

## INTANGIBLE VALUES OF BIOLOGY

I have just received a letter from a young man—a former student of mine—who is now a patient in a sanitarium for the tuberculous. During the twelve years that passed since I last saw him I had not thought of him once. His letter, however, brings home most forcibly the fact that we as teachers have no way of calculating the final effects of our labors; and it indicates that biology may have enduring cultural values in the lives of our students of which we are not aware. Since the note struck in this communication seems to go beyond any personal message I take the liberty of quoting the letter in full:

“Back in about 1928 or 1929 I was a zoology student of yours at Lindblom High School. You will remember that you gave a 3rd semester of Advanced Zoology one year, which consisted chiefly of the study of Laws of Mendelian Heredity, and which included the breeding of fruit flies in the laboratory. It was my privilege to take this course and it may interest you to know that I have always regarded the fundamentals we learned there as a valuable part of my general education. In the past few years I have had conversations with many young doctors and medical students and have been pleased to find that my grasp of the Mendelian Laws compares favorably with theirs. Your course was a good one, and I am happy to have had the opportunity to have taken it.

“After finishing high school at Lindblom I went into chemical engineering. I worked at this for about six years until last summer when I came down with a mild case of pulmonary tuberculosis. At the present time I am struggling with this in a sanitarium.

“Perhaps you are wondering why I should be writing all this to a Zoologist. It's this:

“Time passes slowly here, even though one does considerable reading. I have become interested in one of those glass enclosed ant nests. You no doubt are familiar with what I mean. They look something like an aquarium, but are much narrower. Only the front and rear panels are glass. The interior is filled with a portion of an ant hill, along with enough ants, workers, queen, etc., to make up a complete nest unit. The top is covered so as to give ventilation but not to allow the ants to escape. The ants build their passageways along the glass panels and afford an excellent opportunity for observation of their marvelous organization.

“One of these would be very interesting to me as well as to some of the other patients here. The only drawback to my idea on this which I can think of is that at night our rooms become very cold, and, I suppose, kill off the ants. Also, as I remember, the ants are dormant in the winter and would not perform.

“As you are the only entomologist I know of, I am asking for your advice in regard to the practicability of keeping such an ant nest in the winter season. Also, can you furnish the name of a biological supply house which sells them?”

Deservedly, this young man will receive a prompt reply, with the advice he desires. It is being suggested to him that he may be able to accumulate observations worthy of being placed on record in published form. But even though his interest in ants as a hobby leads to nothing further than relief from the boredom of his present lot, who can doubt that a little knowledge of biology has in his case paid good dividends?

E. C. C.