

**HISTORY SIMPLIFIED:
AN INTERNATIONAL
PRIMER**

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History Simplified: An International Primer by Albert J. Edmunds

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BY ALBERT J. EDMUNDS

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BUDDHIST AND CHRISTIAN GOSPELS

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PREFACE

SOME years ago it occurred to the writer, during a walk beside the Wissahickon, that there ought to be a world-history agreed upon by all nations. It should deal chiefly with the growth of religion, science, art and literature, giving credit to each nation for what it has done. Wars must be limited to a few great movements of peoples. Proper credit should be given to the neglected nations, the Chinese and the Hindus, who were developing the arts of peace when we were savages and pirates.

Such an outline should be taught in the schools of the world and each nation could add its own internal affairs.

The writer broacht the idea to Charlemagne Tower, who assisted him in bringing it to the attention of the Hague Conference, but nothing more was heard of it.

In the present year the writer had occasion to teach history to two children, and he began by writing each century on a separate sheet, calling the whole *Our Century Book*. At first only a few striking events were written, leaving several centuries blank. At the end the birth-dates of the two children were inserted, thus connecting history with their own lives. In one lesson they absorbed the knowledge, and saw history in perspective as they could not do from pages too much crammed.

More events were then added on the backs of the sheets, leaving the most important in front. It then occurred to us to reverse the order of the centuries, and begin with our own. We had the sheets on steel rings, and this was easily done.

The student is advised to copy the events on separate sheets and re-arrange them in the usual order. Indeed it would be a good exercise to write the facts on cards and play with them. By asking and answering questions a profitable game could be devised and the study of history made a pastime. It would also

be well to write first only those events on the front pages which are printed in heavy type. By thus leaving some centuries blank the child is given a sense of relief and inspired with the confidence of mastery.

Different minds will attach importance to different events, but there is little doubt that the rise of the three great missionary religions furnishes the best series of landmarks. Let the beginner leave blank the centuries between Christ and Muhammad, and so realize the greatness of these two mountain peaks.

But the events are of less moment than the perspective of time. Even the most awful crises are sooner or later dwarfed, and events once great are eclipsed by greater. What the beginner most needs is a vivid idea of the vistas of time instead of the jumbled notions which are common.

The centuries before Christ are purposely written with the Latin word *sæculum* for century, so as to distinguish them at a glance from the Christian ones. Dates not accurately fixed or not necessary to be memorized are placed in their position in the century.

The test of importance is universality. We must never forget that our culture has been hitherto provincial, with the Mediterranean for its central sea and Greece, Rome and Judea for its three classic nations. We do not realize, for example, that at the time of Christ the four great powers of the earth were the Romans, the Parthians, the Hindus and the Chinese. The Roman Empire is allowed to dwarf all else, which is absurd, when the Chinese became a world-power from the Sea of Japan to the Lake Aral. (We may say the Caspian, as the two were probably united). No more the Midland Sea of the Romans is to be our center, but the Pacific Ocean, and our culture, from being provincial, must become planetary.

Names of places are given thruout, that the student may consecrate in his memory for life the sacred spots of the world. The heroic fields of the future will no longer be where Christian slew Christian after praying to the same God, but where Christ said: **Peace I leave with you**; where Buddha plucked the

forest leaves and proclaimed the infinity of truth; where Dante met Beatrice and Socrates drank the hemlock.

Moreover the science of recent decades has changed our attitude toward the mystic and the seer. The beautiful painting by Violet Oakley, at the Capitol of Pennsylvania, of George Fox on the mount of vision, most aptly symbolizes this change. The seer will no longer be our butt, but our pillar of fire, and we shall treat as sacred the spots where John, and Swedenborg beheld the Heavenly City.

It is due to the reader to know that the writer is a member of no Church, and that the names of religious leaders are given from a purely historical standpoint.

Nearly a century and a half has elapsed since the appearance of the first volume of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (London, 1776), and it is not creditable to the Western mind that the broad research therein set forth should have taught us so little. It was Edward Gibbon who, following the French, first gave to English learning a planetary outlook. With all his vast classical attainments, he is not led astray by "the vanity or ignorance of the Greeks" (Chapter XXVI, note 21); and he talks, in the same chapter, as will the scholars of the future, about "the learned and civilized nations of the South: the Greeks, the Persians and the Chinese." He knew the name of China's great historian, Sse-ma-t sien—a name still strange to college professors and other leaders of learning.

In order at once to furnish an authority and to direct the student to Gibbon, I have purposely mentioned him several times. Our knowledge of India was in his day behind our knowledge of China, or the planetary historian would surely have given India her due. Had he only known of the extent and power of Buddhism and other Hindu learning at the time of Christ, the whole subsequent history of New Testament criticism would have been changed. But in spite of this defect and some mistakes about Zoroastrian doctrine and other matters then unknown, he remains what he always has been—the greatest historian in the English tongue.

Besides the usual books of reference, the writer must refer to his published works for the less known authorities, and also to the articles, from 1910 onward, by Richard Garbe, Sylvain Lévi and other scholars, in the *Deutsche Rundschau* of Berlin, *The Monist* of Chicago, the *Journal Asiatique* of Paris and the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* of London. The works of Francis Cumont, Romesh Datt (Dutt), Léon Wieger, the late Arthur Lloyd, and Professor Anesaki, of Tôkyô and Harvard, furnish many neglected facts.

Tho the result of a lifetime of study, the essay is purely tentative, and the author hopes that better qualified scholars, especially along the lines of social and industrial development, will enlarge the study. The present edition is put forth with the hope of securing such co-operation.

I am told by a rising young scholar that I ought to work on this for some years yet. Doubtless I ought, but life already lies more behind me than before, and it may be now or never. We students owe it to mankind to bring our knowledge from the cloister into the street. The mind that has once been trained by historical research can never be swept off by the passions of a day; and unless the facts accumulated under academic towers be made current coin and transformed from knowledge into wisdom, hoarse Demos will once more forge for himself some tyrannous legend—divinely beautiful it may be—which will chain the human mind for another nineteen hundred years. Mark Twain died in 1910, believing that the legend was already forged.

But, *pace* Mark Twain, this momentous affair is not in the hands of the United States or of any one nation. As Myers and Gardner have pointed out, there are forces now at work evolving a world-religion before our eyes. And the process is going on, not merely beside Delaware and Thames, but beside the Volga, the Ganges and the Yang-tse-kiang. In the view of the present writer, the two main forces thus at work are Evolution and Psychological Research. The opposite truths represented by these two great ideas have developed independently among Christian nations during the past half-century. But historically they depend upon

the two leading religions of the world: Evolution has its basis in Buddhism, Psychological Research in Christianity. The one represents an impersonal theory of the universe ascending from below; the other brings to light a personal life beyond, descending from above. In the confux of these two ideas will surely be born the coming religion of mankind.

Some academic friends would fain warn me away from the dangerous ground of spiritistic phenomena. But no such warning is necessary in our State. We Pennsylvanians have in our midst a great University, which once was pledged to the perpetual investigation of these phenomena. From the fifth to the ninth decade of the last century they were deservedly in disrepute with science, but since that time the immortal Myers and the Universities of Cambridge and Harvard have forever lifted them into academic recognition. As a generation is now in the field which knows not of the said Pennsylvanian pledge, I will quote it:

“To the University of Pennsylvania sixty thousand dollars to establish a chair of Moral Philosophy, for the investigation and teaching of religious, moral and intellectual truth, to be known as the Adam Seybert chair, or Adam Seybert Professorship, provided, however, that the principles and phenomena of what is known as Spiritualism shall be fully investigated by the professor who occupies this Professorship.” (Will of Henry Seybert, Philadelphia, December 25, 1882, p. 8).

It is true that some thirty years ago, a Seybert Commission reported adversely upon the pretensions of professional fortune-tellers, and the University of Pennsylvania has since adopted a hostile attitude toward Psychological Research. This is unfortunate, because it was *after* the Seybert Report that Myers and Hodgson collected, from non-professional sources, the facts upon which our present knowledge of these obscure phenomena is based. Let us hope that the Hodgson Memorial research at Harvard will enable Massachusetts to make amends for the backwardness of other States. The mingled rôle of hindering and helping which universities have played in the progress of truth is indicated by several little facts below.