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Clio, the Voice of the People

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Clio, the Muse of history and the mythological daughter of Jupiter, was one of a numerous family. Her name in Greek means to celebrate or glorify which gives a clue to one of the purposes of historical writing. Her statues in the Vatican, the Louvre, and elsewhere usually represent her with a wreath on her brow, a scroll in one hand and a trumpet in the other. Thus, it would seem that to the Greeks history was to be valued for the patriotic pride which it could stimulate.

Some years ago the writer was asked to review a revised edition of a high school text by Professor Albert Bushnell Hart of Harvard University, *Essentials in American History*. A survey disclosed that this text had been widely used only in the North and West, but that in the South nearly all the larger cities were using a text written by Professor Nathaniel W. Stephenson of Charleston College, Charleston, South Carolina. In the first, Sherman's "March through Georgia" is described as a brilliantly conceived military campaign, successfully executed by a splendid fighting force under a great general. A boy could scarcely help but feel a patriotic thrill of pride as he read these paragraphs. In the second, this decisive campaign is described as though it were a devastating Nazi invasion accompanied by a wanton destruction of property and the means of maintaining life that brought untold tragedy to the people affected. And ironically, the two texts were published by the same company! Basically, they were written, not by two historians, but by two peoples living in different sections.

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Though most of us teach the principle that history makes the great man rather than that the great man makes history, yet we seem to exalt our own craft and do not apply this principle to it. Recently, it fell to my lot to give a graduate course, "Representative Historians and Their Writings." After the students had surveyed the writings of such historians as Herodotus, Livy, Bede, Gregory of Tours, Vasari, Voltaire, Macaulay, William Bradford, George Bancroft, Theodore Roosevelt, McMaster, and Treitschke, it dawned upon them anew that an historian usually mirrors the times in which he lives and that the people determine the major lines of history, not the historian alone.

Listen to some sentences from the Russian historian, D. Ilajavski, whose school textbooks went through twenty editions in the generation of Tsarist rule before 1917, tell the story of the French Revolution and Napoleon: "Louis XVI was a peaceable and gentle monarch who in the course of his long reign showed himself particularly skillful in finding expert Ministers of Finance. Loved and honored by his people, the aged monarch died suddenly after a glorious reign, as a result of a fit of apoplexy. He was succeeded by his son, Louis XVII, who was obliged to conduct several wars, wherein the captain of his hosts, the royal marshal, Napoleon Bonaparte, conquered a great part of Europe for his King. Napoleon, however, abused his power and made a public attempt to rebel against his liege lord and to compass his own ambitious ends. Under the leadership of Alexander I, King and Autocrat of all the Russias, the general was deposed, deprived of all his honors and dignities and all claim to pension. He was banished to St. Helena."

As a part of a stimulating examination for freshmen one could give them this quotation and ask, (a) List all the errors you can discover in this paragraph and correct each as you name it. (b) Comment on this quotation.

Another example may be found in journalese history. In describing the Hundred Days following Emperor Napoleon's escape from Elba and his march toward Paris in 1815, *Le Moniteur Universel*, the leading nineteenth century newspaper of France, reported to its readers: March 14, 1815. "A wretch covered with the blood of a million Frenchmen, flatters himself in vain that he will find partisans among them. How does he dare to offer us his usurping

and tyrannical yoke" March 17. "Bonaparte has dared to set foot on the soil of France. Such an excess of audacity and madness has roused the indignation of the army; it demands the death of a man who can no longer be regarded as the chief of the brigands. . . ." March 18 ". . . and what Frenchman could ever recognize the titles and rights of a sovereign in the person of Napoleon Bonaparte. . . ?" March 19. "Bonaparte is advancing towards the capital. . . ." March 23. (An article giving a day by day summary.) "From Castellane to Digne and throughout the department of the Basses-Alpes the peasantry, apprized of the Emperor's march, flocked to the route from all quarters and displayed their feelings with a forcefulness which left no further room for doubt. . . . From Grenoble to Lyons the Emperor's march was nothing less than a triumph!" March 21. "The king and the princes departed during the night. . . . His Majesty, the Emperor arrived this evening at eight o'clock at the palace of the Tuileries."

It was Voltaire who defined history as *une fable convenue*.

During the "Roaring Forties," with its campaign slogans, "All of Oregon or None," "The Reannexation of Texas and the Reoccupation of Oregon," and "Fifty-four Forty or Fight," George Bancroft, the most honored historian of the age, often phrased his concluding paragraphs in hyperboles. Here is his estimate of the American Revolution and the Federal Constitution: "In America, a new people had risen up without king, princes, or nobles. . . . By calm meditation and friendly councils they had prepared a constitution which, in the union of freedom with strength and order, excelled every one known before. . . . In the happy morning of their existence as one of the powers of the world, they had chosen justice for their guide; and while they proceeded on their way with a well-founded confidence and joy, all the friends of mankind invoked success in the unexampled endeavor to govern states and territories of imperial extent as one federal republic."

Speaking of the significance of the year 1763, he declared, "In America, the Teutonic race, with its strong tendency to individuality and freedom, was to become the master from the Gulf of Mexico to the poles; and the English tongue, which, but a century and a half before, had for its entire

world a part only of two narrow islands on the outer verge of Europe, was now spread more widely than any that had ever given expression to human thought. Go forth, then, language of Milton and Hampden, language of my country, take possession of the North American continent! Gladden the waste places with every tone that has been rightly struck on the English lyre, with every English word that has been spoken well for liberty and for man!"

Professor James Harvey Robinson on one occasion used the following illustration of this general theme. In order to appreciate the arbitrary nature of the selection of historic facts offered in our standard textbooks, let us suppose that a half dozen alert and well-trained minds had never happened to be biased by the study of any textbook or outline of history. Let us suppose that they had nevertheless learned a great deal about the past directly from a vast range of sources, both literary and archaeological. Lastly, let us assume that they were all called upon independently to prepare a world history textbook, suitable for use in high schools. They would speedily discover that there was no single obvious rule for determining what should be included in their review of the past. Having no tradition to guide them, each would select what he considered most important for the young to know of the past. Writing in the twentieth century, they would all be deeply influenced by the interests and problems of the day. Battles and sieges and the courts of kings would scarcely appeal to them. Probably it would occur to none of them to mention the battle of Issus, the advent of Hadrian, the Italian enterprises of Otto I, the six wives of Henry VIII, or the invasion of Holland by Louis XIV. It is tolerably safe to assume that none of these events would be considered for inclusion by any one of our writers as he thought over all that man had done, and thought, and suffered, and dreamed, through thousands of years. All of them would agree that what men had known of the world in which they lived, or had thought to be their duty, or what they made with their hands, or the nature and style of their buildings, or how they tried to establish peace, would any of them be far more valuable to rehearse than the names of their rulers and the conflicts in which they engaged. Each writer would accordingly go his own way. He would look back on the past for explanations of

what he found most interesting in the present and would endeavor to place his readers in a position to participate intelligently in the life of their own time. The six manuals when completed would not only differ greatly from one another but also from our current textbooks.

In historiography there are two basic principles competing with each other as guiding principles for the historian. One principle would have him mirror the times and describe events as the people of the period viewed it; the other, to write, not from the point of view of contemporaries, but from the point of view of posterity, lifting out of the experiences of the past those items which most influenced posterity.

To illustrate: In the 1880's the American public was much interested in river and harbor bills. Usually these were passed through Congress by logrolling, pork-barrel methods. Today, we no longer favor such methods of procedure, but instead prefer scientific planning and the execution of such plans by experts as in the case of the Tennessee Valley Authority. If the historian follows the first principle, he will give many paragraphs to a discussion of the Rivers and Harbors Bill of 1883 and its veto by President Chester Arthur, but devote only a few sentences to the Mississippi River Commission created in 1879 and headed by the leading civil engineer of his day, Captain James B. Eads. If the historian follows the second principle, he will reverse this procedure and emphasize the work of the engineer rather than that of the politician.

Another illustration is found in the story of December, 1903. If the history of this month be written from the first point of view, it will devote pages to Theodore Roosevelt and his annual message to Congress. Column upon column of the newspapers of the time and numerous editorials and magazine articles discussed his policies and this message for weeks and months. But during that same month, only a few days after Roosevelt's message was read, Wilbur and Orville Wright made their historic flight at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. Contemporaries paid practically no attention to it. Very few newspapers gave any account of it and those that did had only a few short paragraphs on an inside page. And yet, if a great historian in the year 5000 A.D. should look back upon our age and write its story, he may

follow the second principle and devote pages to the story of how man learned to fly during this period but pass over the story of Theodore Roosevelt with only a glance.

The distinguished Italian historian, Benedetto Croce, defines history as "contemporary thought about the past." One of our respected masters, Professor James Westfall Thompson, on the occasion of his being elected president of the American Historical Association was presented with a volume of essays written by his students. In accepting it, he observed: "When I began teaching we all felt that mankind was constantly improving and that there was such a thing as progress which could be understood by the rational mind. We felt that we could know history and understand it, and thought that we could narrate it. Today I am willing to assert that neither a grain of sand nor history can be understood by the human mind. The stream of time has come down out of remote ages and passed headlands and highlands. It has brought down the debris of broken empires. The historian is but a fisherman on the shore, pulling out of the flood a fragment here, a broken statue there, vestiges of the dead past. He then tries to fit these together and make a pattern which we can understand. Is it not presumptuous to assume that we ever can understand?"

Cross currents in the history of the United States in our own day illustrate the definition given by Croce, "History is contemporary thought about the past." The war which ended in 1945 caused millions of Americans to realize how much they loved their country and the rich heritage of its ideals. This spirit is illustrated by the story of a gallant soldier home from the Pacific battlefield who upon returning to the United States knelt and kissed its soil. Never before in war were the American people as united. Their past history has taken on new interest and usefulness.

In Europe every nationality has been brought to a consciousness of its own inner unity by learning of its past. The story of the common glories and common sorrows experienced by a people weld them into a nation. When Frantisek Palacky, the great Czech historian, undertook to revive the national spirit of the Czechs, he began by writing their history. There has been abroad in America the intuitive feeling that its citizens cannot give their fullest loyalty to the nation in its hour of dire need without an under-

standing of its ideals and aspirations as these have developed in its past. It was undoubtedly because of this spirit of the times that the surveys of the teaching of American History by the *New York Times* in 1943 received such immediate and wide attention.

The first survey reported that seventy-two per cent of the colleges and universities did not require American history for admission, and nearly ninety per cent did not require it for graduation. When the colleges replied that many students' programs left no time for American history and that college students brought a knowledge of this subject from high school, the *New York Times* examined seven thousand freshman college students and found them woefully lacking in this respect. The day after its results were published, the *Philadelphia Record* observed: "It is time for Americans to know their history . . . a great many of us know almost nothing about these 'woods and templed hills' and even less of the history of the 'land where my fathers died.'" Even the United States Senate considered "the appalling neglect of United States history in our public schools." A resolution instructed its Committee on Education and Labor "to study the ways and means by which the Federal Government may most effectively promote a more thorough study of the history of the United States."

The two surveys and the conclusions drawn from them became almost overnight the subject of conversation among thousands of citizens, and of discussions at conventions, forums, and other meetings all over the country. They touched off what was already in the minds of many Americans. The *New York Times* surveys have not been so much the cause of a renewed interest in American history as the result of such an interest.

The Committee on American History in Schools and Colleges, appointed in 1943, dealt with the question we have been considering—the selection of historical facts. To avoid duplication of high school and college courses, the committee recommended that the content of the college course be altered to conform to the suggested new title, "American Civilization: its Origins and Development." Such topics as the history of ideas, science and invention, cultural trends, the role of religion, humanitarianism, and philosophy, education, music, and art were to be included and the entire story

given a proper setting in the history of the western hemisphere and taught from a world point of view. Should such a change not make the course a successful educational adventure for students, the committee would abolish it. Meantime, the committee recommended that students who by an examination revealed no need for such a course be permitted instead to elect advanced, specialized courses.

To make such a suggested course a success would require the "retooling" of most of the professors who have been teaching the traditional sophomore course. It would mean that topical headings, such as "The French and Indian War, 1754-1763," would be regarded just as narrowly misleading as would the topic, "The German and Negro War, 1914-1918," if that were used in a national history textbook of the Union of South Africa to describe African phases of World War I. In the latter case attention would then be centered upon the campaigns in German Southwest Africa while the decisive phases of the struggle which took place in the North Atlantic and in western Europe would be largely disregarded. The proper treatment, of course, would dictate first a study of each war from a global point of view and then an examination of the secondary role played by colonists and aborigines in South Africa or America.

The proposed revised course would also mean that much new material would have to be included. The most widely used college texts today do not, for example, discuss the development of radio communication except from a narrow, nationalistic viewpoint. They usually describe the days of the early crystal sets when every American had the liberty, freedom, and independence to erect a broadcasting station and broadcast what and when he pleased, if he pleased. The account then goes on to tell how the resulting mutual interference caused radio listeners to demand a clearing of the air channels. This was accomplished in 1927 by the Federal Radio Act and carried further by the Federal Communications Act in 1934. Here texts stop. They do not interpret this development by calling attention to the fact that by 1934, so far as radio broadcasting was concerned, the American citizen had lost much of his liberty, freedom, and independence and had to submit to regimentation and censorship by a "bureaucracy."

Current textbooks frequently feed the fires of isolationism by not presenting the repercussions on America of the work of radio engineers as invention after invention permitted broadcasting in ever widening circles. The only way in which many an American citizen could continue to enjoy his radio and avoid interference by stations in Quebec, Montreal, Vancouver, Havana, and El Paso, Mexico, was by having the United States sit down around a conference table in Mexico City with Canada, Cuba, Mexico, and other neighbors in a North American Radio Conference to parcel out certain wave lengths to each. This was done in 1928, and, as a result, a portion of American sovereignty and some of the free air over the United States for which George Washington had fought, had to be surrendered. But in return, the United States acquired certain reciprocal rights with respect to each of its neighbors.

In a few decades, when inventors will make it as easy to broadcast around the world as it is today to broadcast in the United States, a world-wide radio conference will again meet and through co-operation among nations clear the air for all peoples of the world. Progress in this direction was made at a conference of fifty-six nations—including the United States—in Madrid, Spain, in 1932. In 1938, sixty-six nations met in Cairo, Egypt, in another conference. Only by teaching American history with such a world outlook can we prepare our students for world government tomorrow, when electricity, the internal combustion engine, and atomic energy will inexorably demand international co-operation. The spirit in man's intellectual life gives fundamental unity to modern civilization.

Unless American history teachers grasp this outlook, then the present wave of emphasis upon its teaching will result in a dangerous provincialism and narrow nationalism and bring only ashen disillusionment. Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald in a speech to the American Congress in 1932 in the midst of the great depression asserted: "In these times there is no Italy, no Germany, no America, no Britain apart from the rest of the nations. There is nothing smaller than a world, nothing less than a system which is crumbling around our feet." His words remind one of analogous words by Patrick Henry: "Fleets and armies and the present state of things show that government is dissolved . . . the distinc-

tions between Virginians, Pennsylvanians, New Yorkers, and New Englanders are no more. I am not a Virginian, but an American." That so many Americans in the past few decades thought they were living in a country when actually they were living in a world has been due in part to the isolationist flavor of American history teaching. We have taught our boys and girls about Lewis and Clark but not about Alexander Mackenzie who crossed the Rocky Mountains before Lewis and Clark. There came to my desk for reviewing one day Jeannette Mirsky's brilliant book, *The Westward Crossing*, wherein a continental, not a provincial, motif runs through the pages as she follows Balboa, Mackenzie, and Lewis and Clark.

"If you will revise your departmental course along these lines," stated a professor of science, "I'll vote to make it required of all students." Especially is such a change needed in high schools which do not require world history. There came to my attention one such high school which enrolls fourteen hundred boys and girls but has only twenty studying world history.

To a member of the Progressive Education Association, the teaching of history should be more functional. He would emphasize much more history of yesterday, and also regard the events of today as good history, even though still in the making. He would build upon the pupil's interest by proceeding from the near to the remote. To him a fundamental issue is involved—an issue stated thus by Charles F. Kettering of General Motors: "We spend all of our time studying the past. Now I have no objection to history—history is very important, but we've been looking at the past and backing into the future. I want to turn around and back into history far enough to get a good look ahead." A member of the Progressive Education Association would want an area of learning selected for study, and then, starting with the contemporary scene, have the students collect and master such historical data as would be useful for the area selected. History would thus be fused with the other social studies. It may be that fifty years from now this point will be considered orthodox.

President James B. Conant of Harvard once reminded us that in the thousand years of the history of universities one fact stands out: universities have flourished when their

teaching was relevant to the times, but they have withered when they clung to outworn traditions and disciplines. The same principle applies to the teaching of history. A few years ago, one of our great eastern foundations studying successful teaching decided to use the inductive or case method. A list of one hundred outstanding teachers of history in the Middle states was secured. A field man then visited each teacher and talked with him, his students, and official superiors. When the results were tabulated, it was found that some of the one hundred had a sanguine, others a phlegmatic temperament; some were heavy-set, others had that lean and hungry look which Shakespeare mentions; some used objective, others, essay examinations; some used the class period in accordance with old-fashioned methods, others in accordance with new-type methods.

All, however, had one trait in common: they read their morning newspaper and associated the lesson of the day with the big, busy, teeming world in which their students lived. They possessed a certain alertness and vital interest in contemporary life from which they drew to enrich their teaching. This trait enabled them to transform the history of ancient Athens into modern history. The absence of this point of view, however, would make even the administrations of Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt ancient history. After all, the major function of teaching history is to enable us the better to understand and interpret the present-day world in which we live. To achieve this end, the teacher must be wide awake and willing to work. It was to this type of teacher that Charles W. Eliot referred in an address at Harvard when he said: "Two kinds of men make good teachers: young men, and men who never grow old."

To relate the material studied in history to present day life need not take much time, nor detract from the essential facts to be mastered. A question, a few comments, some pictures, a sketch, an assigned exercise, or a report will suffice. The teacher of history should possess a sufficient knowledge of its content so that he knows what is available in the historical storehouse for use, and, when all is said and done, this is perhaps the most important factor in making history interesting. Today, for example, we are all interested in post-war eras, and subsequent panics and depres-

sions. Hence, if we reach into our storehouse and bring forth additional facts relating to the critical years after the American Revolution or the years of reconstruction after Appomattox we shall strike a responsive cord. President James R. Lowell of Harvard once said: "The art of life does not consist in the solution of problems, but in the selection of problems to solve." Similarly we may say that the selection of facts is critical to the history teacher or historian.

In an historically-minded age, the potential power of the wrong kind of history for evil is tremendous. Loyalty to country and humanity, as well as loyalty to history, is best served by looking facts squarely in the face and not selecting them to prove an *a priori* thesis in the interest of any party, creed, system, or nation. Facts need to be interpreted with humility in the hope that one may be somewhere near the truth. Important questions confront our guild. Great, new horizons have confronted us, almost overnight. How challenging history teaching is today and promises to be tomorrow!