Culture and Utility in the College Curriculum.

BY HOWARD EDWARDS.

(Paper read before College Section, State Teachers' Association, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Dec. 27, 1900.)

For many years colleges such as that with which I am concerned have borne the sobriquet of "Bread and Butter Colleges," because they are expected to produce engineers or architects, not sweetness and light. Compayre, in his history of pedagogy, commands that no man shall dare to cause literary culture and industrial training to dwindle into a mere profession. Our new Professor Payne, who succeeds Dr. Hinsdale of revised memory, in a note in the same book, states that "if I seek the bread of life, I may not be the direct way to attain large and rounded culture, but in the prospect of a career such as I pursue the culture aim in some sort antagonistic."

The scientist, too, he who has had no contact with the Bible, cannot gain recognition from the devotees of culture, no sooner attains a place in the class, The Great, he turns with disdain upon the very reason for his training, his culture, and utility are in some sort antagonistic.

Professor Bessey, in a somewhat recent address, deplors the fact that the student "feels his bread is culture of hand and brain as well as the other. There is very little difference between the two schools just here is that the humanist is constantly saying, "What is the study culture?" I will pursue it. If not I will carefully avoid it. I must see to it that my mind is protected from the pollution of bread-winning thought and training." He seeks culture as of value in and of itself. On the other hand the utilitarian, 'the utilization of all processes and results of education,' true culture included, as simply means to an end. He asks, "What subject or minimizes it on no other utility are interchangeable terms. We must be able because it serves the common man."

The discussion of the two schools just here is that the humanist is constantly saying, "What is the study culture?" I will pursue it. If not I will carefully avoid it. I must see to it that my mind is protected from the pollution of bread-winning thought and training." He seeks culture as of value in and of itself. On the other hand the utilitarian, "The utilization of all processes and results of education," true culture included, as simply means to an end. He asks, "What subject or minimizes it on no other utility are interchangeable terms. We must be able because it serves the common man."

The second point of difference between the humanist and the utilitarian is that the latter rigidly applies one standard of success, and is good to the greatest number. He is democratic and inclusive, while the humanist is exclusive and exclusive.

The utilitarian sorts his material according to fitness for various ends and adapts his processes to the end in view. "What is a knowledge of a single road and stamps as "trash" the great number who do not come upon his standard in one rigidly fixed dimension; in fact, he knows no other dimension. The former, considering the necessities of the great mass, seeks to provide for those necessities by combining all ends and in various ways. The second contends that culture is confined to certain subjects and that the two should be kept in a fixed and unfailable way.

The full and explicit statement of the utilitarian position would seem to be quite possible for itself. "The end of life is the student. Happily the earlier training is to know what you will not come up to his standard in one side of man's nature."

I am perfectly aware that no humanist will consistently apply the distinction that I have drawn above. In order to do so, he would have to recognize explicitly that education is a matter of the favored few, and this, while freely admitted in the past, is no longer tenable. Nevertheless, the distinction must be true however incessantly the humanist has said, all the wild woods, is confused by the roar of the city. It fails to distinguish sounds that the civilized man readily recognizes. The literary man observes that "What is the study culture?" I will pursue it. If not I will carefully avoid it. I must see to it that my mind is protected from the pollution of bread-winning thought and training," he seeks culture as of value in and of itself. On the other hand the utilitarian, "The utilization of all processes and results of education," true culture included, as simply means to an end. He asks, "What subject or minimizes it on no other utility are interchangeable terms. We must be able because it serves the common man."

DEFINITION OF CULTURE.

This is prepared to stand by, but it applies in one direction as well as the other. There is a close similarity of thought and of purpose between the utilitarian and the humanist in education. Should I take Mr. Arnold's definition of culture, "Knowing the best that has been thought and said in the world," or that of Mr. Symonds, "Self-effectuation?" the individual attempts to train himself so that he may be wise enough to solve for himself that greatest of educational problems, the making of a man. And, secondly, that no curriculum is worthy of the name which does not consider and provide for more than one side of man's nature.

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May I ask, also, of our students that they will earnestly ponder the questions raised in this paper? It was the desire of the author to discuss the worth and dignity of our courses as college work; but for us as students, may I mention the courses the teacher in connection with the paper is, Are we pursuing these courses in the spirit here set forth? It is, I trust, part of the philosophy of our work as existent in two phases: (1) in the method and spirit in which it rests with the patience, for no charge will be made for it. The only way, however, is shown in the Record.

I hope that no one will forget the meeting on next Friday evening at 7 p.m. in the chapel, to organize a debating society. The idea has been received quite enthusiastically by some of our best and most earnest students. I earnestly desire that we all work for the same general purpose. There are several things from it in many ways. If students and members of the faculty can be induced to take interest in developing this new spirit, it will have greater importance, I am sure that no work will count for more good to all.

It was a great disappointment to me not to be able to be present at the gathering in Grand Rapids, Michigan, a little after 5 p.m. on Thursday afternoon, Dec. 27, I received an urgent telegram to come home on account of sickness in my family. I left a hasty note of regret, and took the 5:20 train. I hope that the stay will not be long, and I have every reason to believe that it was so. These occasions are old and great in importance, and should be carefully arranged for beforehand, now that the S. T. A. no longer meets in Lansing.

The paper on "Culture and Utility in the College Curriculum" is too long and too pervading in character; but I so earnestly desired that our people should think over the whole matter and come to a conclusion as to what is the best way of proceeding as quickly as possible, and plan more wisely for, all working for the same general purpose, and we can and determined to insert it. We are closely, and plan more wisely for, what the course should become in the future.

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It is during this period that the determination of aptitude and fitness comes into play, and the student is fitted to be a thinker, is to follow any of the traditional learned courses, or the humanistic curriculum, modified as it has been by modern thought and industry, all of which will be of help to the student who has all the wisdom of those who have built the courses, will be zealously and eagerly for the all-important element of self-control, of whether he has a taste for a given study already developed. He is here for just that, and he must be prepared for certain well-defined limits it still remains true, and will always remain true, that these studies, which for him are hardest are just the ones he most needs.

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Why, then, should the literary college vaunt and plume itself on its culture phase, and ignoring its own utilitarian, scorn us for this feature, declaring it as impossible to unite culture with our utility as to serve God and mammon? Is there any cultural difference between the dollar that our engineer earns and the dollar that their teacher earns? They combine pedagogy with chemistry, and rightly too. I am glad to see them moving in the right direction. But they condemn us for combining thermodynamics with literature, and this, I say, is wrong.

SUMMARY.

To sum up: It is not the subjects primarily that give culture. It is rather the treatment and attitude of mind toward the subjects. Any subject that is worthy of the name can be made highly cultural, and it cannot become in the highest degree utilitarian until it has become cultural. He who is teaching his subject forgets or ignores its culture value is not worthy of his subject or his students. On the other hand, no subject can be really cultural without possessing the truest utilitarian value.

Let me close with a quotation which will, I think, apply equally to both sides and may teach the value of culture in insisting upon that catholicity of thought which should characterize us in all educational matters. "Specialists, unless they be creative geniuses of the most marked type, require to be armed by culture against narrow-mindedness and the concept of thinking that their own concerns are all-important. A man of moderate ability, who cannot see beyond the world of beetles, beyond the painter’s studio, beyond the church or chapel, beyond the concert-room, beyond the grammar school, beyond the grammar of an extinct language, or some one period of history, is apt to be intolerable. Culture teaches him his modest place in the whole scheme.

M. A. C. RECORD—The offices of the director, agriculturist and clerk of the experiment station were moved last Saturday from the Agricultural Laboratory to the new Dairy Building, second floor, north-west corner. In recognition of this event Director Smith, Professor Towar and Miss Kellum issued invitations to all the faculty and employees of the College and Experiment Station generally to a "house warming" in the Dairy Building, Saturday evening, January 5th from 7:30 to 11 o’clock.

To the President and Faculty of M. A. C.: The new offices of the director, agriculturist and stenographer of the experiment station in the new dairy building, are now ready for occupancy. We want the faculty to give us a lovely time deoxidating them, Saturday evening, next, from 7:30 to 11 o’clock.

If you have an appetite for drink, sharpen it for buttermilk.

There will be innocent amusements for the young, games and conversation for the middle-aged, and dancing for the old.

If you have a swallow-tail coat, don’t wear it.

If you have a pair of dancing pumps, bring them along for some dancing.

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ARCHITECTS

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A very happy affair in connection with the State Teachers' Convention. Two weeks of the State Teachers' Convention at Grand Rapids was the alumni meeting of such of the M. A. C. students as happened to be in attendance at the convention. After discussing a very good dinner with Landlord Johnson of the "Gem" at the old place, the class left for the parlor to where a pleasant hour or two spent in reminiscences of college days. Professor P. Clark, '83, of Benton Harbor was elected president and R. S. Campbell of Holland, secretary for the en­closing year. It was decided that a more determined effort be made to bring the old boys together at different times and the secretary was instructed to urge a more complete attendance, and that Mr. Willey himself, as fellow­ship and fraternity by writing to the old boys before the next meet­ing of the State Teachers' Convention, which will be held in Grand Rapids. It is the practice of the denominational schools to hold such meetings at least once a year and M. A. C. should be out­right in the times of this respect. The old students in the business are anxious to see the college again and too often rather forget their alma mater and these meetings must always be productive of good in renewing the ties of college life.

Among those present were Char­les L. Benis, '75; W. V. Sage, '53; H. A. Arnold White, '83; E. Court, '82; Mr. C. L. Curtin, '82; E. H. Ward, '83; and H. A. Arnold White, '83; E. H. Ward, '83; and V. J. Willey, '93; C. L. Brooks, '93; and Bertha E. Malone, 1900.

About the Campus.

Mrs. Howard Edwards, who has for some time been in failing health, left Saturday morning for her home in Virginia. She took with her her little boy, '90; H. A. Arnold White, '92; R. T. V. Campbell, '93; V. J. Willey, '93; C. L. Brooks, '93; and Bertha E. Malone, 1900.

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