

A MODEST PLEA FOR THE RETENTION IN OUR EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM OF SOME TINCTURE OF LETTERS.

*(Being the Annual University Lecture, delivered in the Royal Victoria
College, February, 1904.)*

Some weeks ago a colleague of mine and I strayed into a meeting of the Physical Society. We were both professors of Literature—the kind of person which Canada, to use the continental vernacular, has not much use for; which Canada seems inclined to treat with not much more consideration than Plato would have treated our masters the poets—to whose works we act the modest and very moderately remunerated part of guides. Plato would have crowned our masters with crowns of laurel, anointed them with oil and myrrh, and then expelled them from his state. Canada does not quite expel us, it is true, at least not directly—but where are the crowns, or, alas! even the half-crowns? Where are the frankincense and the balm? Being members of a profession so rejected and despised, we were naturally in a most edifyingly humble frame of mind; painfully conscious of our limitations; knowing well what anachronisms we are in this quintessence of modern civilization which men call McGill University; and meekly desirous to have the gross darkness of what we may, perhaps, be permitted to call our minds, a little lightened. Therefore we paid our visit to the Physical Society. Fortune favoured us beyond our deserts. We found that we had stumbled in upon one of Dr. Rutherford's brilliant demonstrations of radium. It was indeed an eye-opener. The lecturer seemed himself like a large piece of the ex-