

DISCIPLINE AND DELIGHT.

A Psychological Sermon by PROF. ROBT. MACDOUGALL, PH. D.

The law is a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ.—Gal. III, 24.

When one consciously does right or performs a morally good act, one thinks of more than himself. That the act is good or just, means that in it the actor has considered others, recognized their needs, rights, feelings, and that these elements have become significant factors in determining his act. Not its reality as a craving or movement of his own nature, but its objective bearing in relation to other willing subjects, has been the paramount motive of the deed. The actor has ceased to regard his act solely in its relation to his own complex of desires and ends, and has passed over to the conception of it as organic in a system of human relations existing beyond himself. He is no longer the whole, but a part; his deed is not unique but typical of a class. What he has done is what any man capable of understanding the situation, and not influenced by prejudice, would have done in the same circumstances. One shifts from the individual to the social point of view and strips his decision of all passion and prejudices due to time and place and personal relations. Moralization is generalization: the moral act is one which points and exemplifies law.

When one does wrong, or commits a morally evil or unjust action, on the other hand the deed must be regarded as exceptional. In the evil as in the good act there is fundamentally involved the reference to a supra-individual system of relations. When this knowledge is absent no moral quality can be attributed to the will-act. Its results may be helpful or hurtful, it may bring happiness or misery, as the sun may now quicken and then destroy the sown grain, but to the impulse itself can be awarded praise or blame no more than to the blind elemental forces which indifferently work us weal or woe. Impulses are the bare plastic material of the willing subject which, taken on moral quality, as virtuous or vicious, righteous or unrighteous, only with the rise in consciousness