



D. P. Mayo.

Principal of the State Normal School.

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DAVID PERKINS PAGE.

AMONG the self-educated teachers of our time, the men who, as was said of old of poets, "were born, not made" teachers, and in whom the instinct for knowledge, and for imparting it to others, was sufficiently strong to overpower all obstacles, and carry them to the highest eminence in their profession, there are none who have excelled the subject of this brief memoir.

DAVID PERKINS PAGE was born at Epping, New Hampshire, on the 4th of July, 1810. His father was a prosperous, though not affluent farmer, and his early life was passed as a farmer's boy, with that scant dole of instruction which, forty years ago, fell to the lot of farmer's sons in small country villages in New Hampshire, or, for that matter, any where in New England. From his earliest years, however, the love of books was the master passion of his soul, and in his childhood, he plead often and earnestly with his father for the privilege of attending an academy in a neighboring town, but the father was inexorable; he had determined that David should succeed him in the management of the farm, and he did not consider an academical education necessary for this. His refusal doubtless exerted a good influence on his son; for a mind so active as his, if denied the advantages of the school, must find vent in some exercise, and the admirable illustrations he drew from nature, so often, to embellish and enforce his instructions in after years, showed conclusively that, at this period of his life, the pages of the wondrous book of nature had been wide open before him, even though his father's fiat had deprived him of other sources of information.

But He who guides the steps of his creatures had provided a way for the gratification of the thirst for knowledge which was consuming the farmer's boy, and that by what seemed an untoward Providence. At the age of sixteen, he was brought to the borders of the grave by a severe illness; for a long time he lingered between life and death; and, while in this condition, his friends despairing of his recovery, and his father, whose heart yearned over him, watching his enfeebled frame, seemingly nigh to dissolution, the apparently dying boy turned his large, full eyes upon his father's face, and, in an almost inaudible whisper, begged that, if he recovered, he might be allowed to go to

Hampton Academy, and prepare to become a teacher. Was not this, indeed, an example of "the ruling passion strong in death?" The father could not refuse the request proffered at such a time; what father could? The boy did recover, and he did go to the academy, a plain farmer's boy; he dressed in plain farmer's clothes, and hence, some self-conceited puppies, whose more fashionable exterior could not hide the meanness of their souls, deemed him fit subject for their gibes and sneers; but his earnest nature, and his intense love of study were not to be thwarted by such rebuffs; he pursued the even tenor of his way, and, having spent some months at the academy, he taught a district school for the ensuing winter, and then returned again to the academy. Here his progress in study was rapid; but, the ensuing winter, we find him again teaching in his native town, and his further studies were prosecuted without assistance. The next winter he had determined to make teaching a profession, and accordingly, having taught a district school at Newbury, Mass., during the winter, at its close he opened a private school; a daring step for a young man but nineteen years of age, and who had enjoyed so few advantages of education, but the success which followed fully justified the self-reliance which led him to attempt it. At the beginning he had five pupils, but he persevered, and before the close of the term, the number he had contemplated was full. Here, as every where else, during his career as a teacher, was manifested that diligence, industry, and careful preparation for his duties, which made him so eminently successful. He studied the lessons he was to teach, thoroughly, that he might impart instruction with that freshness and interest which such study would give; he studied his scholars, thoroughly, that he might adapt his teachings to their several capacities, encouraging the diffident and sluggish, restraining the forward, and rousing the listless and careless to unwonted interest and energy; he studied, too, their moral natures, and sought to wake in their youthful hearts aspirations for goodness and purity; and he studied whatever would enlarge his sphere of thought, intelligence, and professional usefulness.

Such a teacher was sure to rise in reputation; slowly, perhaps, but certainly, and hence it need not surprise us to learn that, within two years, he was associate principal of the Newburyport High School, having charge of the English department. Here, for twelve years, he was associated with Roger S. Howard, Esq., one of the most eminent teachers in Massachusetts, and how well he fulfilled his duties, Mr. Howard, who survived him, testifies. The same intense fondness for study characterized him, leading him to acquire a very competent knowledge of the Latin language, and something of the Greek; the

same earnest and conscientious performance of all his school duties, and delight in them, was manifested here as in his humbler position. It was while occupying this post, that he first began to come before the public as a lecturer. He was an active and prominent member of the Essex County Teachers' Association, one of the most efficient educational organizations in Massachusetts, and delivered before that body several lectures, which Hon. Horace Mann characterized as the best ever delivered before that or any other body. Of one of these, on "*The Mutual Duties of Parents and Teachers,*" six thousand copies were printed and distributed (3000 of them at Mr. Mann's expense,) throughout the state. Mr. Page's powers as an orator and debater, were of a very high order; he possessed, says Mr. Mann (himself an orator of no mean powers,) "that rare quality, so indispensable to an orator, *the power to think, standing on his feet, and before folks.*" As a teacher, he exhibited two valuable qualifications; the ability to turn the attention of his pupils to the principles which explain facts, and in such a way that they could see clearly the connection; and the talent for reading the character of his scholars, so accurately, that he could at once discern what were their governing passions and tendencies, what in them needed encouragement and what repression. Thus, useful, active, and growing in reputation, Mr. Page remained at Newburyport till December, 1844.

In the winter preceding, the legislature of New York, wearied with the costly, but unsuccessful measures which, year after year, had been adopted for the improvement of her public schools, had appointed a committee of its own body, warm friends of education, to visit the normal schools of Massachusetts, and make a report thereon. The committee attended to their duties, and made an elaborate report in favor of the adoption of the normal school system. That report was adopted, and an appropriation of ten thousand dollars outfit, and ten thousand dollars per annum for five years, was voted, to establish a normal school, as an experiment. The friends of education in New York felt that, liberal as this appropriation was, every thing depended upon securing the right *man* to take charge of it, and long and carefully did they ponder the question, who that man should be. Mr. Page's reputation had already outrun the town and the county in which he resided; and, on the recommendation of Hon. Horace Mann, and other friends of education in Massachusetts, Prof. (afterward Bishop,) Potter, Col. Young, and other members of the committee, entered into correspondence with him, on the subject. In reply to the first communication, he addressed numerous inquiries to the committee, concerning the plan proposed for the organization and management of the school.

These questions were so pointed, and so well chosen, that Col. Young, on hearing them, at once exclaimed, "That is the man we need," and expressed himself entirely satisfied, without any further evidence. So cautious, however, were the committee, that it was decided that, before closing the negotiation, Dr. Potter should visit Newburyport, and have a personal interview with Mr. Page. He accordingly repaired thither, called at Mr. Page's residence, and found him in his every-day dress, and engaged in some mechanical work connected with the improvement of his dwelling. An interview of a single half hour so fully prepossessed him with Mr. Page's personal bearing and conversation, that he at once closed the negotiations with him, and secured his services as principal of the New York State Normal School.

Mr. Page closed his connection with the Newburyport High School about the middle of December, 1844; not without numberless demonstrations of regret and affectionate regard on the part of his pupils and friends. While on his way to Albany, he spent a night with Mr. Mann, in Boston, and the new duties he was about to undertake, the obstacles and difficulties, the opposition and misrepresentations he would meet, and the importance and necessity of success, formed themes of converse which occupied them till the early morning hours; in parting, Mr. Mann said to Mr. Page, as a veteran commander might have said to a youthful officer going to lead a forlorn hope, "SUCCEED OR DIE." The words sank deep into his heart; they were adopted as his motto in the brief but brilliant career which followed; and once, on recovering from a dangerous illness, he reminded his friend of his injunction, and added, "I thought I was about to fulfill the last alternative." He arrived at Albany a few days before the commencement of the "experiment," as the normal school was designated, and found every thing in a chaotic state; the rooms intended for its accommodation, yet unfinished; there was no organization, no apparatus, and indeed very few of the appliances necessary to a successful beginning; while the few were hoping, though not without fear, for its success, and the many were prophesying its utter failure. From this chaos, the systematic mind of Mr. Page soon evolved order; full of hope, and confident of the success of the normal school system, himself, he infused energy and courage into the hearts of its desponding friends, and caused its enemies to falter, as they saw how all obstacles yielded to the fascination of his presence, or the power of his will. The school commenced with twenty-five scholars, but ere the close of its first term, the number had increased to one hundred. At the commencement of the second term, two hundred assembled for instruction. From this time its course was onward; every term

increased its popularity; and the accommodations provided for it, large as they were, were soon crowded. For the first three years it had to contend with numerous and unscrupulous-foes; some of whom attacked the system, others its practical workings, others still, who were strangers to his person, attacked the character of the principal of the school. Meantime, Mr. Page labored indefatigably; against the assaults upon the organization, or its practical operations, he interposed able, manly, and courteous defenses; those which were leveled at himself, he bore in silence; but no man, whatever his position in the state, and however bitter might have been his hostility to the school, or to its principal, ever came within the magnetism of his presence and influence, without being changed from an enemy to a friend. Among the most decided, as well as the most conscientious opposers of the normal school, was the Hon. Silas Wright; indeed, in his election as governor, the enemies of the school claimed a triumph, and counted largely on his eminent abilities to aid them in putting it down; but a very few months' residence in Albany converted this man, of strong and determined will, into one of its sincerest friends. During the vacations of the school, Mr. Page gave himself no rest; he visited different parts of the state, attended teachers' institutes, lectured day after day, and, wherever he went, removed prejudices, cleared up doubts, and won golden opinions. Every such visit drew a large number of pupils to the school from the section visited the ensuing term. The state superintendent was accustomed to say, "that he needed only to look at the catalogue of the normal school to tell where Mr. Page had spent his vacations."

Before four years had passed, the school had ceased to be an "experiment;" it was too firmly rooted in the hearts of the people to be abandoned, and the opposition, which had at first been so formidable, had dwindled into insignificance. But the toil requisite to accomplish this, had been too arduous for any constitution, however vigorous, to endure. The autumnal term of 1847 found him cheerful and hopeful as ever, but with waning physical strength; he sought (an unusual thing for him,) the aid of his colleagues in the performance of duties he had usually undertaken alone, and at length consented to take a vacation of a week or two during the Christmas holidays. Alas! the relaxation came too late; the evening before he was to leave, there was a meeting of the faculty at his residence; he was cheerful, but complained of slight indisposition, and retired early. With the night, however, came violent fever, and restlessness, and by the morning light, the physicians in attendance pronounced the disease pneumonia. At first the attack excited little alarm, but it soon

became evident that his overtasked vital powers had not the ability to resist the violence of the disorder. On the fourth day, he expressed to a friend his conviction that he should not recover. The severity of the disease soon increased, and, on the morning of January 1st, 1848, he passed away.

Six months before his death, he had, in company with one of his colleagues, made a brief visit to his former home, at Newburyport; and, while visiting the beautiful cemetery there, he stopped suddenly near a shady spot, and said, "here is where I desire to be buried." The sad funeral train which bore the clay that once had been his earthly habitation, from Albany to Newburyport, laid it sadly, yet hopefully, in that quiet nook, to repose till the archangel's trumpet shall be heard, and the dead be raised.

His life had been short, as men count time; he lacked six months of completing his thirty-eighth year when he was summoned to the better land; but, if life be reckoned by what is accomplished, then had his life been longer far than that of the antediluvian patriarchs. Of the hundreds of teachers who were under his care at Albany, there was not one who did not look up to him with admiration and love; not one who did not bear, to some extent, at least, the impress of his character and influence; and, it is doing no injustice to those who have so worthily succeeded him, to say that a very large part of the progress which the Empire State has made in the cause of education, during the past ten years, has been from the reflex influence of his spirit and teachings upon those who were his pupils. Nor is this influence confined to New York; other states feel it; even now, men, who were trained under him at Albany, are occupying high positions in the cause of education in several of the Western States; and gifted women, who, under his teachings, were moved to consecrate themselves to the holy duty of training the young, are now at the head of seminaries and female schools of high order, extending his influence in widening circles over the boundless prairies of the West.

Our brief narrative exhibits, we think, clearly what were the marked traits of Mr. Page's character; industry, perseverance, decision, energy, great executive ability, ready tact, and conscientious adherence to what he regarded as duty. But no language can describe the fascination of his manner, the attraction of his presence, his skill in what he was accustomed to call the *drawing-out* process, or his tact in making all his knowledge available. His familiar lectures to his pupils on subjects connected with the teacher's life and duties, could they be published, would form an invaluable hand-book for

teachers. He possessed, beyond most men, the happy talent of *always saying the right thing at the right time*. In personal appearance, Mr. Page was more than ordinarily prepossessing,—of good hight and fine form, erect and dignified in manner, scrupulously neat in person, and easy in address, he was a living model to his pupils, of what a teacher should be. Aside from a few lectures, published at different times, to some of which we have already alluded, Mr. Page left but one published work,—“*The Theory and Practice of Teaching*,” a work which has had a large circulation, and one which no teacher can afford to be without.

As evidence of the estimation in which Mr. Page was held by the distinguished teachers with whom he had been associated, we subjoin a portion of the addresses made on the subject, at the meeting of the American Institute of Instruction, on the announcement of his death.

Mr. Gideon F. Thayer said Mr. Page possessed a clear and logical mind, a sound judgment, and remarkable powers of discrimination; decision and firmness for all occasions, unwavering integrity, and a fearless exercise of his own rights without infringing on the rights or wounding the sensibilities of others. Dignity, affability, and courtesy, were so beautifully blended in his manners, as to secure respect and conciliate regard.

He began to teach when quite young, and, struggling with difficulties, neither few nor small, arose at last, through various important grades, to the highest rank in his profession,—being, at the time of his death, the principal of the state normal school, in the capital of New York. And although he had to encounter distrust and opposition, on assuming this extremely responsible charge, he, in a short period of time, lived down these obstacles, which a blind prejudice against the institution had generated, and died,—if not without an enemy,—leaving a multitude of devoted and sorrowing friends.

The secret of his success was found in the characteristics above mentioned, in his thorough conscientiousness, his religious principle, his fidelity in duty, connected with his self-faith, his diligence, and his indomitable will. He felt that he *could*,—he *resolved*,—he *conquered*!

He was a man of genuine modesty, and felt, to the day of his death, not as though he had fully attained and were already perfect; but constantly strove for additional acquisitions to the very liberal stock which his industry and perseverance had secured to him.

The last time I had the pleasure of seeing him, was in November, 1847, when, in a discussion upon the value of the study of the classics, he intimated that he had become somewhat familiar with the Latin, but had not made much progress in the Greek. “I intend, however,” he added with enthusiasm, “to master that too, within the coming year, if my life is spared.” Alas that the condition could not be fulfilled!

He thus filled up the measure of his life; not only in term-time, when the labors of his school occupied his mind and called for all his energies; but, in his vacations, when his exhausted powers demanded relaxation, he was still in harness, visiting schools, institutes, and conventions of teachers, throughout the broad surface of the Empire State; teaching, lecturing, and aiding those who needed his efficient assistance in the great work of common school education. To these supererogatory labors is to be attributed his early decline; he became the victim of excessive mental and bodily toil; sacrificing his life to his insatiable desire to benefit his race.

In debate, Mr. Page was able, candid, and forcible. He was blessed with a noble figure, a manly bearing, and great personal comeliness; all which were lighted up and adorned by an intelligence that flashed from his fine eye and beamed from the lineaments of his countenance; while a voice of much compass and

sweetness added its charm, and completed the outline of a most accomplished and eloquent orator.

His labors among us in this Institute, were of the most valuable kind. Among the lectures which he delivered to us, was one on the reciprocal duties of parents and teachers, six thousand copies of which were printed and distributed over the land; doing good to all parties interested, and furnishing lessons of wisdom, which will continue to bless the age, though their author has passed to his high reward.

This, and his larger work, will now be more dearly cherished, since his task on earth is finished; and will, as we trust, be a means of inciting multitudes to enlightened and judicious action, in the great work of training the child for his heavenly destiny.

In conclusion, the speaker said he would not enlarge on the character of the deceased. It was too well known to need his feeble eulogium. It was written in letters of living light on the walls of the various institutions, with which the deceased had been connected. It was impressed in ineffaceable lines on the tablets of the hearts of those who knew him, and especially of those whose early steps in the path of knowledge and virtue he had led with parental solicitude, and of his more recent pupils, prepared, by his instruction and wise counsel, for the duties of the teacher's vocation.

He would, therefore, by the permission of the chair, offer, for the adoption of the Institute, the following resolutions.

Resolved, That, in the demise of DAVID P. PAGE, the cause of education has lost an efficient friend, our fraternity an able and faithful coadjutor, and the community a member devoted to its highest and most sacred interests.

Resolved, That, while this Institute laments the bereavement of a warmly-esteemed and most worthy brother, its members will not cease to cherish the remembrance of his high aims, his spotless life, his reverence for religion, his singular devotion to the cause of man, and his consequent success and triumph over the difficulties of his vocation.

Resolved, That we hold the life and character of Mr. Page as a valuable legacy to the teacher, the citizen, and the philanthropist; and feeling that, though dead, he yet speaketh, we will endeavor to make his example a model for our imitation, as teachers, as men, and as citizens.

Resolved, That we deeply sympathize with the family of the deceased in this irreparable loss, and that a copy of these resolves be transmitted to the afflicted widow.

Resolved, That these resolutions be entered upon the records of the Institute.

Mr. Wm. H. Wells said, as a citizen of Newburyport, the field of Mr. Page's labors for several years previous to his removal from Massachusetts, I beg leave to offer a word in relation to the resolutions before us.

To the teachers of Essex County, the name of Mr. Page is a term of deep and solemn interest. We loved Mr. Page sincerely while living; and we now cherish a most affectionate regard for his memory. He advanced rapidly in our midst, from the humble charge of a district school, to such a degree of eminence and reputation in his profession, that we were unable to retain his services among us.

In rising to eminence himself, Mr. Page did much to honor and elevate the profession to which his life was devoted. Truly, a standard-bearer has fallen, and every teacher in the land has lost a sincere and devoted friend. England will as soon find another Thomas Arnold, as America another David P. Page.