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Methods and the teacher

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THE FORUM

METHODS AND THE TEACHER

THE book reviews under New Books in THE QUARTERLY JOURNAL are always of interest, particularly when we happen to be already acquainted with the book in question. The review of Professor Lee Emerson Bassett's Handbook of Oral Reading (Houghton Mifflin) which appeared in the April JOURNAL brought forward a question which somehow is kept constantly uppermost in the minds of most teachers, the question of methods in teaching.

On the whole, the reviewer heartily recognized the splendid qualities of the book; but in speaking of the Program of Recitations which appears in the back of the Handbook, she said:

"This plan has too many written assignments for an oral class, too much time to be spent in learning about the author—where he lived, where he died, etc.—rather than the message and inspiration of the text. Must we follow this dry-as-dust, antiquated study of literature in order to claim a right to scholastic existence with English departments?"

Incidentally, out of sixty-four lesson assignments, only twelve are written. These are chiefly resumes of the most important chapters in the book. As for the "dry-as-dust, antiquated study of literature" having to do with the lives of authors, only two such assignments are to be found out of sixty-four, numbers 4 and 53 about Irving and Sheridan. The point, however, on which I take issue with the reviewer is this: granting that the study of an author's life in connection with his works may be antiquated as to method, it is not necessarily flat, stale, and unprofitable as to results.

I have found that an unexpected amount of interest in an author's works can be aroused by the right kind of presentation of the author's life, a presentation in which the relationship between life and works is kept in mind, and from which every fact

that does not illumine the thought or spirit of the author's writing is omitted.

An article appearing in the *English Journal* for June, entitled "Literature, the teacher, and the Teens,"* is particularly suggestive in discussing the question. I quote from it:

".....biographical facts can be so presented as to be of immense service in stimulating interest. I do not mean dates or the periods into which some text-book divides a man's life, but the vital things that helped or made him what he was. Or perhaps a mere incident connected with a writing will help to make the students want to read it. Tell them, for example, that during the Napoleonic War the Scotch poet, Thomas Campbell, was arrested on suspicion of being a traitor; when he was brought before the court his only defense was to hand the magistrate the manuscript of a poem. The magistrate read it and instantly released him. The poem was that stirring and splendid battle chant, 'Ye Mariners of England.' Immediately they will want you to read it to them."

But supposing that, for the moment, we entirely separate the author from his work, and, imagining ourselves in our public speaking class, make this assignment for tomorrow: In the books on the reserve shelf you will find a great deal of information about the life of Washington Irving. Let us see if out of these dead ashes of facts, you can bring Irving to life again, make him actually live for us here in the classroom. Try to make us see the twinkle in his eye, feel again the charm of his personality, and be conscious of his fine idealism by describing definite incidents in his life which show that these qualities belonged to him.

I venture to say that the effect on the class will be a deeper appreciation of Irving's writings. Perhaps, too, the result will reestablish our faith in certain antiquated methods or perhaps it will make us realize that methods, antiquated or not, are, after all, dependent upon the personality of the teacher for success or failure. Age-old methods are frequently fruitful of splendid results, when sometimes even the newest methods fail in the final test.

To go back to the Handbook; the fact that the book reflects the personality of the teacher, of a finely inspired teacher, makes

* Waitman Barbe, "Literature, the Teacher, and the Teens," *English Journal*, June, 1917.

it thoroughly teachable. Mr. Bassett combines a scholarly attitude toward his subject with a practical handling of his material, a combination which is the keynote of success in teaching.

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SPEECH CLINIC FOR SOLDIERS

THE following very significant news article clipped from the *New York Times* of September 30, 1917, seems well worth reproducing in full.

In view of the fact that thousands of American soldiers are likely to return from the front with their powers of speech impaired or destroyed by gunshot wounds of the mouth, the jaw, and the neck, great importance is being attached by the medical authorities to the establishment in New York of a free clinic where, for the first time in this country, all branches of treatment bearing upon the cure and correction of speech disorders will be promoted and coördinated upon a practical and thoroughly scientific basis.

Financed by the private philanthropic endeavor of a number of public-spirited citizens, this institution has been incorporated as the New York Clinic for Speech Defects, with Dr. Herbert L. Wheeler, a member of the Medical Board of the National Council of National Defense as President. It will be at 143 East Thirty-seventh Street and will be opened to the public early in October under the medical direction of Dr. James Sonnett Greene, a speech specialist, who has done extensive scientific work both here and abroad for all forms of speech and voice diseases.

Not only medical authorities, but scientists from all over the country, among them Thomas A. Edison and Dr. Abraham Jacobi have given their support to the enterprise as a valuable preparedness and defense measure for the cure of soldiers and sailors who may require the treatment, which this clinic by combining all the medical and scientific facilities bearing upon speech correction and diseases of the jaw, will be able to give.

The staff of the institution will be composed of a number of competent specialists who have volunteered their services gratis. Actively identified with the conduct of the clinic as members of the Medical and Consultant Board will be Dr. Abraham Jacobi, Thomas A. Edison, Judge Franklin Chase Hoyt of the Children's Court, Dr.