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THE STUDY OF LITERATURE.

INAUGURAL LECTURE BY PROF. ALEXANDER, TORONTO UNIVERSITY.

PERHAPS there is no subject of study in which there is a more general and widely diffused interest than Literature. All who read—and they in our day and generation constitute a very numerous and varied class—are in so far students of literature. It is partly for this very reason—from the fact that so many ill-trained and half-trained minds are in some measure devoted to its pursuit—that the aims and methods of literary culture are so generally misapprehended. The popularizing of the subject brings the claims of mediocrity to the forefront, and there follows the inevitable attempt to find some easy mechanical method whereby the secret of literary enjoyment and literary culture may be attained. Men adopt the method, and, ignorant of the true outcome of literary training, are unconscious that they miss the aim. Perhaps, for example, the aspirant to culture conscientiously wades through a supposed authoritative list of the one hundred best books. He completes his tale—the incongruous selection of individual

caprice, the Iliad, the Koran, Don Quixote, Sartor Resartus, and so on—without one moment of keen literary enjoyment, unthrilled by a single passage, with scarce an iota of permanent result in the shape of intellectual openness, flexibility and polish which literature ought to give. He has won only the self-contentment and self-satisfaction of the sciolist, the worst outcome of that dangerous thing—a little knowledge. It is not the reading of many books, be they one hundred or one thousand, but the manner in which they are read that is essential. One play of Shakespeare, properly studied and properly appreciated, will do more for literary culture than countless books, however excellent, read, as most people read them. I think it very necessary, therefore, that in entering on our work together, we should come to an understanding as to the aim of our studies and the results which we expect to flow from them, and as to the methods by which these results are likely to be best attained.

Literature, like most other terms,