THE TEACHING OF HISTORY.

I. In Preparatory Schools.

The teaching of history in preparatory schools to-day is complicated by at least two difficulties. First, by the comparatively short time we are able to give the subject in our already overloaded curriculum. The small boy must have a good grounding and fair start in Latin, English, Mathematics, and French if he is to do himself credit at, and reap advantage from, his public school. If he is to get a scholarship there, we must probably teach him Greek, and now they threaten us with science too! Secondly, there is the trouble, no inconsiderable one in these days, of getting uniformity of method and a progressive course of teaching throughout the school.

Although no subject perhaps has increased more in importance in the course of the last twenty years in the public schools, it is very difficult for the preparatory school master to give a greater place to the teaching of history in his time-table, no matter how much he may wish to do so; and this is mainly because a boy's knowledge or ignorance of the subject does not, as a rule, affect his place when he enters his public school *vid* the common entrance examination; his form is settled chiefly in regard to his Latin papers, therefore it seems unwise to take time from the latter subject to give it to history, which apparently does not count. Neither can we give less to mathematics or French if the average boy is to do those papers even fairly well; the Geography paper must at least be attempted, and some schools, Harrow in particular, insist on a boy showing some knowledge of the Scriptures.

On the other hand, in scholarship examinations the English papers are often of great importance. Harrow gives, I think, at least one scholarship to the candidate who shows promise in history, and sets an extra paper on that subject. Where, as at Eton, the history questions are included in the general English paper, the boy who is able to answer these accurately and well scores tremendously: first, because he has these answers at least

to his credit, even if the rest of the paper does not suit him particularly well, as may quite well happen to the moderately well read and informed small boy, general knowledge being such a very wide subject. Secondly, he is guided to a certain extent as to which questions to choose, always a difficult matter.[1] Therefore, it appears to be well worth while to give as much time as possible for history to the clever boy; but there is less encouragement to do the same for the average or even stupid child, although one feels that the latter might really benefit more by a good grounding in history and extra training in the reading and writing of English than his more fortunate brother, who is apt to pick up such knowledge naturally in the course of reading and conversation.[2]

In most preparatory schools the boys in the upper forms work, as a rule, from 30–32 hours a week. Classics and mathematics claim considerably more than half this time, in some schools quite two-thirds; that remaining has to be divided between Divinity, French, and English subjects, which last include, of course, general knowledge, geography, essay-writing, and some knowledge of English literature and poetry, as well as history. It has been suggested that some statement of the hours and periods we are able to give here to English, more particularly to history, may be interesting; it must, however, be understood that we do not pretend that our division of time is necessarily the right one, any more than that the methods explained later on are exempt from criticism; but we have arrived at our system after some years of careful thought and experiment, and are fairly well satisfied with the results.

In the classical sixth only four and a half to five hours a week can be spared for English subjects.[3] These are divided into six periods of about three-quarters of an hour each, of which three are given to history, one to geography, and one to the reading and writing of essays (some on historical subjects) and to English

[1] For instance, at Eton eight questions are set of which the boy must answer five; the first, an essay, is obligatory, and if he chooses two on history, he will probably not have much trouble in finding two more that he can do among the remaining five.

[2] It is a question whether the dull boy without linguistic or mathematical ability would not gain more in education if he were allowed to give more time to the history and literature of his own country, and spend less struggling with Latin sentences and syntax, which are often quite beyond his powers of assimilation, and leave him hopelessly bored, so that he gives up trying and loses all interest in his work. But this we must leave in the hands of our headmasters. Of course we do not want early specialisation, but the stupid boy does have rather a dull time of it under our present system of education.

[3] Navy candidates and modern side boys in a parallel form get six extra periods given equally to extra French, Geography, and English reproduction, while the others are learning Greek.

literature and poetry, the last as far as possible in connection with the period of history being studied during the term. The sixth and remaining English lesson is taken up by general papers which are set one week and answered in class the next, but prepared out of school hours. Four or five questions are given every week, and always include at least one on general history. These entail a certain amount of reading and research if they are to be properly answered, and while on the subject I should like to insist that the boy should look things up for himself. Tell him where and how to look, what to read, give him plenty of good reference books, but don't do all his work for him With a week in which to prepare his answers and to make notes, he should do the paper fairly well, and he gradually acquires a large amount of diverse and useful information which opens up fresh channels of interest for him in all directions, and he remembers it all the better for having taken some personal trouble to acquire it These answers are usually written, and teach the boys to state their facts briefly and clearly; occasionally they give them orally, but they are not allowed to rely on doing so, otherwise some of the lazy members would not trouble to look everything up, but would rely on getting asked something they know.

Two of the three history lessons go to the period being learnt during the term, the third is used for revision and questions and answers on history outside the afore-mentioned period. After the scholarship and common entrance examinations are over—that is, during the last fortnight or three weeks of the term—the boys often read quickly through one of Shakespeare's historical plays, taking parts, giving up a few history lessons to it, as well as the weekly literature class, and not stopping for elaborate explanations or notes which divert their attention from the story. Frequently the class selects a scene and produces it at a Saturday night concert for the benefit of the rest of the school; a cupboard full of acting-clothes supplying the necessary costumes. In the same way all the classes often themselves dramatise scenes from English history for the benefit of their friends, and murder Becket (with the aid of much red ink), scourge Henry II., "turn the loaf" for the betrayal of Wallace, and try Charles I. with evident enjoyment.

The fifth forms get four lessons a week in history, three in geography, and two in English composition and reproduction, one for reading and literature; no general papers are set, but one history lesson a week is given to the writing of answers to six or seven questions set the week before, to their verbal correction,

and to the setting of new ones. These questions are contained in very few words; the answers are easily corrected in class, but they entail a certain amount of reading and trouble, as the specimen which follows will show.[1]

1. Whose ship was the *Royal Sovereign*?

2. There were two Mary Tudors. Name their husbands.

3. Name (*a*) an English battle fought in a snowstorm; (*b*) an English Prince who was drowned; (*c*) a Prime Minister who was murdered.

4. Name a preacher who caused a stir in Anne's reign. Was he a Whig or a Tory?

5. "Roll up that map." What map? Who said it?

6. Against which Danish king did Alfred fight?

The younger boys have four history lessons, three geography, and four in English composition and dictation; the fourth form also look up a few easy questions in the same way as their elders, and they all learn some English poetry in class every day; no lesson is ever longer than three-quarters of an hour.

It will be found possible in this way to give an intelligent boy a sound groundwork and growing interest in his subject, particularly if he gets some help and guidance in his out-of-school reading and is provided with the right sort of books. It is delightful to see how quickly he develops a nice taste in literature and rejects rubbish; he only needs encouragement. If, for example, at the end of a history lesson on the Stuarts, the teacher will read a few pages from *Old Mortality* or *The Three Musketeers*, and leave off at any interesting place, the whole class will want to borrow the book, which will be read with avidity. *The Talisman*, *The White Company*, *Windsor Castle*, and *Westward Ho!* can all be read in connection with their respective periods, and plenty of similar books will suggest themselves. The great thing is to get interest awakened; the boys enjoy the story, and soon learn to distinguish fact from fiction.

We are all agreed that boys ought to be interested in the history of their own country, and that the subject is not to be treated as a sort of mental gymnastic course like Latin grammar; and it is very easy in these days of delightfully written and illustrated books to make the lessons pleasant and entertaining. But at the same time we must not lose sight of the fact that we want the boys to *know* the outlines of British history accurately and

[1] These questions were all set by the late Mr. Townsend Warner in the Harrow History Prize Competitions at different times. This competition, which is open to all Preparatory Schools, is now to be called "The Townsend Warner Prize Competition," and examined for by Mr. Marten in March every year.

well. Slipshod, careless answers, wild guesses at dates, and ignorance of all sequence of events are far too common, and are the evidence of a slack, sloppy habit of mind on the part of both teacher and pupil. The boy who was asked in the last common entrance examinations to state what he knew about Judge Jeffreys, and replied that "He was called the Bloody Assize," evidently had no idea of the meaning of the last word in his answer, and also was completely muddled in mind. Another reply that "he was a cruel judge who murdered a lot of people" is an instance of the sort of answer which should not be tolerated, and is the result of what may be called the vague method of teaching. It is so easy to spend the lesson in reading to the boys stories in which they are mildly interested. They are apt to remember quite well, for instance, that somebody "never smiled again," but who the gentleman was and the cause of his extreme gloom are matters to which they are entirely indifferent unless their teacher takes the trouble to make these facts important. We all know how difficult it is to teach a boy a thing which he half knows, and this is particularly true of history. Unless he gets a clear, broad outline when he is quite young and is taught to be accurate, he gets into a muddled state of mind out of which it becomes almost impossible to extricate him. Some teachers—we hope they are few—are content to give the boys a text-book and tell them to learn so much while they read the paper or write letters, after which they ask dull questions relating solely to facts. This method often produces worse results than the vague one, as the boy becomes unspeakably bored and actively dislikes his history lessons.

Another method, rather an old-fashioned one, is to let the boys read some history book aloud in turn before catechising them at the end of the chapter, but this plan has several disadvantages. The effort of reading distracts the mind of the young boy from the matter in hand; few of them read really well aloud; dull and monotonous reading will cause the attention of the others to wander, and when a really bad or nervous reader begins they all become horribly alert to catch him tripping, and have no idea of the meaning of what he is trying to produce. Of course, boys must learn to read aloud, but not in their history lesson.

Perhaps the most satisfactory method is for the teacher himself to read some book suited to the age and intelligence of the class, stopping to explain words, emphasise important points, and ask questions. These should be of two sorts, the first bearing simply on what he has been reading, to make sure that the boys

are all attending and to catch the dreamer napping; and the second testing their reasoning powers. For instance: "Why did such a person do such a thing? Was he right or wrong?" Any definite point, such as a date, on which the class do not agree can be looked up in a text-book which every boy should have to hand; we use Carter's *Outlines* here. There will be a scramble to find the place first and to prove their neighbours in the wrong, and they will remember it far better than if they had been told it.

Sometimes they may write their answers, and these should be short and concise, containing some definite information; the elder boys can write short biographies and explanations, but for the younger ones questions which can be answered in two or three words are better; they are learning to write English in other lessons. The late Mr. Townsend Warner, who examined for at least twelve years in the Harrow History Prize Competition, told me that he believed in the above type of question for little boys, and he was a past-master in the art of setting them in such a way that the well-read or well-read-to boy was at an advantage over his rival who crammed from text-books for the examination. Let the boy learn to write down what he knows first; style and power of expression will come later, particularly if he only reads and listens to well-written books.

In this connection I do not think it is often realised that children understand and appreciate books when read aloud which they could not deal with themselves. For instance, most boys here, except, of course, the babies, thoroughly enjoy Green's *Short History*, more particularly the chapters on the Normans and early Angevin kings and on Puritan England. One youth of eleven remarked to me that it was "the best book for making up plays" he knew, and I have heard them reeling off long sentences from it in some of their historical dramatic productions. Here we use several books in the top forms: Warner and Marten's *Groundwork* perhaps most just now; Fletcher's *Introductory History* is a great favourite too, particularly the first two volumes. Every boy above the two lowest forms possesses a Carter, and directly he is old enough and interested enough to want a bigger and fuller book of his own, he can have one. Some collect nearly all those mentioned in this article before they leave, and do not regard them merely as lesson-books but as valued private possessions.

The lower sixth are being taught from Meiklejohn's *History* just now, one of the fifths has Warner's *Brief Survey* read to them; in other classes we use the Cambridge History Readers,

which are excellent and very well graded; while Mrs. Synge's *Stories of the English* and H. E. Marshall's *Our Island Story* are delightful for the smallest boys.

In the top forms we generally take four terms to cover the whole period of British history; the middle school get through it with less detail in three, and the little boys cover the ground more rapidly and therefore more frequently. All the younger ones spend more time in proportion over the earlier period and touch very lightly on the Hanoverians, as constitutional history is beyond them. We try as far as possible to fix their attention in each age on the most important event or policy of that time without worrying them with details which do not affect the main issues; while at the same time we try to tell them something of French and Scottish history which does affect these issues. It must be admitted that tables of genealogy are dull things, but if instead of learning them from a book the boy makes his own in class from information given him from time to time, he will rather enjoy working out the relationships, and will be very much pleased to find he has done it correctly when he compares it with the table in his book.

As the boys grow older a system of note-books will be found excellent—at least, we have tried it here with great success. No one may have one (so the thing is a privilege) until he can write fairly well and cleanly. Then he gets a stiff-covered exercise-book, quite different from his class-books and private property, and he begins by writing in order the names of the Kings and Queens of England, setting two pages aside for each with dates under each name. Then half-way down the page he writes down an event in that particular reign; he generally chooses a battle if possible. As he goes up from class to class he fills up these pages with further details as he learns them about wives, children, laws, parliaments, and important men and events, till he has a fairly comprehensive synopsis written by himself. He also copies in genealogical tables which he has made, sketch-maps of Scotland, France, Ireland, and the American colonies. These may be coloured. Three or four pages are set aside for nicknames, with their owners opposite; there is a list of important archbishops—Canterbury on one page, York and St. Andrews on another. Prime Ministers and Justiciars have a page to themselves, and we like to have a list of famous ships with their owners; regiments get attention in some note-books with their dates, and names of the men who raised them. In the same way pages are set aside for notable sayings with their contexts and approximate

dates. All this is done gradually out of school hours, at odd times on wet afternoons, etc. The books are examined from time to time, suggestions made, and prizes for the best awarded in divisions. The boys can get help where and from whom they like, but everything must be verified from a *book* before it is written down. The note-book becomes a cherished possession, and is often very useful later on.

It is very usual in these days, and incidentally a great saving of trouble to themselves, for teachers to maintain that historical dates are dull and unnecessary for boys and can be learnt later on. Nothing is more untrue or misleading; they never are learnt later except with great trouble and annoyance, and are then often valueless. To try to teach a boy history without dates seems rather like building a house without putting up a scaffolding. We want to give him a broad outline with a chain of important events if he is to look upon history as a whole, and the dates are useful pegs to help him on his way. Let him learn, as a matter of course, the date of each important event as he is told about it, otherwise he will have no idea where he is, and will get dreadfully muddled and produce horrible chronological blunders later on. It is not a bad plan to let the little boys repeat frequently the dates they have already learnt during the last five or ten minutes of their history lesson; they will enjoy standing up in a row and taking each other up and down. The element of competition prevents their being bored by constant repetition, while the change of position and train of thought is welcome to the mind and body of the restless small boy. A scholar of his public school, a boy of seventeen, told me lately that he had never forgotten what he had learnt in this way as quite a little child.

With this method of training all necessity for learning lists of dates later is removed, and the boy will possess a sequence of events in his mind and will be able always to fix on an approximate date for a minor event.

Mr. Grant Robertson, who examines here every year, and has kindly given us much valuable help and advice, always insists on the value of accurate and definite knowledge for young boys. I hope, therefore, I may be forgiven for urging the need for accuracy so persistently. It should not militate, as some people believe, against interest, if the teacher is ready to let the boys see that *he* is both keen and accurate and ready to answer intelligent questions, though this sometimes entails a good deal of extra work on his part; the boys appreciate the fact that he is taking trouble too. They think none the less well of him if

he says frankly that he is not sure of a point they have raised but will "look it up and tell them to-morrow." We cannot expect to get history specialists to teach our little boys in these days; the public schools want all there are left who are not making history themselves in France or on other battlefields; but we must have teachers who are enthusiastic on the subject and willing to work with their pupils. No boy ever works for a master who does not!

In teaching history, as in other subjects, there must be a certain amount of spadework done, but competition keeps the interest going at first till the boy gets a pride in his own definite knowledge and is willing and ready to work to add to it. Little boys are delightfully keen; if they are not, it is their master's fault for boring them; he has no excuse when teaching such an interesting subject. It may be considered that I have insisted too much on his responsibility, but there can be no doubt that the horrid results one sees in common entrance papers are brought about by careless and bad teaching, and headmasters are not altogether free from blame, in so much that they are often ready to hand over the history to a games master whom they do not consider capable of dealing with anything else (the poor young athlete would probably teach the juniors their Latin grammar extremely well and patiently, remembering his own early struggles!). It is not fair to expect our public schools to produce history scholars if we send them boys badly grounded, with all interest in the subject destroyed; better to leave it alone altogether and let them begin it there.

Let us get the best teacher we can for history, and let him take the subject right through the school as far as possible and teach it to the boys as a logical and interesting sequence of events, and not as a jumble of dry facts. In this way it will train the reasoning power, exercise the memory, develop the intelligence, besides being a valuable medium for teaching a boy to express himself and reproduce what he knows in good, simple English. Apart from all educational considerations, if, as some of us believe, "the future of the world lies in the hands of the Anglo-Saxon race," is it not of the first importance that our boys should learn, while their hearts are so susceptible and their minds so receptive, to love and understand the great heritage to which they are born; and how shall they do this better than by being taught faithfully and sympathetically the history of the British nation?

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