

The Teaching of History in Superior Schools.*

By ERNEST SMITH.

There is perhaps no subject in the authorized course of study which gives the Teacher a wider scope in his work than History; and there is no subject which is capable of greater neglect on the part of the teacher or of less benefit to the pupil if treated in a loose, slipshod fashion.

A glance at the official reports of recent examinations shows that the average number of marks gained by the pupils attending our superior schools is very low. Does this encourage us to go on teaching the subject, or does it show a lamentable deficiency? I am afraid that very few of our pupils have the slightest idea of what the words Canadian History should mean to them.

To the young pupil they not unfrequently present a picture of tomahawks, scalping-knives, a tree to which a poor victim is tied and a yelling crowd of red men: To the senior pupil they are generally associated with poring over a thick red book, the prettiest part of which is the cover; the only useful part the index; and the comic part the absurd illustrations dotted here and there so as to make the already uninteresting letter press positively incomprehensible. How often does it occur to any pupil that his life and character are perhaps forming a part of some future history of the province or township in which he lives? Yet, in this fact, lies the key to successful teaching, for as Freeman has so well said "History is past Politics, politics is present History". We may present a class of pupils for examination in History: and they may give a long string of events with exact dates: they may recite in their order the names of all the Sovereigns from Egbert to Victoria: they may be able to give the chief provisions of all the important treaties: but it does not follow that they know anything of History. They may be only so many human parrots with good memories. I am sure we all realize the advantage of a good memory and the necessity for being able to place events in their proper order: but, while we remember this it is necessary to bear in mind also that History *includes*, rather than consists of these elements. We must of course introduce our pupils to the Court, the Parliament and the battle-field, but we must not forget that we do this in order to show them the nation. When a boy can tell me that the rebellion of 1837 was the result of an unjust system of government, that the people were treated with contempt by the family compact: that representation of this condition of things was made to the Imperial Parliament: that the Imperial Parliament did not see fit to interfere, when he can further explain that

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