

History, and Its Use.

Everything must have a beginning, and profane history, like all other branches of learning, began somewhere in the remote past, how and when we know but little. The earliest records are but chronicles of the bald facts. It is only recently that history has received any special attention. Modern history in Europe began with the romance. The earliest historical production in England, of which we have a record was in the form of a poem called "Layamon's Brut."

This appeared about the year twelve hundred, and was a chronicle of British events from the time of the Roman invasion till the close of the seventh century. A little later about the time of the Norman conquest, another historical record called the "Saxon Chronicle" was published. As history advanced still farther the writers strove to please the fancies and emotions.

A true historian will picture the spirit and character of the age in perspective, as it were; and in the study we should have brought before our minds the place in which the event occurred, together with the immediate surroundings. The period in which it took place will show the relation it sustains to the

previous ages. In the record of a battle in ancient history, we should not expect the same training of military forces, nor the weapons of war that are used at the present time, nor should we expect the same skill in choosing points of attack as we should in times of greater knowledge and progress. The same thing is true of almost any, I may say all, of the departments of history, whether we are studying the government of a country, the social laws, manners and customs, or the causes and effects of any particular time. The governments, laws, and customs keep pace with the people and change, as they change, to meet their wants and needs. Along with the time and place we should think of the causes of a reform or a war, as well as the persons associated with the particular incidents or movement. Around these should be clustered the more interesting details, to give vividness to the scene; afterward the result may be given and its effect and influence on the important questions of the day.

Ours is an age of progress and competition, and the study of history, like many of the newly discovered sciences, is advancing in importance and growing in favor with the

people. But we still have the discrepancies of history with which to contend. If we could weave the works of several historians together, we might get a nearly perfect history of the whole. Taking one, like Thucydides, who was a great story-teller, and Hume, who always strove to prove his statements, with Macaulay, who was proficient in representing character, and we should have a very good record.

History is told by fiction and by facts, the facts give us the principles to be found underlying all history, and from the abstract truth we gather our knowledge. We get but comparatively little absolute truth; as a history of the past must generally be taken from the testimony of others. In the first place no two people who behold the same thing, will relate it in just the same way; for no two persons see a thing from the same standpoint, one will emphasize one part, the human element perhaps, another will dwell upon the intellectual, or others will illustrate the social, patriotic, or governmental features, agreeing only in the more essential points. So we find in the details of history many imperfections which must of necessity exist. Further than this the greater part

of the testimony must be taken second hand, which makes the possibility of obtaining accurate truth far more difficult; still it is these details which fix the truth in our minds, and we must not be confined too closely to the bare facts, if we would interest and stimulate the young mind to further study. If a happy mean between the facts and the historic novel could be found the interest and progress of the study of history would be increased many fold. To the teacher we must look for a remedy for the difficulty; which might be obviated by the interspersions of lectures on the subjects under discussion in connection with the text book, which contains the simple facts. This system which has been tried in Germany, has been found very satisfactory. Again, in the study of history we cannot understand the special until we have some knowledge of the general history of the country, then in order to understand the history of any particular incident, of a movement, nation, or age, we must know something of the general surroundings and their relations, and then we shall be prepared to take up the study of a particular period.

Our relish for history is much of it

due to the sympathy or likeness to our own experiences or something within us. The allusions to the deeds and the records of brave men in defending their home and country forms a very interesting portion of history; and meets with the approval of the patriotic sentiment which we all possess. Here we learn of the heroic acts of warriors and soldiers in defending and preserving our national liberty; and the struggles of individuals, peoples, and nations, for the protection of their rights; who can fail to be influenced as he studies the character and spirit of the previous ages?

Our judgments are improved in the study of history; from the many facts or incidents we must select the few that are the most probably true. We find here a similarity to our every day life in which we are constantly making inferences and judging of acts, when perhaps we do not understand the act itself; and so we draw our conclusions, and are governed ourselves accordingly, and the more correct our judgments the more successful we shall be in practical life. The importance of an act will depend upon the particular point at which it is enacted, for example, the success or defeat of a battle often depends upon one commander or general.

Recall, if you please, General Burgoyne's surrender, in the battle at Stillwater, in which the fatal shot aimed at General Morgan's men caused the British General, Frazer, to fall, and so decided the victory for the Americans.

In the study of history we must study humanity, and though the principal actors in any movement are often spoken of in a general way, yet the individuality of men exerts a great influence for good or ill. Think of the results of the efforts of individual men in conquests and victories. Napoleon will long be remembered for his great achievements in France and the adjoining countries; while the influences and memory of Alexander, the Great, are due to his great conquests and successes along Western Asia. The impulse given to the world through the discovery of America can never be estimated. It aroused the people to new activities and new thoughts, led the way to freedom for the oppressed and opened a field of usefulness and independence of which Columbus never dreamed. It would be interesting to trace the career of Washington, Lincoln, and many others whose influence on the side of right in our own day will always be felt.

Each one exerts an influence, and so long as the lives of such men are recorded they will go on speaking, down through the ages.

Many of the themes for literary productions have sprung from a knowledge of the history of past times. Writers of poems have received their inspiration from an exploit or noble action, a great many of the essays, criticisms, biographies and scientific researches, would be lost to us, either in the preservation of their records, or the subject matter on which they are founded, were it not for history. In regard to science history tells us of the advancement of our own time over the previous ages. The discoveries that have been made, the theories and laws that have been established, and one nation may learn and profit by the science and arts of other countries. We know but little of ourselves, it is by learning of what others have known or recorded, and by our own experience that we gain a knowledge of the material world. Much that is useful and valuable is obtained in searching the histories of previous times. It is said that like causes will produce like effects, and what we have observed to be the cause of a reform, war, or movement of any kind in the case

of one nation or country, may in our own time under similar circumstances produce similar results; so by a knowledge of past states and conditions we may form an adequate idea of what will follow in our own time.

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