

Religious Meetings, G. E. Pentland, W. B. Beer, W. H. T. McGill B.A.; A. J. Madill, J. S. Martin, B.A.; Mem. Com., N. Black, T. M. Wilson, B.A., C. E. Race, B.A.; Com. on Bible Study, J. T. Luton, B.A., M. R. Reid, B.A., M. N. Clark, B.A.; Fin. Com., A. H. Brown, G. A. Lucas, B.A., J. H. Hancock, B.A.; Miss. Com., J. A. Bannister, J. H. Dolan, B.A., R. B. Page, B.A.

Ethical Value of Literature.

EXTRACT FROM AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BEFORE
THE O. N. C. LITERARY SOCIETY, BY J. A.
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WITHOUT attempting to decide at what point in the school courses the formal teaching of ethics should begin, I am convinced that there should be "regular lessons" in morals; and especially that the ethical spirit should quicken the whole life of the school—that the ethical aim should be *paramount and kept consciously in view*; and that therefore all methods of instruction and all subjects of instruction, pre-eminently History and Literature, should make for this supreme end. I still cling to the doctrine of formal discipline though not perhaps in its extreme form. Every subject has its value even for moral discipline. I mean that every subject when *rationaly* taught and learned has a distinctly ethical effect. On the other hand, every subject badly taught—taught so as to thwart the normal action of the mind—is, I will not say *immoral*, but certainly *unmoral* in its effect. Such teaching tends at once to bembur the intellect and to arrest moral development. I believe that different subjects, according to the character and complexity of the relations with which they deal, have different values as instruments of training, and especially as means of moral training. I see, for instance, that mathematics, a process of extreme simplification dealing

only with space and time relations, is simpler than physics, physics than chemistry, chemistry than physiology, physiology than sociology, sociology than philosophy; and I cannot convince myself that each of these departments has precisely the same effect in intellectual and moral discipline.

Many evangelists of the newest education preach the doctrine that all subjects are of equal value as instruments of both moral and intellectual education. A noted college president declared not long ago that there is as much ethical value in the study of an oak plant as in the study of the life of Washington. This is one more instance of how a half-truth may become a mischievous falsity in the hands of an injudicious enthusiast. The assertion ignores the nature of ethics and contradicts plain common sense. Moral ideas, moral relations, moral character and conduct have to do with the actions of self-conscious beings. I don't believe that an oak has any moral character. When with its great trunk and wide spreading branches, it "robs" a little plant beneath it of its sunlight and food-elements till it dies away, can we charge it with any crime, or say that it utterly lacks "the quality of mercy"? We shall leave the distinguishing professor, to whom reference has been made, to bring an indictment against the forest king, to provide the tribunal, to quote the law of evidence, to cite precedents in the case, and to execute the penalty if the accused be found guilty.

I cannot for my part believe that all subjects are alike for purposes of moral culture. The solution of a differential equation, or a difficult chemical analysis, or a delicate physical experiment, while sharpening and strengthening the intellect, leaves no increase of humanism in the heart. These subjects have no *direct* bearing upon human relations. But the study of some heroic deed as recorded in literature, or of a profound analysis of some universal human passion, or