

American History.*

The educational changes of the last thirty years are well illustrated in the topics assigned for this morning's papers. Thirty years ago, the discussion of historical topics and historical methods was practically, if not entirely, unknown in the United States. Now the courses of study in nearly all our higher educational institutions embrace a vast group of studies of an historical nature. In addition to pure history, political economy, sociology, administration, finance, statistics, and a host of other differentiated subjects, all pursued from the historical stand-point, are gradually crowding out other topics, to make room for themselves. Twenty years ago, even, such a paper as this would probably have been an attempt to prove that history had a right to a seat in the charmed circle where educational questions were discussed. Ten years ago, or perhaps even less, the writer would probably have felt compelled to devote his entire strength to prove that American history was not an outcast, and that it had a right to sit at the fireside with "readin' writin' and 'rithmetic." Now, it is unnecessary to argue for the right, either of history in general, or of American history, or of any of their allies, to appear upon this platform. This means, of course, that the historical studies have won for themselves a place in the educational field. It means that their value, as a means of mental culture, is no longer seriously disputed. It means, above all, that their practical value, in producing good citizenship, in advancing civilization by means of making men more tolerant, more humane, more true to their fellow-men, wiser in planning, and more skillful in executing, is accepted by those who make educational curricula. It is no longer necessary to prove that history may be so taught as to make it a valuable mental discipline, for it is admitted that few studies, when properly presented, afford a better training for memory, judgment and

imagination, while reason itself is not left undeveloped. Its influence in broadening and elevating the moral character is not second to that of any study pursued in our schools. Its practical value in fitting men to fill ably and wisely all the ordinary vocations of life, especially those of a public nature, is now admitted on all hands.

Thus the first contest is won. The fact that history in its various forms is to be with us in our educational work, makes it necessary that we should advance to the next great question connected with the subject, viz: how it is to be presented so that the greatest possible benefit may be secured with the least possible waste of energy?

In admitting that historical study in our schools is of recent growth, it is necessarily implied that precedent has as yet done little to establish methods that may, without question, be adopted in teaching history. It has the advantage, however, that it is not hampered in its development by tradition and time honored, yet false methods. Like all new subjects, it is only just now passing out of the experimental stage into one where certainties in method prevail. Thus we are just at the moment that makes it all-important that we adopt, while we may easily, correct methods. The rest of this paper will be an attempt to contribute my little mite to the true solution of this problem, to give some plain suggestions in a very simple and unambitious style in regard to methods of teaching American history.

* * * * *

The aim in teaching and studying history should be (1) to promote intellectual development, (2) to secure ethical improvement, and (3) to give information that may be of use in practical life. * * * *

Now how may history be so taught as to accomplish these ends? First, it must be said very emphatically, and appreciated very thoroughly, that the teacher must have a fairly wide acquaintance with the facts and principles of history; and that the conditions under which the political, social, economic, and intellectual life of the United States has

*Extracts from a paper on "Some Suggestions in Regard to Methods of Teaching American History," read before the State Teachers' Association, December, 1892, by H. W. Caldwell.