

**THE TEACHING OF HISTORY IN
SCHOOLS: A LECTURE DELIVERED
AT THE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION
MEETING IN OXFORD, AUGUST
6TH, 1892; PP. 10-37**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649246991

The Teaching of History in Schools: A Lecture Delivered at the University Extension Meeting in Oxford, August 6th, 1892; pp. 10-37 by J. Wells

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

J. WELLS

**THE TEACHING OF HISTORY IN
SCHOOLS: A LECTURE DELIVERED
AT THE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION
MEETING IN OXFORD, AUGUST
6TH, 1892; PP. 10-37**

THE TEACHING OF HISTORY
IN SCHOOLS

THE TEACHING OF HISTORY
IN SCHOOLS 4/2011

A LECTURE

*DELIVERED AT THE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION
MEETING IN OXFORD, AUGUST 6th, 1892*

BY
J. WELLS

FELLOW AND TUTOR OF WADHAM COLLEGE

PRINTED BY REQUEST

Methuen & Co.

18, BURY STREET, LONDON, W.C.

1892

[All rights reserved]

PREFACE

3 THIS lecture was received with the greatest kindness by the audience which listened to it at the Oxford Summer meeting last month, and its publication was urged on me by two friends, whose names, did I quote them, would carry weight with teachers. I am conscious, however, that I must myself bear the responsibility for rushing into print ; my only excuse is that I have a most genuine interest in my subject. I have not attempted to rewrite my paper, as to do so would not increase its real value, and might lessen the welcome which I hope it may receive from those who heard it delivered. It is therefore somewhat rhetorical in tone (and at times also colloquial), as it was written to be heard rather than read.

WADHAM COLLEGE, OXFORD,

September, 1892.

are more and more asserting themselves, we may hope that this neglect of English history will pass away. It may be worth while then to consider—before going further—what special results we hope to attain from a teaching of history.

We may put aside at once that training of the mental faculties, which is the primary object of all branches of education, and without which any results in the way of actual knowledge are comparatively worthless. That such a training can be imparted from history all are agreed; though its development does not follow the strict laws of the exact sciences, yet it has principles of its own which even a child may learn to notice, and which are the more important as being to a great extent the principles on which the everyday life of the world around us is being conducted. As Guizot has said, "History is a school of truth, reason, and virtue;" to make it so will be the ideal of every teacher. But this part of the subject belongs to the science of education generally, and has no special bearing on the points before us; hence it may be taken for granted that we all shall wish to teach history so as to help our children to observe and to think, and that we shall try to avoid making it mere memory work.

Of the special results of history, as distinguished from other subjects, no doubt the first place would be given to the training it furnishes for citizens. History is one of the three great divisions of knowledge made by Bacon in his *Advancement of Learning*,¹ and he says it is to be taught to supply experience, because in no one man's life is there experience or precedent sufficient to rule his conduct.

¹ Spedding's edition, iii., p. 271.

Children, says Milton,¹ are "to know the beginning, end, and reasons of political societies" and "to dive into the grounds of law and legal justice." So, too, Locke:² "History is the great mistress of prudence and civil knowledge." The importance of this point it is impossible to exaggerate, especially now, when the bases of our state have been wisely widened; wisely, I say, even though political power is entrusted to classes which have not the traditions of long experience of government to guide them.

It is with a view of furnishing such a political education that Herbert Spencer defines what history is to teach. He gives nine points³ on which it is to instruct us. At the risk of spending too much time on this part of my subject it may be worth while to briefly enumerate them, as by doing so I think it will be at once obvious how easy it is to exaggerate the direct influence of history in education. I have compressed his nine points into six. History then, says Spencer, is to tell us (1) What the government of a country is, its principles, and methods; (2) It is to explain the ecclesiastical government, and the superstitions; (3) It is to give an account of the moral condition of the people, illustrating by their laws, proverbs, &c.; (4) It is to describe their daily life, their food, and amusements, and their domestic life—the relations between the sexes; (5) It is to give an account of class relations, and especially of the relations of employer and employed; (6) It is to describe their intellectual condition, the state of the arts and sciences, &c.

Now, while it is clear that these are the things which a

¹ Tractate on Education.

² Edition of 1824. Vol. viii., p. 174.

³ *Education*, p. 35.

citizen needs to know, it is equally clear that they are, as a rule, the last things that children will be able to learn in school. A child has a healthy appetite for facts; he likes V action and story, and if we offer him instead theories of the relations of classes, he will either learn them like a parrot, or, more likely, learn nothing at all. In fact, though it is important above all things to remember, in teaching history, that we are teaching young citizens; yet, to accomplish the results wished for, we must also remember that the shortest way is by no means always the best.

So far my conclusion has been a negative one, although perhaps it has been stated more strongly than was really necessary, to mark my opposition to the dogmatic views of Herbert Spencer and his school. But there are other results which can certainly be achieved by teaching history; it furnishes the best training in patriotism, and it enlarges the sympathies and interests. On each of these points I should like to say something, obvious as they are.

Patriotism, some would say, is at a discount now. To appeal to it is to appeal to a decaying virtue; to sneer at John Bull and his ways is almost a mark of especial culture. If such be the views of the coming generation of teachers, it will be an evil thing for England: but pessimism is the characteristic of a bad citizen, and I see no reason to identify the views of the majority of Englishmen with those of a self-assertive set of faddists. If, however, patriotism is worth preserving, it must be cultivated. This is so obvious a truism that it needs stating with emphasis; for while I imagine few would deny it, yet still fewer seem to me to act upon it. To take a recent instance: Mr. Morley tells us there is no teaching to be obtained from Macaulay. No teaching in a writer who every-

where stirs men's hearts to appreciate the greatness of their country, and whose fine passages have almost the effect of verse in stimulating the love of England! If there be no teaching in Macaulay, then I for one prefer his plain and ignorant pages to any number of elaborate modern studies, in which so much light is thrown on doubtful problems that the broad issues of right and wrong, patriotism or lack of patriotism, are obscured.

Mr. Morley's position will be made clearer if we quote another passage of the same essay. "Macaulay's unanalytical turn of mind kept him free from any temptation to think of love of country as a prejudice, or a passion for freedom as an illusion."¹ He would have been proud that it did; but if any of my hearers think with Mr. Morley, I can only leave them to their opinions: to them I will not apologize.

This teaching of patriotism is especially necessary at the present day. England has been made great by her prejudices; happily these are passing away; but if she is to remain great, something positive must be put in their place. The average Englishman in the last century thanked God daily—if he thanked Him for anything—that he was not a frog-eating Frenchman, or any sort of contemptible foreigner. Such a feeling was most unfortunate; but, while it has made us the best-hated nation in Europe, it won us the rule of the seas and Waterloo. What are we going to put in its place? We do not want the average Englishman to mark himself everywhere by trampling on a foreigner's prejudices with the abounding contempt of ignorance; but we do want him to feel that to him and the English-speaking race

¹ *Critical Miscellanies*, by John Morley, vol. i., p. 270.