

**THE TEACHING OF
ENGLISH, A
NEW APPROACH**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649117963

The teaching of English, a new approach by W. S. Tomkinson

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
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W. S. TOMKINSON

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Educator
Teacher

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E N G L I S H

A NEW APPROACH

BY

W. S. TOMKINSON

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OXFORD
AT THE CLARENDON PRESS

1921

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
LONDON EDINBURGH GLASGOW NEW YORK
TORONTO MELBOURNE CAPE TOWN BOMBAY
HUMPHREY MILFORD
PUBLISHER TO THE UNIVERSITY

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PREFACE

'Will he have right opinion from being compelled to associate with another who knows and gives him instructions about what he should do?'—*Rep.* x. 602.

MR. TOMKINSON, I am sure, would answer with Plato in the negative. For as self-government is better than good government, so, in education, discovery is better than direction. The teacher, like the lover, must 'find out his way'; and Mr. Tomkinson's book is mainly the record of the way he has found for himself in the teaching of English. It was not spun in the study out of fine theories, but was built up in the school out of materials furnished almost as much by the pupils as by their teacher. But, though it is the record of actual practice, that practice is not mere empiricism, but has been guided by a discerning knowledge of theories based on the results of successful teaching in the past and, especially, of recent experimental methods.

The most important of those theories is concerned with ideals, and insists that the true aim of English-teaching is not to provide a supply of clerks and office-boys, but to open the gates of that enchanted world in which Richard Feverel dwelt as the type of educated adolescence, 'lord of kingdoms, where Beauty was his handmaid, and History his minister, and Time his ancient harper, and sweet Romance his bride; where he walked in a realm vaster and more gorgeous than the great Orient, peopled with heroes that have been', the magic realm of Literature.

And as literature is communion with the imagined world, so language is the means of intercourse with the real one. Mr. Wells has placed 'widening of the means of intercourse'

first among the objects of instruction ; and Stevenson has said that when a man has not a full possession of language, the most important, because the most amiable qualities of his nature have to lie fallow and buried, so that he loses much of what makes life truly valuable—intimacy with those he loves. These, though Mr. Wells has failed to appreciate the fact, are the essential aims of those very *literae humaniores* the pursuit of which, in the older universities, he deprecates. What Greek literature did for a few in the past, English literature must do for the many in the future. The new ideal in the elementary schools is indeed the old ideal in the universities—an education not so much concerned with livelihood as with living. What is really new is the revelation of the importance of the emotional life and of the need to cultivate and enrich it by humanistic treatment of all our studies, not art and literature only, but history, geography, and science—to provide that ‘culture of the feelings’ without which, as John Stuart Mill discovered, all intellectual culture is in vain. Carlyle has stated the fundamental truth of all education : ‘A loving Heart is the beginning of all Knowledge.’ Instruction which does not widen and deepen human sympathies is ultimately a curse and not a blessing, alike to the individual and the community.

The methods discussed in this book are likewise the old methods, though modified in the light of new experience. The speech exercises, on which so much stress is rightly laid, are a return to a practice which justified itself in Greek education and in the schools of the Renaissance, and the decay of which Stow regretted in his account of Elizabethan England ; the verse-making is advocated not only because Latin and Greek verse composition has proved the best of all means towards an appreciation of Classical literature, but because modern psychology suggests that verse is a natural medium of childish expression ; and, to speak last of what is perhaps first in importance, the

training in literary appreciation is an attempt to get back to the time when the poet and minstrel was everywhere an honoured guest, when a taste for music and poetry was a national possession, and when every workman was an artist—or, at least, an art-critic.

There are people who think it more important that he should become an efficient artisan: I believe that spirits are not finely touched but to fine issues; and that an education which makes better men will also make better workmen.

E. A. GREENING LAMBORN.

LITTLEMORE,

Nov. 5, 1920.

