

ALUMNI ESSAY

(Continued from page 50)

Man in the primitive state has only the pleasures of the senses; but his struggle for existence is so great that the senses are kept under control. As man advances in the social scale, however, the struggle for existence becomes less, and consequently the senses become stronger; there then comes into being a necessity for man to find something that will control the senses and keep them in subjection. The development of the intellect is the best means that can be found for this. The development of the intellect is accomplished by literature. Literature trains the mind to noble ideals; it places before the mind examples of true greatness, and encourages and helps it to seek new beauties, it opens to the mind in fact a vast territory upon which it may wander, ever advancing, ever becoming nobler and more exalted yet never reaching the limit.

The faculty of speech is a great gift to man, yet if one has no thoughts to express, such a gift is worse than useless, for it may become a nuisance to those who will have to listen to continual chatter. Most men can express themselves well if they have anything to say; it is the lack of subject matter that is the cause of much useless talk. A man that has something worth while to say can always get an audience; he can enliven a social gathering, and moreover, he can raise the general tenor of the conversation; he can talk to an audience without disgracing himself; and he can at all times defend his own principles. From the study of literature man acquires numerous facts about all subjects; politics, religion, history, social uplift, are all treated upon in literature, and he can become conversant with all of them and have an abundance of material upon which to draw when speaking. He can in his conversation pass on these facts that he has learned from literature to his fellowmen, and thus broaden their minds. Of course, he must always be modest in his conversation, and, as I pointed out before, he will be modest, for he will not pride himself upon his literary attainments, unless he has persued literature for the main purpose of appearing wise, and has not drunk deeply of the great font. We see, then, that from literature man obtains material for conversation, and having this material he is welcome wherever he may go; life is made pleasant for him.

We now come to perhaps the greatest advantage that is acquired from literature. You need never be lonesome if you read literature, for it has within it that which will be a solace for every trouble, will lessen every pain and and augment every joy. Friends may desert you, enemies may plot against you, but there is always one comfort left—your books. It is said that a true friend is one of God's greatest gifts to man. A friend, however, brings to you certain responsibilities, and, for the enjoyment he gives, exacts a certain recompense. To a friend you must be considerate, taking care not to hurt his feelings or to inconvenience him in any way.

You cannot exhibit all your moods and feelings before him, for if you do, you will soon find that you have no friend. Literature on the other hand asks no recompense for the pleasure that it gives. You pick up a book; perhaps it does not please you at that moment, so you throw it to one side; it remains ready to serve you and to give you pleasure when you feel more in a mood to enjoy it. It is not subject to any moods or changes; it is ever the same. It does not come to you when you would rather be alone, as a friend may do; and, when friends are far away, it is there to delight you. There need be no tiresome minutes to a student of literature. He can always have his pleasure; his imagination is bountifully supplied with material upon which it may work, and even away from his books he can revel in the scenes and among the delights that they have presented to him.

Never was a greater advantage to be gained from literature than in this present age. The people of the twentieth century seem to be going mad in their rush for pleasure. The value of everything is reckoned according to the amount of pleasure that it can give. There is no thought of God, of eternity, of human uplift; we are concerned only with the constant struggle for pleasure. Nor does this desire stop with licit pleasure, it leads on from pleasure to pleasure until, too often, it satiates itself in pleasures that are sinful, pleasures that ruin the mind and body, and prepare the soul for eternal misery. There may be different ways of overcoming this evil, but one of the greatest is the study of literature. Literature gives pleasure enough to satisfy all cravings and, while it gives pleasure, it develops the mind, making it strong; and it shows the mind what is of true

value in the world. It has no delusions about it; everything is simple and plain.

Every man that can read is able, from the study of literature, to reap its benefits. All men may not reap these benefits to the same degree, but all can become better individuals and better citizens, and so train themselves that they may never feel ashamed in any position in which they may find themselves.

* * * *

The professor ceased. His students had forgotten the passing of time. The bell had rung for the dismissal of class, but none of them had heeded it. They, who forty minutes before had been a sleepy class, were now all attention to the words of the professor, and they all started as he said:

“Colier, do you now see why you should study literature?”

There was fervour in Colier’s words as he answered: “Indeed I do, from now on I am going to study literature, you can be sure of that.”

And he expressed the sentiments of the entire class.

JOSEPH E. CAMPBELL

