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Title: An Ethnologist's View of History

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Release Date: July 31, 2009 [EBook #29554]

Language: English

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Transcriber's Note

A number of typographical errors have been maintained in this version of this book. They are marked and the corrected text is shown in the popup. A description of the errors is found in the [list](#) at the end of the text.

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AN ETHNOLOGIST'S VIEW OF HISTORY.

AN ADDRESS

BEFORE THE
ANNUAL MEETING OF THE NEW JERSEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY,
AT
TRENTON, NEW JERSEY, JANUARY 28, 1896.

BY

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PHILADELPHIA, PA.
1896.

[2]

[3]

An Ethnologist's View of History.

MR. PRESIDENT:

* * * * *

The intelligent thought of the world is ever advancing to a fuller appreciation of the worth of the past to the present and the future. Never before have associations, societies and journals devoted to historical studies been so numerous. All times and tribes are searched for memorials; the remote corners of modern, medieval and ancient periods are brought under scrutiny; and going beyond these again, the semi-historic eras of tradition and the nebulous gleams from pre-historic milleniums are diligently scanned, that their uncertain story may be prefaced to that registered in "the syllables of recorded time."

In this manner a vast mass of material is accumulating with which the historian has to deal. What now is the real nature of the task he sets before himself? What is the mission with which he is entrusted?

To understand this task, to appreciate that mission, he must ask himself the broad questions: What is the aim of history? What are the purposes for which it should be studied and written?

He will find no lack of answers to these inquiries, all offered with equal confidence, but singularly discrepant among themselves. His embarrassment will be that of selection between widely divergent views, each ably supported by distinguished advocates. [4]

As I am going to add still another, not exactly like any already on the list, it may well be asked of me to show why one or other of those already current is not as good or better than my own. This requires me to pass in brief review the theories of historic methods, or, as it is properly termed, of the Philosophy of History, which are most popular to-day.

They may be classified under three leading opinions, as follows:

1. History should be an accurate record of events, and nothing more; an exact and disinterested statement of what has taken place, concealing nothing and coloring nothing, reciting incidents in their natural connections, without bias, prejudice, or didactic application of any kind.

This is certainly a high ideal and an excellent model. For many, yes, for the majority of historical works, none better can be suggested. I place it first and name it as worthiest of all current theories of historical composition. But, I would submit to you, is a literary production answering to this precept, really *History*? Is it anything more than a well-prepared annal or chronicle? Is it, in fact anything else than a compilation containing the materials of which real history should be composed?

I consider that the mission of the historian, taken in its completest sense, is something much more, much higher, than the collection and narration of events, no matter how well this is done. The historian should be like the man of science, and group his facts under inductive systems so as to reach the general laws which connect and explain them. He should, still further, be like the artist, and endeavor so to exhibit these connections under literary forms that they present to the reader the impression of a symmetrical and organic unity, in which each part or event bears definite relations to all others. Collection and collation are not enough. The historian must "work up his field notes," as the geologists say, so as to extract from his data all the useful results which they are capable of yielding. [5]

I am quite certain that in these objections I can count on the suffrages of most. For the majority of authors write history in a style widely different from that which I have been describing. They are distinctly teachers, though not at all in accord as to what they teach. They are generally advocates, and with more or less openness maintain what I call the second theory of the aim of history, to wit:

2. History should be a collection of evidence in favor of certain opinions.

In this category are to be included all religious and political histories. Their pages are intended to show the dealings of God with man; or the evidences of Christianity, or of one of its sects, Catholicism or Protestantism; or the sure growth of republican or of monarchical institutions; or the proof of a divine government of the world; or the counter-proof that there is no such government; and the like.

You will find that most general histories may be placed in this class. Probably a man cannot himself have very strong convictions about politics or religion, and not let them be seen in his narrative of events where such questions are prominently present. A few familiar instances will illustrate this. No one can take either Lingard's or Macauley's History of England as anything more than a plea for either writer's personal views. Gibbon's anti-Christian feeling is as perceptibly disabling to him in many passages as in the church historians is their search for "acts of Providence," and the hand of God in human affairs.

All such histories suffer from fatal flaws. They are deductive instead of inductive; they are a [6]

defensio sententiarum instead of an *investigatio veri*; they assume the final truth as known, and go not forth to seek it. They are therefore “teleologic,” that is, they study the record of man as the demonstration of a problem the solution of which is already known. In this they are essentially “divinatory,” claiming foreknowledge of the future; and, as every ethnologist knows, divination belongs to a stadium of incomplete intellectual culture, one considerably short of the highest. As has been well said by Wilhelm von Humboldt, any teleologic theory “disturbs and falsifies the facts of history;”⁶⁻¹ and it has been acutely pointed out by the philosopher Hegel, that it contradicts the notion of progress and is no advance over the ancient tenet of a recurrent cycle.⁶⁻²

I need not dilate upon these errors. They must be patent to you. No matter how noble the conviction, how pure the purpose, there is something nobler and purer than it, and that is, unswerving devotion to rendering in history the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

I now turn to another opinion, that which teaches that—

3. History should be a portraiture, more or less extended, of the evolution of the human species.

This is claimed to be the “scientific” view of history. It was tersely expressed by Alexander von Humboldt in the phrase: “The history of the world is the mere expression of a predetermined, that is, fixed, evolution.”⁶⁻³

It is that advocated by Auguste Comte, Draper and Spencer, and a few years ago Prof. Gerland, of Strasburg, formulated its basic maxim in these words: “Man has developed from the brute through the action of purely mechanical, therefore fixed, laws.”⁷⁻¹ [7]

The scientist of to-day who hesitates to subscribe to these maxims is liable to be regarded as of doubtful learning or of debilitated intellect. I acknowledge that I am one such, and believe that I can show sound reasons for denying the assumption on which this view is based.

It appears to me just as teleologic and divinatory as those I have previously named. It assumes Evolution as a law of the universe, whereas in natural science it is only a limited generalization, inapplicable to most series of natural events, and therefore of uncertain continuance in any series. The optimism which it inculcates is insecure and belongs to deductive, not inductive, reasoning. The mechanical theory on which it is based lacks proof, and is, I maintain, insufficient to explain motive, and, therefore, historic occurrences. The assumption that history is the record of a necessary and uninterrupted evolution, progressing under ironclad mechanical laws, is a preconceived theory as detrimental to clear vision as are the preoccupations of the theologian or the political partisan.

Any definition of evolution which carries with it the justification of optimism is as erroneous in history, as it would be in biology to assert that all variations are beneficial. There is no more certainty that the human species will improve under the operation of physical laws than that any individual will; there is far more evidence that it will not, as every species of the older geologic ages has succumbed to those laws, usually without leaving a representative.

I am aware that I am here in opposition to the popular as well as the scientific view. No commonplace is better received than that, “Eternal progress is the law of nature;” though by what process eternal laws are discovered is imperfectly explained. [8]

Applied to history, a favorite dream of some of the most recent teachers is that the life of the species runs the same course as that of one of its members. Lord Acton, of Oxford, in a late lecture states that: “The development of society is like that of individual;”⁸⁻¹ and Prof. Fellows, of the University of Chicago, advances the same opinion in the words, “Humanity as a whole develops like a child.”⁸⁻²

The error of this view was clearly pointed out some years ago by Dr. Tobler.⁸⁻³ There has been no growth of humanity at large at all comparable to that of the individual. There are tribes to-day in the full stone age, and others in all stages of culture above it. The horizons of progress have been as local as those of geography. No solidarity of advancement exists in the species as a whole. Epochs and stadia of culture vary with race and climate. The much talked of “law of continuity” does not hold good either in national or intellectual growth.

Such are the criticisms which may be urged against the historical methods now in vogue. What, you will ask, is offered in their stead? That which I offer is the view of the ethnologist. It is not so ambitious as some I have named. It does not deal in eternal laws, nor divine the distant future. The ethnologist does not profess to have been admitted into the counsels of the Almighty, nor to have caught in his grasp the secret purposes of the Universe. He seeks the sufficient reason for known facts, and is content with applying the knowledge he gains to present action. [9]

Before stating the view of the ethnologist, I must briefly describe what the science of Ethnology is. You will see at once how closely it is allied to history, and that the explanation of the one almost carries with it the prescription for the other.

It begins with the acknowledged maxim that man is by nature a gregarious animal, a *zoon politikon*, as Aristotle called him, living in society, and owing to society all those traits which it is the business of history, as distinguished from biology, to study.

From this standpoint, all that the man is he owes to others; and what the others are, they owe,

in part, to him. Together, they make up the social unit, at first the family or clan, itself becoming part of a larger unit, a tribe, nation or people. The typical folk, or *ethnos*, is a social unit, the members of which are bound together by certain traits common to all or most, which impart to them a prevailing character, an organic unity, specific peculiarities and general tendencies.

You may inquire what these traits are to which I refer as making up ethnic character. The answer cannot be so precise as you would like. We are dealing with a natural phenomenon, and Nature, as Goethe once remarked, never makes groups, but only individuals. The group is a subjective category of our own minds. It is, nevertheless, psychologically real, and capable of definition.

The *Ethnos* must be defined, like a species of natural history, by a rehearsal of a series of its characteristics, not by one alone. The members of this series are numerous, and by no means of equal importance; I shall mention the most prominent of them, and in the order in which I believe they should be ranked for influence on national character.

First, I should rank Language. Not only is it the medium of intelligible intercourse, of thought-
[10] tranference, but thought itself is powerfully aided or impeded by the modes of its expression in sound. As “spoken language,” in poetry and oratory, its might is recognized on all hands; while in “written language,” as literature, it works silently but with incalculable effect on the character of a people.[10-1](#)

Next to this I should place Government, understanding this word in its widest sense, as embracing the terms on which man agrees to live with his fellow man and with woman, family, therefore, as well as society ties. This includes the legal standards of duty, the rules of relationship and descent, the rights of property and the customs of commerce, the institutions of castes, classes and rulers, and those international relations on which depend war and peace. I need not enlarge on the profound impress which these exert on the traits of the people.[10-2](#)

After these I should name Religion, though some brilliant scholars, such as Schelling and Max Müller,[10-3](#) have claimed for it the first place as a formative influence on ethnic character. No one will deny the prominent rank it holds in the earlier stages of human culture. It is scarcely too much to say that most of the waking hours of the males of some tribes are taken up with religious ceremonies. Religion is, however, essentially “divinatory,” that is, its chief end and aim is toward the future, not the present, and therefore the impress it leaves on national character is far less permanent, much more ephemeral, than either government or language. This is constantly seen in daily life. Persons change their religion with facility, but adhere resolutely to the laws which protect their property. The mighty empire of Rome secured ethnic unity to a degree never since equalled in parallel circumstances, and its plan was to tolerate all religions—as, indeed, do all enlightened states to-day—but to insist on the adoption of the Roman law, and, in official intercourse, the Latin language. I have not forgotten the converse example of the Jews, which some attribute to their religion; but the Romany, who have no religion worth mentioning, have been just as tenacious of their traits under similar adverse circumstances. [11]

The Arts, those of Utility, such as pottery, building, agriculture and the domestication of animals, and those of Pleasure, such as music, painting and sculpture, must come in for a full share of the ethnologist’s attention. They represent, however, stadia of culture rather than national character. They influence the latter materially and are influenced by it, and different peoples have toward them widely different endowments; but their action is generally indirect and unequally distributed throughout the social unit.

These four fields, Language, Government, Religion and the Arts, are those which the ethnologist explores when he would render himself acquainted with a nation’s character; and now a few words about the methods of study he adopts, and the aims, near or remote, which he keeps in view.

He first gathers his facts, from the best sources at his command, with the closest sifting he can give them, so as to exclude errors of observation or intentional bias. From the facts he aims to discover on the above lines what are or were the regular characteristics of the people or peoples he is studying. The ethnic differences so revealed are to him what organic variations are to the biologist and morphologist; they indicate evolution or retrogression, and show an advance toward higher forms and wider powers, or toward increasing feebleness and decay. [12]

To understand them they must be studied in connection and causation. Hence, the method of the ethnologist becomes that which in the natural sciences is called the “developmental” method. It may be defined as the historic method where history is lacking. The biologist explains the present structure of an organ by tracing it back to simpler forms in lower animals until he reaches the germ from which it began. The ethnologist pursues the same course. He selects, let us say, a peculiar institution, such as caste, and when he loses the traces of its origin through failure of written records, he seeks for them in the survivals of unwritten folk-lore, or in similar forms in primitive conditions of culture.

Here is where Archæology renders him most efficient aid. By means of it he has been able to follow the trail of most of the arts and institutions of life back to a period when they were so simple and uncomplicated that they are quite transparent and intelligible. Later changes are to be analyzed and explained by the same procedure.[12-1](#)

This is the whole of the ethnologic method. It is open and easy when the facts are in our

possession. There are no secret springs, no occult forces, in the historic development of culture. Whatever seems hidden or mysterious, is so only because our knowledge of the facts is imperfect. No magic and no miracle has aided man in his long conflict with the material forces around him. No ghost has come from the grave, no God from on high, to help him in the bitter struggle. What he has won is his own by the right of conquest, and he can apply to himself the words of the poet:

“Hast du nicht alles selbst vollendet,
Heilig glühend Herz?” (*Goethe*).

Freed from fear we can now breathe easily, for we know that no *Deus ex machina* meddles with those serene and mighty forces whose adamantine grasp encloses all the phenomena of nature and of life.

The ethnologist, however, has not completed his task when he has defined an *ethnos*, and explained its traits by following them to their sources. He has merely prepared himself for a more delicate and difficult part of his undertaking.

It has been well said by one of the ablest ethnologists of this generation, the late Dr. Post, of Bremen, that “The facts of ethnology must ever be regarded as the expressions of the general consciousness of Humanity.”¹³⁻¹ The time has passed when real thinkers can be satisfied with the doctrines of the positive philosophers, who insisted that events and institutions must be explained solely from the phenomenal or objective world, that is, by other events.

Sounder views prevail, both in ethnology and its history. “The history of man,” says a German writer, “is neither a divine revelation, nor a process of nature; it is first and above all, the work of man;”¹³⁻² an opinion reiterated by Prof. Flint in his work on the philosophy of history in these words: “History is essentially the record of the work and manifestation of *human nature*.”¹⁴⁻¹ In both sciences it is the essentially human which alone occupies us; it is the *life of man*.

Now men do not live in material things, but in mental states; and solely as they affect these are the material things valuable or valueless. Religions, arts, laws, historic events, all have but one standard of appraisal, to wit, the degree to which they produce permanently beneficial mental states in the individuals influenced by them. All must agree to this, though they may differ widely as to what such a mental state may be; whether one of pleasurable activity, or that of the Buddhist hermit who sinks into a trance by staring at his navel, or that of the Trappist monk whose occupations are the meditation of death and digging his own grave.

The ethnologist must make up his own mind about this, and with utmost care, for if his standard of merit and demerit is erroneous, his results, however much he labors on them, will have no permanent value. There are means, if he chooses to use them, which will aid him here.

He must endeavor to picture vividly to himself the mental condition which gave rise to special arts and institutions, or which these evolved in the people. He must ascertain whether they increased or diminished the joy of living, or stimulated the thirst for knowledge and the love of the true and the beautiful. He must cultivate the liveliness of imagination which will enable him to transport himself into the epoch and surroundings he is studying, and feel on himself, as it were, their peculiar influences. More than all, chief of all, he must have a broad, many-sided, tender sympathy with all things human, enabling him to appreciate the emotions and arguments of all parties and all peoples.

Such complete comprehension and spiritual accord will not weaken, but will strengthen his clear perception of those standards by which all actions and institutions must ultimately be weighed and measured. There are such standards, and the really learned ethnologist will be the last to deny or overlook them.

The saying of Goethe that “The most unnatural action is yet natural,” is a noble suggestion of tolerance; but human judgment can scarcely go to the length of Madame de Stael’s opinion, when she claims that “To understand all actions is to pardon all.” We must brush away the sophisms which insist that all standards are merely relative, and that time and place alone decide on right and wrong. Were that so, not only all morality, but all science and all knowledge were fluctuating as sand. But it is not so. The principles of Reason, Truth, Justice and Love have been, are, and ever will be the same. Time and place, race and culture, make no difference. Whenever a country is engaged in the diffusion of these immortal verities, whenever institutions are calculated to foster and extend them, that country, those institutions, take noble precedence over all others whose efforts are directed to lower aims.¹⁵⁻¹

Something else remains. When the ethnologist has acquired a competent knowledge of his facts, and deduced from them a clear conception of the mental states of the peoples he is studying, he has not finished his labors. Institutions and arts in some degree reflect the mental conditions of a people, in some degree bring them about; but the underlying source of both is something still more immaterial and intangible, yet more potent, to wit, Ideas and Ideals. These are the primary impulses of conscious human endeavor, and it is vain to attempt to understand ethnology or to write history without assigning their consideration the first place in the narration.

I am anxious to avoid here any metaphysical obscurity. My assertion is, that the chief impulses of nations and peoples are abstract ideas and ideals, unreal and unrealizable; and that it is in pursuit of these that the great as well as the small movements on the arena of national life and on the stage of history have taken place.

You are doubtless aware that this is no new discovery of mine. Early in this century Wilhelm von Humboldt wrote: "The last and highest duty of the historian is to portray the effort of the Idea to attain realization in fact;" and the most recent lecture on the philosophy of history which I have read, that by Lord Acton, contains this maxim: "Ideas which in religion and politics are truths, in history are living forces."

I do claim that it is timely for me to repeat these doctrines and to urge them with vehemence, for they are generally repudiated by the prevailing schools of ethnology and history in favor of the opinion that objective, mechanical influences alone suffice to explain all the phenomena of human life. This I pronounce an inadequate and an unscientific opinion.

There is in living matter everywhere something which escapes the most exhaustive investigation, some subtle center of impulse, which lies beyond the domain of correlated energy, and which acts directly, without increasing or diminishing the total of that energy. Also in the transformations of organic forms, there are preparations and propulsions which no known doctrine of the mechanical, natural causes can interpret. We must accept the presence of the same powers, and in a greater degree, in the life and the history of man. [17-1](#)

[17]

It may be objected that abstract ideas are far beyond the grasp of the uncultivated intellect. The reply is, consciously to regard them as abstract, may be; but they exist and act for all that. All sane people think and talk according to certain abstract laws of grammar and logic; and they act in similar unconsciousness of the abstractions which impel them. Moreover, the Idea is usually clothed in a concrete Ideal, a personification, which brings it home to the simplest mind. This was long ago pointed out by the observant Machiavelli in his statement that every reform of a government or religion is in the popular mind personified as the effort of one individual.

In every nation or *ethnos* there is a prevailing opinion as to what the highest typical human being should be. This "Ideal of Humanity," as it has been called, is more or less constantly and consciously pursued, and becomes a spur to national action and to a considerable degree an arbiter of national destiny. If the ideal is low and bestial, the course of that nation is downward, self-destroying; if it is lofty and pure, the energies of the people are directed toward the maintenance of those principles which are elevating and preservative. These are not mechanical forces, in any rational sense of the term; but they are forces the potent directive and formative influence of which cannot be denied and must not be underestimated.

Just in proportion as such ideas are numerous, clear and true in the national mind, do their power augment and their domain extend; just so much more quickly and firmly do they express themselves, in acts, forms and institutions, and thus enable the nation to enrich, beautify and strengthen its own existence. We have but to glance along the nations of the world and to reflect on the outlines of their histories, to perceive the correctness of the conclusion which Prof. Lazarus, perhaps the most eminent analyst of ethnic character of this generation, reaches in one of his essays: "A people which is not rich in ideas, is never rich; one that is not strong in its thinking powers, is never strong." [18-1](#)

[18]

I claim, therefore, that the facts of ethnology and the study of racial psychology justify me in formulating this maxim for the guidance of the historian: *The conscious and deliberate pursuit of ideal aims is the highest causality in human history.*

The historian who would fulfil his mission in its amplest sense must trace his facts back to the ideas which gave them birth; he must recognize and define these as the properties of specific peoples; and he must estimate their worth by their tendency to national preservation or national destruction.

This is the maxim, the axiom, if you please, which both the ethnologist and the historian must bear ever present in mind if they would comprehend the meaning of institutions or the significance of events. They must be referred to, and explained by, the ideas which gave them birth. As an American historian has tersely put it, "The facts relating to successive phases of *human thought* constitute History." [18-2](#)

I am aware that a strong school of modern philosophers will present the objection that thought itself is but a necessary result of chemical and mechanical laws, and therefore that it cannot be an independent cause. Dr. Post has pointedly expressed this position in the words: "We do not think; thinking goes on within us," [19-1](#) just as other functions, such as circulation and secretion, go on.

[19]

It is not possible for me at this time to enter into this branch of the discussion. But I may ask your attention to the fact that one of the highest authorities on the laws of natural science, the late George J. Romanes, reached by the severest induction an exactly opposite opinion, which he announced in these words: "The human mind is itself a causal agent. Its motives are in large part matters of its own creation. * * * Intelligent volition is a true cause of adjustive movement." [19-2](#)

For myself, after what I have endeavored to make an unbiased study of both opinions, I subscribe unhesitatingly to the latter, and look upon Mind not only as a potent but as an independent cause of motion in the natural world, of action in the individual life, and, therefore, of events in the history of the species.

Confining ourselves to ethnology and history, the causative idea, as I have said, makes itself felt through ethnic ideals. These are influential in proportion as they are vividly realized by the national genius; and elevating in proportion as they partake of those final truths already referred

to, which are all merely forms of expression of right reasoning. These ideals are the *idola fori*, which have sometimes deluded, sometimes glorified, those who believed in them.

I shall mention a few of them to make my meaning more apparent.

That with which we are most familiar in history is the warrior ideal, the personification of military glory and martial success. It is present among the rudest tribes, and that it is active today, events in recent European history prove only too clearly; and among ourselves, little would be needed to awaken it to vivid life. [20]

We are less acquainted with religious ideals, as they have weakened under the conditions of higher culture. They belong in European history more to the medieval than to the modern period. Among Mohammedans and Brahmins we can still see them in their full vigor. In these lower faiths we can still find that intense fanaticism which can best be described by the expression of Novalis, "intoxicated with God," drunk with the divine; [20-1](#) and this it is which preserves to these nations what power they still retain.

Would that I could claim for our own people a grander conception of the purpose of life than either of these. But alas! their ideal is too evident to be mistaken. I call it the "divitial" ideal, that of the rich man, that which makes the acquisition of material wealth the one standard of success in life, the only justifiable aim of effort. To most American citizens the assertion that there is any more important, more sensible purpose than this, is simply incomprehensible or incredible.

In place of any of these, the man who loves his kind would substitute others; and as these touch closely on the business of the ethnologist and the historian when either would apply the knowledge he has gained to the present condition of society, I will briefly refer to some advanced by various writers.

The first and most favorite is that of *moral perfection*. It has been formulated in the expression: "In the progress of ethical conceptions lies the progress of history itself." (Schäfer.) To such writers the ideal of duty performed transcends all others, and is complete in itself. The chief end of man, they say, is to lead the moral life, diligently to cultivate the ethical perception, the notion of "the ought," and to seek in this the finality of his existence. [21-1](#) [21]

Keener thinkers have, however, recognized that virtue, morality, the ethical evolution, cannot be an end in itself, but must be a means to some other end. Effort directed toward other, altruism in any form, must have its final measurement of value in terms of self; otherwise the immutable principles of justice are attacked. I cannot enlarge upon this point, and will content myself with a reference to Prof. Steintal's admirable essay on "The Idea of ethical Perfection," published some years ago. [21-2](#) He shows that in its last analysis the Good has its value solely in the freedom which it confers. Were all men truly ethical, all would be perfectly free. Therefore Freedom, in its highest sense, according to him and several other accomplished reasoners, is the aim of morality, and is that which gives it worth.

This argument seems to me a step ahead, but yet to remain incomplete. For after all, what is freedom? It means only opportunity, not action; and opportunity alone is a negative quantity, a zero. Opportunity for what, I ask?

For an answer, I turn with satisfaction to an older writer on the philosophy of history, one whose genial sympathy with the human heart glows on every page of his volumes, to Johann Gottfried von Herder. [21-3](#) The one final aim, he tells us, of all institutions, laws, governments and religions, of all efforts and events, is that each person, undisturbed by others, may employ his own powers to their fullest extent, and thus gain for himself a completer existence, a more beautiful enjoyment of his faculties. [22]

Thus, to the enriching of the individual life, its worth, its happiness and its fullness, does all endeavor of humanity tend; in it, lies the end of all exertion, the reward of all toil; to define it, should be the object of ethnology; and to teach it, the purpose of history.

Let me recapitulate.

The ethnologist regards each social group as an entity or individual, and endeavors to place clearly before his mind its similarities and differences with other groups. Taking objective facts as his guides, such as laws, arts, institutions and language, he seeks from these to understand the mental life, the psychical welfare of the people, and beyond this to reach the ideals which they cherished and the ideas which were the impulses of their activities. Events and incidents, such as are recorded in national annals, have for him their main, if not only value, as indications of the inner or soul life of the people.

By the comparison of several social groups he reaches wider generalizations; and finally to those which characterize the common consciousness of Humanity, the psychical universals of the species. By such comparison he also ascertains under what conditions and in what directions men have progressed most rapidly toward the cultivation and the enjoyment of the noblest elements of their nature; and this strictly inductive knowledge is that alone which he would apply to furthering the present needs and aspirations of social life.

This is the method which he would suggest for history in the broad meaning of the term. It should be neither a mere record of events, nor the demonstration of a thesis, but a study, through occurrences and institutions, of the mental states of peoples at different epochs, explanatory of their success or failure, and practically applicable to the present needs of human society. [23]

Such explanation should be strictly limited in two directions. First, by the principle that man can be explained only by man, and can be so explained completely. That is, no super-human agencies need be invoked to interpret any of the incidents of history: and, on the other hand, no merely material or mechanical conditions, such as climate, food and environment, are sufficient for a full interpretation. Beyond these lie the inexhaustible sources of impulse in the essence of Mind itself.

Secondly, the past can teach us nothing of the future beyond a vague surmise. All theories which proceed on an assumption of knowledge concerning finalities, whether in science or dogma, are cobwebs of the brain, not the fruit of knowledge, and obscure the faculty of intellectual perception. It is wasteful of one's time to frame them, and fatal to one's work to adopt them.

These are also two personal traits which, it seems to me, are requisite to the comprehension of ethnic psychology, and therefore are desirable to both the ethnologist and the historian. The one of these is the poetic instinct.

I fear this does not sound well from the scientific rostrum, for the prevailing notion among scientists is that the poet is a fabulist, and is therefore as far off as possible from the platform they occupy. No one, however, can really understand a people who remains outside the pale of the world of imagination in which it finds its deepest joys; and nowhere is this depicted so clearly as in its songs and by its bards. The ethnologist who has no taste for poetry may gather much that is good, but will miss the best; the historian who neglects the poetic literature of a nation turns away his eyes from the vista which would give him the farthest insight into national character.

The other trait is more difficult to define. To apprehend what is noblest in a nation one must oneself be noble. Knowledge of facts and an unbiased judgment need to be accompanied by a certain development of personal character which enables one to be in sympathy with the finest tissue of human nature, from the fibre of which are formed heroes and martyrs, patriots and saints, enthusiasts and devotees. To appreciate these something of the same stuff must be in the mental constitution of the observer. [24]

Such is the ethnologist's view of history. He does not pretend to be either a priest or a prophet. He claims neither to possess the final truth nor to foresee it. He is, therefore equally unwelcome to the dogmatist, the optimistic naturalist and the speculative philosopher. He refuses any explanations which either contradict or transcend human reason; but he insists that human reason is one of the causal facts which he has to consider; and this brings him into conflict with both the mystic and the materialist.

Though he exalts the power of ideas, he is no idealist, but practical to the last degree; for he denies the worth of any art, science, event or institution which does not directly or indirectly contribute to the elevation of the individual man or woman, the common average person, the human being.

To this one end, understanding it as we best can, he claims all effort should tend; and any other view than this of the philosophy of history, any other standard of value applied to the records of the past, he looks upon as delusive and deceptive, no matter under what heraldry of title or seal of sanctity it is offered.

6-1 In his epochal essay "Die Aufgabe des Geschichtschreibers." *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. I., s. 13. It was republished with a discriminating introduction by Professor Steinthal in *Die Sprachphilosophischen Werke Wilhelm von Humboldt's* (Berlin, 1883).

6-2 "Der Zweck-Begriff bewirkt nur sich selbst, und ist am Ende was er im Anfange, in der Unsprünglichkeit, war." *Encyclopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften*. Theil, I., § 204.

6-3 "Die Weltgeschichte ist der blosse Ausdruck einer vorbestimmten Entwicklung." (Quoted by Lord Acton.)

7-1 "Die Menschheit hat sich aus natürlicher, tierischer Grundlage auf rein natürliche mechanische Weise entwickelt." *Anthropologische Beiträge*, s. 21.

8-1 *A Lecture on the Study of History*, p. 1 (London, 1895).

8-2 See his article "The Relation of Anthropology to the Study of History," in *The American Journal of Sociology*, July, 1895.

8-3 Ludwig Tobler, in his article "Zur Philosophie der Geschichte," in the *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie*, Bd. XII., s. 195.

10-1 One of the most lucid of modern German philosophical writers says, "Without language, there could be no unity of mental life, no national life at all." Friedrich Paulsen, *Introduction to Philosophy*, p. 193. (English translation, New York, 1895.) I need scarcely recall to the student that this was the cardinal principle of the ethnological writings of Wilhelm von Humboldt, and that his most celebrated essay is entitled "Ueber die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues und ihren Einfluss auf die geistige Entwicklung des Menschengeschlechts." The thought is well and tersely put by Prof. Frank Granger—"Language is the instinctive expression of national spirit." (*The Worship of the Romans*, p. 19, London, 1896.)

10-2 "Law, in its positive forms, may be viewed as an instrument used to produce a certain kind of character." Frank Granger, *ubi supra*, p. 19.

10-3 *Lectures on the Science of Religion*, p. 55.

[12-1](#) How different from the position of Voltaire, who, expressing, the general sentiment of his times, wrote,—"The history of barbarous nations has no more interest than that of bears and wolves!"

[13-1](#) *Grundriss der ethnologischen Jurisprudenz*, Bd. I., s. 5. (Leipzig, 1894.)

[13-2](#) "Das Geschichte ist weder eine Offenbarung Gottes, noch ein Naturprocess, sondern eben Menschenwerk." Tobler in the *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie*, Bd. XII., s. 201.

[14-1](#) *History of the Philosophy of History*, p. 579.

[15-1](#) There is nothing in this inconsistent with the principle laid down by Lecky: "The men of each age must be judged by the ideal of their own age and country, and not by the ideal of ourselves."—*The Political Value of History*, p. 50, New York, 1892. The distinction is that between the relative standard, which we apply to motives and persons, and the absolute standard, which we apply to actions. The effects of the latter, for good or evil, are fixed, and independent of the motives which prompt them.

[17-1](#) "The historian," says Tolstoi, "is obliged to admit an inexplicable force, which acts upon his elementary forces." *Power and Liberty*, p. 28 (Eng. Trans., New York, 1888).

[18-1](#) See his article "Ueber die Ideen in der Geschichte," in the *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie*, Bd. III., S. 486.

[18-2](#) Brooks Adams, *The Law of Civilization and Decay*, Preface (London, 1895). This author has reached an advanced position with reference to thought and emotion as the impulses of humanity.

[19-1](#) *Grundriss der ethnologischen Jurisprudenz*, Band I., s. 4.

[19-2](#) *Mind and Motion*, pp. 29, 140, etc. (London, 1895.) Prof. Paulsen goes much further, as, "The inner disposition spontaneously determines the development of the individual," and "The organism is, as it were, congealed voluntary action."—*Introduction to Philosophy*, pp. 187, 190.

[20-1](#) Before him, however, the expression "ebrius Deo" was applied to the ancient rhapsodists.

[21-1](#) As expressed by Prof. Droysen, in his work, *Principles of History*, (p. 16, New York, 1893), recently translated by President Andrews, of Brown University—"Historical things are the perpetual actualization of the moral forces." Elsewhere he says—"History is humanity becoming conscious concerning itself." There is no objection to such expressions; they are good as far as they go; but they do not go to the end.

[21-2](#) In the *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie*, Band XI., Heft II.

[21-3](#) *Ideen zur Geschichte der Menschheit*, B. XV., Cap. I.

Transcriber's Note

The following errors and inconsistencies have been maintained.

Misspelled words and typographical errors:

Page	Error	Correction
3	milleniums	millenniums
8	developes	develops
10	thought-tranference,	thought-transference
fn. 6-2	Theil,	Theil
fn. 12-1	expressing,	expressing
fn. 18-1	<i>Völkerpsychologie.</i>	<i>Völkerpsychologie,</i>
fn. 19-2	pp,	pp.
fn. 21-1	itself,"	itself."

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK AN ETHNOLOGIST'S VIEW OF HISTORY ***

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