

THE TEACHING OF HISTORY TO YOUNG CHILDREN,
With Practical Illustrations.

By MISS E. A. PARISH, ex-student of the House of Education, and Co-principal of Spange Hawe School, Ewhurst.

In the school curriculum no subject is more important than history—we may say that none is as important. In the *Parents' Review School*, history is the pivot on which so much [p 894] of the other work turns. Geography, literature, art, are all used in emphasising the reality of the history lesson. History is the greatest power we have in cultivating the higher growth of the child's nature. By it, we can instil the great lessons of life.

In teaching history we have an end in view, and a means towards that end.

The end—the great lessons of life: unselfishness, fortitude, chivalry, progress.

The means—realisation, visualisation, narration.

With such an aim in view, the importance of history cannot be over-estimated, and we must remember to leave an inspiring idea with the children. If we have left them indifferent and bored, we may know that our lesson has failed. If we see them interested and alert, we may flatter ourselves that we have partially succeeded. But when we see a little girl patiently and heroically eating burnt porridge, "because Julius Cæsar never knew whether what he was eating was nice or nasty," we may know that Cæsar's example has been taken.

Through history we are able to realise other times, other men, other worlds. It brings us into touch with the greatness of the dead and gone. It gives us a sense of the reality of these lives. The very unconscious egoism of children will stand them in good stead here. It is so natural for them in their work, in their play, in their affections, to be the centre of their universe. A child will bask in the sunlight and say: "Is not *my* sun beautiful?" It begins with babyhood. "Is not baby clever?" "Is not baby kind?" But the child playing at being Hudson crossing the ice, and balancing himself on his bricks across the nursery floor, is no longer a clever boy; he is just Hudson.

It is in this power of realisation that lies one of the fundamental blessings that are to be gained from history. Children are so easily stirred to admiration, and the next step is the bright hope to imitate and excel those knights of old they have been so quick to love.

Though it is best to have as little paraphernalia about a lesson as possible, a thoughtful teacher will always have to hand any detail which may help her pupils to feel at home with the period they are taking. It is so important to make the characters they are reading about real people, they must be neither fairies nor names, but just real people; to be

[p 895]

consciously imitated. Children must needs love the highest, and they are thrilled by grand stories of trust and bravery.

No part of a history lesson has been thoroughly taken which has not been visualised. Pictures, especially to young children, are of great use here, such as the frescoes in the Royal Exchange; pictures of old towns and castles; good book illustrations, etc. But the word-pictures which they glean from good books help them still more. Those who love Scott will know how he presents one word-picture after another, each more enthralling than the last. Then for older children there are pictures such as Carlyle has given us in the Battle of

Dunbar; or those contained in *Westward Ho!* or *The Cloister and the Hearth*.

Having visualised and realised the story, the next step is to narrate it. In this way young children gain the command of beautiful words and learn unconsciously to express themselves well and fully. In repeating the words of a well-written book they lose the habit of using four words where two will do, and of contenting themselves with the same adjective to express every shade of opinion.

These three, realisation, visualisation and narration, are a means to an end, but they are also ends in themselves, for it is these which go so far towards satisfying the intellectual cravings of a child, providing the mental food which his soul longs for, and which is as essential to his mental health as material food is to his body. To realise a thing is to make it a reality. To visualise it is to make it ours. To narrate it is to share our possessions with others.

Miss Mason tells us that "life should be all living; not merely a tedious passing of time; not all doing, or all feeling, or all thinking—the strain would be too great—but, all living; that is to say, we should be in touch wherever we go, whatever we hear, whatever we see, with some manner of vital interest. The question is not, how much does the youth know? when he has finished his education, but how much does he *care*?" And how can a child *help* caring when a lovely story is made his in this way. It *is* life to see in mental vision the great deeds of history.

Now for the end we have in view; that inspiring idea which is to instil one or other of the great lessons of life. Lessons of fortitude, endurance and abnegation. Tales of [p 896]

courage: Matilda on the Snow; Guy Fawkes; The Spartan Boy. Examples of unselfishness or selflessness, Sir Philip Sidney. Dependability: Gordon at Khartoum, Josiah Wedgewood. Heroism: Lord Nelson. The sad lesson of retribution, of cause and effect, and the righting of wrong. Children have to learn how "the mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small."

And then the lesson of progress; that wonderful sequence of events by which each age teaches its successor: how there is a necessity for perpetually going on. No age can stand still. Each age must work out its own salvation.

There is also the supreme lesson of brotherhood. It is by means of history that a child gets into touch with the wideness of the world. Past and present are made intelligible to him, and his sympathy is kindled towards all men and all nations in all time, and he learns that as each great age was the result of the individuals, so the greatness of his own time may be affected by his own small share of the life around him.

I do not mean that one or all of these great lessons are to be taught in each lesson, nor even that every lesson is to teem with such ideas. This would be absurd as it is absurd to imagine it possible. But where occasion offers, and it offers so often, the opportunity is not to be lost. Often the lesson is there and the children find it for themselves. It is always best when it is so.

You will see that in the lesson I am about to give, I have chosen to use the efforts of Arkwright as an illustration of the contest between invention and ignorance. In order to make it more complete I shall probably put more into a short time than I should were I to be teaching the children constantly. In that case I should devote a whole lesson to the fascination of cotton, and to the idea of the different sorts of warfare, taking another occasion for the chapter on Arkwright. But I should always try to have some leading idea through a lesson or series of lessons in each. I should be careful to leave a desire to go on

next time. In this case, I hope the children will wish to go on to Puffing Billy.

Though mental dawdling must never be allowed, it is certainly a distinct gain to go in a leisurely way through one or two periods of history, to become at home in the period, and intimate with its leading personalities. We do not tax

[p 897]

children's memories with many dates. Chronology gets unconsciously and most successfully taught by the history charts, which are cunningly devised original illustrations of memorable events. Our efforts are to make our pupils thoroughly at home with the period they are studying, and we give ourselves considerable trouble in procuring all the means we can of focussing their interest upon this period.

Just now, Class II. are taking Julius Cæsar in their history. They are also taking him in Plutarch, and are reading Shakespeare's *Julius Cæsar*. Of course they are pleasurably anticipating a visit to the British Museum, where they will see his bust. In my own class, their affection for him is an absolutely living thing, and has given a wonderful impetus to their Latin. Are they not using the very words that Cæsar used? They are forging ahead and jumping obstacles in a way that would amaze me, did I not know that Julius Cæsar was at the bottom of it.

Later on, these detached fragments become pieced together in the child's mind, and form so many milestones of which they are sure. Naturally a teacher will see to it that these fragments get posted in the right order of sequence. This is the way we build. The materials for the house have to come from all quarters, but when each is in proper position and firmly cemented by constant recapitulation and reproduction, the house is fair and strong.

Some of you, when reading through a P.R.S. programme may have found the multitude of subjects rather startling, and even to an Ambleside teacher the first few weeks of the term sometimes seem a little anxious and overwhelming when she sees all there is to get through before the thirteen or fourteen weeks are over. But she keeps this anxiety to herself, and as the weeks go by she finds how all the subjects dovetail and help each other, and that after all it is a case of *multum*, and not *multa*.

SKETCH OF LESSON.

Book used: *Our Island Story*, by H. E. Marshall.

Richard Arkwright.

OBJECTS.

I. To give the children the idea of conquest of mind over matter. The battle between invention and ignorance.

[p 898]

II. To bring them into contact with a good book.

III. To give them some idea of the manufacture of cotton, and of Richard Arkwright.

IV. To improve their power of narration.

LESSON.

Step I.—Battles of "long ago." Battles between nation and nation, man and man. Battles between virtue and vice; between invention and ignorance.

Step II.—Conquest of mind over matter, which frequently results in machinery. Show some raw cotton and a piece of calico. Some pictures of machinery.

Step III.—Speak of Richard Arkwright, the man whose wits conquered time and

prejudice.

Step IV.—Read the chapter, “The Story of the Spinning Wheel,” elucidating where necessary.

Step V.—Summarise and point out how great the ignorance was. Emphasise the ingenuity of the man who found out how to attract customers, how to dye hair, how to make such clever models of machinery, how to turn the ignorance and superstition of others to his own advantage—in short, the process of invention.

Step VI.—Explain the wide thought contained in the saying “A nation of shopkeepers.”

Step VII.—Recapitulate with narration.

The lesson was followed with much interest by the audience, and at the close the Chairman congratulated Miss Parish, both on her paper and her demonstration of the art of teaching history.

Several questions were asked, and one, “Is it not possible to make the lesson too pleasant?” was replied to by Miss Parish, who said they need not be afraid that anything would be too pleasant. Life was sad enough to all, and the main thing was to awaken interest, and in the lesson that had just been given they had seen that most admirably done. The children were interested and learned their lesson: what more did they want?

Answering Mrs. Franklin, MISS PARISH said she should be entirely guided by the children with whom she had to deal as to whether in giving the lesson she read to them or allowed them to read the book themselves.