TABLE V. College and University Degrees Held by the City Superintendents of Virginia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degrees</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Per Cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. B.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. B., B. S.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. B., A. M.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LLD.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. B., A. M., Ph. D.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ninety per cent of these superintendents hold college or university degrees.

The personnel of the rural school superintendents has greatly improved in the last ten years. There has been striking improvement in both the general training and professional preparation of these officials. This five years. Ninety per cent of these superintendents hold college or university degrees.

In both training and experience Virginia's school superintendents compare favorably with any State in the Union. Naturally there are those who ask, will this high standard be maintained among these school administrators under the recently proposed method of electing them? Also, are the present high standards due to the present method of appointment?

M. L. Combs

REMARKS ON TEACHING ENGLISH

WHEN asked by Dr. Fuess to address this meeting I was at first in doubt as to my competency, since I have never taught English, and have lacked extended experience as a student in English courses, while my acquaintance as a college executive with the problems of English teaching has been too brief to enable me to speak with any authority on that ground. If, however, you are willing to listen to me as a teacher of the classics (my regular work until the present year), and from my observations to select those which may commend themselves to you as reasonable, I am willing to offer myself as a victim, and to speak of some thoughts which I have had, all of them far from original, on the opportunities, the weaknesses, and the possible improvements of English teaching. I trust, however, that any suggestions I may present will be received or rejected in as friendly a spirit as that in which they are offered, for experience leads me to think that teachers, as a body, receive far too much of hostile and far too little of constructive criticism. I shall avoid the technical lingo of pedagogy, and speak in the tongue in which men normally discourse.

An address before the New England Association of Teachers of English at Springfield, December 10, 1927. Reprinted, with permission, from The English Leaflet, January, 1928.
I

Time is lacking to discuss the history of English teaching, save to call attention to the fact that it is a comparatively modern study and one in entire innocence of which (as academic discipline) most of our greatest men of letters were reared.

As to its purposes, I may express the view that they are: first, to impart an intelligent, enthusiastic, and abiding devotion to the great works of our literature; and, second, to train us in the sincere and effective oral or written presentation of our own ideas. These purposes I shall not, at the present time, undertake to defend, seeing myself defenseless here in the presence of so many and so varied defenders of the faith.

The distinctive opportunities open to teachers of English arise from several causes, of which there may be especially mentioned five: (1) because English is a subject perhaps more generally prescribed than any other in our school and college curricula; (2) because English departments teach a subject which, in general, is without the prerequisites of other prolonged or difficult studies such as are found in subjects more obviously developed in sequences or necessitating lengthy drill in paradigms or formulae; (3) because English teachers deal with the mother tongue, the importance of which is apparent to nearly every one, and have no need of spending valuable time and energy in aggressive propaganda or defensive apologia; (4) because they deal not only with a great world literature, but with one which has the added interest of being constantly in the making, which possesses, that is, the zest of contemporaneity; (5) because, in English composition, they teach the use of a tool considered essential for successful expression in many fields.

With these advantages which English teachers enjoy over their colleagues in various other subjects (although not all five are peculiar to them) come certain weaknesses and perils of which they should be clearly aware and against which it would be well that they should set their house in order, by means of severe self-criticism like that from which the teachers of the classics are now profiting. Some of these weaknesses you will, I trust, pardon me if I frankly enumerate.

(1) The wide prescription of English is likely to crowd your classes with indifferent or at times rebellious students, unwilling to work and a constant burden upon the educational body. This same objection, of course, applies to any other prescribed subject, but in somewhat lesser degree in proportion as other subjects are less universally prescribed.

(2) The comparative lack of prerequisites robs you of the advantages which come from receiving students drilled in a stiff preliminary training, some of whom have acquired a respect for study as such, and the majority of whom have a more or less mild expectation of having to work. When they observe the easy-going way in which students are admitted to English courses and in which some teachers are appointed to the teaching of English, they are likely to lose respect for a subject which appears (mark, I do not say which is) so painlessly mastered. That “any one can teach English” is an idea fundamentally wrong, but too widely held by students, parents, school principals, and the public at large for the good of the subject.

(3) The very familiarity of the mother tongue may not only arouse respect but also breed contempt. The readiness with which a student has despised, misused, and maltreated this mother tongue since birth is not easily changed. You may tell a student of Latin that the subject of the finite verb is in the nominative case and he will accept that fact (when he does not forget it), but if he is told not to say “It ain’t no use,” he may be very loath to change, aware, as he is, that millions of the em-
ployers of the language do use the expression; and even a boy who has been brought up in cultivated surroundings and who speaks with reasonable correctness may be restive in an analytical study of English grammar—a fact which probably goes far toward explaining the comparative neglect today of intensive grammatical study, and the consequent vague, sketchy, or mistaken ideas current about language as such. I should hazard the guess that most of the correct, or at least of the definite, ideas about language in general to be found anywhere in America today are derived from the study of Latin grammar. Were grammar a mere idle frill, a painful classification of the obvious, or a disciplinary snare devised to entrap the unwise, we could well dispense with it; but when we reflect that it is the essential framework of speech, and, with its closely related and similarly neglected kinsman, logic, the absolute prerequisite and condition of precise thinking, its loss is deplorable, and I think that the teachers of the classics, in particular, have some justification for feeling that they have been all too often abandoned at just this point by the teachers of English and of the other modern languages, who should have been their closest allies, but who have chosen the easier way. Further, while granting that all language is in a constant state of growth and change, I deplore the attitude of those insurgents among the ranks of English teachers who are not only willing but apparently eager to demolish all standards of correct speech and to admit into good linguistic company the vulgar and illogical jargon of the gutter. Perhaps we may never attain in English an accuracy of pronunciation and precision of expression like those of the French in the use of their mother tongue, but certainly we might, both by teaching and example, do more than we are now doing in this direction.

(4) From the very contemporaneity of English literature arises one of your greatest perils, namely, that of substituting for superior and tested standards those which are trivial, ephemeral, or meretricious. Label a course “contemporary literature” or “the contemporary novel” and it will be flooded with students often entirely unfitted for it, because completely ignorant of what is of permanent worth in English literature. Surely, narrowing as is the provincialism of space, the failure to know and the inability to imagine what is outside our own limited residence, it is comparatively harmless beside the provincialism of time, which views, not man, but the moment and its passing fads as the standard of all things. It is a valid argument that we should understand the civilization in which we live, but equally important is the fact that we cannot intelligently understand the contemporaneous except against the background of what has preceded it. As I scan college catalogues and programs of study, it appears to me that this unfortunate sort of provincialism is on the increase, and that even the English classics, like Shakespeare and Milton, which furnish real meat and demand honest work, are more and more relegated to the company of Beowulf on the shelf of the antiquarian. Nor is this to be considered merely a sin of commission, the wasting of time on what is, after all, unworthy of it and on what is, for us, on its literary side, so obvious as to demand no exegesis and little discipline of rigorous thinking. Equally lamentable is the fact that students are thus, at a formative age for their tastes and standards, cut off from the really great, and lured away, perhaps forever, from a supreme opportunity. Anyone of ordinary intelligence can read a contemporary novel (with more or less satisfaction—or disgust), but the classic English writers, on account of inherent difficulties of style or because of the unfamiliarity of their setting, are in more need of an expert to guide students to their understanding and teacher. Nor is it good psychology, by over-spiced foods, to spoil a student and better worth the time spent by stu-
dent's taste for those which are really rich in intellectual vitamins.

(5) From the idea that English composition is an effective tool for expression and hence of practical application in the work of the world arise two closely related dangers, both based on a fundamental insincerity: the first, that of making cleverness of style a cloak for absence of ideas; and the second, that skill in speaking or writing may become the one essential tool of propagandists, shysters, demagogues, professional promoters and agitators, emotional revivalists, yellow journalists, and the rest of that ten or fifteen per cent of the population who live as parasites upon honest science, art, business, and labor. If effective writing is a mere trade trick, to be picked up (as some quack advertisements persuasively imply and some more reputable teachers appear to admit) in a short and non-disciplinary course of study, if it be a part of one's education to write at short notice themes on subjects of which he cannot, in the nature of things, know anything, or to defend views which no normal and up-right man should uphold, then the door is open for every type of insincerity and fraud. One of my friends, who expresses himself with decision, has repeatedly said to me that he considers college debating the most immoral influence in our colleges today, because it tends to produce a sophist-like readiness to defend either side of a case, irrespective of the right. I have never happened to ask him where the daily theme comes in his classification of crimes insofar as it may lead a student to write about topics irrespective of knowledge of them or belief or interest in them. In all these matters, the danger clearly arises from the irresponsible manipulation of vocabulary (where one should find the logical exposition of ideas), with a premium upon the spicy and specious rather than upon the solid and substantial.

II

So much, then, for a diagnosis of weaknesses. Now let me suggest a few possible remedies, none of them new and most of them perhaps already practised by those present. For the difficulties arising from the almost universal prescription of English, I have no suggestion to offer, but against the danger of too great ease, the remedy is obvious; make English courses harder. It is too often the case, however, that this is done by increasing the bulk of outside reading, with the result that more books are skimmed, or even (where the cramming system is well organized) covered only by outlines prepared by unscrupulous tutors; and instead of acquiring a wider view of the field, as hoped, by the teacher, the student merely adopts less careful and less thoughtful habits of reading. Furthermore, granted that the reading is conscientiously done, the amount of time consumed by such work, in courses in English and history especially, frequently raises the complaint that those subjects are unduly trespassing upon others in the curriculum. What is needed, I believe, to make the study of English literature hard is the kind of hazard found in the study of a foreign language, with constant insistence on accurate and intensive study, thus increasing requirements in a qualitative rather than a quantitative manner. In the classics, our study has been so constantly intensive that we need, for our outside work, an extensive balance. In English, at present, I think the reverse is perhaps the case. Further, a return to the older requirements of memorizing a fair number of masterpieces of poetry would do much toward stiffening English courses and would leave a larger and more valuable residuum after they are completed.

To counteract the contempt for the mother tongue, of which I have spoken, you have open to you an insistence, first, on that grammatical study which you have so largely jettisoned, and, secondly, upon ac-
curacy in detail and conciseness of expression. Punctuation, for example, is worthy of far more attention than seems to be generally given it; and there seems to be no good reason why we should not expect themes and written exercises to be handed in to us in a form fit for publication, so far as correctness in details is concerned, or why we should not grade severely all failures to attain such a standard. To encourage conciseness, let me recommend an exercise, possibly sometimes tried, but too seldom for the results to be as yet conspicuous. Prepare a paragraph or two in the turgid, vague, and periphrastic style unhappily so common today, and require the students to reduce it to the smallest number of words consistent with retaining all its ideas and expressing them in good English. Then compare the original and the deflated versions and bestow discreet commendation on the successful condensers. Such exercises widely practised over a series of years would save millions of dollars in printing and would set untold hours of readers free for the acquisition of additional ideas, for turgidity and vagueness are almost the equals of procrastination as thieves of time.

Against the danger of excessive contemporaneity the remedy is easy, namely, to admit no one to a course in modern or contemporary literature until he has successfully completed a very considerable amount of work in the older classics and has some acquaintance with those standards which are followed, modified, or rejected by contemporary writers. Furthermore, before discussing contemporary fiction, drama, or essays dealing with social, economic, and religious problems, beyond the experience and the mental development of most of the class, demand that students should have successfully completed some work in history, economics, philosophy, or comparative religions so that they may be qualified to judge of these questions on the basis of real information, and so that callow minds may not be at the mercy of the irresponsible smartness of clever writers. Far more harm than some imagine is being done by setting immature students at such alluring but often destructive reading without first equipping them with that steadying of judgment which comes from the mastery of difficult but highly pertinent prerequisites. Incidentally, your courses may thus become courses in English, rather than as at present thoughtful critics often accuse, courses in things in general.

Lastly, encourage sincerity rather than smartness. I do not mean by this to advocate dullness or banality; yet I do feel that in an excessive reaction from the trite and the obvious, we too often steer students into the whimsical, the paradoxical, and the untrue. Better it would be to leave the theme unwritten than to make it a vehicle for ideas not sincerely felt and intended merely to startle. If you feel that literature is merely an external manner, you may suppose that such exercises can have little or no deleterious effect on a student’s real life and thought, but I trust that you take a higher view of your chosen field than this would imply. In fact, it seems to me that upon us teachers of literature devolves a very important part of the burden of shaping the moral thought of our students, for it is we who are the conservators and the dispensers of a large and essential part of the idealism of the race, both past and present, to the generations of the future; and if our salt has lost its savor it bodes ill for the world.

The advice which I have given will not meet with wide acclaim in the market-place, or perhaps even among your ranks; it will not produce immediate successes upon the stage, and on the railroad bookstands, or perhaps even in the lecture hall and the pulpit. Those who consistently practise it may be doomed to ridicule as puritanical and to contempt and misrepresentation as reactionaries; yet if ably pursued, with determination and courage, over a series of years, the remedies I have advocated (and similar
ones which will perhaps occur to you) would, I believe, free the teaching of English from many of the reproaches now directed against it by thinking men and would train up a generation of school and college graduates less tolerant of mediocrity and sham and more eager for substantial values and respectful toward real literary merit. The application of such standards in English, moreover, would hold up the hands of those who, in the face of many attacks, have been trying to maintain them in other studies of the curriculum. Real reform in the teaching of any subject must come from within. Accordingly it is yours, as English teachers, rather than mine, either as a former teacher or a present executive, to improve conditions if need there be. I might, as Plato makes Socrates say, have said to you pleasant things which it would tickle your ears to hear; but I have preferred to play the part of the Socratic gadfly; and, after all, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend.”

Arthur S. Pease

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF AMERICAN HISTORY, 1789-1861, WITH ASSIGNMENTS

Introduction

The aim of this plan is to encourage each child to work up to the limit of his capacity. This does not mean that each child will reach the “A” standard but that each child will be encouraged to use his thinking power to the best of his ability. Thus each one will reach a different level.

American history between 1789 and 1861 has been divided into six topics. Each topic has been outlined and assignments have been made on each topic. There is no choice given in the D assignment, which calls for such knowledge of the history of this period as must be gained in order to satisfy the requirements of the state course of study. The C, B, and A assignments each contain several choices and allow for individual differences within each assignment. It is hoped that the large majority of the class will pass from the D assignment on to the C assignment and some will go on to the B and perhaps the A assignment. There is no range of grades within each assignment. Excellent work will be required of each child before he is allowed to go from one assignment to another; his grade depends upon the quantity of work done. He either masters the assignment or he does not.

If a child who has mastered the D assignment wants to tackle a particularly challenging B assignment before he does a C assignment, it would be wiser not to break the law of readiness by forcing him to do a C assignment but let him do the B assignment. However, he will only receive C credit for mastery of the B assignment until he has also mastered a C assignment, at which time he will receive B credit. This, of course, is the exception and not the rule.

The child, when working upon these assignments, is not expected to be working for a grade and these assignments are not to be held up to him as grade markers. Rather he is working for a mastery of the subject. The letters, A, B, C and D may not be mentioned to the children at all, but the assignments may be called Group 1, Group 2, etc.

The length of time given to each topic must be regulated by each teacher. The suggested place to call time is when one or two students have reached the A standard. Of course, if no one reaches this standard within a reasonable length of time the teacher may have to call time. However, it would not be advisable to break off a piece of work particularly satisfying (to pupil and teacher) for the sake of time.

This plan is not fixed but should be changed by each teacher to suit the needs of her class. The order in which the topics appear, or the topics themselves, may be