

# HISTORY

JULY, 1917.

BOARD OF EDUCATION,  
WHITEHALL, LONDON, S.W. 1.  
*June 7th, 1917.*

DEAR MRS. GREEN,

You have asked me to write a few words which may serve to encourage the Historical Association to persevere in its work, despite the difficulties and discouragements of the present time. I need hardly assure the members of the Association of the great importance of preserving the continuity of learned effort in this country. It will indeed be a disaster if any society formed for a learned and scientific purpose, and discharging at the same time a valuable office in popularising the results of historical research, should intermit its activities by reason of the war, because threads once broken are not easily tied together again.

Now in the matter of the Historical Association, I cannot affect to speak with impartiality. John Grote, a greater man than his brother, the Greek historian, once expressed regret at the tendency of all studies to run to History, and I suppose it is true that the introduction of the historical method into all our great studies is calculated to blunt the keen edge of speculative contrarities. But, on the other hand, everybody must admit that the historical method of treating a subject is the only scientific method and that our ordinary education has suffered a very great deal by its wholly inadequate recognition of the historical basis of all study.

Boys and girls are supposed to learn French. They dip into a French Grammar, they read a few fragments of French literature—perhaps, if they are lucky, they are afforded some exercises in the colloquial use of the language—but how many boys and girls who are supposed to have learnt some French in our Secondary Schools have the faintest notion of the French people, of the *rôle* which the French nation has played in the history of

Europe, or of the general social structure of the country with whose language and literature they are presumed to have acquired some shadow of acquaintance? Even the teaching of Greek and Latin, which has long been the most effectively taught subject in our better Secondary Schools, has been unintelligently divorced from the study of classical antiquity in its broader aspects. To me it is inconceivable that the study of any literature should be intelligently pursued unless it is surveyed in the context of history. In this particular respect German education appears to me to have a distinct advantage over the system which prevailed in England until very recent times. I had some experience of teaching German Rhodes Scholars at Oxford. They were not brilliant men; upon the side of linguistic scholarship they were decidedly inferior to the best products of our English public schools, but they did appear to me to have been given a more intelligent comprehension of the main outlines of classical antiquity and to have a firmer grasp of its essential features than English boys of similar aptitudes would naturally derive from their school training.

We are, however, just beginning to make a marked improvement in our historical teaching in the schools. The effect of the Modern History Schools at Oxford and Cambridge and in the newer Universities is beginning to be felt. Specialist History masters are being appointed, the level of historical attainments shown in History Scholarship Examinations is steadily rising, and the formation of the Historical Association itself is a sign of this quickened and most beneficial interest. The short and practical bibliographies, so carefully compiled by the Association, will be of great help to teachers all over the country, and will assist the formation of good historical libraries in our schools.

One other point. The catastrophe in which the world is involved is very largely due to the vague generalizations of rhetorical but ignorant persons with respect to the character, intentions, and probable action of foreign countries, and it is only to the diffusion of a sound knowledge of modern European history through the community that we can look for an improvement in the quality of the judgments which we pass upon the complicated course of international affairs.

Yours sincerely,

H. A. L. FISHER.