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of the Religious Parliament Idea

FOUNDED BY EDWARD C. HEGELER

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Contents for July, 1930

Meditation on a Hill.....	M. C. Otto
On the Reality of Things.....	William Curtis Swabey
Louis de la Chambre, 1594-1669.....	Albert G. A. Balz
Discussion.	
Of the Spurious Mystery in Causal Connections.....	C. J. Ducasse
Of a Curious Reluctance to Recognize Causal Necessity.....	
.....	Sterling P. Lamprecht

Reviews of Books.

James H. Dunham's Principles of Ethics, by Warner Fite—*John Baillie's The Interpretation of Religion*, by Edgar Sheffield Brightman—*Leon Brunschwig's Le progres de la conscience dans la philosophie occidentale*, by Arthur E. Murphy—*Clement C. J. Webb's Ioannis Saresberiensis Episcopi Carnotensis Metalogicon Libri IIII*, by Gerald B. Phelan—*Edward Bradford Titchener's Systematic Psychology: Prolegomena*, by W. B. Pillsbury—*Frederick J. E. Woodbridge's The Son of Apollo*, by Rupert Clendon Lodge—*Heinrich Ratke's Systematisches Handlexikon zu Kants Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, by G. Watts Cunningham—*H. G. Creel's Sinism*, and *L. Adams Beck's The Story of Oriental Philosophy*, by Alban G. Widgery—*Emile Meyerson's Identity and Reality*, translated by Kate Loewenberg, by H. R. Smart.

Notes.

Charles A. A. Bennett. Ralph Barton Perry. John Baillie. The philosophical section of the Ohio College Association. The Facsimile-Text Society. Current philosophical periodicals.

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Volume XLIV (No. 8)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
<i>Frontispiece.</i> HENRY D. THOREAU.	
<i>In Promotion of Character Training.</i> EDWARD L. SCHLAUB.	449
<i>Asmodeus, Dandy Among Demons.</i> MAXIMILIAN RUDWIN.	459
<i>Paul, Alias Simon the Magician.</i> ROBERT P. RICHARDSON.	467
<i>The Use of the Word Tao in the Confucian Analects.</i> HUANG KUEI YUEN AND J. K. SHRYOCK.	489
<i>Two Notable Philosophic Works.</i> VICTOR S. YAKROS.	496
<i>The Insights and Raptures of the Mystic.</i> (Concluded) RADHAKAMAL MUKERJIE	502
<i>Henry D. Thoreau, Oriental.</i> FRANCES FLETCHER.	510

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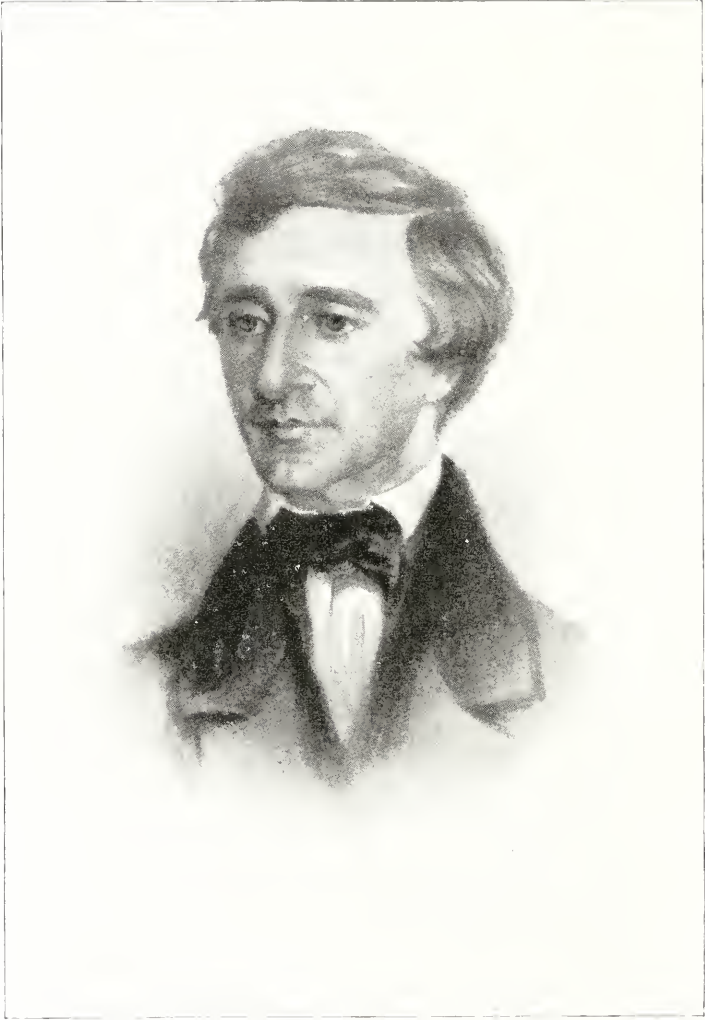
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IN PROMOTION OF CHARACTER TRAINING

BY EDWARD L. SCHLAUB

WHETHER or not our contemporary western civilization deserves the epithet of materialistic may be open to question. That it is technological in nature, however, may scarcely be doubted. Now the very term technological most commonly carries the connotation of a manipulation of physical materials. It is understood as the application of scientific knowledge, and this more especially in connection with the industrial and mechanical arts. The scientific knowledge in question is therefore essentially that of the natural sciences. In the field of these sciences man has acquired exceptional powers of prediction. Not alone this. The results have been such as to yield an almost incredible measure of control over the factors of the physical environment. Indeed man's achievements along these lines have been so rapid, and so sweeping in their consequences, that many fears have been aroused lest they prove a humanly destructive boomerang if notable advances are not made in the development of the moral outlook and in the fashioning of sound character.

On all hands, therefore, we note a growing consciousness of the imperative need for scientific investigations into the nature of character, the laws of its development and the methods of its training. This is true of parents, teachers, and citizens, in their capacity as individuals; but we find also that all manner of associations are turning their attention to the problems mentioned. Ever more numerous, for example, are coming to be the committees and other groups charged with investigating the methods of character education that are in operation in schools, churches, homes and other institutions. In general there is an acute sense of the darkness

which still shrouds this field. Here, too, it is felt, there are secrets which if we could but learn them would enable us to direct activity intelligently, and to make more fully attainable the goals which upon reflection we set ourselves.

A notable incident in this development was the Morality Codes Competition arranged during 1916 through the Character Education Institution of Washington, D. C. This was designed to bring to light, with a view to subsequent dissemination, the moral ideas which should be inculcated into the appreciation and into the lives of individuals beginning with earliest childhood. In the realization that this was but the beginning of investigative work, a prize of \$20,000.00 was then offered through the Executive Committee of the Character Education Institution for the best program of ways and means for imbuing children with the ideals which commend themselves to intelligent public opinion. The aim was the promotion in general of right character. It was believed that while our public education had given much effective attention to programs for intellectual education, and that while it had likewise provided to some extent for vocational and physical training, it was as yet relatively backward in the furtherance of the supremely important objective of character formation.

Typical of the questions which the competitors for the \$20,000.00 prize were asked to consider were the following: "How to get children to understand and appreciate the wisdom of moral experience? How to develop personal convictions in matters of morality in the minds of the children themselves, and the will to live up to these convictions? How to correlate school and home life so as to influence character development together? What character education should be given teachers themselves as a preparation for personal influence over character development of children? How shall teachers be enlightened as to the moral ideas to be inculcated, and how trained to efficiency in the use of methods of character?"¹

The plan which most commended itself to the judges, and which was therefore awarded the prize, was elaborated by a group of Iowa educators, working under the chairmanship of Professor Edwin D. Starbuck. This plan made fundamental the clear envisagement of definite goals and stressed the need of measurements, as accurate

¹ *Character Education Methods: The Iowa Plan \$20,000. Award, 1922*, p. V. This brochure is available from the Character Education Institution, Washington, D. C., and from the Institute of Character Research, Iowa City, Iowa.

as possible, of progress made in their realization. It developed primarily the contentions that our ends must be personal and social; that moral persons must be productive as well as creative; that character must be practiced rather than dreamed or thought of; that conduct must be vitalized through sympathies, and the mind be richly furnished with effective imagery; that moral thoughtfulness and conscious self-control should be gradually but continuously fostered; that sheer duty must be transformed into a joyful sense of beauty; that children should be familiarized with the best of our racial tradition and be awakened to loyalty as well as stimulated to reverence. It insisted upon the necessity, in the case of the average normal child, of a three-fold recentering, described as follows: "(1) The transformation of a lower selfhood of cruder instincts and desires into 'higher' personality of refined tastes, of insight, outlook and intelligent purpose. (2) An awakening into wholesome appreciation of the interests and well-being of others and participation in their programs, customs, conventions and institutions, and loyalty to their ideals. (3) A disinterested admiration of the non-personal values in Nature and Life that glorify both the self and other-than-self and culminate in a spirit of reverence."²

That the numerous influences converging from various directions upon the issues of character training were powerfully reinforced through the activities of the Character Education Institution is very apparent. It was in a large measure these latter that gave impetus to the establishment, in 1923, of the Institute of Character Research in Iowa City. This Institute was legally recognized by the Iowa State Board of Education in 1927 and represents an integral part of the State University of Iowa. It includes among its objectives instruction of a sort similar to that of a department in one of our colleges of Liberal Arts. Thus, a survey course on "Character and its Development" seeks to provide the Juniors and Seniors admitted to it with some insight into the intricate problems of character, with special reference to the early formative factors and with particular emphasis upon the home and school. In fact the aim of the course is described as practical: it "looks for the preparation for family life and for teaching." A further course offered by the Institute seeks to give to more advanced students a better orientation in the field of character analysis and development, and primarily to lay the basis for research on their part. And it is,

² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

indeed, upon research that the ultimate interest of the Institute may be said to focus. It is realized that we have as yet but a very partial and unsatisfactory knowledge respecting the nature of character and personality, their elements and their laws; and it is likewise realized that there is urgent need of understanding better "the sorts of influences or training on which they depend, the bodily and mental processes conditioning them, the right content of the curriculum, the proper placement of materials, and the best methods of character training."³

Thus the Institute makes its contribution to the general program of studies pursued by students, and likewise gives stimulus and equipment for the enrichment of knowledge and the perfection of the technique within its field. More than this. It also seeks to prepare its students for service in various vocations, such as deanships, directorships of personnel, specialists in character problems in public school systems, superintendentcies and principalships.

Typical of the Institute's work in the genetic psychology of morals are studies now being made with respect to the origin of the moral impulses and the mental processes involved therein. Investigations are in progress as to the beginnings and the growth of the imagination in pre-school children; the development of abstract notions; the relation of delayed response to moral attitudes; and the mental and physical processes involved in self-other reactions. On a grant from the Boy Scouts of America a genetic study has been undertaken of the abstract-concrete interests and skills of children between the ages of nine and twelve. Already there has been published a doctoral dissertation relating to children's attitudes toward the law.⁴

Promising attacks have been made by the Institute upon the analysis of character and personality. These include not only more or less general essays such as that of Dr. Rachel Knight on the personality of George Fox,^b but also more technical studies pursued by objective methods and under carefully controlled conditions. Such, for example, is the investigation by Dr. W. E. Slaght^c into the factors conditioning truthfulness and untruthfulness in children.

³ This quotation and all others unless otherwise stated are taken from bulletins which the State University of Iowa has published on the work of the Institute.

⁴ See item a in the list which we append to this article of publications by those connected with the research work of the Institute. References by letters in the text from this point on will refer to the same list.

By the use of three ingenious tests, a selection was effected of two groups (the truthful and the untruthful) of 70 pupils each. Intensive study led to the conclusion that the major factors conditioning untruthfulness are impulsiveness, suggestibility, lack of inhibition, inadequate moral discrimination, and unfavorable home surroundings. The factor of intelligence, in its aspects other than are involved in the factors just mentioned, seems to be relatively negligible, though the truthful children exhibited a decidedly wider range of information and a better fund of thoughtful experience. The common belief that lying is related to imaginativeness was lent some support by the investigation, though at this point the latter was incomplete and therefore urges the need for further research on the topic.

Members of the Institute have succeeded in throwing some light on certain aspects of character by use of a method of correlations in which evaluations are made, singly and severally, of the interacting elements in combinations of relations. Thus Dr. R. D. Sinclair^d has compared mystically minded persons with those of the non-mystical type. Dr. T. H. Howells^e selected from 542 students the 50 who had the greatest measure of belief in orthodox statements and the 50 who ranked lowest in this respect. These groups, designated as the conservatives and the radicals, were subjected to some 30 psychological tests. A variety of conclusions emerged. Thus, the radicals showed themselves more intelligent than the conservatives; religious beliefs, experiences and practices, it seemed, are conditioned by a general tendency towards suggestibility; the conservatives improved on threat of punishment while the radicals did not.

The valuable monograph by Professor Shuttleworth on "The Measurement of Character and Environmental Factors Involved in Scholastic Success"^f is concerned directly with the problem of scholastic maladjustment; as its title indicates, however, it makes a distinct attack upon questions as to how we may measure character traits. Realizing the need for the measurement of the non-intellectual factors in scholastic success or failure, the author attempts to devise objective tests for the subtle factors of environmental background and character traits, as well as for the prediction of scholastic success.

An important feature of the Institute's activity is its attention

to curriculum problems, more especially to the proper grade placement of materials within the curriculum. For example, the parables and sayings of Jesus have been studied with respect to their difficulty of comprehension and their place in a course of study adapted to the mental maturity of children.^g Something of a similar sort has been done in connection with selections from the Old Testament prophets.^h

A useful piece of research by Dr. P. R. Hightowerⁱ led to the conclusion that there is essentially a zero correlation between Biblical knowledge and moral conduct. Confirmation was found of the more general conclusion that moral conduct has its springs elsewhere than in clear idea and in reasoned judgment. The conviction reached is that direct moral instruction issues in negative rather than in positive results in respect to both conduct and attitude.

Attitudes in respect to other national groups were the object of study by Dr. James C. Manry^j. Carefully constructed tests of information and judgment on world affairs were given to freshman, sophomore, junior and senior classes of various colleges with a view to ascertaining the degree to which the objective of world citizenship was actually being realized. Moreover, considerable information was secured about nationality, extent of travel, previous studies, place of birth, etc., in order to discover the factors that seem to favor the development of a practical sense of world citizenship. Of these factors important ones are an initiatory or orientation course, and social studies in general. An understanding of foreign nations seems to be rendered easier if there are opportunities for a sympathetic understanding of remote sections of one's own native land. Hence Dr. Manry would encourage the free movement of teachers and students about the United States. In general it might be said that the typical errors made in the tests that were given indicate that "sheer ignorance, together with the democratic impulse to entertain opinions notwithstanding, is responsible for the most part for the purely emotional and verbal thinking about international affairs."

In Dr. Searles's research^k into the study of religion in the State Universities of the United States, we have an illustration of a piece of work involving historical orientation and present trends, as well as an examination of the State Constitutional, legislative and Supreme Court provisions relating to sectarian religious influence in the Public Schools. Nevertheless the research was motivated

essentially by an interest in character development. Religion, it was felt, could function satisfactorily in the training of character only if students were provided with a greater informational and intellectual background than has in the past been provided. When religion is recognized as a fact of human experience amenable to interpretation through definite methods, its scientific study carries decided cultural and liberating influences. Hence the problem as to the place of such study in our State universities is one of significance from the standpoint of character formation. The conclusion reached by Dr. Searles is that these institutions may very properly claim "the right to carry on that aspect of religious education which involves research, investigation, and teaching in those fields where there is little difference of opinion among taxpayers." On the other hand, the churches "either singly or unitedly should be free to carry on a high grade of academic work commensurate with university standards in those fields more closely related to the practical work of the church in which it is felt they can make a significant contribution." Through this union of forces it is believed that religious motives may be made to function in the ethical lives of the students.

Very shortly there will be available in printed form the results of some research by Dr. George W. Beiswanger on "The Biblical Narratives Judged as to Their Character Value." This study employs a carefully developed technique of which a monograph by Dr. Shuttleworth¹ offered a description. The technique is one utilized by the Institute in a most comprehensive and significant enterprise which is designed to issue in a series of volumes bearing the caption "A Guide to Books for Character." These guides will aim to give to parents and teachers, as well as to librarians, effective aid in so directing the reading habits of children up to the 9th grade that very definite results may be achieved in the stimulation and correction of specific traits of personality. The importance of this undertaking is suggested by the fact that the finer features of morals cannot issue from preachment or indoctrination but are the results of contagion. Investigations have shown that one should not tamper directly with the morals of children, and that progress in character may not be secured through the action of a corps of moral drillmasters. It is spontaneous choice of values that brings grace and strength. Children and youth should be provided with desirable cultural sustenance; we should "trust literature to do its own work."

Two volumes of the above-mentioned guides have thus far appeared, those relating to "Fairy Tale, Myth, and Legend"^m and to "Fiction."ⁿ Another volume grading the voluminous literature on biography is well under way, and in due course the various other realms of literature possessing value for character training will be considered. A general idea of the objectives, method and value of the project as a whole may most conveniently be given by some specific statement respecting the most recent volume, that dealing with fiction. The tremendous dynamic inherent in fiction and available for character training will be obvious to all who realize that nine-tenths of the reading of America's children would seem to consist of novels, and also to all who, in the words of Professor Moore's review of the volume on fiction, have "ever observed a girl curled up on a davenport lost to the world about her as she follows the golden threads of a fascinating story or perchance a lad stretched out on the floor so absorbed in the adventures recited between two covers of a book that even the call to dinner is unheard." In preparing the guide to the literature of fiction Professor Starbuck's collaborators selected as worthy of recommendation and report 663 from approximately 2000 volumes mentioned in lists of fiction alleged to be suitable for children. This selection was made by use of eight standards of excellence as follows: unity, right craftsmanship, agreeable emotional tone (these three having to do with literary form and quality), effectiveness, artistry in appeal, truthfulness (these three relating to educational fitness), refinement of the fundamental human attitudes, and proper orientation (these last two referring more specifically to the work that literature should do in the changing of attitudes). All selected material received the independent judgment of at least three readers, on all of whom periodic statistical checks were made to determine the extent of their agreement. The readers' judgments were weighted so as to make them comparable, and special study was made of all cases of wide disagreement. Before publication there was "a final editing in the light of the whole process and range of judgments." In view of the author's clear envisagement of his problem and of the careful procedure employed in its solution, the results that are presented may be considered trustworthy in a high degree. And it should be noted that tests carried on in the Institute have shown a "reasonably high positive correlation between children's ratings and the

judgments of experts as to the character and cultural value of selections."

The investigators have offered their results in the form *first* of a *book list*, grouping the 663 recommended titles according to school grade, arranging them within each group in the order of their excellence, indicating the situations and moral attitudes involved in the story, and providing short comments; *second* of a *situations list*, in which the same titles are similarly graded and ranked but are grouped according to specific situations; *third* of an *attitudes index*, which lists in alphabetical order all the attitudes exhibited toward given situations and gives reference numbers to titles in the book list; *fourth* of a *classification index*, which provides "a grouping of material according to type, subject matter, and the background, with reference by number to the complete analysis in the book list."

Worthy of note is a feature that should be of value to students of genetic psychology as well as to all who are interested in character training. We refer to a chapter touching upon numerous works of fiction that throw light on the motivations and the inner life of children and of adolescents. This literature richly supplements one's own informal observations and supplies suggestions for further observations and for verification. Thus also it bridges the gap between haphazard experiences of children and scientific studies of them.

This account of the one volume of the series "A Guide to Books for Character" should express more effectively than could mere eulogistic words the high practical importance, as well as the careful scientific basis and procedure, of the enterprise. As one of its by-products we are now shortly to have a work "The Wonder Road," which, in its three volumes, will make conveniently available more than sixty of the selections that ranked highest in the study that was made of fairy tales, myths, and legends. Thus the children's book-shelf will receive a notable addition.

The work of the Institute is supported in part by Graduate College and other funds available to the State University of Iowa. The Institute, moreover, has received valuable co-operation from the Institute of Social and Religious Research. It is, furthermore, very specially indebted to the generosity of private individuals who have recognized the high value of its aims and the promise of its further fruitfulness in a supremely important field of inquiry and

of social concern. Within recent months the State University of Iowa has put at its disposal an extensive section of East Hall, and thus the Institute is at present provided with satisfactory working quarters. It now remains to be hoped that the Institute may not be crippled or restricted in its activities by a lack of funds, but that it may be enabled to build up an organization within which its gifted leader may acquire an adequate number of effective collaborators and may make satisfactory provision for the permanence of the enterprise to which he has dedicated himself.

List of publications referred to above as growing out of the Institute:

^a Lockhart, Earl G., "The Attitudes of Children toward Law," Iowa Studies in Character, Department of Publications, State University of Iowa.

^b Knight, Rachel, "The Founder of Quakerism," London: Swarthmore Press, 1922.

^c Slaght, W. E., "Untruthfulness in Children: Its Causes and Setting in Child Nature," Iowa Studies in Character, Vol. I, No. 4, Department of Publications, State University of Iowa.

^d Sinclair, R. D., "A Comparative Study of Those who Report the Experience of the Divine Presence and those who do Not," Iowa Studies in Character, Vol. II, No. 3, Department of Publications, State University of Iowa.

^e Howells, Thomas H., "A Comparative Study of those who Accept as against those who Reject Religious Authority," Iowa Studies in Character, Vol. II, No. 2, Department of Publications, State University of Iowa.

^f Shuttleworth, Frank K., "The Measurement of the Character and Environmental Factors Involved in Scholastic Success," Iowa Studies in Character, Vol. I, No. 2, Department of Publications, State University of Iowa.

^g Franklin, S. P., "An Attempt to Measure the Comprehension Difficulty of the Precepts and Parables of Jesus," Iowa Studies in Character, Vol. II, No. 1, Department of Publications, State University of Iowa.

^h Case, Ralph T., "A Study of the Placement in the Curriculum of Selected Teachings of the Old Testament Prophets," Iowa Studies in Character, Department of Publications, State University of Iowa.

ⁱ Hightower, Pleasant R., "Biblical Information in Relation to Character and Conduct," Iowa Studies in Character, Department of Publications, State University of Iowa.

^j Manry, James C., "World Citizenship," Iowa Studies in Character, Vol. I, No. 1, Department of Publications, State University of Iowa.

^k Searles, H. L., "A Study of Religion in State Universities," Iowa Studies in Character, Vol. I, No. 3, Department of Publications, State University of Iowa.

^l Shuttleworth, Frank K., "Statistical Studies in Children's Literature," Iowa Studies in Character, Department of Publications, State University of Iowa.

^m Starbuck, Edwin D., assisted by Shuttleworth, Frank K., and Others, "A Guide to Literature for Character Training: Vol. I, Fairy Tale, Myth, and Legend," New York, The Macmillan Company, 1929.

ⁿ Starbuck, Edwin D., and Others, "A Guide to Books for Character: Vol. II, Fiction," New York, The Macmillan Company, 1930.

NOTE.—After the manuscript of the above article was already in the hands of the printer, announcement was made of the transfer of Professor Starbuck to the University of Southern California. There he is to inaugurate work similar to that undertaken in Iowa City by the Institute of Character Research. The activities of this latter organization, according to present reports, are to be continued under new direction.