

THE VALUE OF THE STUDY OF ETHICS.

This was the subject of the inaugural lecture of Prof. J. Gibson Hume, M.A., Ph.D., which was delivered in University Hall on Saturday, the 14th inst. The afternoon was fine and there was present a large, intelligent and appreciative audience, among which was a numerous sprinkling of students.

In approaching the subject of "The Value of the Study of Ethics" the lecturer said that there was great need for adopting a critical method of investigation. The method of blindly accepting dogmas and principles without any proof of their validity or critical examination of their foundation, was one which must here be abandoned. Unquestioning faith in authority must be thrown aside and replaced by intelligent understanding.

The adoption of this method is almost forced upon us; 1st, by the natural desire of every student to investigate, 2nd, by the prevalence of so much controversial literature, and 3rd, by the influence of science which is so wide-reaching and all-important in this age.

The work of science is to investigate the laws of the existent. In doing so it is compelled to offer explanations of the existent. Now every explanation is a theory. So science theorises. Theories may be false or true. An example was given of a plausible theory that would not stand the test of a critical examination, viz., that the fundamental reality is unknowable, the mind itself is one of the appearances of this unknowable, and its activities are appearances of this appearance.

This theory was shown to be self-destructive. In its sweeping denunciation of all theories it condemned itself also. For the very fact that we can say that men reason illogically and act irrationally presupposes that we have a knowledge of what is rational as opposed to what is irrational.

From all this it was concluded that we cannot but resort to "a critical and reflective consideration" of our mental activities. In the words of Kant we must consider whether knowledge *a priori* is possible. "Such a critical and reflective examination is the special work of Philosophy." "Thus science needs to be completed by a theoretical Philosophy."

The question then arose, Is a theoretical Philosophy sufficient without adding also a practical or moral Philosophy? In regard to theoretical Philosophy it was shown that it arose in order to prevent science from becoming skeptical about knowledge. However, as Philosophy was engaged in maintaining the universality and necessity of mental principles, it became itself apt to set up abstractions to take the place of the unknowable. The laws of thought were hypostatized, taken to be self-subsistent and independent of the thinker. It was thought that there ought to be knowledge without a knower.

Just here was where ethics was needed to show that these laws of thought were not realities but abstractions. "In setting them up we were virtually saying, 'This abstraction is better than concrete reality.'" This statement is a fundamental judgment of estimation or worth. Such judgments presuppose a criterion of worth. It is the work of ethics to consider these standards. In pursuing this course the conclusion is arrived at that in considering ideals or estimates of truth ethics is dealing with "the intentional conscious activity of a choosing subject or person."

Thus Personality came to be considered as the all-important matter. It has various aspects. It was shown that volition was the self-expression of the whole person. That in each correct choice in accordance with ideals "the person was loyal to claims of the highest ideal, viz., the Perfect Personality." All our moral dissatisfaction arises from the recognition that we are not what we should be as measured by this standard.

It was then shown that philosophy and science are mutually dependent on and inter-connected the one with

the other. It was contended that science should not be completely separated from ethics. In regard to this an illustration was drawn from Political Economy.

In concluding the lecturer showed that the study of ethics was intended to prepare men for the duties of life. "No one lives for himself alone, all our moral acts directly, nearly or remotely affect our fellows." We may not only know and do the right, but we may also assist others to know and do the right. This, it was said, was the teacher's mission, and in this sense each one should be a teacher of the true and good.

The lecture then closed with the following tribute to the late Prof. George Paxton Young:—

"I am sure that when I thus speak of the grandeur of the teacher's mission, the nobility of the teacher's work, the thought of everyone here will at once turn to the noble teacher whose memory will always be sacredly cherished by those who had the privilege of knowing him—Professor George Paxton Young.

"What was the secret of his wonderful power and influence as a teacher? Many would answer 'his remarkable personality'; and this would be a fitting reply if we remember that the personality is not one element in the character. The personality is the man himself, the whole character. Professor Young had a mighty influence because he was a great man. Throughout his whole life he concentrated all his energies upon one aim, the development of the highest personality, the truest, purest character in himself and in others. Few have had so clear a conception of the ethical ideal, few have striven so earnestly to attain it, few have been so successful in realizing the moral ideal, few, indeed, have succeeded to such an extent in influencing the lives of others for good.

"With a many-sided training that exemplified the Grecian idea of education, the symmetrical development of all the powers, with a wide experience of life with its very real joys and deepest sorrows, with a profound theoretical philosophy, he concentrated all upon the statement, solution, and application of ethical problems.

"The results he reached were so nearly in accord with those gained by the late Prof. T. H. Green that, upon the appearance of the latter's work, the 'Prolegomena to Ethics,' he seems to have abandoned all intention of publication. This, to his students, has been a matter of deep regret. This regret is not lessened when we recollect that Prof. Green's valuable work is written in a heavy and difficult style, while Prof. Young's exposition was marked with the lucidity that comes from long experience in teaching and thorough mastery of the subject.

"The shorthand notes left by him are chiefly resumes of standard works in Psychology-Logic, Philosophy and Ethics, with criticisms interspersed, various outlines of arguments, no doubt intended to arrange the exposition that he intended to present to his class. He never wrote out his lectures. Whether a work can be compiled containing some of the results of his teaching and thinking is still an unsettled question.

"But though Prof. Young left so little in the way of publication his work and influence can never be lost. Each pupil who sat under him, and came in contact with him, will carry throughout his life deep influence for good, won from the inspiration of his beloved teacher. In my own case it would be impossible for me to estimate how much I owe, not only in the way of direct guidance and teaching in the lecture-room, but also in the way of counsel and encouragement beyond it.

"Love is cheap that can be told. In endeavoring to fulfill the responsible duties that devolve upon me as a teacher in this University, I shall aim to emulate the example of a noble predecessor."

A new league has been organized including the School of Science and teams from affiliated colleges.