can know a true poem only so far as we can reproduce it sympathetically within ourselves—in other words, we know it to the extent that our own spirits respond to the spiritual appeal which is made to us. If we apply the insulated intellect to a poem, . . . we get only the definite thought which articulates it. The indefinite spiritual element, which every true poem must have, and which constitutes its real life, as a poem, we can know only when our own spirits respond to it; and then we may be said to know it more vitally than we know the definite, intellectual element of it; for it is a matter of inward consciousness, and there is nothing more vital and positive than that.

His ideas on poetry led him to attack historical analysis, the method used in the departments of literature that he accused of being "most Germanized." Corson saw such an approach as "an altogether intellectual and philosophical study," completely devoid of education of the spirit.

An exclusively intellectual attitude is taken toward what is a production of the whole man, as a thinking, emotional, imaginative, moral and religious being; a production which can be adequately responded to only by one in whom these several attributes are, in some degree, active; and literary education should aim after their activity; should aim to bring the student into sympathetic relationship with the permanent and the eternal—with that which is independent of time and place.

Corson viewed historical analysis not as useless, but rather as incidental, in preventing the student from setting his mind "in that direction, and thus shutting him off
from a response to the essential, intrinsic character of the work itself." Works of genius had an intimate relationship to the time and place of their production, and a student mature in the "what Is" could benefit from the historical knowledge. However,

it is far from important to know the relations of these works to the universal, to the absolute, to the eternal, by virtue of which alone, they continue to live; because, so to know them implies that that which is absolute the eternal within ourselves, the "what Is," has been brought into play; a way has been opened out whereby some of the imprisoned splendor of the Hidden Soul has been set free.

Corson discussed three methods of presenting poetry to students that he had observed being employed in the schools.

1. by resolving and filling out its closely-textured and elliptical language into the language of prose; [paraphrase] 2. by translating, as far as possible, the concrete into the abstract, and thus bringing the former into a more direct relation with the intellect; [theme] 3. the editorial matter of the text-book is largely devoted to impertinent and obtrusive explanatory notes and to purely gratuitous etymologies. [phonology]

Disapproving of these three methods he suggested that the teacher should rather aim "to hold the minds of the class up as near as possible . . . to the height of the poet's thought and feeling."

And how is the best response to the essential life of a poem to be secured by the teacher from the pupil? I answer, by the fullest interpretative vocal rendering of it. On the part of the teacher, two things are indispensable: 1. that he sympathetically assimilate what constitutes the real life of the poem; 2. that he have the vocal cultivation demanded for an effective rendering of what he has assimilated. He may be able to lecture very
brilliantly about poetry, even about poetry which he has not taken to himself; he may, indeed, not have read at all what he is lecturing about; his lectures may be wholly the result of a study of the criticism which has gathered around a certain poem, and his students may be charmed with his fine talk and made to feel that they have been introduced in a very pleasant way to the poem on which he has lectured, and that they really know it . . . . He may not know, and they may not know, that he has failed in his duty. Lecturing about poetry does not avail any more, for poetical cultivation, than lecturing about music avails for musical cultivation. Both may be valuable, in the way of giving shape to, or organizing, what has previously been felt, to some extent; but they must not take the place of inward experience.110

It should be noted that Corson's suggestions here were for the teacher of literature and not for the student. The teacher was a superior spirit because he had made the real life of the poem a part of his "unconscious personality," the "what Is." If he had also cultivated his voice to its highest potential, he was able to give an interpretative reading for his students. The spirit of the poem lived in the teacher during the performance, and the student's spiritual response to "the essential life of the poem" cultivated his own "what Is." The teacher acted as a "medium" between the spiritual life of the poem and the spiritual life of the student. Corson employed this teaching method in his own literature classes with great

110Corson made a similar statement in an essay on "Vocal Culture" contained in An Elocutionary Manual, his first published work on the oral study of literature. "An indispensable condition of an aesthetic appreciation of high poetry, is, that it receive an adequate vocal expression. Without a high vocal culture,—without the highest vocal culture,—the study of poetry must be more or less imperfect," p. 31.
success. The problem inherent in such a method is obvious. If a teacher of literature lacks "vocal culture" he cannot teach. The person who aspires to teach poetry has a severe handicap if he has not been cultivating his voice since childhood. "Vocal culture should begin very early, the earlier the better." Corson suggested that the earliest training should be in the physical production of speech.

A system of vocal training might be instituted in the lower schools which would give pupils complete command of the muscles of articulation, extend the compass of the voice, and render it smooth, powerful, and melodious. A power of varied intonation should be especially cultivated, as it is through intonation that the reader's sympathies are conducted, and the hearer's sympathies are secured.

Once the student was in total control of his speech production, it was time to cultivate the voice. Corson compared this cultivation with the study of singing. "The reading voice demands at least as much cultivation as the singing voice."

With a realization of the high ideal of vocal culture in the schools, "there can be some hopes entertained of securing the best results of literary study." Once all students have vocal culture, they too can begin to read aloud as a test of how well they have assimilated the essential life of the poem. "A literary examination may then be made to mean something."

The student instead of being catechised about the merely intellectual articulation of a poem, the occasion of its completion, its vocabulary, and a
thousand other things which is may be quite interesting to know, will be asked to render it, in order to show through his voice, to what extent he has experienced it within himself, responded to and assimilated what the intellect cannot define or formulate.

To define good reading, Corson quoted the Old Testament, Chapter 8 verse 8 of Nehemiah: "So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading."

According to Corson, "to read distinctly, to give the sense, to cause to understand, meet all the conditions of effective reading. He then discussed each of these points separately.

As an example of his first requirement of good reading, "to read distinctly," Corson quoted from Chironomia, in which Austin compared the delivery of words with coins fresh from the mint. Words and coins should be "deeply and accurately impressed, neatly struck by the proper organs, distinct, in due succession, and of due weight." Corson held that if a person unskilled in delivery were trained to enunciate in the manner of Austin's metaphor, he would be "morally elevated. His enunciation would strike in." Later he summarized, "To read distinctly belongs to the 'what Does.'"

"To give the sense," the second requirement, means to communicate the intellectual level of the material. According to Corson poetry is more than thought.
"It is the product of co-operative soul and intellect; of the 'what Knows' and the 'what Is.'" On the other hand, writing that appeals only to the mind, such as a biology textbook, is not literature. In reading such work, all that is required is to give the sense. In reading poetry or any other writing "interfused with soul," however, the reader must communicate on a spiritual as well as an intellectual level. "To give the sense belongs to the 'what Knows.'" The reader of poetry must give the sense, but he has a further obligation before he has fulfilled the requirements of good reading.

The statement "To cause to understand," the third requirement, should be interpreted in the Biblical meaning of "the understanding heart." Corson expected the reader, "by his intonation, by the vocal coloring . . . which he gives to thought interfused with soul, to induce, in his hearers, a sympathetic response to the soul element."

When this idea became part of The Aims of Literary Study, Corson appended a note (p. 152) to explain his meaning of sympathy and to share credit for the notation with DeQuincey, who had also found need to define it.

I mean, of course, sympathetic in an art sense, a sympathetic response being a reproduction, within one's self, of feelings described, or exhibited, in a work of poetic or dramatic art. DeQuincey, in a note on his use of the word, 'sympathy,' in his essay, 'On the knocking at the gate, in Macbeth,' says: 'It seems almost ludicrous to guard and explain my use of a word in a situation where it
would naturally explain itself. But it has become necessary to do so, in consequence of the unscholarlike use of the word sympathy, at present so general, by which, instead of taking it in its proper sense, as the act of reproducing in our minds the feelings of another, whether for hatred, indignation, love, pity, or approbation, it is made a mere synonym of the word pity.

Corson held that inducing this sympathetic response to the spirit of the poem: "the all-important thing to be done, in interpretative reading." He made no distinction between "sympathy" and "empathy."

Not all material demands vocal interpretation. Some writing, he said, was "thought" "presented in a white light." Such material as "a proposition of Euclid could not be enforced by the voice, as there is nothing to be enforced." The meaning would be the same in "barbarous Latin" or in "the most perfect Greek," because the thought is independent of the form. Herein lies the difference between scientific writing and literature. Corson held that form should be preserved in poetry only because its form was an essential part of its spirit.

spiritualized thought demands organic form, and can be enforced and rendered more apprehensible through a sympathetic intonation of the voice of a reader who has adequately assimilated it. The voice serves as a chorus to call forth, to guide, and to interpret, the sympathies of the hearer.

The form of a poem is the visible manifestation of its spirit. This idea was expressed in Corson's writing as
early as 1865 in *An Elocutionary Manual*, in which he explained at length what he meant by form.

the History of English Literature is often studied in our Institutions of learning, before there is any, not even the most superficial, acquaintance with individual productions. If they are studied at all, they are usually studied in fragments, in the shape of "Beautiful Extracts" . . . and the advantage derived from the study of organisms is thus entirely forfeited. The one mode is as inferior to the other, as the study of bits of china would be, to contemplating the beautiful and graceful vase of which they once formed parts. In the study of the mere material, we lose sight of the beautiful form into which the artist moulded it. It is by the form which he has given to his manifold material, and which is the basis of all high aesthetic impression, that he is to be estimated. What has he made or moulded out of his material? is the question to be asked. How has he organized it, and with what results? With what success has he brought all details under the pervading, vitalizing influence of a dominant idea, causing them to impart to his work a richness and an intense vitality? Has he wisely rejected everything superfluous, or are there excrescences which contribute nothing to the general moral impression? Is his rhetoric in the web of his thought, or is it only sewed on, like gold lace on a coat? Are his thoughts evolved with a skillful and graceful transition from one to the other? or are they abrupt, insulated, capricious, with little or no law of succession? No number of brilliant passages will compensate for a deficiency in the organic unity and vitality of a work.

Corson concluded his remarks about the third reading requirement by asserting that "To cause to understand . . . belongs to the 'what Is.'" In his view "it is the latter, alone, in the reader, which can effectively reach the 'what Is' in the hearer."

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*An Elocutionary Manual*, p. 17.
The speech concluded with his assessment of methods of instruction in the schools of the time.

In these days of the almost unlimited monarchy of the 'what Knows' in our schools, the greatest and most difficult problem to be solved (and I fear that professional educators are most in the way of its solution), is, how to secure a better balancing than now exists of the intellectual and spiritual man.

He held that the future contained the possibility for the answer to the problem, and when the spirit is educated along with the intellect,

there will then be a civilization more linked with the eternal, because proceeding more from the 'what Is' of the human kingdom, and therefore a more Christian civilization than that in which we are living—a civilization such as the world has never yet known.

In 1894 the editors of Poet-Lore asked Hiram Corson and other "experienced specialists" to write for their magazine thoughts on the topic, "How may Literature best be taught?" The editors' plan was twofold. First, they wanted to stimulate open discussion of the aims and needs of literary study. Second, they wanted to discover limitations and effectiveness of teaching methods. They asked each professor the following questions to serve as points of departure: "Should our present philological and linguistic study be reformed or supplemented, and how?" "Should methods pursued in the study of science be adopted in literary study and criticism?" "Should there be study of the subject-matter of literature as well as
of its form and history?"\textsuperscript{112}

Articles were written in response by Frederic Ives Carpenter, L. A. Sherman, Katherine Lee Bates, Hiram Corson, and Oscar L. Triggs, and were published in the August-September issue. All but one were able to confine their remarks to the pages provided. The editors explained, "Professor Corson finds his space all too short for his thoughts, and will continue his present contribution . . . in our October issue."\textsuperscript{113} Actually, Corson's remarks continued through October, and the conclusion appeared in November.

He began his article, "The Aims of Literary Study," with a definition of poetic and dramatic literature, "the expression in letters of the spiritual, co-operating with the intellectual, man, the former being the primary, dominant coefficient." The inference from this definition as to the aim of literary study, he told his readers, "is therefore easy." He formulated the inference:

literature is not a mere knowledge subject . . . that with which the discursive, formulating intellect has to do. But it is a knowledge subject (only that and nothing more) if that higher form of knowledge be meant which is quite outside of the domain of the intellect,—a knowledge which is a matter of spiritual

\textsuperscript{112}Poet-Lore\textsuperscript{, VI (August-September, 1894), 48.}

\textsuperscript{113}Poet-Lore, VI, p. 378.
consciousness, and which the intellect cannot translate into a judgment.

Next he launched an attack on methods of literary study that emphasized the intellect over the spirit. He blamed for this problem teachers who had not "assimilated the informing spiritual life" of the work. "With literature as a power they have nothing to do; its value with them consists in its furnishing material for various kinds of drill."

He then argued against the study of "Histories of English Literature, and of the relations of literary masterpieces to the periods in which they were produced." He recommended instead a book such as Stopford Brooke's Primer of English Literature that could "map out" the literary works for the student. Histories could not educate the spirit, they could only give literary knowledge. Corson asserted that most college undergraduates were not prepared for a historical treatment of literature. Study of history could only be profitable if the student knew the best literature from Chaucer on, and if he had a "feeling of its historical current." The "informing vitality" of literature "must come from the absolute personality of the author," not from the "influences of time and place."

His discussion continued in the October, 1894, issue of Poet-Lore. He had made the same points before in his writing. The study of literature is an art, not a
science. Corson asserted that he was not opposed to scientific instruction:

Let it not be understood that there is implied, in the foregoing remarks, any depreciation of grammatical, philological, rhetorical, or any other kind of instruction for which the work studied affords material. Philology, on its higher planes, is a great science,—one of the greatest, indeed, which has been developed in modern times. But it is a science; it is not literature. And in literary study, the only true object of which is to take in the life of the work studied, that object must not be defeated by the teacher's false notions of thoroughness, which resulted in his obtruding upon the student's attention all manner of irrelevant things.

According to Corson, these materials "may have their importance, but they must also have their proper time and place."

In the conclusion to his article in Poet-Lore, November, 1894, he returned to his favorite statement:

How is the best response to the essential life of a poem to be secured by the teacher from the student? I answer, by the fullest interpretative vocal rendering of it. (And by "fullest" I mean that the vocal rendering must exhibit not only the definite intellectual articulation or framework of a poem, through emphasis, grouping, etc., but must, through intonation, varied quality of voice, and other means, exhibit that which is indefinite to the intellect. The latter is the main object of vocal rendering.)

Although he recognized the importance of explication and analysis in the study of literature, to Corson these studies were secondary. The primary objective in studying literature was to assimilate it in its aesthetic entirety and then to bring it to life through interpretative reading. Corson's theories were developed in books, articles, and lectures. Influenced by
the writers of the Romantic Period, he formulated a theory of the spiritual nature of literature that could only be brought to life through an interpretative reading by one possessing vocal culture.

THE INFLUENCE OF CORSON’S LITERARY THEORY

In the latter part of the nineteenth century a controversy raged over methods of teaching English. The Dial in 1894 invited English department heads and other professors to submit discussions of the programs in their schools. The interest their articles stimulated in literary circles prompted D. C. Heath and Company to reprint them the next year in book form. The philosophical disparity in English departments was revealed in this book, entitled English in American Universities, edited by W. M. Payne.114 Essays on Johns Hopkins University and the University of Minnesota not previously appearing in The Dial were added, as were an introduction by the editor, William Morton Payne, who also edited The Dial, and an appendix of discussions on the reports.

Methods of teaching English literature were in a transitional stage at the time, and professors were "exhibiting a strong tendency toward more enlightened

ways of dealing with this vastly important subject."  

Literary study appears to have been divided into two camps, the scientific and the aesthetic. Editor Payne, representing the general attitude of The Dial, raised the question, "It is doubtless much easier to treat literature by the method of science than by the method of aesthetics, but does not literature, thus treated, cease to assert its peculiar and indispensable function?" He suggested that it might be wise to separate English literature from its allied subjects by making it a distinct department of university work. English scholars were either "literary critics or masters of linguistic science."

The problem arose that a department head would emphasize his own specialty at the expense of the other in his department. Payne's solution was to place English literature and English philology as separate departments, as they were at Columbia, Cornell, and Stanford.

To show that he had a representative sampling of American English Departments, Payne categorized the contributors. The first group consisted of "the venerable Eastern institutions," Harvard, Yale, Columbia, and

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115 Payne, p. 7.  
116 Payne, p. 19.  
117 Payne, p. 3.  
118 Payne, p. 19.  
120 Payne, p. 27.
the University of Pennsylvania. It also included Amherst and Lafayette as small college representatives, and the University of Virginia, "representing the earlier type of Southern education so well justified of its children during the long ante-bellum period." The second group was the state-supported universities of Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, and California. The third group was the private institutions of Cornell, Johns Hopkins, the University of Chicago, and Wellesley. Payne justified the grouping by asserting that it amounted to a geographical pattern of East and West or chronological of old and new. The older Eastern institutions stood for "conservative adherence to well-tried methods and aims," and the new West stood for "experiment, fertility of invention, and the broadening of standards."\(^\text{121}\) He explained this phenomenon by comparing the home lives of Eastern and Western students. In the East, books, culture, and tradition were essential to the family; in the West, the pioneer environment had caused emphasis on alertness and adaptability.

From the reports as a whole, the editor made certain observations on the status of English education.

1. English courses were popular with students, running closely with classical courses.

\(^{121}\text{Payne, p. 23.}\)
2. Many schools, particularly in the West, were establishing entrance requirements in English.
3. In most colleges there was a marked differentiation of literature and linguistics. In many cases, rhetoric made up a third department.
4. Graduate work in English was growing in importance.
5. A tendency had developed toward giving a larger place to Seminar investigation.

In summary he stated that present higher instruction in English was "alert, progressive, and eager in its outlook for higher things than have as yet been attained, however far it may still be from the fulfilment of its whole ambition."122

In the 1890's three trends existed in English instruction in American Universities. Hiram Corson was prominent among those teachers who emphasized an aesthetic approach to studying literature. Others insisted that a scientific investigation was most valuable. The majority of the professors in The Dial discussions, however, maintained that a combination of the aesthetic and the scientific methods of teaching literature would be best.

In keeping with his lifelong philosophy, Corson maintained in his discussion of the English program at

122 Payne, p. 28.
Cornell that interpretative reading was the best method of literary instruction. He did not deny that biographical information about the poets or linguistic analysis of the text were profitable study; he merely held them to be secondary concerns. Although he was the only respondent to advocate oral performance, others joined him in the aesthetic approach. The University of Wisconsin English faculty aimed "to arouse and cultivate the literary spirit . . . the artist spirit that rejoices in creation, in the perfect embodiment of an idea." Consequently, they taught rhetoric as an art.

Katherine Lee Bates, the only woman to participate in the discussion, was an ardent supporter of Professor Corson. In another forum in Poet-Lore she had allied herself with his "view of a work of literature as a concrete unity," and it seemed to her "ruinous to tear apart form and content." She condoned instruction in "Philology" only for making "the speech of the writer . . . thoroughly understood and enjoyed in its significance, emphasis, and beauty." Professor Bates suggested in her Dial essay that the Wellesley faculty was exper-

123 Payne, p. 127.
124 Katherine Lee Bates, "How May Literature Best Be Taught?" Poet-Lore, VI (August-September, 1894), p. 44.
125 Ibid.
imenting with methods of instruction to discover "by what process . . . shall the essential values of literature be impressed." 126

The philosophy at the University of Illinois was that "the grammatical and linguistic side" of literary study should "be reduced to a minimum, as a means to a greater end." 127

At the University of Chicago, "the literary and linguistic lines of study" were separate "except when linguistic questions are vital to the interpretation of a passage." Professor Albert H. Tolman, who described the Chicago approach for the Dial, asserted, "I must not be understood as objecting to the most thorough study of the English language." In explaining his philosophy, however, he held fast to the attitude that literature should be studied primarily as works of art. His statement on literary study is an excellent summary of the aesthetic position:

To investigate every possible question that can be raised in connection with a piece of literature is to be thorough indeed; but is it not possible, in being thorough, to be thoroughly wrong? An artistic whole, like a vital one, is something indefinitely greater than the sum of its parts. We should not fail in artistic study to make the whole the centre of interest. The study of the most charming of the English classics has too often been made a mere starting-point for laborious investigations into antiquities, history, geography, etymology, phonetics, the history of the English language, and

126payne, p. 144. 127payne, p. 130.
general linguistics. The stones of learning have been doled out to students hungry for the bread of literature. Literary masterpieces should be studied chiefly, it seems to me, for their beauty. It is because of their charm, their beauty, that they have immortality; it is only because of this that we study them at all.128

The scientific approach was typified by Johns Hopkins University. Corson had been a frequent guest lecturer and had initiated a Browning Club there, but by the last decade of the century emphasis on philology had surpassed whatever influence he might have had. James W. Bright, chairman of the department, was Professor of English Philology. He and two other professors taught undergraduate and graduate courses, emphasizing composition and philology. Graduate students participated in seminars and received "training in historical and comparative study of both the literature and the language."129 As a tool for comparative research, they were required to have a reading knowledge of French and German as well as a thorough understanding of "Anglo-Saxon, Middle English, Gothic, Germanic conditions, and Indo-European affinities of English." The student received "practice in presenting his own judgments and in reporting results of his investigations."130

The University of California required English of all students except those in engineering. Linguistics

128 payne, p. 89.  
129 payne, p. 150.  
130 ibid.
was required for teacher certification. The major emphases in the advanced program were rhetoric and theory of criticism, linguistics, and historical and critical study of literature.

Philosophically, the University of Michigan aimed "to supply the necessities rather than the luxuries of literature. For literary fads and vagaries there is neither time nor inclination."\textsuperscript{131}

At the University of Minnesota, there were two departments, English Language and Literature and Rhetoric and Elocution. The plan was to reorganize them under one head. Students spent their first two years in linguistic training "as a foundation for the two upper years in literature."\textsuperscript{132} The faculty stressed "historical relations of literature in the study of a great period."\textsuperscript{133}

Lectures, recitations, drills, and conferences were the teaching methods employed at Amherst. The departmental philosophy included "stern weeding out of what is merely speculative and unpractical." This practice left "more time and energy to devote to the greater literary forms, and to learn how close . . . to the requirements of daily life" they were.\textsuperscript{134}

\textsuperscript{131}Payne, p. 118.  
\textsuperscript{132}Payne, p. 160.  
\textsuperscript{133}Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{134}Payne, p. 115.
Francis A. March, another advocate of the scientific approach, had been professor of the English language and comparative philology at Lafayette College since 1857.135 J. W. Bright, English professor at Johns Hopkins, had been his student. March was a leading philologist, and it was works such as his *Method of Philological Study of the English Language* that Corson loathed.136 Along with his son, F. A. March, Jr., he taught Lafayette students that "English should be studied like Greek." He claimed to draw on the resources of philology, comparative study of language and literature, rhetoric and oratory, prosody and rhythmic art, psychology, and biography.

Although some of the schools reported emphasis on either the scientific or aesthetic approach, seven indicated eclectic methods of instruction. The University of Indiana expressed the typical philosophy of the group. The writer, Martin W. Sampson, distinguished between "the study of literature" and "the study of literature."

To all who assert that the study of literature must take into account the emotions, . . . I agree, but between taking them into account, and making them the prime object of the study, there is the difference between night and day . . . . The professor who


tries chiefly to make his students love literature wastes his energy for the sake of a few students who would love poetry anyway, and sacrifices the majority of his class, who are not yet ripe enough to love it. The professor who tries chiefly to make his students understand literature will give them something to incorporate into their characters.137

Stanford expected the student not only to acquire a scientific knowledge of the English language and literary history, but also to appreciate literature as an art, "to cultivate a refined appreciation of what is best."

Students at the University of Pennsylvania studied both English literature and English philology. They also stressed forensics, although it was not emphasized "beyond care exercised incidentally to reading aloud, and in opportunities offered for declamation by students of the lower classes." The departmental philosophy toward elocution was that it should not be "too professionally taught . . . the character of the individual should be developed in his utterance rather than overwhelmed with the oratorical mannerisms."138

Edward Everett Hale, Jr., wrote for the University of Iowa that their English department had two objectives. First, they wanted to "give the opportunity to attain good English style." Second, they attempted "to encourage feeling and taste for good literature." Professor Hale who later went to Union College as Professor

of Rhetoric,\textsuperscript{139} wrote, "It is a pity that we cannot develop further than we do the more scientific aspects of linguistic study and of criticism and literary history."

The University of Virginia in 1892 formed two separate departments. The Linden Kent Memorial School of English Literature emphasized aesthetics, while the School of the English Language was most concerned with philology. All courses were elective, and men could study in either or both schools.

Nebraska was in favor of the scientific method, as illustrated by the formation of a permanent Browning Club "from the scientific rather than from the literary side of the class."\textsuperscript{140}

Harvard, which had granted America's first Ph.D. in English literature in 1876,\textsuperscript{141} made "no sharp distinction between literary and linguistic courses." The department philosophized that each teacher's best method is his own. "When a course is given into a man's charge, then, he is absolutely free to conduct it in any way he chooses."

In 1891 Harvard established a Division of Modern Languages, with Francis James Child as chairman. In that division were the departments of English, German, French, \textsuperscript{139}Payne, p. 83. \textsuperscript{140}Payne, p. 126. \textsuperscript{141}Applebee, p. 27.
Italian, and Spanish, and Germanic and Romance Philology. The fundamental concern of the English Department was with composition. Students were required to write weekly themes based on lectures from English literature and argumentation.142

Other universities encouraged oral reading as an instructional method in English teaching, but Hiram Corson of Cornell was alone in using it as a primary method of teaching literary art. In its place a major trend toward philology had developed, brought about by Francis James Child, Edward Everett Hale, Jr., and other Americans who had gone to Germany to study and had returned to America to teach.143 At that time "Germanic ideals of research were transforming graduate education in general."144

One result of the changes in graduate studies in English was a significant difference in literary instruction in American secondary education. When colleges instituted entrance requirements in literature the high schools began preparatory training in that subject. Literature had become a required course in most American high schools.


144Ibid.
by 1900.145

The work of John Dewey helped to change the direction of high school English instruction and to free secondary education from "the classical pedagogy which had come to dominate English teaching."146 English continued to be a required high school course, however, and Normal Schools began to produce trained teachers to meet the increased demand for qualified English instruction on the secondary level.

The development in English instruction in America generated curiosity in England. In the early 1900's a British scholar, M. Atkinson Williams, came to America to observe the teaching of English and to report his findings to his own countrymen. He observed that many of the Normal Schools were using Percival Chubb's The Teaching of English as a textbook for training high school teachers.147 Through this textbook the work of Hiram Corson was introduced, and interpretative reading was encouraged as a method of English instruction. Giving unqualified support to Corson's theories, Chubb wrote:

146Applebee, p. 48.
"The course in literature is best conceived of as a
course in reading, as Professor Corson used to maintain."
A footnote advised, "His The Voice and Spiritual Edu­
cation should be on our shelves."148

Another textbook used in Normal School instruction
of English teachers gave importance to oral reading in
teaching literature. Its authors, Carpenter, Baker, and
Scott, dissented from what they understood to be Corson's
insistence on teaching by "merely reading the literature
aloud in the classroom."149 Their misunderstanding of
Corson's theory must have influenced other teachers of
English. In the matter of oral interpretation, "teachers
were left to settle for themselves the question of how
much is desirable."150 For the most part, English teachers
were "unwilling to allow it to take first place among
other teaching methods."151

As Corson's philosophy lost momentum among

148Percival Chubb, The Teaching of English in the
Elementary and the Secondary School (New York: The

149George R. Carpenter, Franklin T. Baker, and
Fred N. Scott, The Teaching of English (New York:

150John Rexford Searles, "Some Trends in the
Teaching of Literature since 1900 (In American High
Schools)" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin,
1942), p. 47.

151Ibid.
English educators, it was adopted by speech teachers. By 1932, Corson was being quoted in the oral interpretation classic *Reading Aloud* by Wayland Maxfield Parrish. From then until the present, his work has influenced scholars in oral interpretation. Corson's ideas were controversial among his contemporary English professors, many of whom were devoted to a philological approach in literary instruction. However, his influence was felt not only among his peers but also in the teaching of high school English. An examination of his literary theory and of his position as a literary scholar can be enlightening to the modern student of oral interpretation.

Chapter 8

CONCLUSION

Scholars in speech have long associated the work of Hiram Corson with the oral interpretation of literature in the nineteenth century. Their interest is well founded, for Corson spent most of his life in literary study. His limited schooling emphasized oral reading and languages, and he compensated for his lack of a college education by working in the United States Senate and the library of the Smithsonian Institution.

His formal teaching career began no later than 1856, when he and his wife, the former Caroline Rollin, were superintending a school in Washington, D. C. He later worked as an elocutionist in Philadelphia as an associate of J. W. Taverner, although he would later write disparagingly of elocutionists. He also supported his family by touring as a professional lecturer in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. His elocutionary training was limited to his "reverential study" of Dr. James Rush and to his early practice in reading aloud. He had little patience with the superimposition of gesture on the reading of a literary work. To Corson, oral reading was the best way to study literature.
Corson was first appointed to a professorship in 1865 by Girard College in Philadelphia. From there he taught at St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland, from 1866 to 1870, when he assumed the chair of Rhetoric, Oratory, and English Literature at Cornell University. During his forty-one years in Ithaca, New York, he engaged in interpretative reading as a method of English instruction, as a mode of lecturing and performing, and as the basis for his literary scholarship.

The years of Corson's career at Cornell fall roughly into decades of concentration on particular interests. In his first ten years as a professor at Cornell his life was centered on securing a campus identity and establishing his reputation for scholarship both at home and among others in his field. At the end of his first decade he had established an instructional pattern. He lectured and read to his classes from English and American writers, supplementing his classroom activity with extra-curricular readings that were open to the public. He also served as a critic for the few performances that toured through Ithaca. Notable among these performers were Charlotte Cushman, Mrs. Scott-Siddons, and Bret Harte. Corson's own readings for the Ithaca townspeople were their major source of entertainment during his early years at Cornell.

He travelled to other cities as well. In the 1870's he read and lectured in Annapolis, Philadelphia,
Syracuse, Cortland, and Aurora, New York. These reading engagements not only augmented his salary but also aided in the establishment of his scholarly reputation beyond the boundaries of Cornell. The success of his venture to establish his reputation was realized when he was invited to lecture before the New Shakspere Society of London in 1877. On that trip he met several British literary scholars in addition to the young John William Watson, who was to become Sir William, a major contender for the laureateship after Tennyson's death. He sent Corson the earliest known draft of his first major poem, "The Prince's Quest," for Corson's critical reaction.

The decade of the 1880's was the time of Corson's intense concentration in the interpretation and performance of Robert Browning's poetry. He travelled throughout the northeastern United States reading and lecturing on Browning and initiating Browning Clubs. The Browning Society he established in Ithaca was the first of its kind, and he was also instrumental in planning the London Browning Society. As a charter member of that association, he made an address to the group during their first year. A personal friendship with Browning, developed during that decade, was a highlight of his entire life. Corson travelled extensively in Europe during the 1880's. He also read and lectured in America on other topics in addition to Browning.
The last decade of Corson's formal teaching career was the 1890's. This time was spent in the main in Ithaca, where he continued his lecture readings for students and other residents of his community. He made one voyage to Ireland, where he represented Cornell at the Tercentenary Celebration of the University of Dublin. Many of these years were spent in preparing the books that contain his theories on interpretative reading and the study of literature.

Corson had always been a devout believer in spiritualism. The years following the death of his wife and his retirement from Cornell saw him engaging in that practice frequently. Through his housekeeper-medium, he read aloud to the spirits of those literary figures whom he had most admired. He also travelled extensively to read and lecture. In 1903 he received his second honorary degree when Princeton awarded him a doctorate. His first honorary degree was from St. John's College. To the end of his life he was active as an interpretative reader, an English teacher, and a literary scholar.

In addition to numerous articles for literary journals, Hiram Corson wrote or edited eleven books. Almost all of his writing contributed to his theory of interpretative reading and the study of poetry. His belief in spiritualism united with his respect for romantic literature to create a philosophy of performance.
According to Corson, the only way to bring life to a poem was to recognize and assimilate the spirit of the work and then to recapture and communicate that spirit through interpretative reading. He also insisted that the reader should have the same control over his voice that the accomplished musician had over his instrument.

His own international recognition as an inspiring interpretative reader is testimony to the powerful insight within his theory of vocal interpretation. Hiram Corson had controversial ideas; few of his peers could accept them fully. He did, however, have a strong influence over the teaching of English in America. A reinvestigation of his work reveals the debt teachers of oral interpretation owe to this gifted man.

When present-day researchers in oral interpretation seek historical basis for the concept of understanding the text, they recognize Samuel Silas Curry, documenting their reference with the most highly regarded contemporary interpretation theorists. Although Curry and Corson appear together in numerous accounts of oral interpretation history, emphasis has been placed on the study of Curry's contributions to interpretation theory rather than on Corson's work. Curry appears to be partly

responsible for this attitude. He read Corson's *An Elocutionary Manual*, saw the note in praise of Dr. Rush, and dismissed Corson as an elocutionist. Consequently, it is Curry who is praised for breaking away from the mechanical tradition by asking that readers "think the thought."

Professor Don Geiger, one of the most influential modern interpretation scholars, wrote of Curry's work:

It was for Curry to emphasize once and for all the importance of understanding the literary text, to performance. What we can say accurately is that recent writers, more than Curry, have stressed the importance of performance to understanding the literary text.\(^2\)

What also can be said accurately is that Hiram Corson, along with the recent writers, "stressed the importance of performance to understanding the literary text." To Corson, "understanding" involved more than the intellectual response to the thought. The reader must go beyond the thought to the spirit within the poem, assimilate both thought and spirit, and bring the poem to life through performance. His theory even went so far as to show how interpretative reading can be used as a tool in practical criticism of a literary text. It is time for oral interpretation scholars to recognize their indebtedness to Corson and to examine his life and

work closely for the lessons contained therein. His philosophy is not out of date. Any student who would study literature through performance should benefit from an investigation of that philosophy as it was manifested in the life and work of Hiram Corson.
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Major Field: Speech

Title of Thesis: Hiram Corson: Interpretative Reader, English Teacher, Literary Scholar

Approved:

[Signatures and names]

Major Professor and Chairman
Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

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Date of Examination:

May 16, 1977