

If no man is ready for the work, may not one of such women write a new elementary history of the British Islands as a whole, apart from politics, for the use of the illiterate professional classes and others? Before the labours of the men who write at length with profuse learning on abstruse subjects will meet with any intelligent appreciation, it is necessary that such a history should be written, and it is also necessary for the furtherance of our political ideals.

CHAPTER XXIV

CONCLUSION. A FEW OBSERVATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

I END by making a few suggestions as to historical study on which others may pass criticism.

The value of a trained memory, and the extraordinary powers of the memory when trained, are not sufficiently appreciated in our day. Our education, even in the mathematics, is carried on so entirely by the use of books and paper that little encouragement is given to the balancing of facts or figures accumulated in the mind, leading to a mental indigestion of food which may be followed by terrible results.

The value of the training of the memory does not merely consist in the housing of the material; the process of digestion is of far greater importance, and one which has a far more enduring effect than the mere acceptance of facts by reading. It is this which gives the great value to the training of the memory; the man can turn over in his mind the facts which he has remembered; they are his own and not another's; he can consider for himself their explanation; he can see them in their full bearing, and not merely as the written, perhaps casual, opinion of one party, to whose work, if he has relied on the writing, he must refer before he can so consider them; and by the more frequent use of his memory he can strengthen the powers of observation, the accuracy of thought, the grasp in the mind of the bearing of the facts digested.

This is an especially valuable assistance in the study of history, in which there may be a great mass of facts leading in many different directions, resting sometimes on very questionable authority, useless for any purpose unless the conclusions drawn from them can be formulated by weighing in the mind their different aspects.

At present we are so entirely given up to diffuse reading, for the most part foolish reading and vain repetitions, that very few men indeed, I believe, ever think out any political or historical question for themselves. They read either for the one or the other

what someone else has written about it, taking the written opinions of men who, like the monks of past times, were frequently anonymous, of whom they know nothing unless it is the name, men who very likely have not given any more consideration to the subject than the reader, or have merely compiled their facts from others who went before them. This want of mental responsibility for one's opinions is not only a pressing danger in our political life, but it is a symptom of the decay of a language and of our civilisation, a decay which comes when men cease to think for themselves.

I would suggest that geography is not sufficiently taught or studied. Without it, most facts of history are meaningless, and many lead to wrong conclusions. All histories should be accompanied by maps to illustrate the movements of peoples, the military campaigns, and the limits of the jurisdictions. I do not mean by maps those pictures in which all the Teutons are on one side of a painted line and all the Celts on the other, but maps showing the watercourses—the course, for instance, of the Clyde and the Forth—and the mountain ranges which form watersheds, such as the Grampians. Scottish history, even if it may satisfy the pride of the Lowlander, is imperfect and misleading without such assistance. The military movements of former times, the great march of William I. from the north into Wales, the movements of the armies in the

barons' wars of the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries, cannot be appreciated at all without some knowledge of the obstacles, such as swamps, rivers, and mountains, which confronted men in days when journeys were made on foot or on horseback, to say nothing of the movements of commerce which were dependent on them.

It would not be at all a bad thing if very elementary facts of geological formation assisted the knowledge of geography. It is especially of force in the history of Scotland and Ireland. If some such maps as those in Mr Edward Hull's *Physical Geography and Geology of Ireland* were inserted in histories, it might be easier to understand why the Pale remained where it was or shrank in one direction rather than another; why corn-growing Meath was so often raided on all sides; why Connaught only came under English rule in the reign of Elizabeth; it might even help to show why the people of East Ulster, apart from any matter of religion, have always separated themselves from the rest of Ireland and joined their own people in Western Scotland.

I would urge that, so far as may be possible, every reader of history should be instructed in what is known about the writers on whom he is to rely for facts, not only those who lived at the time, but those who followed them. It should be impressed on him that, although Brompton and such authorities as that "very

curious specimen of the apocrypha of the law," the *Mirror of Justice*, are discredited as authorities in these more critical times, it was not always so, and that many errors have passed from their pages into credited works now in use of which he must be wary. His attention should be called to the difficulty attendant on the obtaining of correct information in those days of slow motion, and the certainty that any story must have passed through many mouths before the original oral tradition dropped into the written form in the MS. from which the history is taken. It is not the amount of fact, but the conclusion which can safely be drawn from it, which is of importance.

Everyone who takes up history as a serious study ought to make himself acquainted with at least one of the great languages of the world, Latin, Greek, or a modern tongue, and one of the historical languages of the islands as well, Saxon or Irish or French or Welsh or Norwegian or Danish, with a view to applying the knowledge to the unlocking of the ancient dialects in which so much of our history is written. There are few workers and a large field to cover. The knowledge of languages so acquired could be used in addition in furtherance of commerce or even in the Foreign Office. Our ignorance of languages handicaps our people in every relation with other peoples.

Very few people ever get any further in the reading of history than the middle of the

seventeenth century. Most do not get so far. All the great deeds of our navy, all our greatness and good luck in expansion which has followed, all the history of the routes which commerce has taken in the past and may leave in the future, are hidden from the man who is being perpetually told by the politician that he is the ruler of a great Empire. Such study would be of immense value if an early and a late period (the times of Henry II. and Anne, for instance) were read together and contrasted.

A reference to the rise of the Italian republics and the history and persecution of the Jews might lead to a sympathetic understanding of that most necessary study for the historian—the sources of national wealth, and the changes in national finance. In this connection, some of the accounts of the king's household in times past would put a truer light on his position as sole manager of popular affairs and sole leader and guardian of the State, revealing an interesting development which could be traced down to our own time.

A study of legal matters would show the limitations to the king's authority by custom and the law courts, and their bearings on revolutions. It would show the student that the liberty which we have had has been won not half so much by fighting or by talking in Parliament as by judicial decision at the hands of judges who dared, in days of great difficulty

and under grievous temptation, to stand up for the only true liberty—the right to a fair trial before an impartial bench.

I urge that, when reading and when writing history of the past, we should cultivate humility in comparing ourselves with the men and women who fought and suffered in past times. It is doubtful if in any respect we have made any advance beyond the conditions of the Middle Ages, except in the one great matter of medical and mechanical appliances; we can move about the world much faster than was thought to be possible less than a century ago, and we can send thoughts and facts and news round the world in a few minutes. But few of us have the hardy frames of the men of the twelfth century; few of us, like the seventeenth-century lawyer, can rise to read at four in the morning. We have easier life, greater freedom from plague, artificial means of prolonging days; morally or mentally, it is doubtful if there is any change, at least for the better. It is easy to sneer at the great Duns Scotus, and to babble about angels dancing on the point of a needle. How many of the best minds of our day can command the clarity of expression, the logical thought, the reserve in use of forcible language, the bold reverence in treatment of the subject, of the author of *Cur Deus Homo*?

A just appreciation of the facts of past history and of their bearing on the conditions of the present will depend on our getting rid

of the aggravated assumption of superiority over all former times.

I have spoken throughout this book of the evil to historical study of accepting the monastic statements of the Anglo-Roman chroniclers without checking them and distrusting them. But I protest against the possible suggestion that anything I have said should be taken as reflecting on Christ's Holy Catholic Church, more especially that Reformed branch of it established in this kingdom, which represents to me in many respects the highest teaching of Christian morals to be found in the world.

It is the fashion for the ignorant to sneer at the National Church and to attribute to her neglect any lack of faith and any decay of morals. The National Church is a human institution, and has all the defects of a Catholic Church which holds the mean between the two extremes. Her faults and failings are ours, and at her best she stands for all that is best in us which we have learnt from her.

We cannot judge the mediæval Church by the standards of our own time, but we owe it nearly all the advance in civilisation which we have made. In a time when unceasing war was the normal condition of Europe, the Church always directed its efforts to widen the short intervals of peace; it enforced the sanctity of oaths and contracts, using all the penalties of the Church to safeguard them. It is to the unceasing efforts of the Church

that we owe any progress that we have made in this direction, and it would be the grossest ingratitude not to acknowledge her overpowering influence in awakening our moral sense, as well as our debt to her for progress in the arts and sciences.

But for that very reason the monastic writers—a class apart in the land, responsible only to an alien authority, judging all men's actions by the test of unquestioned obedience to the Roman discipline which was their strength, to the only power which intended a moral sense—are most unsafe and partial authorities to follow without a certain counter-check either for estimates of personal character, which they must always have judged by the relations to the Church, or for historical facts in matters where the king or other layman was in conflict with the views of the Church.

This becomes the more marked when the monasteries grow to be immensely wealthy and very worldly, when the monk, or more often the layman, with no more religion than a pheasant, masquerading under the tonsure as a religious, writes his accounts of the affairs of Church and Court from the idle gossip which he picked up in the streets or the antechamber.

In the hands of our modern historians, especially in the hands of churchmen, these accounts become doubly unsafe. It is due to the higher moral sense impressed by the great National Church that these most impartial

writers are only too apt to accept as truthful the monk's stories as the account of a religious man, without considering the strong bias under which they were written; whereas, for the reasons just given, though they are very necessary and in fact indispensable, it is not safe to trust the monk by himself without the exercise of common sense on the conditions under which he wrote, aided by every available check from without. Nothing is gained to religion or to morals by basing history on doubtful presentation of facts.

There is no truth in the idea that history can be made to revolve round any one personality or can be written from one side only. There is a plaintiff and defendant in every cause, and neither holds the whole of the truth. If you take the monastic view that one man in any age controlled affairs because he was unutterably bad or impossibly saintly, you lose sight of the causes, spiritual, physical, and commercial, which regulated the happenings of history.

The danger is still with us. It is not unlikely that in later days the history of these stirring times may be written round the personality of some one man.

Moreover, in early days, owing to poor means of communication, the single person, even if most exalted, was of far less importance than he now may be. The spiritual call of life which leads to events never follows the moral character of any one man. To take

such a position is to lose sight of all the lessons which history can teach us.

What can history teach us? As a training for the mechanical powers of the mind, for improving the qualities which require rigidity and narrowness of view, for strengthening the memory, for encouraging accuracy or concentration of thought, it is surely inferior to languages and mathematics. But in another direction, away from the mechanical operations of the intellect, it may have very great value. It can assist in forming a right judgment on matters of national importance about which we may learn lessons from the past, and it can encourage a broad and temperate outlook upon contemporary affairs. It can do more than this; if the history is read with a definite end in view, if the facts put before the reader be real facts, and he be warned against the distorted vision which is sure to accompany every contemporary presentation, the study of past history can lead the mind into a higher sphere, can bring it to a contemplation of hopes and plans for future social advantage, unselfish conceptions of human progress, dreams of a better and happier world which may unite all the jarring atoms in harmony.

Through long centuries history is identical with poetry; it hands down to us the subjects of poetry, the greatest actions of the bravest men, the purest thoughts of the greatest minds. It is closely bound up with ethics; it shows us the persistent efforts made in every age by

men of action and reflection to restrict the evils which afflict society ; it is the compendium of many books, of many ages, from which can be drawn out of the experience of the past an unselfish ideal of social life, racial, national, and imperial—a united people with a definite social aim for which they are willing to make great sacrifice, a nation not ashamed to own to past faults strenuously urging forward its aims at social betterment regardless of the cost to itself, and an empire resting on the contentment of its varied races. And it can be an equally evil influence if it is falsely taught in hatred and suspicion.

At present we have no historical or national ideal whatsoever, and apparently no voice through which an ideal may speak to us.

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I make no excuse for my views. As some great writer has said, there is no harm in a false theory, because men set to work at once to refute it: it is the false presentation of fact only which matters.