

# THE VIRGINIA TEACHER

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## BEDE'S PEDAGOGICAL TRINITY

THOUGH histories of education quite naturally refer frequently to Froebel, Pestalozzi, Horace Mann, and others, they contain, so far as I am aware, no reference to the teacher with whom learning in England had its real beginning. If Wiclif may be called "The Father of English Prose," and Chaucer, "The Father of English Poetry," the title of "The Father of English Learning" may well be bestowed upon Bede.

Born about 672, Bede was placed, at the age of seven, under the guardianship of Benedict, the abbot of the monasteries of Wearmouth and Jarrow. The library of Benedict was the equal of any in the land; he had laid both England and the Continent under tribute for his books and his teachers. That Bede, with his studious habits and scholarly instincts, made the most of his academic advantages is evidenced by the amazing variety of his works, which number forty-one in all and include poems, hymns, epigrams, biographies, commentaries, and treatises on grammar, rhetoric, metrics, history, chronology, and the natural sciences. These books, which practically summed up the learning of Western Europe at that time, became, as Brooke says, "the teachers not only of England, but also of Europe. They were the textbooks of the school of York to which students came from Gaul, Germany, Ireland, and Italy." Among these students was Alcuin, the Erasmus of the eighth century, the leader of the Carolingian Renaissance, and the founder under Charlemagne of the Frankish schools which did so much for

learning on the Continent. Bede was thus both scholar and teacher, a schoolman in the best sense of the word—a founder of schools whose influence dominated his part of the world.

It is therefore of no mere bookish monk that I am writing, but of one of the greatest men of his day and time—one who would have been great in any day and time. Scribes in Winchester and in Rome worked for him; the monks of many monasteries opened their manuscripts to him. Archbishops and kings gave him their friendship and homage. He was as true a Humanist as any of those later scholars who during the Renaissance strove earnestly, like Matthew Arnold in more recent times, to lift the level of learning in their respective countries.

His most notable book is the *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*, which was written in Latin, as were practically all his works, and was one of the four books which King Alfred selected for translation into Old English. It was at that time, and still is, the outstanding authority in its field—no small feat that, to have written a scholarly work that has maintained its pre-eminence for twelve hundred years. It contains many memorable chapters, but none so well-known as that in which he tells of the beginning of English poetry through the divine inspiration of Cædmon (Book IV, Chapter 24), an account that is known wherever English poetry is read and loved.

The story of Bede's death has been told by his pupil Cuthbert in a letter of such tenderness and beauty that lack of space alone prevents its insertion in full. When, in 735, his final illness came upon him, he was translating the *Gospel of St. John* into

English, and even though he realized that the end was near—in fact, because of that very realization—he spent the entire day in dictating. Thus passed the day, and near evening the boy who was his scribe said, “Dear Master, there is yet one sentence not written.” He answered, “Write quickly.” Soon after, the boy said, “The sentence is now written.” He replied, “It is well; you have said the truth. It is ended.” And so, like Cædmon, “he closed and ended his life with a fair end.” His tomb in Durham cathedral was demolished during the reign of Henry VIII, and no memorial of him remains save a long inscription ending, *Hæc sunt in fossa Bedæ venerabilis ossa*, which may be freely rendered, “Here beneath these stones lie Venerable Bede’s bones”—an epitaph that calls to mind the more famous bit of doggerel on Shakespeare’s tomb.

An analysis of Bede’s character shows that he had not only the habits but also the instincts of a scholar. His unwearied industry is an invariable accompaniment of scholarship; there is no royal road to learning save that of work—which is indeed a royal road! Mingled with his will to work was a kindly sympathy and a singular freshness of mind that lifted his labor above the level of task-work and dry-as-dust research and lent an interest and beauty to all he wrote.

Another notable quality of Bede’s mind was its reverence. He closes his best-known work with these words, “Here ends by God’s help the fifth book of the *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*.” There are those who deny any necessary relation between reverence and scholarship. Personally I am inclined to think that such a relationship should and does exist and that Tennyson came near the root of the matter when in *In Memoriam* he wrote:

“Let knowledge grow from more to more,  
But more of reverence in us dwell;  
That mind and soul according well,  
May make one music as before.”

The greater the scientist’s lack of reverence,

the lesser scientist he; the greater the theologian’s ignorance of science, the lesser theologian he.

The foundation of scholarship, however, is truth, absolute allegiance to the principle of truth in all things, and this Bede possessed in abundance. Let the following sentence from the Preface of his *Life of St. Cuthbert* stand for the many that could be adduced: “I have not dared to transcribe what I have written without the most accurate examination of credible witnesses, without inserting the names of my authorities to establish the truth of my narrative.”

But by far the most significant sentence, for us at least, in all his forty-one varied volumes, is this brief statement in his autobiography: “I ever found it sweet to learn, to teach, to write.” Here in the nutshell of a single short sentence is expressed the sum and substance of what it means to be a teacher, the three great commandments for all who would teach. The mere reading of it carries us forward six hundred years or more to the concluding sentence of Chaucer’s description of the typical scholar of the Middle Ages, the Clerk of Oxenford—“And gladly wolde he lerne and gladly teche.” Note the essential similarity of the two lines, both fundamentally simple as great things and great men usually are. What it took to make a great teacher in Bede’s day does not differ one whit from what it took in Chaucer’s day nor from what it takes today. The great teachers in all ages of English history have been made of one and the same material; there is no difference save that of time between Bede and Bacon and Bradley. I seriously doubt if real teaching can ever exist apart from a real personality.

To learn, to teach, to write—the scholar, the teacher, the writer. Learning, teaching, and writing are closely inter-related, and like Tennyson’s triple sisterhood of Beauty, Good, and Knowledge, “never can be sun-

dered without tears." No one of them is sufficient unto itself. Scholarship that neither teaches nor writes, but is wrapped up in itself alone, is as useless as the barren fig tree and deserves an equal condemnation.

The position of the teacher in Bede's pedagogical trinity is highly significant, being supported on one side by learning and on the other by writing. We cannot teach until we have learned something to teach and have acquired a means of expressing what we have learned. Despite the importance of pedagogical methods and child psychology—an importance that we have only in recent years begun to esteem at its true value—it yet remains unassailably true that knowledge of one's subject is the best possible preparation for teaching that subject. For this there is no substitute whatever. The cart before the horse is not so contradictory or so useless as a teacher whose mind is filled with methods but empty of matter. It has been conclusively proved at the University of Virginia and elsewhere that students taught in the high schools by teachers who have majored in the subjects they are teaching make better grades than those taught by teachers who have in college neglected the "what" of teaching for the "how."

For those who intend to teach English there is nothing better to study than Old English. Today the trend is all toward the modern in literature, art, and thought. Even Tennyson and Browning have been labelled "essentially Victorian" and thereby condemned to the limbo of the real but unread poets. Victorian they may be, but I, for one, prefer the prudery and sentimentality of Dickens and Tennyson (imagine what Edgar Lee Masters would do with the legend of Godiva!) to the "frayed spirituality and soiled æstheticism" of much of our modern fiction and poetry; and I greatly prefer the melody of Tennyson and the moral message of Browning to most of the rhymeless and reasonless poetry of Sand-

burg, Vachel Lindsay, and other laureates of this saxophone age. As Byron said of Southey's epics, "They will be read when Homer and Virgil are forgotten—but not till then."

How infinitely transient and tawdry does much of our highly acclaimed modern literature appear when measured by Lowell's definition of a classic: "Something that can be simple without being vulgar, elevated without being distant; that is neither ancient nor modern; always new and incapable of growing old." Such a piece of literature is Bede's account of the poet Cædmon, Cynewulf's description of Constantine's battle with the Huns, the pathetic plaint of *The Wanderer*, and the ringing war songs of *Brunanburh* and *Maldon*. No one can read these latter, even in translation, without rejoicing in the racial heritage that they portray and without having his heart "moved more than with a trumpet." Why not take at least some of our literature "straight," with the full racy flavor, the wild tang of the age that produced it fresh upon it, instead of attempting to make a satisfying mental meal wholly upon the literary knick-knacks and highly spiced confections of the present age?

The craze for the modern is as insistent within the college walls as without. The classroom of an elective course in Old English bears a marked resemblance to Mother Hubbard's cupboard. Pushed aside in the mad rush for journalism, contemporary drama, contemporary poetry, and contemporary fiction, there is none so poor to do such a course reverence or even cast a passing glance in its direction. I am not advocating that a thorough course in Old English should be required of all English teachers, but I do maintain that no one can properly teach Modern English unless he has some acquaintance with the pit whence it was digged, unless he has at least such elementary knowledge as can be gained from a half-

year's course in Old English. An architect who knows nothing whatever about the foundations upon which his buildings rest is no more of an anomaly than a teacher of English grammar who has no knowledge of Old English.

The necessity of learning will doubtless be conceded more readily than that of writing. Is it not enough, one may ask, to speak fluently and forcibly in the classroom? No, it is not. Oral composition, important as it is, has not yet taken the place of written composition in our high school courses, and I trust never will do so. If written composition be good for the pupil, it ought also to be good for the teacher; as a matter of fact it is, though most of them are no fonder of it than are their pupils. Furthermore, by writing we reach a larger audience than that which our classroom walls encompass; and our classes have an increased respect for teachers of English composition who are able, in Bernard Shaw's phrase, both to teach and to do. But these, however useful and important they may be, are none the less minor considerations. There are at least two better reasons for writing—first, write because it helps you to think; and second, write for the pure joy of writing, the artist's joy of creation.

The inter-relation, the inter-dependence, in fact, of clear writing and clear thinking is so thoroughly explained and so constantly insisted upon in all modern textbooks on composition that it scarcely needs reiteration here. But lest we forget, may I remind you once more that clear, forceful thinking must precede clear, forceful writing. Before the writer can transmit clear, forceful thoughts to others through the medium of the written word, he must have them himself. We cannot give away what we have not got in either law or life. Writing, then, forces us to set our mental house in order, to take stock of our thoughts, to discard the useless and acquire the useful. Not only so, but the very exercise of writing helps to

bring about the condition that should precede it. Attempting to express the thoughts we have, helps us to clarify them and to get other thoughts. There is, therefore, a reciprocal relation between the two—thinking helps writing and writing helps thinking.

But it is of the second major reason for writing that I wish mainly to speak. Be the created thing e'er so humble, there is no gift like that of creation, of giving actual, bodily form to one's thoughts, whatever may be the medium of expression—paint, marble, sounds, or words. To do this is to translate the dream into reality; it is in the most real sense putting oneself into one's work, and thus making it not work or even play, but life itself. According to Flaubert, poetry is not merely moonshine and flowers, but "we must get it out of anything whatever, for it is to be found anywhere and in all things." This is one way of finding it—one of the best ways. If we would have a friend, we must be one, the old proverb tells us; *Date and Dabitur* are twins, said "grand, rough, old Martin Luther"; if we would catch a glimpse of the poetry of life, we must ourselves in some small way be poets, we must create—the old name for poet was "maker."

Poetry, says Don Marquis, is "the clinking of a couple of unexpected coins in the shabby pocket of life." If you want to hear them clink in unexpected fashion and get the same surprised and joyful thrill that such a sound brings in actual life, create something with words, even though it be for your eye alone. I have known of more than one teacher who made for himself the excellent rule to publish at least one article of some sort each year—an editorial, a short story, a poem, a book review, a bit of research. If you have never seen your name in print at the head of an article, you have missed something in life that is worth while; but do not print the article unless you are willing for your name to appear in connection with it.

President Neilson of Smith College in his recent address before the Modern Language Association of America noted with regret the comparative scarcity in our college faculties of the scholar who can teach. If our colleges would stress scholarship more and pedagogy less, and if our graduate universities would stress scholarship less and teaching more, there would be fewer warped and one-sided instructors on our teaching staffs and there would be an increasing number of those who could say with Bede, "I have found it sweet to learn, to teach, to write."

ALFRED ALLAN KERN

### APPOINTMENT SERVICE FOR TEACHERS—PROG- RESS AND PROBLEMS

**W**E KNOW something of the personal suffering of professional workers occasioned by lack of employment. It has come to our friends, to our relatives, and perchance to ourselves. We, likewise, know something of the havoc wrought alike to individuals and to institutions when professional workers are misplaced; I presume nearly all of us have experienced it personally. Its larger effects are observed daily. How frequently do we hear, "He is a very capable man, but he is misplaced; for his own good and for the sake of the institution, someone should tell him that he should find another position." Many a professional career has been retarded seriously, and even blighted, because the right opportunity for service did not present itself. While psychologists tell us that merit tends to find adequate opportunity for its expression, the chance factors of time, place, and circumstance tend as frequently to bury in obscurity young people

of great potential ability as to raise to prominence those of mediocre calibre.

Our apparent inability to find adequate ways and means to distribute or market professional talent in accordance with personal merit and institutional and community needs is one of the outstanding problems affecting all professions alike.

A recent graduate of a medical school decided not to go to his home town to practice. Where should he go? He talked to his professors who suggested this town and that. He consulted the United States Census of Occupations to see if he could discover cities with fewer doctors than apparently would be needed. He considered factors of climate, proximity to schools and colleges, and finally decided to locate in Seattle. As he remarked later, it would have been just as reasonable to write the names of a dozen cities on slips of paper and then pick one from a "grab bag" as to proceed as he did. His choice might just as well have been Denver, Kalamazoo, Charleston, or Miami.

For many centuries, teachers in our schools and colleges have regarded as part of their responsibility, the placement of the students in whom they have most interest. Professor Monroe has in his possession some of the record sheets of the teachers in the "Charity" schools of England of the 18th century wherein there are frequent entries indicating that the teacher had placed a youth in a certain position, then replaced him in another, and so on. This interest of the public schools in placing young people who leave or complete the work of the school is now expressed through placement bureaus. College and university instructors long have rendered employment service similar to that of the "Charity" school teachers. We may call this the period of individual placement.

We are trying to outgrow this period of in finding appropriate positions for their individual activity on the part of instructors major students. It is reasonable to hope

An address delivered before the Association of Appointment Secretaries, at Cincinnati, February 26, 1925.