THE VIRGINIA TEACHER


MYRTLE L. WILSON

TRAINING SCHOOL FACULTY

MARIE ALEXANDER
Building Stones. Virginia Teacher, February, 1926.
Our Wild Flower Show. (With Louisa Persinger). Virginia Teacher, June, 1926.
Health Land in the Fourth Grade. Virginia Teacher, April, 1927.

VIRGINIA BUCHANAN
Working for the Birds. Virginia Teacher, June, 1925.
Nursery Schools. Virginia Teacher, April, 1926.
A Real Playhouse for the Kindergarten. Virginia Teacher, March, 1927.
Composing Poetry in the Grades. Virginia Teacher, December, 1927.

MARY E. CORNELL
Rhythm in the First Grade. Virginia Teacher, February, 1922.
Poetry in the First Grade. Virginia Teacher, April, 1926.
Supplementary Reading Based on Mother Goose Rhymes. Virginia Teacher, May, 1927.
A Summer Sale in the First Grade. Virginia Teacher, November, 1927.

GLADYS GOODMAN
Our Model Playground. Virginia Teacher, April, 1926.
Practice Sheets in Third Grade Number Work. Virginia Teacher, April, 1927.

CALLIE GIVENS HYATT
The First Grade Has a Circus Parade. Virginia Teacher, June, 1927.

BERTHA MCCOLLUM
Purposeful Activity in the Third Grade. Virginia Teacher, January, 1924.

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MARGUERITE MURPHY
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MAMIE OMOHUNDO
Writing News Notes for a Real Newspaper. Virginia Teacher, May, 1927.

SARAH ELIZABETH THOMPSON


TOPICAL OUTLINE OF AMERICAN HISTORY, 1789-1861.

Hazel Brown Welsh
How the Third Grade Became Knights. Virginia Teacher, February, 1928.

SOME APPRECIATIONS OF “BIOGRAPHY: THE LITERATURE OF PERSONALITY”

The posthumous book of our lamented James C. Johnston not only has found many to read it and to value it in high places in the literary world, but has opened a vein almost new. It has moved others to think after him, has set them to working this vein. Other writers and scholars have been stirred to thought by his question as to what are the qualities of an excellent biography. It seems fitting, therefore, that the Virginia Teacher should quote at some length several of the press-comments upon this work of its founder.

Leon Whipple, in his department, "Letters and Life," of the Graphic Survey, devotes two columns of the November issue to the following discussion of Mr. Johnston's book and then goes on to review four recent biographies just published, using and acknowledging in these reviews Mr. Johnston's criteria for evaluating such works—for instance, that the first essential quality for a "life" is the personality of a unique individual. It will be noted that he thinks Mr. Johnston himself had the habit of reading, perhaps, for something better than that for which the masses read.

Biography means in the Greek roots, life-writing. Now life-writing whether one's own or another's is a delicate and responsible task; moreover, the reading of lives is a mode of education in psychology and history as well as a fascinating entertainment for our human curiosity. Therefore, declares James Johnston, it is high time that we sought some standards for life-writing, and set up criteria to distinguish between good and bad biography. Chairs of biography have been established at Dartmouth and Wittenberg Colleges, and Dr. Richard C. Cabot at Harvard has been teaching from lives. The populace is avid for printed gossip, and richly rewards authors who dis-pedestal our images, reveal secrets and intrigues, and parade one-time heroes as scandalous specimens of human frailty. The Hall of Fame is like to become a catch-penny arcade, catering to the transient lewd. To recall the ancient lineage of biographical writing, to note its aims and duties, to define its kinds and give their marks, and finally to proclaim that life-writing demands art and ethics as well as the huckster's incognita in the realm of letters.

The interest in lives, says this historian, is as old as the race. Even the myths were a form of biography; and the end of such writing was to set up ideals and preserve morals. The father of biography, Plutarch, wrote his Lives to inspire and guide the young. But biography, like all other things human, has become more and more concerned with the inside of a man. Christianity succeeded myths and Old Testament heroes; the soul became as important as the deed. Thus came the Confessions of St. Augustine, the Vita Nuova of Dante and the long line of self-analysts through Rousseau, Cardinal Newman and his Apologia, to that tortuously woven masterpiece, The Education of Henry Adams. The "I Confess" story is no modern invention. Similarly the life-writer became interested in telling how he fitted into his age, and we have the Memoirs and their cousins, the Diaries. Cellini and Casanova revealed their naughtiness, Evelyn and Pepys recorded the minutiae of their daily rounds. Next, great writers, feeling that both the chronological record, the curriculum vitae, and the introspective personal diary, were incomplete in themselves, invented the literary portrait that tried to combine events and motives, personality and background, into a rounded study of the man. So we have Froude's Cesar, Pater's Imaginary Portraits, and the great crush of modern lives of which perhaps Lytton Strachey's Queen Victoria is the prime exemplar. Last of all is the modern psychological study in which the author or the man himself seeks to interpret a life as a shadowy complex of heredity, environment, childhood experience, sexual struggles, obscure urges and inhibitions. Here men are pursued into the subconscious by that pitiless detective, Psycho-Analysis. The recent lives of Poe and Hawthorne and the self-studies of Sherwood Anderson are of this kind.

This is a hint of some of the meat in Mr. Johnston's book. It is bigger than its own interest in schoolmaster's categories and definitions: for what could be more pitiful and inspiring than the blind efforts of the human race to tell each other and new generations about themselves? I feel that the author does not quite realize the possible drama in his theme, and is rather more interested in the topography of his field than in its inhabitants. But he does stand firm for what seems to me the main point: to write, that biography is the art of revealing an individual and his unique personality in relation to his times. It is not history, or scandal, or a day's work, or the inside story of great events by participants. It is a bitter struggle to give the man himself as an autonomous fleshly creature. We are finally interested because in this other human we may somehow understand ourselves.

That is why the chapter on the ethics of what to tell and what to censor in life-writing will seem somewhat conventional to modern readers. The author declares for nothing but the truth, but not truth as mere gossip unless it plays a clear part in delineating personality. He would omit "the unhappy penumbra" of Poe's life, and be chary in the use of diaries and letters. But where draw the line, we ask, when our new materia biographica includes a man's childhood memories, his dreams, his phobias, even his spasms and slips? Why worry about reticence on his love affairs when we are eagerly pawing into the very essence and fire of his love itself? For the student of the human, nothing is alien. We cannot trust too much to some literary entrepreneur. But the exploitation of a man's lapses by commercial scandal-peddlers is quite another thing, and we approve the author's righteous castigation.

Mr. Johnston misses one thing: first, that most of us do not read lives for historical knowledge or moral discipline. We read them for fun, for good gossip; scandal is its charm. Inspiration and education are incidental. They come not consciously but because jealousy keeps us comparing ourselves to our hero, and we are just mean enough to enjoy seeing him fall in the mud, for that is where most of us already are. This is the wisdom of the scandal-monger, and explains why the present style in life-writing is a paradox. It chooses for subject one whom people
have accepted as extraordinary in soul or deeds; then it devotes vast pains and ingenuity to proving how far from remarkable he was, how human, minor, peccable, and negligible. It is not lust for truth that makes people enjoy image-breaking, but an evil envy and lust for self-justification. The next step for biography seems to be to admit (and forgive) the minor sins of men, to transcend an adolescent need for perfection in our heroes, and to brand on the race mind what a miracle it is for any man, saint or sinner, to add a line's breadth to the human ascent. The scintilla of greatness in any man is worth admiration regardless of the matrix of evil in which embedded. Man is by general consent imperfect and, in face of the cosmos, humility the first virtue. But as members of the race some pride is needed to keep us going. These are the best we have and to belittle them is to demean ourselves. This may be poor stuff but 'tis our own.

Mr. Johnston's book called forth also an article of three thousand words on "Biography as an Art" from James Truslow Adams in The Saturday Review of Literature, November 12, 1927. We quote the first paragraph.

It is possible that the simple naturalness of the biographic art, originating in personal narration or casual gossip, has prevented it from being considered as esthetically artificial and idiosyncratic as the epic, lyric, drama, novel, or essay. At any rate, with all the pother about other forms, almost nothing has been written about biography as an art. James C. Johnston in his volume just issued has made the first elaborate effort to establish it as a separate one worthy of critical analysis and study. In his whole review of the literature in three languages dealing with biography as a form he is, however, able to list only fifteen essays, several of which are merely short articles of a few pages each and others of which deal with autobiography rather than biography proper. In no other field of literary endeavor are we so in need of careful and sanely critical analysis of all the problems involved.

Another periodical of which Mr. Johnston was long an appreciative reader, The English Journal, in a book review of January, 1928, pronounces this "a readable but scholarly volume exploring the increasingly popular field of biography as color, warmth, movement, and emotional flow," adding that it is "a summary of the field, with annotations on criteria and standards."

Upon its appearance, Biography was included in the Booklist, published monthly by the American Library Association as a selective guide to new books.

Dr. S. Parkes Cadman, of Brooklyn, made a very complimentary reference to this volume last month in his syndicated questions-and-answers column, which appears in daily papers in America and abroad.

Lyman B. Sturgis, book editor of the Century Company, says: "We are congratulating ourselves that we have so important a book on our list. It is so fresh in treatment and so well written that the book ought to go far."

Very significant is the estimate of Gamaliel Bradford: "It is a most painstaking and suggestive essay in a very difficult and unexplored subject, and I hope it will receive the understanding welcome which it deserves. It is indeed a great loss to all biographical workers that Professor Johnston could not follow it up with the results of his extensive studies in other departments of the same field. The book interests me so much that I think I shall be tempted to make an excursion into the same field myself, of course... recognizing and amply acknowledging the debt I shall owe to him for information and suggestion of all sorts."

We shall include one more quotation from a personal letter—from that of Dr. Julian A. Burruss. "This is a valuable work, a pioneer work in a field that is important and that appeals to the amateur as well as to the professional literary man. To me it speaks more than it could possibly do to one who did not know the author. All through it I see him: his most unusual mind, so versatile yet so capable in the several fields in which he took peculiar interest; his conservatism and charity where others were concerned; his innate modesty as to his own ability and accomplishments; his love of truth, and yet his gentleness in referring to his fellow-men; his inherent qualities and habits of thought of the old type of 'gentleman and scholar'—all stand out in this book."

Two other specimen clippings must suffice to give the tone of the various book
reviews throughout the country. In the Syracuse (N. Y.) Standard appeared the following:

The literature of personality is always interesting if the subject of it is the least bit interesting. The approach to any subject is personal. Emerson said that there is something in the person that never gets into what the person does. The person is more interesting than his works. Gamaliel Bradford's "Darwin" is far and away more interesting than any study of Darwinism with Darwin left out. Jesus is more interesting than Christianity, or than the depersonalized Gospel. There is in reality no depersonalized personality. The best history of science is the story of the scientists. Jean Henri Fabre is more interesting than anything he ever wrote about what he found in the insect world of his back yard. Not all of our curiosity about people is evil. We care more for them than for the houses they build. Napoleon and Bismarck and Caesar have outlived the states they founded.

There is a permanence in personality which is spared only with ideas. Thus it happens that a publisher can say that a million readers wait anxiously for the reinterpretation of old lives. And thus it happens that the "New Biography" is upon us, with what The Outlook calls its "snobbery," its delving into old gossip and key-hole stories of the lives of the dead.

Professor Johnston comes into this presence with his book on the materials and the principles of biography. He examines the remains, the literary remains, of men and women. He classifies and arranges these remains, and explains how the writer of biography should handle them. He shows how a journal, a poem, or a scrap of biographical material, must be dealt with as a part of the living experience of the one who wrote it.

If the outlines of Professor Johnston's book were followed by the writers of the new biography, of any biography, there would be less exploiting of this or that incident or fragment, and a more symmetrical story, in which the large outlines of the subject would stand out in the perspective. The writing of biography is becoming an important factor in our knowledge of history. It can be made more accurate by following the counsels of Professor Johnston.

And from the Knickerbocker Press at Albany this review is taken:

Professor Johnston pioneers in literary criticism with his analysis of what constitutes good biography. This is an age of biography; perhaps no other form of literature has flourished so mightily in the twentieth century. So many, so varied, so skillful the efforts of twenty or thirty leading writers that the public almost has made it an object of close study. Perhaps there has been no outstanding critic who was able to point out what such standards should be and hold them steadfastly before the eyes of his fellows.

At all events, Professor Johnston has filled the breach. In a volume which undoubtedly is authoritative and which succeeds in being keenly interesting as well, he builds up the artistic canons which should govern biography. Resenting the cheap criticism which brands each successive biography as the "definitive life," he gives an admirable series of tests for what really constitutes a definitive life.

He is by no means unaware of the vast extent of his field. In his chapter on "The Remains of a Dead Man's Individuality" he classifies the various types of biography with a clarity which brings order out of chaos. The analysis is fully documented by references to most of the generally known biographies. In an appendix he shows his thoroughness and his scholarship in a glossary of terms defining the aspects of biography.

The book should be interesting to the general public which already has given such striking evidence of its preoccupation with the subject. It should be invaluable to writers and critics, each seeking to advance somewhat an art which promises to be the most perfect of our times.

The following article from the Harrisonburg Daily News-Record of October 18, 1927, shows how the book was received at home, among the author's close friends.

Himself a man of abundant personality, it was natural that James C. Johnston should have responded to the special appeal of biography and, over many years, should have read widely in this department of literature. For he found that "in no other literary form is personality so completely the determining factor." This wide familiarity in the field of biography it was that equipped him so well to undertake the preparation of a volume which would point out the art and the method of the writer of biography.

"In the publisher's records for 1925," he says, "biography alone among the principal departments of publications showed an increase in the number of works over the preceding year. While the demand for biographical works of all kinds has never before been so general, and the bookmaker's art in presenting them so skilfully exercised, the indiscriminate choice of subject and the almost absolute abandonment in the handling of biographical material reflect seriously upon the intelligence of modern readers."

The author regards biography (in its popular form of expression) as an art not old, but still exceedingly complex. "This complexity," he says, "with the present confused standards, or the more general lack of standards, raises many obstacles to its highest appreciation and greater possible enjoyment, except among the few who have made it an object of close study."

The peculiar merit of this volume, then, lies in the fact that the author has read extensively with an eye to the various approaches and methods in the writing of biography and has further more undertaken to classify and systematize the field.

Gamaliel Bradford, distinguished author of Lee The American (1912), Confederate Portraits (1914), American Portraits (1922), Damaged Souls (1923), Wives (1925), and perhaps a dozen more volumes, has written an introduction in
which he refers to the author as "a pioneer in the elucidation of an immensely complicated and largely unexplored subject." In Mr. Johnston's pages he finds "an ample accumulation of material and an earnest and enthusiastic discussion of the manifold aspects" in which biography can present itself.

In the chapter entitled "Nihil Nisi Verum" one meets the question of how far the biographer should go in his disclosures of his subject's foibles and weaknesses. Here the author sets up standards that will enable one to read more discriminately many biographies now current, such as Hibben's *Life of Henry Ward Beecher*, Rupert Hughes's or W. E. Woodward's *Life of George Washington*, Russell's *Benjamin Franklin*—biographies that present a picture much more human than "ideal."

The broad scope of the term biography is apparent as the author discusses its many types, chief among which are: the autobiography, memoirs, diaries, the confession, the letter, the biographical essay, the literary portrait, the literature of travel, biographical poetry.

The appearance of this posthumous volume will be especially gratifying to the many friends of James Johnston who were shocked at his death last June. In this book is ample evidence of a success that lay just ahead of him in the field of literature. Following the completion of this work, it was his purpose next to write a life of Matthew F. Maury, a most appropriate objective, for it would have combined Mr. Johnston's interest in science and his application of the very principles of writing which he has analyzed in the present volume. But for his untimely death, one may be sure that "Biography" would shortly have been followed by other studies of equal merit with this one.

We can not better close than with the foregoing appreciation from Mr. Conrad T. Logan, colleague of Mr. Johnston, and joint-editor with him of *The Virginia Teacher*.

ELIZABETH P. CLEVELAND.

Of the graduates of New York State normal schools and teachers' colleges in the past six years, it is known that 94.25 per cent taught the year after graduation, and that 96.42 per cent of those who taught were employed in the schools of the State of New York. The relatively small number not recorded as teaching includes those who are continuing their studies, those who were unable to find positions, those who failed to report their movements, and those who married or died.

**ECONOMIC RESOURCES AND SCHOOL COSTS: 1926**

*Some Measures of Our Educational Interest*

In 1926, the estimated value of tangible wealth in Virginia was $5,702,450,000; the yearly current income was $1,264,561,200; the amount in savings accounts was $229,383,000. This state expended $49,549,100 for the construction of buildings; and a total of $74,878,320 for the following articles: soft drinks and ice cream, theatres, candy, chewing gum, tobacco, sporting goods and toys, jewelry, perfumes and cosmetics.

As compared with these indications of its economic resources and buying power, Virginia expended $21,755,438 in 1926 for public elementary and secondary schools.

For every thirty-eight cents expended in 1926 for public schools, the people of Virginia had $100 of tangible wealth; for every $1.72 expended for schools the people of Virginia had $100 of current income; for every $9.48 expended for schools, there was $100 in the savings accounts; for every $43.91 spent for schools, the people of Virginia spent $100 for building construction; and for every $29.05 expended for schools, $100 was expended for the above mentioned luxuries.

*Below National Average*

In only two of these items does Virginia show a better interest in education than does the nation as a whole. These are in the proportions that the public school expenditures are of the total savings accounts and of the building expenditures in the state for 1926. It is interesting in this connection to give the similar data for the United States as a whole.

For every fifty-five cents expended in 1926 for public schools the people of the United States had $100 of tangible wealth; for every $2.25 expended for schools the people of the United States had $100 of