

The Proper Teaching of History

A Most Important Factor in the Training of the Future Citizen.

[A paper read before the Northumberland County Teachers' Institute, at Chatham, N. B., October 15th, 1909, by Henry Harvey Stuart of Newcastle. Principal of Douglastown Superior School.]

In emphasizing the great importance of the proper teaching of history, both as a separate study and as correlated with geography, I do not attempt to minimize or in any way detract from the value of other subjects of the curriculum. Arithmetic, algebra and bookkeeping, manual training, physics chemistry and agriculture each provide good training for the mind and furnish the student with knowledge of the greatest value in his after life. The work of geometry and logic in developing and strengthening the reasoning faculty cannot be overestimated. The humanizing effect of the study of history, which, by showing the intimate relationship between animal and vegetable life, prepares the mind for the early and permanent absorption of the main principles of the theory of Evolution, is an irresistible recommendation for that branch of education. That physiology and hygiene must be taught goes without saying, and so with English, grammar, composition and cognate studies. The acquisition of Latin, in order to more thoroughly understand our own tongue, is useful if the pupil has the time to spare; and the learning of some foreign language such as the richly endowed speech of France or Germany and the commercially profitable one of Spain, is highly desirable. But to lay in the student's mind the foundation of good citizenship and to adequately equip him or her for the proper discharge of political duties and the satisfactory solution of urgently pressing problems of a social, industrial and moral nature, the student must be well grounded in the history, past and present, of his own country and also have an intelligent knowledge of the great historical crises in the other important countries of the world. The success with which we are to develop our national resources and mould our national destiny depends more than upon anything else upon the value of the education which our boys and girls receive in the public schools, and especially upon the carefulness with which they are trained in history.

When a child comes to school, at five or six years of age, he already knows a certain amount of history, quite enough to serve as a foundation for future instruction. He knows much about himself and his own family and a great deal about his neighbors. Taking what the child already knows as a starting point, the teacher should take up the outlines of the history of the village. The pupil should be required to give in his own words, correctly and nicely, a description of his native place at the present time. He should then, by any means available, be led to discover facts concerning the earlier settlers and the aborigines and their present day representatives, if any. The manners and customs of the people at different periods should be discussed until the pupils intelligently understand them. In like manner, but more briefly, the neighboring villages should be treated.

When the pupil has had time to assimilate this instruction, the political institutions of the community should be considered, the school meeting coming first. Here is an excellent opportunity to initiate the child into the mysteries of representative government. The whole body of rate-payers are the fountain of authority. They, at their annual meeting, determine the amount of money to be raised by taxation. They elect a central committee of three—the trustees—to hold office for a definite period, and an auditor to see that the money is properly handled. The trustees appoint their own secretary, who does business for them and is directly responsible to them. In towns trustees are generally appointed, partly by the municipal government, and partly by the provincial government. If the children are thoroughly taught the system of district self government, they will, later on, experience no difficulty in understanding the principles of municipal, provincial and, finally, national government.

After the village has been properly discussed take up the county, teaching municipal government. Then consider the province, dealing with the origin, peculiar characteristics and other important facts concerning its different nationalities, laws, system of taxation, etc. Deal in same way with the Dominion; then, briefly, with the British Isles.

Side by side with the teaching of the history of the geography of the different sections should be taught, as the topography of a district has much to do with determining the character of its people.

There are many passages in the prescribed readers which are suitable for lessons in Hebrew history. These should be utilized for that purpose, because to the Hebrews we owe more than to any other people, the Greeks and Romans not excepted.

After this preparatory oral course, which will take about four years, the pupil is ready for the text book. And this is a critical period in the life of the youthful student. Very much depends upon the way in which he is allowed to use the text. Learning to recite the text by rote or merely memorizing names and dates is not studying history.

Although each recent change in our history texts has been an improvement, and the present texts are the best we have ever had, much of what they contain is necessarily so condensed that, unless the teacher, by explanations and additions, clothes many parts in a new dress and breathes into them the breath of life, the subject will be dry and uninteresting to the average pupil. History can be made intensely interesting to most pupils if the teacher knows his subject well and is himself interested in what he is trying to teach. Otherwise the history hour will be largely wasted.

The purpose of history is, or should be, to teach the rising generation to avoid the mistakes of their ancestors, and so be able to substantially improve the social, moral, industrial and political system handed down to them by their immediate progenitors. To this end, great care should be taken by the teacher to see that the pupil thoroughly understands the real condition of the common people in each period and sees the difference between them and their predecessors, on the one hand, and between them and ourselves on the other. British history is admirably adapted for this kind of teaching. The instructor can trace the development of Britain's inhabitants up from the time of the Stone Age, when our ancestors were savages of the North American Indian type; through the barbarism immediately preceding the Roman occupation, to the introduction of Roman civilization, which was followed closely by Christianity. The tribal system and the grim Druidical religion of the Celts; the strength, discipline and superior refinement of their Italian conquerors; and the merciless warfare with the English invaders, form extremely fascinating topics of study. The distinguishing characteristics of the Anglo-Saxon immigrants—their fierce religion, their riotous habits, piratical disposition, trial by ordeal, and other absurd customs, all accompanied, however, by an intense love of liberty and well-developed democratic principles of government which, in spite of the then practice of slavery, and the subsequent enslavement of the masses under the feudal system, finally gave the common people the feeling that they are the natural rulers of any community and the teachers a fine opportunity of instilling into their minds the noblest of all lessons—the lesson of freedom.

hatred of oppression, and desire to carry on the work of progress until every man and woman of the British race, and of the whole human family, has been guaranteed by law and custom an absolute equality of opportunity—an equality which is still, in far too many cases, a theory only—not an accomplished fact.

The overthrow of the old English system of land tenure by which the majority of the citizens held their land as freehold, which they were able to dispose of as they saw fit, and its replacement in the reign of William the Conqueror by the Feudal system, affords an opportunity for the teacher to contrast the old system with the Feudal and with the Celtic custom of each clan holding the land in common—a custom which survived in Ireland for centuries and in Scotland until the fateful battle of Culloden in 1746.

The resurrection of representative government, overthrown by the Normans in 1066, and partially restored by Simon de Montfort in 1265, is a most interesting and useful study. The growth of the Commons can be traced gradually through the reigns of the Plantagenets till its temporary overthrow by Edward IV., and its re-establishment in 1689, for the benefit of the upper portion of the middle class, the whole middle class becoming finally enfranchised by the Reform Bill of 1832.

The most interesting topic of all is the rise of the lower classes. Up to about 1085 chattel slaves, they became under the Feudal system serfs, liable to be bought and sold with the land, but not off it. Exigencies of the Hundred Years war, enabled many serfs to buy their freedom, but the effect of this concession was neutralized by the infamous Statute of Laborers in 1348, which forbade the free laborer (as in Mexico today) to ask higher wages or leave his parish in search of work, and empowered landowners to seize idle men and make them work for the wages set by the parliament, composed of these same land owners or others of their class. The first rising of the laborers took place in 1381, when their leaders, Wat Tyler, Jack Straw and Rev. John Ball, boldly demanded the abolition of serfdom and lost their lives for their pains, suffering vicariously, however, for their comrades, and, by their death, undermining the foundations of the hated Feudal system. Then, in 1450, comes the rising of Jack Cade and his fellow workmen, demanding free elections, and resulting in defeat and death for the leaders, but still a great gain for popular freedom. Then for hundreds of years the working class seemed quiescent and hopeless, but finally concessions were wrung from the rulers and, beginning with the reign of George IV., in 1820, the Statute of Laborers and many other anti-Labor laws, were repealed; workmen were finally allowed to organize themselves into unions; the Reform bills of 1832 and 1867 gave them some share in the government, the reversal of the Taff-Vale decision against Trades Unions in 1906 gave the Unions further legal standing; and the condition of the laborer was still more improved by the Old Age Pensions Act of 1909 and minor enactments.

In considering the religious upheavals and persecutions, the pupil should be led to see that, through all the centuries of religious strife, of bloody wars waged in the name of the Prince of Peace, of inhuman betrayals and fiendish tortures, Religious Liberty, in the British and many other dominions, has slowly emerged from the depths of the ocean of popular discontent, and now men are allowed to worship

as their consciences dictate. Concurrently with the gradual enfranchisement of the small landowners and better-paid workers, goes the decay of the rule of the great landowners represented by the House of Lords, the present political developments in Britain presaging an alliance of the middle class capitalists (Bourgeoisie) and the wage-working class (Proletariat) to wipe the House of Lords out of existence.

In studying British history, such important chapters of the contemporary history of other nations as the rising of the Gallic peasantry of France again their Frankish masters in the war of the Jacquerie in 1358; the French Revolution of 1789; the European revolutions of 1848; the Russian Revolution of 1904, still going on; the revolutions of 1908-1909 which resulted in the establishment of representative government in Turkey and Persia; and that which is peacefully transforming China into a new and formidable competitor of the western nations, should be referred to and given their proper place in the story of human progress.

Similarly should Dr. Hay's excellent little text on Canadian history be dealt with, special emphasis being placed upon the struggle of the common people against the Family Compact for equal political rights and the partial success of the popular side when Responsible Government (so-called) was obtained in 1848, leaving, however, the masses still handicapped by being required until 1896 to possess so much property in order to vote for members of parliament, and, to this day, in order to be eligible as candidates for city, town and county councils.

In noting the progress of settlement in Canada's vacant lands, the pupils' mind should be directed to the possible dangers of the intermingling of races of different colors and of the risks Canada should assume if she should sever her connection too soon with the rest of the Empire.

In the history of both Britain and Canada the educative value of the work of the best authors should not be overlooked. English literature is among the richest in the world. In teaching geography, the pupils' attention should be directed to the marked difference between the laws and customs of his own country and those of the country which is being discussed. For instance: In New Zealand and Australia, all the railways, telegraphs and telephones are publicly owned, education is free and compulsory, the old have pensions guaranteed, and women have the ballot. In Russia, the original home of the Doukhoborts, who by their communistic system of co-operative industry have become the richest agricultural settlement in Canada, the land of the peasantry is held in common as anciently in Ireland and Scotland. In Switzerland, they have Direct Legislation by the Initiative and Referendum. This means that no act of the Legislature of that country becomes law until the electors have had a chance to demand its submission to a popular vote (referendum) which, if taken, settles the question; and that the same proportion of the voters as is required to secure a referendum may prepare a law of their own and have it submitted to a general vote (initiative). In Belgium they have Proportional Representation whereby each political party is represented in parliament in the same proportion as its vote received stands to the total vote polled. For instance, a party securing 5, 10, 20 or 30 per cent. of the popular vote elects 5, 10, 20, or 30 per cent. of the members of parliament, whereas in Canada such a minority party might not elect any representatives. In Finland, women have not only the ballot on equal terms with the men, but also the right, exercised by a large number, of running for, and, if elected, taking their seats in parliament. In Austria, every registered voter must vote, under penalty if he neglect or refuse to exercise his franchise. In South Africa, where the non-whites are not allowed by law to vote, and in the United States of America, where they are practically prevented by custom from taking part in elections, the foundation is being laid for future states which may wreck those bodies politic. In Latin America the so-called Republics, of which men like Porfirio Diaz may be life-long dictators, are no improvement on the monarchies of Latin Europe, showing that a change of name does not necessarily imply a change in character.

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as their consciences dictate. Concurrently with the gradual enfranchisement of the small landowners and better-paid workers, goes the decay of the rule of the great landowners represented by the House of Lords, the present political developments in Britain presaging an alliance of the middle class capitalists (Bourgeoisie) and the wage-working class (Proletariat) to wipe the House of Lords out of existence.

In studying British history, such important chapters of the contemporary history of other nations as the rising of the Gallic peasantry of France again their Frankish masters in the war of the Jacquerie in 1358; the French Revolution of 1789; the European revolutions of 1848; the Russian Revolution of 1904, still going on; the revolutions of 1908-1909 which resulted in the establishment of representative government in Turkey and Persia; and that which is peacefully transforming China into a new and formidable competitor of the western nations, should be referred to and given their proper place in the story of human progress.

Similarly should Dr. Hay's excellent little text on Canadian history be dealt with, special emphasis being placed upon the struggle of the common people against the Family Compact for equal political rights and the partial success of the popular side when Responsible Government (so-called) was obtained in 1848, leaving, however, the masses still handicapped by being required until 1896 to possess so much property in order to vote for members of parliament, and, to this day, in order to be eligible as candidates for city, town and county councils.

In noting the progress of settlement in Canada's vacant lands, the pupils' mind should be directed to the possible dangers of the intermingling of races of different colors and of the risks Canada should assume if she should sever her connection too soon with the rest of the Empire.

In the history of both Britain and Canada the educative value of the work of the best authors should not be overlooked. English literature is among the richest in the world. In teaching geography, the pupils' attention should be directed to the marked difference between the laws and customs of his own country and those of the country which is being discussed. For instance: In New Zealand and Australia, all the railways, telegraphs and telephones are publicly owned, education is free and compulsory, the old have pensions guaranteed, and women have the ballot. In Russia, the original home of the Doukhoborts, who by their communistic system of co-operative industry have become the richest agricultural settlement in Canada, the land of the peasantry is held in common as anciently in Ireland and Scotland. In Switzerland, they have Direct Legislation by the Initiative and Referendum. This means that no act of the Legislature of that country becomes law until the electors have had a chance to demand its submission to a popular vote (referendum) which, if taken, settles the question; and that the same proportion of the voters as is required to secure a referendum may prepare a law of their own and have it submitted to a general vote (initiative). In Belgium they have Proportional Representation whereby each political party is represented in parliament in the same proportion as its vote received stands to the total vote polled. For instance, a party securing 5, 10, 20 or 30 per cent. of the popular vote elects 5, 10, 20, or 30 per cent. of the members of parliament, whereas in Canada such a minority party might not elect any representatives. In Finland, women have not only the ballot on equal terms with the men, but also the right, exercised by a large number, of running for, and, if elected, taking their seats in parliament. In Austria, every registered voter must vote, under penalty if he neglect or refuse to exercise his franchise. In South Africa, where the non-whites are not allowed by law to vote, and in the United States of America, where they are practically prevented by custom from taking part in elections, the foundation is being laid for future states which may wreck those bodies politic. In Latin America the so-called Republics, of which men like Porfirio Diaz may be life-long dictators, are no improvement on the monarchies of Latin Europe, showing that a change of name does not necessarily imply a change in character.

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