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History as Science

IT is given to few Commissions to earn such widespread approbation of their report as has been deservedly afforded to that of the Lytton Commission on the Manchurian dispute. Even the authoritative tributes to its fairness and impartiality from all over the world did not, however, avail to prevent a charge of bias being brought against it in the House of Commons. That such a charge could have been made is evidence of the lack of historical perspective which characterises so much of our political life to-day and so often obstructs progress towards a new international order, and above all persists in regarding as a moral issue what is now only a question of practical policy.

If this absence of historical perspective has made politicians so inept at interpreting the facts of a political situation to-day, so blind to fundamental realities, it has had no less serious consequences among the advocates of technocracy who have been eloquent of late. A grasp of the fundamental fact that the advent of power production has revolutionised the whole position of man in relation to production, and shaken his economic and social structure to its foundations, has not prevented many of its exponents from largely ignoring human values and human factors in the technical control of production and distribution which they develop. Science is only one of the factors concerned, the scientific method only one of those employed by man in his slow advance; and history affords no justification for the neglect of other methods, or for the assumption that mechanical science by itself can solve all the problems with which man is confronted. The same mistake is made to-day as was made by Bacon, who thought that the "sovereignty of man lay hid in knowledge" and that scientific discovery would ensure the fortune of the human race. Three centuries have barely yet taught us how false and dangerous is the assumption that the knowledge of how to use knowledge goes hand in hand with the growth of knowledge.

There is, in fact, something strangely similar in the attitude of those politicians who desperately strive to revert to eighteenth century ways, and ignore the immense change which has come over mankind in the last century, and in that of those who see in science a sole and sufficient guide and imagine that all man's activities can be planned on scientific lines. Each alike lacks the sense of

realities and of values which the study of history is so well able to impart, and it might be fair to place the responsibility of some at least of our difficulties on the neglect of history by our politicians and men of science alike, and on their consequent failure to interpret aright the course of present-day events.

At a time when the importance of studying the human factor is being more and more realised, when men are turning against an economic system in which increased productive powers only lead to more widespread unemployment and want, the qualities of imagination and sympathy which are essential to the understanding of history are in great demand in the affairs of society or State. The very demand and provocation of the humaner qualities which history makes, renders it an invaluable counterpart to the physical or mechanical sciences. Prof. Pollard is surely right when he urges that history is the highest form of science because its subject matter is the highest form of Nature, and that it is not commonly regarded as a science because it is too complex and too human for summary treatment by axioms, rules and formulæ.

If, however, history is not an exact science, it has much in common with the exact sciences. Dr. Tennant, for example, in the "Philosophy of the Sciences", claims first place for history in systematic order of departments of science, and asserts that it gives a far more adequate mirroring of reality than the abstract schemes of the higher sciences. Its collection of data demands qualities akin to those required of every searcher after truth whatever his field of inquiry. It is in the critical interpretation of the data acquired that history calls for qualities which are so admirably fitted to redress the balance, and in the humanisation of methods of controversy history may render its greatest service. Only by its guidance can we understand the causes of the religious, moral, political, social and economic environment in which we live. Knowledge of public action in the past provides the best means of understanding public action in the present and the surest guide for the exercise of political power. The study of history provides one way of joining to the mass of human knowledge the wisdom which alone can sort out the issues and permit beneficial action. Moreover, history, being both a science and an art, requiring a scientific analysis of materials and an artistic synthesis of results, calls for just that balance of scientific and impartial judgment, and imagination and sympathy in interpretation,

which are at the root of wise administration and constructive policy.

History, though more complex, is not in fact less capable of scientific treatment than physics or chemistry, and, apart from providing a background against which alone political issues can be understood or viewed in a true perspective, its study encourages the scientific spirit in which alone political issues can be profitably examined. It is for this more especially that General Smuts has made such eloquent pleas. Prof. Pollard again has pointed out, for example, that a course on the history of London would be the first introduction to the scientific investigation of its present-day problems of local government, the vastest problems of the kind with which the human intellect has ever been called upon to deal.

This spirit we search for in vain, for example, in the recent debate on the arms embargo. We see no signs of any policy beyond that calculated to serve the narrowest exigencies of the moment—no regard to the question of world order and international action, no facing of the problems which must be faced once at least if a community of nations is to demonstrate its determination not to allow the old methods of irrational force to be introduced, no hint of the impartial and scientific survey of the facts of the particular situation carried out by the Lytton Commission and before that by the Institute of Pacific Relations. The expediency which dominated the debate has no room for realism, for the fearless facing of facts, for the scientific inquiry and deliberate co-operation which alone stand between us and world disaster.

Leaving aside the fact that a study of the history of science itself often suggests exceedingly fruitful lines of research, it should be clear that science and history have a joint contribution to make to our national and international needs which we neglect at our peril, and which it is the duty of the scientific worker as of the scholar of history to emphasise with instant eloquence. Bacon's vision of man "that will live and be a citizen of the world" in "De Augmentis Scientiarum" holds out our only hope of survival, and it were idle for science apart from history to seek to enforce the lesson.

Granted the wide fields such as politics, human biology, sociology, economics and psychology, into which the application of scientific methods is long overdue, such methods alone will not bring us the solution we desire. Even when such fields of knowledge have been placed on a scientific

basis, there will remain the problem of human nature, and the study of human affairs by the application of physical formulæ alone is more likely to lead to mental confusion than to order. Scientific methods assist us to ascertain and assemble our facts, to clear our minds from passion and prejudice, but they can lead us to little of the rudiments of justice, ethics, logic or literature, though it must not be forgotten that the scientific attitude of mind may even yet prove to be a much more humanising element than might at first be expected when we think of it in terms of a struggle with the forces of Nature.

In the perspective and sense of values, the appraisal of human factors which the study of history engenders, we are able to assess correctly the position and responsibility of science. From this point of view we realise that the failure of the scientific worker to accept responsibility for the consequences of his discoveries inevitably means that he must accept the repression or suppression of certain aspects of scientific truth if the human race is to survive. If his citizenship is subordinated to his science, and the growth of an international civic sense does not keep pace with the advance of knowledge, society must itself take measures to prevent the perversion of science to destructive purposes. Knowledge may require insulation and control in the same way that electric power is safeguarded and its use restricted to those who can use it aright.

We come back, therefore, to the problem of relating knowledge and power in the service of the community. If acceptance of civic responsibility by the man of science is a fundamental condition before the scientific expert can play the part in human government indicated, for example, in certain phases of the work of the technical committees of the League of Nations, universal suffrage cannot be tempered with science by the efforts of the scientific worker alone. The scientific expert will only take his rightful place in national and international government as the study of history leads both administrators and the electorate to appreciate the significance of current events and tendencies.

This is a problem of education—of imparting not merely knowledge but also understanding, in ensuring that responsibility goes hand in hand with power. It is in this sphere—the teaching of philosophy by means of examples, in supplying the needed touch of human nature, that the study of history is of supreme importance in the study

of scientific politics. Imagination and insight are here as essential as in the equipment of the man of science. History, as Prof. Pollard has said, is a matter of sense as of science, of feeling as well as of fact, and it is because history is not felt that citizenship is feeble. We cannot understand why men acted unless we know how they felt; and in discovering where men failed in sympathy and understanding because they did not understand what others felt, and thus knew not what they themselves were doing, we came to the realities of history upon which good citizenship and a new world order are based. History, being both an art and a science, offers us the opportunity of harmonising the discovery and use of new knowledge in ways which permit the free expansion of the human spirit and the continuous amelioration of the lot of mankind. The scientific teaching of history, as well as the teaching of science as part of ordinary culture, are indispensable elements in that training and discipline through which alone man can acquire the self-command and the wisdom by which to regain control over events.

Chinese Medicine

History of Chinese Medicine: being a Chronicle of Medical Happenings in China from Ancient Times to the Present Period. By Dr. K. Chimin Wong and Dr. Wu Lien-Teh. Pp. xviii + 706 + 55 plates. (Tientsin: The Tientsin Press, Ltd., 1932.) G. dollars 7.50; 30s. net.

TO most people in Great Britain the whole story of Chinese medicine is contained in a legend and an anecdote. The legend is to the effect that, in China, a doctor is only paid for keeping his patients well, and never for attending and curing them when ill—a reflection, probably, on the old saying from the Chinese classics that “The sage does not treat those who are ill, but those who are well”. The anecdote is the well-known story of the sick man who went out to seek a Chinese doctor with the fewest lanterns outside his door, it being alleged that one such lantern must be hung up for every patient who had died at the doctor’s hands, and that, having at length discovered a physician with but one lantern to his discredit, he found to his chagrin that the doctor had previously attended but one patient.

These stories, apocryphal though they are, give a delightful hint as to the possible relationship between doctor and patient in the Far East, but they scarcely claim to tell the whole story of