THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

In the Secondary School

BY

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REVISED EDITION

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

THE present is beyond doubt a period of significant change in the field of secondary education. Under perfect conditions, gradual and continuous readjustment to the changing demands of a dynamic society should be characteristic of education at all times. In the past, however, perfect conditions have never obtained, and in all probability the future will fail to provide them. The history of education shows clearly that the school does not promptly react to changes in social demands, that educational readjustment is seldom gradual, and that desirable changes in education, neglected for the time, gradually increase in number and importance until by the pressure of accumulated force they compel extensive and radical reorganization at irregular intervals. There is every evidence that the present is one of those periods when the accumulation of long-needed changes is compelling radical readjustment in the secondary school as well as in other departments of the system of education.

Numerous factors have combined to bring about the need for extensive changes in the character of secondary education at the present time. During the past quarter-century the secondary school as a social institution has undergone a marked transformation that necessitates important changes in its aims and func-

tions, and, therefore, noteworthy changes in its organization and administration. The fact that in the two decades between 1890 and 1910 the number of pupils in attendance at the public secondary schools of this country more than quadrupled[1] is significant of much more than that a larger number of pupils must be accommodated, or even that a larger proportion of the total population is receiving a high-school education. Such a development is also significant of the fact that large numbers of pupils have entered the secondary school whose different capacities, interests, and probable future activities demand differentiated forms of education that have never before been provided, with far-reaching effects on the aims and functions of secondary education, on the values and purposes of studies, and on methods of teaching.

These changes in the character of the high-school population and in the social functions of secondary education have been accompanied by developments in the fields of educational psychology and educational sociology which have vitally affected the work of the school. Thus, in the field of educational psychology, among other influences may be mentioned the recognition of the importance of individual differences, the development of methods of quantitative measurement,

[1] For the years 1910–1911 the total enrollment in the four-year high schools in the United States was 1,199,469, in 1924 it was 3,176,074. If the seventh and eighth grades are included, the enrollment in 1911 totals 3,347,909, as contrasted with 6,332,536 in 1924.

and a reëxamination of the laws of learning with special reference to theories of mental discipline. In the field of educational sociology, among other influences may be mentioned the reformulation of aims and functions and their restatement in terms of modern social theory, the social analysis of subject values, the recognition of the importance of vocational training and educational guidance, attempts to reduce retardation and elimination, and the endeavor to extend educational opportunity.

Such changes as these demand, and at present bid fair to effect, extensive changes in the entire economy of the secondary school. Developments in the field of educational sociology necessitate an analysis and a revision of the aims and functions of secondary education. Developments in the fields of educational sociology and educational psychology demand a reëxamination and reinterpretation of the values and purposes of subjects of study and a redirection of methods of teaching them.

When such important changes are imminent, there is imperative need of orientation and direction. The series of books on secondary education, of which this volume is an important representative, finds its justification in the recognition of current demands for the reorganization and redirection of the work of our secondary schools. The character of the series and of this book is thereby determined.

The study of the English language and its literature occupies a unique position among the studies of the secondary school — a position which is supported by universal recognition of its importance for all pupils. No other subject can compare with it in the amount of attention directed throughout the secondary-school course or in the extent to which it meets (or should meet) the needs of all pupils. Its economy, therefore, is of greater importance than that of any other subject of study in the program.

While all recognize the importance of the study of the mother tongue and its literature, and while few question the justification of its prominent position in the program of studies, opinions are by no means unanimous concerning the specific values and aims which should obtain in the teaching of English in the secondary school. There personal bias and personal opinion take the place of careful analysis and interpretation, with resulting lack of definite objective and with emphasis placed on this or that phase of the work according to the caprice or special interest of the teacher. English, no less than other subjects of study in the program of the secondary school, requires a careful analysis and interpretation of its special values and purposes.

Such an analysis, however, with its consequent definition of specific values and purposes, can accomplish little unless the implications of those values and purposes actually operate in the work of the school

so as to affect vitally the organization of subject matter and methods of teaching the subject. One of the constant dangers of educational practice, even where correct values and purposes are recognized in theory, is that the organization of subject-material and the character of the teaching method may not be so directed as to achieve the desired ends. The criticism that is at present directed against secondary education affects particularly assumed values and teaching methods. The teaching of English has not escaped such criticism — and in many cases doubtless has deserved it. Only when the values and purposes of the study of English in the secondary school are properly conceived in terms of the aims and functions of secondary education as a whole, only when the organization of subject matter and the character of the teaching are adapted to develop those values and achieve those purposes, can the study and teaching of the mother tongue and its literature become really effective.

In this book the author presents a theory of the purposes of the study of English and an analysis of methods of teaching the subject that are designed to achieve these purposes. The design of Mr. Thomas in writing this book and the design of the editor in endorsing it as a part of this series are to orientate and thereby improve the teaching of English in the secondary school. The author has first clearly and definitely outlined the values to be aimed at in the teaching of English and

the purposes which should obtain. On this basis he has built up a theory of the organization of subject matter and a theory of teaching the subject which are designed to develop those potential values in such a way that they may actually achieve their intended purposes. To this task he brings not only an unusual knowledge of the educational theory involved, but the fruits of his own long and successful experience in training young people through the study of English. In recommending the results of the author's labors to teachers of English and students of education the editor has in mind the importance of a conception which has guided Mr. Thomas in his work — that there is a vast difference between teaching English to pupils and training young people through the study of English.

ALEXANDER INGLIS

PREFACE TO THE ORIGINAL EDITION

KEENER and keener grows the inquiry into the *whys* and *wherefores* of current educational practice. The classics have already come under such severe scrutiny that their opponents have practically banished Greek from the public high school. As we watch the modern trend we are actively wondering if Latin may not sooner or later encounter a similar fate. In several communities the teachers of algebra and geometry have been suddenly placed on the defensive and coolly asked to justify their work. A general consensus of opinion still graciously allots a large amount of time to the study of high-school English, but the skeptical attitude of the scientific inquirer and the insistent questioning of the incredulous parent, as each examines current practices in English teaching, have already suggested very direct investigation concerning the details of our work. Why not include more modern literature? Why teach *Silas Marner* to high-school freshmen? Why spend any time on formal grammar? Why devote so many lessons in the English classroom to drill on certain principles that are habitually ignored in practice in the history classroom? Why allot six weeks to the study of *Treasure Island* — a

book that any normal boy would adequately digest in a day's diversion?

Some of these questions are incidentally answered in the pages of this book, but there has been no attempt to anticipate sporadic inquiry or forestall criticism. There has been, on the other hand, a constant effort to seek fundamental principles that would aid us to justify or to renounce any of our work that chances to be under momentary scrutiny — not so much the scrutiny of the unfriendly critic as that which we ourselves invite and direct. With varying phases of the work brought successively into focus, what will the separate judgments be? And what old methods, as the results of these judgments, shall we discard, what new methods shall we introduce, and what shall be the various shifts of emphasis?

We hope that the net result of this thinking has been constructive, and that there has been established a clearly defined theory of English teaching and departmental management that will be easily applicable to the secondary school.

The direct motive for putting this material into form was the invitation to offer to the students of the Harvard Summer School a course in the teaching of English. To the teachers who have taken this work during the period that it has been offered, the author is indebted for many ideas developed in conference and in class discussion. The major portion of the material is the accumulation of the author's study

and experience through twenty years of school and college teaching. For detailed help generously furnished particular thanks are due Professor Alexander Inglis, formerly the editor of the division of secondary education in this series.

C. S. T.

PREFACE TO THE REVISED EDITION

It is inevitable that a decade of growth should bring its various shifts of emphasis. A response to some of these changes in the teaching of English is this revision of *The Teaching of English in the Secondary School.*

There has, however, been no essential change of base. The general theory on which this text was founded ten years ago remains intact. The newer portions are largely in the nature of amplifications. A separate section has been devoted to spelling. On this problem the psychologists have in recent years centered special attention; experiments by practical teachers have been carried on in scores of places. While we know that it is impossible to develop teaching skill to the extent that spelling will be a simple problem, we do feel that a decided advance has been made. The suggestions in this new chapter have proved helpful in many classrooms.

Another new chapter is devoted to the topic that has been foremost in our discussions in the past few years — that of scales and measures. Because of the widespread interest in this subject, it was deemed desirable in rewriting the book to give an entire chapter to this subject. A comprehensive list of the more important diagnostic and achievement scales and measurements in English has been included.

Another practice which in the very recent years has come into prominence is that of précis writing. Of course, all experienced teachers of English have made use of the basic principle of this device. They have taught their pupils the value of summarizing and condensation. But as I have contrasted the methods employed in the schools of Great Britain with those employed in America, I have realized the importance of our developing in the American classroom a finer technique in précis writing as a help in both interpretation and expression. Suggestions along this line, together with a bibliography on the subject, are included in this revision.

Teachers and students who have grown familiar with the earlier edition will discover many other changes — many interpolations and a few deletions. A fuller bibliography and a list of study questions have been added for each chapter. Throughout the present revision of the book there is a fuller recognition of the value of the newer psychology and its available classroom applications, a stronger emphasis upon the value of challenging present practice, a firmer conviction that teachers of English must make their pupils skillful in handling English as a tool for achievement in all the varied phases of education: English is not for the English classroom merely; it is for every classroom and for every situation in life.

Those of us who have for many years been engaged in teaching English will always be grateful for the help

we have derived from such books as Chubb's *Teaching of English in the Elementary and Secondary School;* Carpenter, Baker, and Scott's *Teaching of English in the Elementary and Secondary School;* Arlo Bates's two volumes, *Talks on Writing English* and *Talks on Teaching Literature;* Simons's *English Problems in the Solving;* and the United States Bureau of Education Bulletin, 1917, No. 2, compiled by J. F. Hosic. In more recent years, we have been greatly aided by Leonard's *Essential Principles of Teaching Reading and Literature;* by Miss Bolenius's two volumes, *Teaching Literature in the Grammar Grades and High School* and the *Teaching of Oral English;* Stratton's *Teaching of English in the High School;* C. S. Pendleton's the *Social Objectives of School English;* C. H. Ward's *What is English?* George Sampson's *English for the English;* W. S. Tomkinson's *The Teaching of English;* Sharp's *Teaching of English;* Hawley's *Teaching English in Junior High Schools;* Paul Klapper's *Teaching English in Elementary and Junior High Schools;* the British Report on the *Teaching of English in England;* Fries, Hanford and Steeves's *The Teaching of Literature;* Boas and Smith's *An Introduction to the Study of Literature;* and all the valuable help which in various ways has been offered by scores and scores of teachers who have shared with us their more significant classroom experiences.

For helpful suggestions the author is deeply indebted to teachers of English in England and to many other

college professors and teachers in the normal schools throughout the United States who have used the text in their courses in the Teaching of English. Special thanks are due to those teachers who, as students in my own classes in the Graduate School of Education at Harvard University, have coöperated in some of the experimental work that made many of my conclusions the more valid. I am under friendly obligation to Miss Helen E. Nute, of the Walnut Hill School, for the detailed help she has given in formulating the questions and comments at the end of the several chapters.

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CHAPTER I

GENERAL PROBLEMS AND OBJECTIVES IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

In the actual process of classroom instruction, most of us who are teaching English find it extremely difficult to see our work in clear perspective. We are daily confronted by a systematized routine whose very pressure and insistence tend to enlarge the importance of a particular isolated task. As teachers deeply concerned with the achievements of our pupils in English, we have conceived a certain plane of accomplishment within our own classrooms, and there we have acquired, perhaps, a superior technical skill in attaining preëstablished goals; but the very immediateness of this routine may prevent us from regarding our work as a whole and hinder us from seeing it in its truest and most significant relationships, with its main objectives accurately defined. Only rarely — and as individuals — have the more thoughtful members of our group clearly perceived the scheme of education and of life with its various functions in proper coördination and subordination. These