

# THE VIRGINIA TEACHER

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## NEW LAMPS AND OLD

ACCORDING to a tale some 2000 years old and familiar to all of us, a great Magician from Africa once went along the street of a city of China calling, "New lamps for old. New lamps for old." And all of the people hearing him rushed into their homes, seized their old lamps, and quickly and gladly effected an exchange for the new, bright, shiny lamps offered by the Magician. Finally he reached the great palace that had been built overnight by Aladdin for his beautiful bride, the Sultan's daughter; and the servants, laughing, carried the news to the Princess who, pleased at making such a bargain, ordered them to get her a new lamp in exchange for an old one that her husband always kept in his own room.

The next day, when Aladdin returned home from a hunting trip, he found no palace, no princess; and worst of all, he found no lamp.

Now this tale from China told by Sheherazade so long ago, as one of one thousand and one items that might serve to keep her head on her shoulders, seems to have real pertinency today in the field of secondary English, for who is not being offered new lamps for old? Even the very name of English is in the process of being exchanged for "language arts." Perhaps there are some of us who are being more or less forcibly urged to discard some of our old lamps altogether, or at least to exchange them for more modern and convenient methods of illumination.

Now far be it from any teacher of English to protest against changes or adaptations that must be made by all of us to orient ourselves and our pupils intelligently from day to day and year to year in this

rapidly changing civilization that encompasses the portion of time and space allotted to us. Certainly none of us would wish to deprive high school girls and boys entrusted to our care of any source or means of education that could even in the smallest way help them to understand the part each may be called upon to play in this marvelous world into which they have been born—a world in which each one will need all types of new lamps to help him find his relative place and function; but for guides to his own human conduct in this world, for what the Virginia State Board of Education in its new "Tentative Curriculum" calls "the development of emotionalized attitudes or general patterns of human conduct,"—we cannot afford to exchange our old lamps for new. Rather we shall need the light of both, and the old lamps will be just as useful as before and, perhaps, even more necessary than ever before if, according to the demand of the curriculum, we are to do our part in developing in our students what it calls "cultivated, integrated, and individualized personalities."

In this "Tentative Curriculum" as recently outlined for the first of our four high school years, the first aim in the field of the language arts is "the development of an ability to appreciate good literature, including that which provides thoughtful content as well as entertainment. To help us in the achievement of this aim, we are given four very definite suggestions as to content and method. Summarized they are:

1. Beginning with material of the pupil's ability to comprehend, we must guide his progress toward material of increasing difficulty and literary merit.
2. Following his own interests, we must through his reading, enrich his own experience to broaden his interests and un-

derstanding and to establish the habit of reading matter stimulating in content and generally acceptable in style.

3. This reading for enjoyment should be concerned primarily with the human qualities of the author and characters and with the psychology of conduct and other aspects of the literature experience which are likewise common to life situations.
4. As the core subjects of the curriculum, the social sciences, the natural sciences and the language arts or English are organized around functional phases of social life, books dealing with conditions and problems of society, if they possess the necessary literary merit, should be included in the reading literature courses.

Here, certainly, following the phraseology of the old tale, we have a whole bazaar to choose from—all types of lamps both to please and to benefit all types of students at all levels of interest and experience. The teacher, beginning, as it is suggested, with the pupil where he is and leading him in his reading to higher levels of appreciation, has infinite opportunities for choice.

Social science students working in American history, and already under the spell of Zane Grey, may start their westward travels in *The Covered Wagon*, follow the old cattle trail from Texas to the Northwest by means of *The Log of a Cowboy*, retrace the pathway of the pioneers of *The Oregon Trail*; they may meet Owen Wister's lovable young Virginian or encounter the rugged individualism of Rolvaag's *Giants in the Earth*, and so win on to higher literary levels of Willa Cather's *My Antonia* or *Death Comes for the Archbishop*.

Nearer home, Virginia will become socialized and real to him as he loses himself in the romantic adventures of Mary Johnston's novels of colonial life at Jamestown and Williamsburg, or travels along her never-to-be-forgotten river road leading from Char-

lottesville to Richmond in the days of Jefferson and Marshall; while Elizabeth Mad-dox Roberts can make him equally realize the struggles and hardships of life on the state's western frontier in her novel *The Great Meadow*. Thomas Nelson Page and Ellen Glasgow make vivid for him those days when Virginia was a battleground and those even more bitter days through which she was forced to live during her tragic era of reconstruction and adjustment.

For the whole Southland, of which Virginia is the keystone, Stark Young, under a title of inevitable beauty, has just interpreted a vanished social life that was organized on the principle of *noblesse oblige* as applied to a long inheritance of standards of human conduct and culture, and that was destroyed because, in the succinct statement of one of its highest exponents, it stood in the line of the Industrial Revolution that started a long time ago in England. Again a tie-up for integration with the social sciences.

But, seeking among the many lamps in our bazaar, there may be other students who have an interest in the natural sciences, aroused possibly at their own level by *The Girl of the Limberlost*. They will need guidance on their transition to higher fields of enjoyment and appreciation of nature with Burroughs or Thoreau, so that they may ultimately be ready to meet and live with W. H. Hudson in his *Far Away and Long Ago* or to wander spell-bound with him through the magic forest of his *Green Mansions*. Should some of them be so fortunate as to possess a whimsical imagination—and some really do—they may even renew their acquaintance with Pan himself as they listen, in the company of Kenneth Grahame, to the wind blowing through the willows; while for those whom nature calls to her own heart there is the whole fair field of poetry to explore.

But natural science has its human aspect too, and some of our boys and girls whose interest has been aroused one way or an-

other—perhaps it was by the life of that valiant young Virginian, Walter Reed,—may be led to follow the quest of *The Microbe Hunters* so dramatically set forth by Paul de Kruif. There they may branch off into Sinclair Lewis's *Arrowsmith*, or be lured into a fuller acquaintance with Pasteur in his great biography by Vallery-Radot; and some will surely travel on to meet that fascinating lover of light, Dr. Axel Munthe, in his sanctuary at San Michele.

Others, desirous of travel—perhaps a left-over urge from their Henty Book days—may journey with young Halliburton to view the poetic beauty of the Taj Mahal, and so on with *Kim* or *Soldiers Three*, according to taste, through Kipling's India into whose forests they perhaps have previously penetrated with Mowgli in *The Jungle Books*. Some, however, will prefer to stick to their original guide and with him retrace the trail of Odysseus that we hope some of them have once traveled with that hero in person. At Athens, Halliburton will give those who wish it a modern key for Browning's "Pheidippides." Or stopping at Skyros, by that spot of ground that is forever England, he may arouse his readers to such an interest in the poetry of Rupert Brooke, the great young lover of all lovely things, that they are ready to be directed to those realms of gold where those who have eyes to see the beauty of the universe and ears to hear the harmony of its many rhythms may rejoice in the emotional release that comes to those whose spirits can dance with Wordsworth's daffodils or soar with Shelley's skylark, whose hearts can glow in the eternal beauty and peace of an autumn landscape that Keats has given us, whose pulses can keep time to the everlasting roll of Byron's deep and dark blue ocean or respond to the deeper and fuller notes of Milton's God-gifted organ voice. "Ivory towers," I hear some cynic say; but stairways can be built even to ivory towers,

and the view, from the vantage point of any tower, even if it has no magic casements, is usually well worth while.

But if problems of social science are the more alluring, and if it be statesmanship and government that interest the seeker of lamps, he can start on any timely investigation of democracy today, tracing its ancestry back through Lowell to the British oak from which it sprang. Not only can he trace it to the day that John so reluctantly signed the Charter of the Barons at Runnymede; but he will be the more ready to enjoy a picture of real democracy in England, as it was portrayed something more than a century later, when on a journey from Southwark to Canterbury, a group of men and women, ranging from a knight and his young squire, a prioress with her Priest and Nuns, on down through the whole social scale to the Shipman, the Cook, the Wife of Bath, and the Miller, sat together in the shade of a wayside tree listening to each other's tales of adventure, of magic, and of experience.

But if, still following the curriculum suggestions in regard to reading, we must also be concerned primarily with the human qualities of the author and characters and with the psychology of conduct; and if, as advised, we are to seek literature dealing with the conditions and problems of society, we can guide our students from Rice, O'Neill and Galsworthy to seek, on a higher level, the answer to our own eternal riddle in the character of Hamlet, to test friendship by Horatio, to visualize for themselves the wages of sinful ambition paid by Macbeth and his Lady, to understand the tragedies that grow out of racial hatreds in *The Merchant of Venice*, or the price of even a "just war" in *Henry V*. On this level, we shall have to be guides only in the true sense of the word, by pointing out historical data and social background; for here life itself with both its individual and its social problems, stands revealed to us in the form

of art so that, as Henry W. Simon has so well pointed out, we can see a purpose and a meaning in life and an essential dignity in the human spirit. "An illusion it may be," he somewhat plaintively exclaims, "but at any rate it's the most profound difference between human beings and animals—and that is the justification for reading Shakespeare in the schools and for all literary study."<sup>1</sup>

It may be objected, however, that students cannot reach such a high level, and that the school of today is a democratic and socialized institution where everybody must have a fair chance to develop. But some, even a very fair proportion of our students, can achieve such a level; and the school, if it is to be a truly democratic and socialized institution, should furnish them the advantages that they seek and are ready for. Let them all have all the lamps to choose from, lamps to illuminate, even to flood-light the immediate pathway and keep the student located in his complicated and ever-changing environment, lamps with fancy-colored lights that for his entertainment respond immediately to a lever or a push-button; but other lamps, too, that not responding to these simple devices yet always recognize their masters so that each burns steadily with a clear soft glow for him, who like Aladdin, can learn its secret and so, command its genie.

In the glow of these lamps, some of them centuries old, some, today, in the making, our minds are enlightened, our imaginations kindled, our hearts touched, our emotions released, and oftentimes, our wills aroused to action. It is these lamps that the gifted and more fortunate in our classes will naturally seek. But it is not for them, primarily, that this plea is made; they will find their own lamps anyway. It is rather for the sake of the under-privileged who, unless they may at least be guided to these lamps,

may pass on never dreaming of their existence. Some who seem just ordinary pupils or even below the average and apparently lacking any special interest in life, may be in that rather pitiful condition because their eyes are aching and their minds are bewildered from the modern glare of the new, patented lamps; they may be eager, if rightly guided, to seek that emotional release that can be found for so many, and so simply, in the enjoyment and the stimulation of real literature. Surely no teacher is gifted to determine in advance whether one or another of his boys and girls is too lazy, too stupid, too lacking in background or in appreciation to use these older lamps—or even those of a newer type that seem intricate in design or in lighting apparatus.

Aladdin himself, who later became the Master of the Lamp, was, the old tale tells us, "A scatterbrain scapegrace from his birth; a careless boy, given to playing with urchins on the street—one who would neither obey his parents nor learn a trade"; and, as it is time itself that changes, not human nature, cannot every teacher of high school English recognize here or there, in his classes today, some young Aladdin?

It was one of mine, a much-worshipped star of the football team, who made *Jane Eyre* the most popular novel on our fourth year reading list by declaring that Jane was just everything you'd want a girl to be, but that there aren't any more like her. Another; this time a quiet, fairly inarticulate girl, who looks like a Jane Austen heroine, devours Scott for romantic adventure. An overgrown, sensitive and high-strung boy, with a most unpromising and difficult background, not only knew every bird poem and legend, but knew the birds too and wrote poems about them himself; while another very different type of young romantic, discovered Masefield, via *The Ancient Mariner*, sat up all night to read the *Salt Water Ballads*, and devoted himself, thereafter, to charting the sea in English literature until,

<sup>1</sup>*The English Journal*, May 1934, H. W. Simon, "Why Shakespeare."

finally, he published in our school magazine his own group of sea poems. Yet another, a tall, blond, blue-eyed bully, always on the verge of suspension, used to come to my office and, with almost reverent intonation, read his favorites from Kipling for however long I could steal the time to listen; and it was a veritable young Aladdin who drove his father's milk-truck along the streets of Lynchburg, during the sunrise hour, who really knew what Emily Dickinson meant when she wrote "The steeples swam in amethyst."

"New lamps for old!" was the cry of the Magician from Africa, that false vendor of lamps in the old tale; "Old lamps, none new!" has for too long a time been the cry of the scholar from his dim and dusty library. But today, neither slogan will serve. Teachers of English must guide students to appreciate good literature; thus they may experience emotionalized attitudes that will function in a social life. For a new day we need a new slogan, "New lamps and old."

EVELINA O. WIGGINS

### THE SEVEN FINE ARTS

To dress so well no one will think about how you are dressed.

To talk so convincingly that profanity is unnecessary.

To believe in yourself without being a bore.

To keep the friendship of the man you have to criticize.

To earn dividends without working injustices.

To tell all the truth that needs be told and no more.

To play for recreation and not for dissipation.—*Musical Forecast.*

## THE SUN TREADER: THE STORY OF SHELLEY

This is the complete manuscript of a drama-logue broadcast on November 30, 1934, under the auspices of Vida R. Sutton, director of the "Magic of Speech" programs of the National Broadcasting Company. At a meeting devoted to *Radio and its Relation to English Teaching*, during the annual convention of the National Council of Teachers of English in Washington, Chairman Max J. Herzberg, of Newark, interviewed Miss Sutton on "Aspects of Radio Writing and Speaking." The following dramalogue was then rehearsed by selected students from Washington schools, after which both interview and play were broadcast with incidental music.

Those in attendance at this program were thus enabled to see an hour's intensive rehearsal as well as the subsequent broadcast.

### CAST

Shelley  
Trelawney  
Alice  
Dorothy  
Maude  
Father  
Students

NARRATOR: We are accustomed to stories of poets who were friendless and poor. Today we meet one born to wealth and position, born also to revolt against what he felt was wrong in his world. Percy Bysshe Shelley's troubles begin in college, not because he didn't study and think, but because he thought so much and so differently from those in authority. Our first scene takes us back to the year 1810 at Oxford University, where things had just come to a climax. We hear some of the college youths in conversation.

1. Have you heard what's happened to Shelley?
2. No. What's he up to now?
3. He's expelled.
4. What? The son of a Baronet and a Member of Parliament expelled?

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