

# FROM THE PAST. . .

## From the Report of the First NEHTA Annual Meeting, December, 1987

### PRACTICAL METHODS OF TEACHING HISTORY.

The subjoined Report was presented at the first Annual Meeting of the Association of New England History Teachers, by the Committee on Methods of Teaching and Study, — Daniel S. Sanford, Head Master of the Brookline High School, Chairman; Anna Boynton Thompson, Master of History in Thayer Academy; Elizabeth Kendall, Associate Professor of History in Wellesley College; J. W. Black, Professor of History in Colby University; and Endicott Peabody, Head Master of the Groton School. It was the main subject of discussion at the morning session.

THE present movement in education recognizes history as a disciplinary study, as one which gives training to the various powers of the mind, rather than as one which burdens the memory. The schools and the colleges demand certain definite methods in its teaching which shall give this training. These methods have been formulated in the Reports of the New England and the New York Conferences, and already Cornell, Pennsylvania, Tufts, Wellesley, and Harvard have committed themselves to the whole or to part of the programme; the movement is spreading rapidly, and every progressive teacher is asking just what is demanded of him. The phrases which define our tasks use the terms "digests," "parallels," "topics illustrated by contemporary material," etc. These phrases cannot guide us till they have a specific meaning for us: we want concrete examples of the various kinds of work required. To supply this want is the purpose of the meeting to-day, and some outlines of examples answering to the several demands have been put in your hands: the pamphlet you now have contains specimens of the various kinds of work which, in the judgment of the secondary schools and colleges, train the powers of the pupil and *wring from history its educational value*. That these specimens may not lie open to the charge of being impossible ideals, mere theoretic attempts of the teacher, they have been taken from actual practice: each paper illustrates methods in use to-day in the teaching of history. They have been chosen from work in Greek History that they may have unity.

Your committee is aware that few schools will be able to introduce all these methods at once, and many schools may be unable to use any one in its full detail. The papers you hold are merely examples of the kinds of work required by the present movement, and actually done in certain schools; each teacher is expected to adopt from them only that which seems possible to him. We also expect that the discussion which is to follow will open the way to still better methods, and that the papers in question will serve merely as a definite something upon which to improve.

Of the papers we will speak in order. No. 1, "Aims and Corresponding Devices of the Teacher of History," is an outline which is put before the student at the very beginning of his work, because from the beginning he is made to feel that class work is of necessity co-operative: it is organic: neither teacher nor student can do it alone: teacher and student must constantly interchange points of view, and the result of such discussion is the only truth for the class. The help of the student in developing a rational method of studying history is sought at every turn: his criticism upon the desirability of the aims of the teacher and the effectiveness of the means used is constantly asked; at the end of the year a full and frank written answer to the question, "How could the study of Greek history have been made of greater value to you?" is requested; the student who can think out a wise method of reaching a desired result gains class-room fame, and his name is handed down from year to year as the originator of the "Cards" or the "Fluent," or what-not. In short, every possible

means is used to rouse the personal interest of each member in perfecting the history course, to awaken in him a progressive spirit and the consciousness that he is a co-worker with the teacher for the welfare of all.

No. 2 in the pamphlet, "The Perspective of Greek History," is an analysis of the general movement of Greek history, and presents that unity which should be insisted upon in every day's lesson: it shows the relation of the minor subjects to the whole, puts them into "perspective." Its daily use meets the objection usually brought against the broad study of history by use of many books. This objection says, too often truly: "With such method the student knows nothing surely: his ideas are vague and chaotic: he cannot pass an examination with credit: he knows no dates, no names, no events: he has no body of facts, no power of statement, no results to show for his work." Such an outcome is avoided if the teacher holds constantly before the class the outline of the whole and in this outline the place of the day's lesson. Suppose, for example, the class is beginning the Peloponnesian War; the teacher questions them in some such way as this:—

- Q. In taking up a new subject, what is our first duty?
- A. To show its relations in the "Perspective of Greek History."
- Q. In what relation does the Peloponnesian War stand to preceding Greek history?
- A. It destroys the Confederacy of Delos.
- Q. Give the epochs of the Confederacy of Delos, with dates.
- A. Aristides, the Founder, 478; Cimon, the Expander, 466; Pericles, the Glorifier and Underminer, 466; Peloponnesian War, the Destroyer, 431-404.
- Q. In what relation does the Confederacy of Delos stand to preceding Greek history?
- A. It is one of the epochs in the development of the "Democracy of Athens."
- Q. Give the epochs of the "Democracy of Athens," with dates.
- A. (See Perspective.)
- Q. In what relation does the "Democracy of Athens" stand to preceding Greek history?
- A. It is one of the epochs in the development of the constitutional history of Athens.
- Q. Give epochs of the constitutional history of Athens, with dates.
- A. (See Perspective.)
- Q. In what relation does the constitutional development of Athens stand to the rest of Greek history?

This questioning must be repeated day after day, day after day, whenever a subject is entered or dropped: the Perspective must be the Alpha and Omega of every new topic: it must be indelibly engraved upon the mind of the student, must be written and rewritten, said backwards and forwards. If this course is pursued the student can, at the end of the year, not only hold the whole of Greek history in his grasp, but give a continuous and detailed narrative of it, based upon sound knowledge of dates, names, events, and their relations. The Perspective is followed by a list of the important dates in Greek history arranged in chronological order. This list is the object of daily drill with the Perspective. Around this core is built the student's knowledge: about it he groups what he remembers of books, sources and class-room talk.

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