

THE VALUE OF A STUDY OF ETHICS.

On entering upon my duties as a Professor of Ethics and History of Philosophy in this University, according to the time-honored custom I am allowed the privilege of presenting to you some of the claims of the department to which I belong.

We are living in a practical age. Very few, then, will be surprised to hear the question asked, "What is the value of a study of Ethics? What is contributed by a rational and critical examination of man's moral convictions, moral actions, and moral relations?"

I should be presumptuous indeed if I fancied that I could answer this question in a short inaugural lecture. All that I can hope to do is to present briefly some of the chief contributions that a critical study of Ethics is fitted to make.

There is a very general agreement that it is well for a man to have moral convictions and moral principles. It is by possessing a moral character that a man becomes worthy of the high praise of the poet :

Moral principles
approved.

"An honest man 's the noblest work of God."

There is, however, no such general consensus of opinion that it is well to critically study these principles and philosophically consider their meaning and validity. It is often supposed that to consider their validity is to question their validity ; to critically examine moral principles is to doubt those principles ; to philosophically enquire what are those principles, and what is their meaning, is to distrust their existence and importance. In short, it may be held that we must regard moral principles, moral conduct, and moral character as having the highest significance, but that a critical study will lead to a mistrust of those principles and an unsettlement of character.

Investigation of
them distrusted.