

## INTRODUCTION

WHY should we teach history in our schools? The question is one which the teacher will surely be called upon to answer at some time or other, very likely as the result of the enquiry of some dissatisfied and unenthusiastic pupil. Many writers have provided answers to the question, and the answers are not by any means similar in all cases. History teaching has been justified on many grounds, some more real and important than others.

The best answer to the question is that a knowledge of history interprets and illumines the whole of human life. We know that the state of affairs which exists in the World at the present day has not always existed; we know that the institutions, the ideas, the States of to-day have not been handed down to us unchanged from time immemorial; and the intelligent mind must from time to time be led to ask how the present state of affairs grew into being and what form the development of human organisation has taken. In a primitive community, such as a tribe of Eskimos or New Guinea savages, there is hardly any need for historical knowledge, for life and manners, institutions and surroundings are much the same now as they were fifty, a hundred, five hundred, a thousand years ago. But in a highly developed State like our own, the need for a knowledge of history is evident, if we are to use our intellectual powers to the utmost. We must know at least how the inhabitants of these islands came to be grouped together as a single organised community, how the present system of common action and mutual protection

grew up, how we became possessors of our oversea dominions, why we have been drawn into conflict with other peoples; we shall be led on from this to make similar investigations into the story of the other peoples of that World in which our lot is cast.

This is the main reason why we should teach history in our schools. It adds to our knowledge of the existing state of the World a knowledge of the way in which human society and institutions have grown up, a knowledge without which a modern education can hardly be said to be complete. The same idea lies at the root of two justifications for history teaching with which we often meet. History is said to “broaden the mind” by showing us the conditions, habits and ways of thought of former times, thus not only adding to our store of information but attacking insular prejudices and local conservatism. Again, it is suggested that a knowledge of history explains and illuminates the multitudinous historical allusions that crop up in the newspaper, in literature and elsewhere. It thus opens up a fresh pleasure in literary reading and even in the trivial perusal of the daily news-sheet, not to mention such things as monuments, buildings and street names. The more history a person knows, the greater the results to be looked for in this direction.

Having indicated in general terms what history teaching can claim to effect, we must turn aside for a moment to mention some false and shallow “justifications” of history teaching which, though they are widely asserted, have no sound strength and consequently tend rather to weaken the really unimpeachable claims of history as a cardinal subject of modern Education. A school history-course does *not* provide a training in citizenship; it does *not* constitute a course of training in the study of human nature

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or applied psychology: and it does *not* make a suitable basis for ethical and moral instruction.

An intelligent voter certainly needs to know something of the past, and a great many psychological phenomena can be studied with more or less profit in the detailed history of certain episodes of the past, but for the political training and psychological exposition derivable from history to have any substance, it is necessary to study the subject in far more minute detail than anyone could possibly find time for in any elementary or secondary school. And from the ethical point of view, there are so many examples of violence, treachery, lying and self-seeking securing temporal gains at the expense of the better moral qualities that to produce a satisfactory effect on the pupil's mind our only course would have to be to adopt the questionable advice by which Plato of old wished to suppress the baser national legends of Hellas and Carlyle in the last century twisted the Machiavellian Frederick the Great into a paladin of Christian virtue. It is not on these grounds that a school study of history is to be based.

The chief complaints that have been raised against the study of history in schools have been provoked by the exceedingly injudicious selection of the matter presented to pupils by the teachers and text-book writers of the past. The pitiable absence of the sense of proportion, the tendency to concentrate on the one hand upon the trivially curious and on the other hand upon the dry summary of names and dates have rendered the old-fashioned history lesson a meet object for ridicule. But present day writers and teachers are gradually being weaned from their affection for the old traditional collection of "facts which mustn't be omitted because they always have appeared in history text-books," and the contents of our modern text-books

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are beginning to take a form more consistent with a reasonable sense of proportion. The names of Edward II's favourites, the adventures of Richard Cœur-de-Lion in the East, and the domestic chronicle of the palace of Henry VIII are still to be found there, but they appear less on account of their own intrinsic importance than as illustrating the constant struggle between the mediaeval Crown and the Baronage, the great Crusading movement and the great religious struggle between the Protestant Reformers and the old Catholic faith.

Having decided on what grounds, and on what grounds only, history teaching is to be approved, we must next consider the question of what history is to be taught. Now it is impossible to lay down a cast-iron syllabus and declare that it and it alone must be adopted in every British school. Local differences, the time at the disposal of the teacher, the controlling influence of public examinations, the facilities for the study of local history, the opinions of boards of governors and headmasters, the social positions of the pupils, all these things will necessarily modify a school history syllabus. All that can be done is to sketch a general outline and put forward certain principles which may be applied according to local circumstances.

What do we want to teach our pupils? First we must deal with the history of our own country. Then, if the time allows, we can extend the syllabus to include local history and more general history, European or World history. In any case an extension of the syllabus should be made on a logical basis; there is no place for such studies as the history of France, Western Europe, the Severn valley; such divisions represent no definite communities to which we ourselves belong. We are Britons

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and Europeans, we may be Kentishmen or Cornishmen or Londoners or Liverpudlians, we all share in a common World-History, but we are not Frenchmen or “Western Europeans” or “Severn Valleymen.”

Local history, besides often illustrating rather vividly the operations of movements of national importance, is useful for giving local knowledge, and there are not many who seriously oppose its study. European and general history have been more severely attacked, but the school of opinion which declared them to be irrelevant to Englishmen is by now all but extinct, and we need hardly waste time in refuting this obsolete theory.

There are two methods employed in teaching European history as part of a school course. One is to allot special time to it as a separate section; the other is to introduce it casually into the English history course. The latter is objectionable in several ways. It interrupts the course of the English history lessons, it gives only a very spasmodic and distracted account of European development, it leads to a good deal of mental confusion, and it tends to perpetuate the old-fashioned idea of England being the only country whose history has been of real importance in the World. To understand European history it is necessary to trace the development of Europe as a whole, and the scrappy method of dealing with it involved in the latter of these two systems is fatal to an intelligent conception of the elements of the subject. If lessons on European history are intercalated with the general English course, such lessons should be kept separate and should form a continuous series related to one another as well as to the English history lessons.

It is advisable, then, to include if possible a series of European history lessons in our syllabus, and perhaps in

addition a series devoted to local history. It is hardly advisable to insert into school courses such sectional studies as constitutional history, military history, or the history of political ideas; we cannot afford time for special treatment of these subjects in an elementary or a secondary school.

The syllabus must be graded according to the capacity of children to grasp the meaning of historical facts. We cannot talk of the State to children who do not appreciate what that institution means. Young children who have not reached their teens rarely have much idea of institutions beyond their immediate personal reach. They know the family, the town, the village, the shop, the tradesman, the post-office, the policeman, the place of worship, the regiment, perhaps also the tax-collector and the election canvass; they know of the existence of important persons like the King, the Queen, the Prince of Wales, the Prime Minister, the leading generals and admirals. But these all seem separate and concrete things in the child's mind; they have little connection with each other, and it is difficult for him to grasp how all these things are bound up together in the organisation of the State.

For the younger pupils, up to the age of eleven or twelve, we can suggest a course more in keeping with the child's knowledge of his environment and his love of the romantic, a course partly social and partly biographical. Some aspects of social history will appeal to the very juvenile mind:—dress, manners, food and drink, sports and pastimes, houses, means of communication, police and the punishment of crime, weapons and military equipment and the development of cannon and ironclads. A great deal of the matter which appears in our social histories is admirably suited for this stage. If a pupil has received a year or two's

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instruction in this elementary school history before he comes to the age when the more serious history begins, he will be in an immeasurably superior position to the pupil who knows nothing of the social life of the past. Those absurd anachronisms which so frequently make us laugh in reading elementary history "compositions" will thus be reduced to a minimum; we shall no longer hear of Saxon farmers smoking pipes over fires where turnips are boiling, of mediaeval monarchs sending telegrams to Scotland Yard for policemen, or of cavaliers and puritans exterminating each other with lyddite shells and magazine-rifles.

On the biographical side, too, much can be done. All boys and girls love a good story, and if that story centres round a single individual so much the better. Numerous examples could be given of biographies suitable for this stage of instruction:—Julius Caesar, St Augustine, Alfred the Great, Harold son of Godwin, William the Conqueror, Thomas Becket, Richard Cœur-de-Lion, the Black Prince, Richard II, Sir Walter Raleigh, Oliver Cromwell, Bonnie Prince Charlie, Nelson, Wellington, George Stephenson. These are only a few of the more important historical characters whose biographies, simplified and toned down, may well be laid before a class of children of twelve, eleven, ten, nine, or even eight years old. The success or otherwise of these biographies will depend, more than ever, on the faculties of the teacher; it seems hardly necessary to add that such advanced and difficult points as Richard II's Shrewsbury Parliament, Cromwell's "Instrument of Government" or Wellington's strategy in the Peninsular war will be omitted from these simple biographical stories. The examples quoted above are all taken from British history, but there is no reason why other parts of

the world should not supply their quota to our collection of romantic celebrities; France can give us Joan of Arc and Napoleon, Germany will provide Charlemagne and Martin Luther, Russia Peter the Great, Sweden Gustavus Vasa and Charles XII, Italy St Francis of Assisi and Garibaldi. Ancient Rome and Greece may furnish us with a score or more of characters, Pizarro and George Washington may be brought from across the Atlantic, while those who happen to be at all conversant with Japanese history may even find a place for Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Saigo Takamori.

The aims and objects of this twofold social and biographical course are, firstly, to raise a preliminary interest in history, and secondly, to provide the pupil with some slight background upon which he can place knowledge acquired later. One point should be most carefully borne in mind; the child should not be taught in a history lesson things that he will have to unlearn at a later stage. Biographies can be simplified without being falsified, and if legendary or doubtful material is introduced, it should be very clearly explained that it is legendary or doubtful. The effect of teaching things that have to be unlearned is particularly harmful, as it encourages the opinion that "History is mainly lies." Though we have the authority of so eminent a man as Mr Charles Kingsley for the truth of this doctrine, we need not pay very much attention to this shallow and rather cheap piece of cynicism. If boys and girls find that what they have learnt as History in the lower forms is largely fictitious, they will naturally be led to wonder whether when they get up to the top of the school they will be told that their lessons in the middle forms were largely composed of imaginative material. Pupils take a keen delight in discovering errors of fact in presumed authorities—they will feel them-



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selves quite superior to Byron and Wolfe when they are told that Napoleon's cannon could not be heard booming through the night before Waterloo and that Sir John Moore was not buried by torchlight—and we do not want to encourage them to shower the same sort of contempt on History as a whole.

We now turn to the work for pupils of somewhat higher age, boys and girls of twelve, thirteen and fourteen, the upper forms in an elementary school and the middle forms in a secondary school. Here we can go a stage further and tackle some more serious history. But we cannot yet set off on a full-blown study of the development of the State. Though our lessons may now take a strictly chronological sequence, we cannot attempt a continuous narrative of the history of the English State. This is undoubtedly a breach with usual practice and tradition. But it may be suggested that many of our difficulties and failures have arisen from an attempt to teach too much in these years. When we ask our pupils of twelve and thirteen to learn the continuous narrative from the days of the Ancient Britons to the reign of George V we are asking too much from them. The idea of History that we should give pupils of these ages is that of a series of interesting episodes and situations, not that of a continuous development, for the juvenile mind has not yet reached the stage at which continuous developments extending over decades and centuries can be properly appreciated. Impersonal things, too, make as yet little impression, and we shall have to confine our outlook to the human element. Thus such things as parliaments, ecclesiastical synods, local government, political ideas, in fact the whole constitutional side of history may be relegated to the future course of study.

To say that we cannot at this stage attempt a continuous

narrative of the history of the English State does not mean that we should either omit to bring out the chronological relationship of the topics selected for lessons or fail to refer back to past lessons for information bearing upon present ones. A rough time-chart ought certainly to be made from time to time to indicate the relative position in time of the events dealt with. And great use can be made of references to things learnt about in previous lessons which help to explain or clarify later events. Thus, in a lesson on Henry VIII and Pope Clement VII which introduces the class to the opening of the Reformation in England occasion may be found for calling to mind things which were discussed in past lessons on the Lollards and on Becket; in a lesson on Joan of Arc we may refer to previous lessons on Agincourt and Crecy; in a lesson on the Indian Mutiny to what we had to say about Clive and Warren Hastings. We must certainly see to it that our pupils do not get the radically false idea that each historical event is something isolated and independent, though it is rather too soon at this stage to attempt to supply that continuous connective tissue which in older forms carries the historical narrative on from point to point as the serial story of one great drama—the development of the nation.

When a one year's or two years' course of this type has been given—two years for preference—the pupil will have a historical background which will lend reality and colour to the more advanced work in higher forms of secondary schools. Should the scope of history be extended before this advanced stage? As regards European history certainly not, except as illustrating and assisting English history; European history is too broad a subject to allow of the minuteness of detail and the wealth of colour here given to English episodes and characters. But there is some scope for local