

The Varsity

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TORONTO, JANUARY 19, 1912

FORMAL DISCUSSION

It is quite natural that in the course of four years of academic life we should meet with a host of facts and ideas which it is quite impossible to assimilate immediately, or even in two or three years time.

Thoroughly appropriating a sequence of thought to one's self is a slow process, even in the most brilliant minds. Were it not so, should we not all be patterns of virtue—assuming that we lean towards the commonly-accepted standards of conduct,—because of the firm grasp which our mental and moral natures would have of the good books and the uplifting addresses which constantly come before us? We must take into consideration, of course, the never-ending change in one's mental attitude, which costs the shadow of doubt upon conceptions but recently formed. As in the forest, where there must be decay as rapid as the growth, else there would be an absolutely impenetrable mass of vegetation, so in the mind, old ideas are constantly giving place to new, and the young growth of to-day feeds upon the fallen structures of a decade or two ago. The young members, in order to live, must perform that peculiarly intricate function known as assimilation. No mere absorption of food matter will produce the ultimate structure.

So too the knowledge which is placed before us from day to day must not only be sucked into our brains. It will never become an integral part of our make-up until it has passed a second modification. Essays, and these are very good digestion stimulants, but for everyday purposes they have not the power which comes with ordinary conversation and contact with our fellows.

The English, and to a certain extent, the Canadian and United States universities have recognized this and have instituted the tutorial system, where questions, answers, and discussions flow freely between pupil and instructor and among the pupils themselves.

The efforts put forth in the departments of History and of Physics, to mention two cases from our own University, to strengthen the grasp of the student, are indeed admirable. But there is other work to be done by the students themselves.

The women of the University are in the ascendancy, if not the lead, at the present time, in this regard. In University College alone there are four "Discussion Clubs" which, members of the Staff assert, have performed a remarkable work in making the ladies more confident of their views and more ready to express opinions. There are very few men's clubs, comparatively speaking, which are doing such a service. In the palmy days of the speculative Club and the Iconoclast Club as undergraduate organizations, there was considerable more discussion of problems temporarily and external than there is at present. At that time, anything from "Resolved: That there is no God" to the National Policy of Sir John A. Macdonald was ardently debated.

A few congenial spirits from any year or faculty can greatly improve their opportunities in college by transferring the casual meal-time conversation into some definite question. Sanitary engineering

astronomy and music are quite as fertile fields as the position of man upon earth, and increased interest in all life's problems will certainly accrue to those who definitely set themselves to laying bare their ideas on any subject.

POLITENESS

Once upon a time, a Youth was going home late one cold winter's night. He wondered what the time was, but he couldn't be bothered fishing his watch out of his waistcoat pocket. On turning the corner, he met a Gentleman, and said jauntily "Do you know the time?"

The Gentleman took off his gloves, unbuttoned his waistcoat, unbuttoned his coat, drew forth his watch, and looked at it; said "Yes", and buttoning up his various garments, walked on. It was a lesson in Politeness. "Do you know the time?"

Typically Canadian—or American. Your Englishman would have said "Excuse me," possibly with "sir" added. He is conscious of his manhood, th's sturdy over-seas brother of ours; he knows, from long centuries of training, that 't detracts not at all from h's manhood—adds to 't, rather,—to shew respect for other men. When speaking to an older man, he will 'nvariably address h'im as "s'r." When speaking to a superior—he 's too much of a man to try to persuade h'imself that he has no superior—whether he be superior socially or in any other way, he addresses him as "s'r." He says "please," and he will thank you for a courtesy.

Isn't it a pity that in our Canada choose to follow the Yankee who is so busy thinking about his own rights that he has no time to think of what is due to others? It is certainly no credit to us. We have two examples before us—the Englishman, and the American. Look at the difference! Why should we follow the worse?

We are not in such a hurry that an "excuse me, sir" would render us time-bankrupt, or that the second for a "thank you" would seriously handicap us. We, with our republican neighbours, are noted, not only in Europe, but in Japan, as the rudest people in the world. Isn't it rather too bad?

CORRESPONDENCE

THE MODERN LANGUAGE COURSE.

To the Editor of The Varsity:

Sir,—

What should be aimed at in a modern language course in a University? This is the question that many a student turns over and over in her mind. The mastery of a language, what the President has spoken of as the appreciation of the delicate shades of meaning in word and idiom, the acquiring of correctness a fluency in speaking, are these the important things?

A teacher in one of our large collegiates once said to a pupil who was coming to study modern languages in the University of Toronto: "Do not be discouraged if you find at the end of a year or two that you have lost the hold you now have on French and German. At the University they do not try to perfect your mastery of the languages; they read the literature. If you can only learn the spirit of the Germans and the French, your course will have been well worth while; proficiency in the language can be gained later."

Is this a wise view to take of an art' course in modern languages. Certainly the understanding, through their literature, of the thought, the life, the very spirit of the peoples—Italian, French, or whomsoever they be—that is indeed worth while. But the question remains as puzzling as ever, at which of the two are we aiming in our University? It is the latter of the two suggestions, why are only disconnected selections from such important writers as Diderot and Rousseau prescribed? Why do we read so little of Racine and Corneille?

The course may be fairly representative of French style, but is that the most important thing? Perhaps it is. Indeed in that very selection of texts may be the solution of our puzzle. Who can say but that the department intends to include both the a'ims we speak of. Nevertheless, whether th's is true or not, it seems a fair criticism of the course to say, that it should not be possible that scores of students graduate in moderns from our University still puzzled as to what we are now aiming at in the modern language course?

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ONLOOKER'S CORNER

HERO WORSHIP.

In the witching hour—I mean that diurnal hour of Transfiguration, after the rising bell, when the process of garbing, washing, shaving and brushing, translates a man from a towled, scrawny savage into a smart, collared, admirable beau,—in that hour, I say, a man's aspirations are most evident.

As he stands before the glass, glancing right and left, to get the effect from all angles, the freshman notices his remarkable resemblance to the hero of the rugby-field. The sophomore cannot help but observe that, with a slight change in brushing, he bears a striking likeness to So-and-So, at the Princess lately.

The junior, staring into his own countenance, is struck by an expression of mouth, a mystic depth of eye, that reminds him strangely of a certain portrait of Carlyle.

But the senior, the all-but-fledged scholar, the gleaner of knowledge, who has swept close to the end of the field, looks like no one else under the sun. He is a type, he declares, to himself. The only resemblance he notices are similarities in stride or posture, affected by some aping freshman. He is, however, as much a hero-worshipper as the others: he worships the self that is to be.

A lengthy—but perhaps an amusing—preamble, reader, to my plea for more and more hero-worship. Let us regard hero-worship as a step towards that idyllic conception, seen afar by our poetically-minded—College Spirit.

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The College is a Government institution, designed primarily for the purpose of giving instruction in all branches of military science to cadets and officers of the Canadian Militia. In fact it corresponds to Woolwich and Sandhurst.

The Commandant and military instructors are all officers on the active list of the Imperial army, lent for the purpose, and there is in addition a complete staff of professors for the civil subjects which form such an important part of the College course. Medical attendance is also provided.

Whilst the College is organized on a strictly military basis the cadets receive a practical and scientific training in subjects essential to a sound modern education.

The course includes a thorough grounding in Mathematics, Civil Engineering, Surveying, Physics, Chemistry, French and English.

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For full particulars regarding this examination and for any other information, application should be made to the Secretary of the Militia Council, Ottawa, Ont.; or to the Commandant, Royal Military College, Kingston, Ont.

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