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THE PROBLEMS OF SOURCES AND METHODS IN HISTORY TEACHING

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The demand for better trained teachers of history for the secondary school must be met. The tendency on the part of school authorities to departmentalize their courses of study creates a greater demand for specialists, aside from the general advance in educational requirements. Men and women specially trained in historical work are more valuable to schools than shelf after shelf of a historical reference library.

In addition to this demand, the fact that a majority of the high-school and the secondary pupils never go to college makes the task of the secondary teacher of greater importance. If the majority of our population is to consist of high-school rather than college graduates, then the emphasis should be proportionately forceful in order to bring the coming men and women of our democracy to meet successfully the vicissitudes of modern life. If this is done, if the American high-school graduate can think correctly, logically, and intelligently on the social, political, and economic problems of life, a part of the task of the history teacher is fairly accomplished.

Present pedagogical defects, however, can be remedied only through the co-operation of the teaching corps. We may have

recommendation after recommendation by committees of historical associations and protest after protest, but unless the *esprit de corps* and the morale of the teachers are awakened all efforts are in vain.

Two problems are of great moment to the modern teacher of history. The first concerns the use of sources and collateral material in instruction: the advisability of beginning the use of these, and its success in practice. The second and the most important is the more general question of methods. "How to teach" puzzles one just as much as "What to teach," and probably for a longer time, after the teaching career has once begun. Practical suggestions upon specific problems in method are noted later, with the hope that the teaching of history in the future may become a pleasurable and profitable exercise to both teacher and pupil, and that it may cease to be the deadening grind of memorizing which it has been to the average student in the past.

I. THE PROBLEM OF SOURCES

The modern textbook contains only a selected portion of the past of humanity. A larger mass of fact lies buried in the past, perhaps never to be unearthed. In like manner many facts are known but are not embraced in the textbook accounts because of their detail or their unimportance to the average pupil. Again, some teachers are steadfast in the belief that one volume used as a text is an all-sufficient account of the period which is being studied. Similarly, others tacitly adhere to this belief, and in times of disagreement as to fact, cause, or effect majestically turn to the opinions of the text as the deciding judgment. This credulity in the verbal sentence and printed page seems common to the mind in all avenues of life.¹

In an art gallery we see a picture in a frame upon which is marked the name of Michael Angelo. Therefore Angelo must have painted it. A musical score bears the name of Chopin on its cover-page, therefore Chopin must have composed it. In history teaching this spontaneous credulity is one of the most harmful

¹ Langlois and Seignobos, *The Study of History*, pp. 87-89.

tendencies. The history teacher must develop a critical judgment and form his decisions from a comparison of several texts and sources. If, when the text is reviewed, there is still a doubt, he should go directly to the sources themselves. He must remember that the authors of the texts have given their own interpretations of the facts, which they have found usually in the original sources; and these texts, therefore, are as much exposed to errors of interpretation as texts by authors who have taken their accounts from erroneous secondary accounts; he must also remember that in the preparation of texts many important facts and inferences are overlooked, and that one text frequently presents a prepossessed point of view which is of decided danger to the average student. But through modern historical scholarship and seminary courses in historical methods, bias has been largely eliminated in constructive study.

Because of this credulity, many have suggested and advocated the adoption of the source method. We cannot discard the textbook method, however, substituting in its place the source method. Even the trained historian would find difficulty in adopting the source method as the sole basis of instruction for younger students, for a large part of their historical knowledge must come from secondary writers. But it is imperative that the teacher of history should be acquainted with the sources of the periods which are studied, in order (1) to gain some knowledge of the foundation upon which the textbook in history rests, and (2) to vitalize the classroom instruction, bringing the younger students to realize that it is life and humanity which they are studying through representative facts. Says M. Langlois:

The historian works with documents. Documents are the traces which have been left by the thoughts and actions of men of former times. Of these thoughts and actions, however, few leave any visible traces, and these traces, when there are any, are seldom durable; an accident is enough to efface them. Now every thought and every action that has left no visible traces, or none but what has since disappeared, is lost for history; is as though it had never been. For want of documents the history of immense periods of the past of humanity is destined to remain forever unknown. For there is no substitute for documents; no documents, no history.¹

¹ Langlois and Seignobos, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

The very word "sources" presents to the mind a conception of origins and beginnings. Sources are composed of relics, traditions, records, inscriptions, newspapers, speeches, letters, and remains of all kinds which have been left to us by the past. The Assize of Clarendon (1166 A.D.) is a source, as is the Salic law (496 A.D.); and the letter of Gregory VII to Bishop Hermann of Metz (1081 A.D.) is of value as source-material, as is the Statute of Laborers (1349 A.D.).

Can the historical reader hope to gain an insight into the true growth and evolution of democracy and law in England without having seen, in its original or transcribed form, the Magna Carta, termed by Henderson "the summary of all the wrongs of all the men of England and a record of the remedies applied";¹ or the Assize of Clarendon, described by Stubbs as "a document of the greatest importance to our legal history, and must be regarded as introducing changes into the administration of justice which were to lead the way to self-government at no distant time"?² Is not a deeper meaning given to the struggle of the Papacy and the Empire when we have before us the letters and decrees of Gregory VII, Frederick Barbarossa, and Boniface VIII?

The textbook is a production from similar sources, and the correlation of sources with the text displays this fact and helps to satisfy the insatiable curiosity of man to get to the bottom of things. The teaching of history without the use of sources is like teaching chemistry or physics apart from the applied experimentation which the laboratory offers. Says Lord Acton, "History to be above evasion and dispute must stand on documents, not on opinions."

History must always associate itself with source-material, and the class presentation of history should be no exception. However, care must be exercised and only a limited use should be made of this material—but a use sufficient to show how the textbook has reached its present form, on what authority it may rest, and what beliefs may be attached to its conclusions.

A limited use only must be made of them because of the intellectual character of the pupils in our schools and colleges. They

¹ Henderson, *Historical Documents of the Middle Ages*, p. vi.

² Stubbs, *Charters*, p. 141.

come to us from smaller schools, with meager equipments of knowledge and little power for endeavor in historical work, and with as little knowledge of how to attack the subject-matter itself. Of these pupils, in the short time during which we have them in charge, we must make historians and students of history. A student of this type is likely to consider his study in history of no consequence as compared with his work in mathematics or the conduct of experiments in chemistry.

Interest must be awakened in these students, and the most promising means to this end is the awakening and development of a healthful curiosity.¹ Every normal youth has a desire to know, "to get at the bottom of things." And sources offer the historical student the opportunity to trace ultimate origins. In one way the student who uses the sources of history finds himself supplanting the historian and his textbooks by drawing his own conclusions from source-material under the direction of his teacher.

All pupils seem to take an interest in historical fiction, in spite of the fact that historians and scholars generally admit the variability of historical truth in fiction literature. The novels of Dumas, Scott, Hugo, the works of Shakespeare, Dickens, etc., will always arouse an interest in our younger students. This is due mainly to the action which the novelist centers around personalities, and the emphasis placed upon historical characters. A like interest may be awakened through the sources. Here the personal element may be revealed by the teacher, and may be made as truly alive in the sources and in fact as in fiction and the imagination. History is, after all, not altogether so literary as it is problematic. It furnishes food, not only for ready reception in story form, but also material for mental abstraction.

Sources are valuable not merely as the lessons of the history text are—as tests in memorization—but for the application their use involves of a more important mental function, that of reasoning. Cause and effect are considered, and the "wherefore" of the fact itself. From this process the student begins to know that historical truth is not as staid and established as the truths of other sciences,

¹ "Sources in Schools," *Proceedings of the New England History Teachers' Association*.

but that it is conditioned by several processes: the weighing and sifting of first-hand evidences, the assumption of accuracy on the part of writers, and the abandonment of bias. To surmount these difficulties the writer in many cases must follow from beginning to end the line of action which has given rise to the document under consideration.

Law and history have been likened to each other in the methods and results of their procedure. There are methods similar in each, and in their results they differ only in essential detail. The law court hears evidence on both sides and makes its decisions, according to the law, usually in favor of one or the other side or by complete dismissal. History seeks to find the truth and is truth in itself, whether this is drawn from one, two, or many conflicting sources. It is the business of history to do one thing alone—to find the truth and state it—as it is the business of the law to determine justice. History gives justice to the past and hence a clear view of the present and future—the spheres of sociology.

Many teachers advance theories for the study of history based on the advantage of its study to their students, of the advantage of training in patriotism, citizenship, morals, etc. These may be worthy aims but they are not the conscious aims of history *per se*. If they appear as a result of history teaching, so much the better. If one can consciously strive for these and succeed a double purpose has been secured. The true aim of history, however, is to get at the truth, to assist the younger generations in their search for the truth, and to engender love of truth for truth's sake. For, in the dictum of John Locke, "to love truth for truth's sake is the principle part of human perfection in this world and the seed plot of all virtues."

Many are the doubtful points in history, and it takes an ardent desire for truth and devotion to historical work to discover them. In the battle of Crécy, it is asserted by the Italian historian Villani, cannon were used for the first time in the history of the world. No other authority mentions the fact in the historical account of this battle. Froissart and Baker have taken great pains in collecting the details of their calendars and chronicles, and in writing of the Battle of Crécy they stress especially the superiority of the

long bow over the mediaeval weapons. In their accounts there is no mention of cannon. Hence the "argument from silence" has been declared by many as worthy of more credence than the misinformation of Villani.¹ Here, however, there is ground for disputation.

The instructors who are doubtful of making use of source material could well take example from the recent social sciences. Economics uses the labor statistics, gathered by the government, market and financial reports over several decades, in order to arrive at its conclusions. Sociology uses actual social conditions, social statistics, newspaper accounts, etc. The student of present conditions reads earnestly his evening and morning papers. The work with the sources is but another way of placing this material before our students. History gets its subject-matter from all these and, more, it gleans the accounts of the legislatures and congresses of the past, it peruses the messages and speeches of presidents and actions of congresses just as the thoughtful and interested citizen does today in relation to the contemporary events of the same nature.

In order to gain a full understanding of our present we must study our past. A like interest, under proper guidance, may be awakened in our contemporary events. In this way, and this way only, may we hope to develop "the truly historic mind, which is the mind of profound sympathy with the great deeds and passionate hopes of man in the past."

II. THE PROBLEM OF METHODS

It is only in the normal schools and the colleges for teachers that we find work in teaching method of any value. In the colleges proper, which train most of the teachers for the secondary work, time is devoted to the theories of psychology and pedagogy, so that the graduates come to our secondary-school system equipped with theories—and sometimes with knowledge—and especially with the ideal of conducting their classes as the favorite professor has conducted his. They lose sight of the fact that the scale has

¹ See "Sources in Schools," *Proceedings of the New England History Teachers' Association*.

changed and that they are teaching pupils who are below the plane of the dignified lecture and college method. This has been one of the faults in the development of the modern high school. The pedantic college man, untrained in method, does not approach the subject in such a manner that it can be profitably studied by pupils of the high-school age.

The most valuable method for the secondary school is the interested oral recitation. To maintain the interest of a class throughout the period is one of the most difficult tasks. The first acquirement of the successful teacher is skill in questioning. In order to achieve its purpose, the question must be clear, concise, definite, and brief. It must be expressed in as few words as possible. The extended or involved question may be left to the written test when the words may be kept before the eye.

The question should be directed with a knowledge of what the teacher desires in answer. If the question is composed of several parts, the answer must be necessarily long. The question should never suggest its answer so that the good guesser may have his opportunity of "shining," or of aimlessly striking at the answer. Nor is it necessary that all questions be important; some will bear directly, others indirectly, upon the subject-matter. The best plan for the beginning teacher, or for one who gives a history course for the first time, is to prepare the questions in writing before the class hour.¹

With the oral question go the written question, the written test and examination. In many classes of the secondary school the written-quiz plan is followed daily for the first ten minutes of the hour. This is the method in many eastern colleges, and it is adopted, where there are large classes, for the purpose of giving each member an opportunity to make a mark in his daily work. The daily averages are kept and averaged with the examinations. Most students dread the written work because in this they have little opportunity to bluff the teacher. The answers must be written directly because of the small amount of time given. This method serves as a check to the daily indolence which some pupils practice

¹ For suggestions on history questions, note: *Analytical Questions in United States History* (A. Flanagan Co., Chicago); Betts, *The Art of Questioning*, chapter on "The Recitation."

until examination time, by checking the work of each individual daily.

Chronology and geography have been called the two eyes of history.¹ Both are necessary studies; time and place are sometimes as important as the fact itself. The selection of these three elements makes a difficult task for the teacher. Facts should be selected by the teacher only on the established basis of the ability of the pupils to grasp them. This ability will depend upon the advancement of the child.

As in the case of the elementary-school pupil, the secondary-school pupil should not be concerned with complex political history or military campaigns. On the other hand, that which is historically picturesque and romantic is presented, and the pupil will find no difficulty in linking his interest with this.

Children love personalities and the teacher will find the thought of the pupil centering around the personalities of history. These can be made the poles about which the facts may center. The early English settlements may center about the leaders in this movement, John Smith, Miles Standish, and other prominent characters; the pre-Revolutionary period about Patrick Henry, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, etc.; the Revolution around Washington and the Revolutionary heroes. In the elementary study of history men will attract when facts are burdensome.

In the high school and the college facts assume more and increasing importance. The development of the constitutional and economic phases of history must be given a larger place, for here historical facts are the "stuff" of which history is made. But facts cannot of themselves make history; and at the same time one who possesses a wide knowledge of facts cannot be called a historian, although popularly he may be so known. These facts must be synthesized and organized so that they may be kept in their proper relation and historical connection. To make them alive they will be taught with spirit, and this is by far the more important element.

To the student or pupil engaged in the study of a period in history, the facts present themselves with the dates as posts on which the facts may be hung and kept in order. In noting dates

¹ See quotation on p. 339.

as the opening and closing of an epoch or movement, we shall find that they are mere approximations. For example, the beginning and ending of the Renaissance, the Reformation, the fall of the *ancien régime*—all of these dates are arbitrary, and it is not to be represented that in a designated year the movement actually began and in another such year the movement closed. Change comes about by gradual movement not only of progression, but also of retrogression. Characteristic movements spread themselves and interlap, although artificial divisions are devised.

The teacher of history will ask himself, "What dates must I teach my pupils?" The answer will be found in a well-selected textbook and more importantly in the judgment of the teacher. The teacher must pass judgment on the essential dates to be remembered in correlation with the facts. The principle of selection should be the importance which the fact and its date bears to the period as a whole, or to some phase of its parts. Every effort should be made to discourage the "pure memorization" of a string of dates. Important dates are to be remembered, but they must be recalled in connection with the facts rather than as isolated items from a stock of encyclopedic knowledge. History clothed in this garb is in its most distasteful form, and is revealed as a most burdensome subject which can be enjoyed only by those who excel in memory exercises.

Although we state that facts are the backbone of history, we discountenance the teaching which seeks to cram the mind of the student with every possible detail of information. The method of wide generalization is open to the same denunciation. Such teaching makes history a dry and dead subject. Yet how many teachers still use these methods and are considered masters in their profession!

The importance of the "place" is tantamount to that of the date and the fact. The evidence of this is borne out best in the accounts of military campaigns and of great events of national character. The history of America, with its record of extension of territory, cannot be clearly understood when no regard is paid to the western extension as illustrated by a map. The historical map, chronological map, and the contemporary map all fill a needed place in history instruction. Thomas Carlyle says on this point:

History is evidently the grand subject a student will take to. Never read any such book without a map before you; endeavor to seek out every place the author names and get a clear idea of the ground you are on; without this you can never understand him, much less remember him. Mark the dates of the chief events and epochs; write them; get them fixed in your memory. Chronology and geography are the two lamps of history.

History instruction, in order to be interesting and profitable, will be planned by the teacher. This plan falls essentially under three heads: (1) the introduction, (2) the development, and (3) the conclusion. The first and last parts serve to link the matter under discussion to that of the previous lesson and of the succeeding lesson.¹

Such an outline is absolutely necessary in the college lecture. It is an idle waste of time for an instructor to enter the classroom and talk to his students out of the fulness of his knowledge and experience, unless he is seeking merely to entertain. There are some scholars who can plan and develop without the aid of notes; but for the average daily lecture notes are always better than the memory—and safer.

Let us urge that the dignified lecture be used only in the college. Oral talks may be given in secondary schools, yet these may become an idle waste of time—depending on the interest aroused by the teacher and the attitude of the pupils. In college the lecture arouses more interest than a textbook recitation, and will give the student a thoroughly unified idea about the matter which is being studied. The lecture ought not be employed to give elementary facts, for this is not the function of the lecture.

Most of us recall with pleasure the college lectures, the facts of which are all forgotten. It is, then, the spirit, enthusiasm, and interest which revive the dead matter in lecture-courses, and they in turn live longer than the facts. The lecturer should furnish the students with a textbook which will follow the course, or with a syllabus of his lectures, giving authorities for consultation. The topical outline will assist the lecture by giving to each student, either in the form of printed investigation or oral question, a topic for investigation.

¹ For examples of lesson plans see Wayland, *How to Teach American History*, pp. 291-307.

As in all work, it is imperative that the teacher should know his subject-matter, or else the work must condense itself into a mechanical memorization of facts by the pupils. This knowledge will be, not only of subject-matter from the texts in use, but also of the general literature of the period under consideration. The teacher should have cultivated a historical judgment which is capable of sifting historical evidence, of weighing conflicting views and different authorities, and of arriving at historical truth. The use of this judicial power enables one to interpret cause and effect, and to determine the answers to the questions: What does it mean? What spirit or motive is back of it? The acquisition of this power by the school-teacher should be strongly sought; for the student is but clay in the hands of the teacher, and the question of form and shape must come directly from the molder who is the teacher.

Not only upon the teacher does the successful teaching of history depend, but also on the equipment of tools. The historical department of every school should be equipped with its laboratory, as well as the chemical and other scientific departments. Libraries, charts, maps, pictures, etc., belong to a well-equipped historical department. The value of the use of this equipment is readily apparent, for this concrete work enables the student to construct a vivid mental picture of the past. The child, being fond of the dramatic and picturesque, will find the representation of small historical dramas increasing his interest very greatly. Historical pictures and lantern slides are of similar value. The use of the blackboard is also important in these and all schools. This offers facilities for quick and rough drafts as illustrations of the story or event which is being studied. Excursions to places of historical interest, and pictures from old magazines and newspapers, should not be overlooked in school instruction.

The recitation is conducted for several purposes: (1) to test the pupil's knowledge of the facts under study, (2) to arouse and develop interest, (3) to incite the reasoning powers, and (4) to assist in the preparation of future lessons. One of the best opportunities for a test of teaching ability lies in the direction of an interesting and lively class discussion. This requires of the teacher resourcefulness, self-possession, and a thorough knowledge of the subject.

There are several methods for conducting the recitation in history teaching in general: (1) the topical method, (2) the quiz and recitation, (3) the daily written paper, (4) the outline and diagram method. The topical method is that by which the teacher announces a topic and calls upon a pupil to recite from that topic. The pupil is permitted to tell all that he may know relative to the topic, stating the main facts which center around the topic. At the close of his recitation other pupils should be allowed to add any facts which may have been overlooked. The quiz is the best method for conducting a review, for more pupils can be reached and a greater amount of the subject covered. It should consist of direct questions which may be answered in a few words. The daily written paper has been explained in connection with a previous discussion of a recitation. But along with this goes the written recitation. In this, questions are put, and a certain amount of the class hour is given to the preparation of the answers; then the pupils are allowed to recite from these notes taken. This recitation has the power of crystallizing thought, and of focusing the mind on the points under discussion. The outline and diagram method is that by which the pupil recites either from an outline copy in his possession or on the blackboard. This method has some merits, but the outline serves as a crutch—a too suggestive one for the average pupil.

The method of many of our high-school teachers is detrimental to the growth of historical perspective or love of history in immature students. The one idea seems to be to cram the minds of students with facts, dates, places, to complete the survey of the period outlined in the text, and fill out the class hour, merely as a part of daily routine.

Educational progress with its emphasis on practice as opposed to theory decrees the cessation of the wasteful teaching which has been a large part of the work of our schools and colleges. The teacher of history who stands with finger on the text, correcting the memorization of the student, must give way to the modern teacher, who will use source and collateral material to supplement the recitation, and a method which will interest the student in his acquisition of fact and pave the way for the citizen ideals which are necessary aids to democratic government.