

according to the taste, the ability, or the acquirements of the writer. They may be told in a dry unpalatable style, or in a style luscious as a honeycomb. If the bare facts are placed merely in juxtaposition, like beads on a string, history is certainly the most unreadable of all reading matter; if, however, these facts are glued together by the proper cements, history may be made to possess all the fascinations of a novel.

The statesman might read a history of dry facts, because his object is to learn from the past how to administer the affairs of the future, and because he well knows that without a knowledge of such facts he can lay no claim to statesmanship. The philosopher might study such a book, because his aim is to find out the causes of these facts, and to observe the effects of which these facts are themselves the cause; but such a book would not be read by one out of a hundred of those who usually read history. Only urgent necessity could induce the majority to read such a book.

A readable history is one that not only communicates information, but also gratifies the taste, excites the feelings and pleases the imagination. The author is anxious to instruct, but he is not less anxious to please. To do the latter, a great deal depends, of course, on his style, diction, etc., his ability to enlist the sympathies of his readers, to carry them along with him, and make them feel as if really actors in the scenes described.

All this is specially true of a history intended to teach young persons. A history for them must be a book pleasant to read. Wanting the quality of readableness, it wants everything; if we wish to give young people a life-long disgust at history, we have only to set them down to an abridgement heavily packed with facts, names, and dates. The mind which has been compelled to bear such a load will soon let it drop like a burden of lead, and never lift it again.

Have we not put such books of history into the hands of our public school children? Have we not and are we not using the merest abridgments, heavily packed with facts, names and dates; the veriest dry bones of history, bleached and whitened, till not a particle of flesh is left—or, to vary the figure, we might say, the quintessence of history, undiluted by anything to thrill the heart, gratify the curiosity, or excite the imagination?

And if such is the character of our school histories, is not the study of them doing more harm than good? Are we not giving our pupils a life-long dislike to the whole subject, instead of cultivating in them a taste for it? The late Rev. Wm. McKenzie, being one day in my room, took up Emilia B. Edwards' little book, and after looking at it for a few minutes, threw it down, with this remark, "What nonsense to expect children to learn history from such a dry affair as that."

If we had more time to devote to the subject, or only a very general outline of it to master, we might, without a text-book, with the aid of the black-board, little talks, pleasant stories, and other devices, break up a number of the hard crusts, moisten them if you will, and deal them out in dainty morsels, easy of mastication, deglutition and digestion. But it takes longer time, in my opinion, to teach a subject without a text-book than with one. Without one, the bulk of the work falls on the teacher, and the value of drill, in a measure, is lost to the pupil. But the time that must be devoted to other subjects renders it impossible to do in this history. The entrance examinations, speaking comparatively, demand considerable proficiency in reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic, grammar, geography, composition, Fourth Book work, etc., and if much time is spent on history, it must be at the sacrifice of one or more of these subjects. Before history was made a compulsory subject in our public schools, I spent half an hour more time in arithmetic than I do now. Indeed, we are so much crowded with other subjects, that I sometimes feel half inclined to think

that it would be better to let history drop out altogether, or, at most, to retain it only to a very limited extent.

Many parents, I know, disapprove of it, and think their children's time would be spent to better purpose in other subjects. Some educationists condemn it as a public school study, on the ground that the mere facts of history, without the general laws which they teach, are of no account, while the philosophy of history is too deep for immature minds. Professor Bain contends that history is a subject proper only for the University. It is, to say the least of it, a debatable point.

No more outline of the subject, however, will meet the requirements of the entrance examinations. We must come down to particulars, and select facts from the reign of every king and queen that has ever reigned in England. For proof of this take the following question from the July paper of 1877; "Edward III, my lords, had seven sons, and so on." After naming them all with their titles, the question is put: "Name in order the kings that reigned between Henry III and Henry VIII, and state from which of these seven sons each was descended." This question embraces eight kings and their descents, and requires a pretty exact knowledge of details to answer it. The examiner, no doubt, would smile at the audacity of such an insignificant mortal as I finding fault with his questions; nevertheless, I venture to say that such questions show a great lack of judgment in what may be expected from fourth-class pupils in our public schools. Nor is this question a solitary one. Any person acquainted with the entrance papers knows that many such might be cited. Then to show that we must travel over the whole length and breadth of English history, yes, and Canadian too, take the following two questions: 1st. Tell how the Roman Conquest of England was brought about, and what were the principal changes effected by it? 2nd. When did Queen Victoria come to the throne, whom did she succeed, and what have been the principal events in the history of Canada during her reign? The first of these questions takes us back to the middle of the century before Christ, the second brings us to the present. Is it reasonable, I ask, taking everything into consideration, to expect fourth-class pupils in ungraded schools to answer questions covering the whole extent of English and Canadian history, and embracing so many minute details? I, for my part, answer with a most emphatic no.

There is another very important consideration: We have no special text-book, guide, or standard for either examiner or teacher. Now, the mass of facts is so great that a selection of some kind or other must be made, and there being no special guide, every one is left pretty much to himself to make his own selection. But no two persons will think alike on the same subject, and consequently no two persons will make the same selections. Examine any number of different histories, even the most condensed, and you will not find any two of them agree. How many would fix on the eight kings and their descents as an important question? I, for one, though I had canvassed the whole domain of English history, would never have marked it so. Take men holding different religious creeds, or men holding different political opinions, and see how widely they differ from each other in their views of the importance of historical facts; and that too even in prominent events, such as the Reformation, Restoration, Revolution, etc. The consequence of all this is, that every teacher drills in what he deems important, and every examiner selects what he deems important and it may be the two classes of facts are wide as the poles from each other. Consequently our pupils will sometimes succeed very well, and at other times though equally well prepared, almost totally fail; their success or failure depending in a great measure on the class of facts selected by the examiner, and the class of facts in which they have been drilled.

Now, in view of what we have said, it may be asked, what do we