

## USEFUL BOOKS.

[STUDIES IN THE TEACHING OF HISTORY: By M. W. Keatinge, M. A., Reader in Education in the University of Oxford, London. Adam & Charles Black, 1910. The Mac-Millan Company of Canada, Toronto. 232 pages, 4s. 6d.]

We so often find theories on teaching a subject dealt with authoritatively by men who are experts in that subject, but have no knowledge of teaching, that it is with a sigh of relief that we read the following footnote to one of Mr. Keatinge's pages:

"It may surprise those who have never taught, to hear that a boy, and by no means an exceptionally stupid boy, may fail after the summer holidays to remember not merely the details, but even the outline of the work done in a school study during the previous year."

"Ah!" we say, "here is no mere theorist, but some one who knows what teaching is, and who has been used to no ideal pupils, but to the every day boy or girl whom we ourselves have to teach," and we set ourselves with more confidence to read what he has to say on the teaching of history.

Mr. Keatinge does not ignore the objections that have been made to the value of history as a school subject: that history is of no use as "a means of education;" that it does not exercise the observation nor train the thinking powers of the student; that "it tends to become vague, desultory or didactic." Nor does he say that it is an easy matter to find and to use methods that will put history on a level as an educational subject, with mathematics or natural science. He speaks of "the well justified feeling that a subject in which the work has to be done for the boy by the teacher, which in the long run resolves itself into either listening to interesting matter or learning by heart; which is, in short, a soft option, is unsuited to be a main study for boys of a certain age."

"It is, however," he goes on to say, at the end of his opening chapter, "by no means certain that history is of this nature or need be taught in this way, and it is clear that if the subject is of first rate importance, the problem of method deserves serious attention. It is in the belief that for purposes of culture no other subject can approach history that the following pages have been written."

As to the value of the subject, the writer prizes history as "an introduction to the world of human nature."

"By bringing the learner into contact with civilizations and societies unlike his own it lessens race and class prejudice. In its chronological aspect it introduces us to the gradual development of civilization in time. In all these and in other directions the value of history is difficult to overrate, and impossible to express in a few words." Comparing it

with natural science "we are told that science trains to observation and to inference as does no other subject. But it is notorious that men who observe well in one field, and who draw sound inferences from their observations, may be unobservant and unsound of judgment in another."

\* \* The attention paid to a formal training in science is no excuse for neglecting to give a similar training on the side of humanity."

The question, Mr. Keatinge says, is this: "How can history be made into a real training school for the mind?" and this question he goes on to answer by a number of definite directions, freely illustrated by material from his own class teaching. He deals fully with the use of "Documents," and it is this part of the book that we feel will be of the greatest use to our teachers. Extracts from "original sources" have been made so accessible by the issue of many cheap editions for school use, that no teacher can be at a loss where to turn for them. Many teachers, we are sure, would gladly make use of them, if they knew how to do it in a really practical way. And such a way is admirably set forth in the chapters on "Documents and Method" and "Documents as Atmosphere."

For instance, to a class studying the reign of Richard II, an extract is given from Froissart's account of the Peasants' Revolt, and they are required to write down everything that the extract tells them about the author:—

"The points that a boy may reasonably be expected to get hold of are the following:—

1. The writer was contemporary.
2. He seems acquainted both with England and other countries.
3. He appears to know the situation in England very well.
4. He seems to be on the side of the upper classes.
5. But it at the same time sympathetic with the rebels.

Each statement is supported by a phrase or sentence quoted from the extract. A number of such exercises, varying in difficulty, are given, and many teachers who do not use them with a class will find them of immense help in their own study and preparation.

A very useful chapter is that on "Concrete Illustration," from which we quote,

"For young boys legislation and religious changes tend to be the most stubborn of abstractions. And yet there is nothing abstract or intangible about legislation for those who are brought into contact with it. An increase in the income tax is not in the least abstract to the boy who is told that for him and his brothers it means a fortnight less at the seaside. For the boy the concrete is the small human detail, and if we can show in this detail the effect that legislation