Bias in History

by A. N. BOYCE

Vice-Rector, Johannesburg College of Education

"HISTORY is something that never happened, written by a man who wasn't there" wrote an unnamed cynic. This rather startling assertion will shake the confidence which so many of us have in history as a fixed body of knowledge. In many of our institutions history is taught as an absolute: it has already happened and so there is no doubt about what happened. Textbooks state why things happened, and these lists of "causes" are fed back at test time for the teacher's approval.

History presented in this manner is based on the assumption that history is over and done with and therefore unalterable — history is in fact the *past*. It is also assumed that the facts speak for themselves, and that historians need only compile a record of irrefutable and objective facts.

E. H. Carr in one of his memorial lectures given at Cambridge in 1961 in the series "What is history?" denounces this concept of history as a fallacy.

> 'Anyone who succumbs to this heresy will either have to give up history as a bad job, and take to stamp-collecting or some other form of antiquarianism, or end in a madhouse. It is this heresy which during the past hundred years has had such devastating effects on the modern historian producing . . . a vast and growing mass of dry-as-dust factual histories, of minutely specialized monographs, of would-be historians knowing more and more about less and less, sunk without trace in an ocean of facts.'

The facts of history do not speak for themselves.

> 'The facts speak only when the historian calls on them: it is he who decides to which facts to give the floor, and in what order or context . . .a fact is like a sack — it won't stand up till you've put something in it.'

W. A. Walsh in his "Introduction to the Philosophy of History" makes a distinction between the *plain* narrative, and the *significant* narrative of past events. While the former attempts to give an exact description of what happened, the latter attempts to explain what happened. History proper does consist of a significant rather than a plain narrative of the past experience of human beings; the historian aims at a reconstruction of the past which is both intelligent and intelligible. (p. 31-32).

J. B. Bury in his inaugural address at Cambridge in 1903, asserted "history is a science, no less and no more." Do we agree? Are the methods used by the historian in producing his significant narrative those of an artist or a scientist? Should history be classed with the humanities, along with literature, the arts and philosophy, or does it belong to the group of studies known as the social sciences, such as political science, sociology, economics and geography?

The historian's approach to his subject cannot be strictly scientific. While the social scientist is able to arrive at some general laws about human affairs, "history is the study of a unique sequence of unique individuals, events, situations, ideas and institutions, occurring in the one-dimensional and irreversible stream of time", according to Robert Daniels (Studying History, p. 24). But while there are no laws in history, as in the natural sciences, there are regularities and patterns in human behaviour which the historian must take into account in his attempts to give a significant narrative. Carr asserts that the historian is committed to generalizations, but this is not to say that historians should attempt to explain the human past by discovering laws. Carr has also reminded us that though scientists and social scientists refer to laws, they no longer believe in laws fixed for all time. Scientists make discoveries and acquire fresh knowledge, not by establishing precise, and comprehensive laws, but by enunciating hypotheses which open the way to fresh inquiry. The historian, like the scientist, produces hypotheses or explanations which we call interpretations. These interpretations are examined critically by fellow historians, and may then be accepted or rejected as the explanation of past events.

Professor Barraclough has expressed it this way. "The history we read, though based on facts, is, strictly speaking, not factual at all, but a series of *accepted judgments*." By this he means historical works are really on working hypotheses or as Butterfield puts it, they are "interim reports" only.

It is therefore apparent that there is no completely objective history. The methods used by the historian render this impossible. History is not the past it is the *record* of the past. When we look into the past we see not just what hap-

pens to be there but what has been selected and displayed for us by other human beings; they are the recorders whose views and prejudices enter into the record, and colour it. "The facts may seem to speak for themselves, but they always require a human being to give them utterance, and a number of essentially personal judgments on the part of someone is likely to have influenced what they say." (Kitson Clark "The Critical Historian" p.33).

The historian, unlike the scientist, cannot help being involved in the object of his study and his point of view will enter into every observation which he makes.

Unfortunately for the historian the facts of history are not available for direct inspiration.

It is not possible, for example, to have all the events of June, July and August 1914 re-enacted, that is the events from the assassination of the Austrian Archduke to the British declaration of war on Germany, so that we may study the causes of the war. This limitation on the historian also prevents him from isolating certain material so that he may discover which factors caused the war. An historian cannot do what a scientist would do, that is repeat the whole process eliminating certain factors to see whether the result would have been the same.

> "He cannot unscramble the eggs of history in order to make up his mind which of them spoiled the taste of the dish that had to be eaten!" (Kitson Clark, p. 23).

Our knowledge of these events depends on the use of documents, the contents of which may be coloured by the emotions, partiality and prejudices of those who recorded the events; the recorders, who may be journalists, reporters, scholars, are all human beings, and their failings, passions, and interests as human beings may have affected what they passed on.

The writer of history therefore suffers from limitations :personal qualities, such as his interests, his preoccupations, his scale of values, his inclination to be careless in checking accuracy of his facts, perhaps a desire to falsify events. The writer of history is also a social phenomenon, both the product and the conscious or unconscious spokesman of the society to which he belongs; he will reveal or express the values and aspirations of the group to which he belongs, whether it be a church, a political party or the community. The work of the historian mirrors the society in which he lives and works.

> "Group focus is the product of the social milieu of a plural society . . . where the individual historian is conditioned by the assumptions and prejudices of his own community, whether it is a community of religion, or class, or language, or race, or some combination of two or more of these factors."

The historian is thus the product of history and tends to view the past through the eyes of his own times.

> "The slant dictated by the state of the world at the time when the historian lives and writes. Every generation has a different view of a period of history because that period is part of the process which has produced the present. What most people require of history is an explanation of the present state of affairs, and as that changes, our interest in the past changes. Thus history tends to be subservient to the temporary interests of the age." (A. Keppel-Jones in an unpublished lecture).

Hence the religious histories of the Reformation and the nationalistic histories of the Nineteenth Century Europe. Hence too the racial focus in some histories of the Southern States of the United States.

We can never get far enough away from historical events to see them without an angle of vision, that is, a slant. The study of South African historiography, a field in which Professor F. A. van Jaarsveld has done considerable research reveals clearly how English historians in the heyday of British imperialism reflected the climate of the times, and how Afrikaner historians in turn mirrored the awakening of Afrikaner Nationalism later in the century.

As Kitson Clark puts it:

> "The flux of time affects the whole of a man's vision: it affects his sympathies, it affects his values, and it also affects his sense of things which could happen in the world, and of the things which he believes to be impossible." (p.38)

The flux of time also affects the motives which historians are prepared to credit to the people about whom they write. Romantic historians in the early Nineteenth Century were inclined to credit a good many historical figures in history with exalted and extravagant motives. In much of the Nineteenth Century virtuous motives were often attributed to people whom the records favoured, but in some critical circles today such motives are suspect, especially if they smack of patriotism or Christian devotion.

"All history is contemporary history" declared Benedetti Croce, the Italian philosopher and historian. I take this to mean that we all tend to see history with the eyes of the present. In no country is history more obviously contemporary than in South Africa.

> "Our examination of the relation of the historian to the facts of history finds us, therefore, in an apparently precarious situation, navigating delicately between the Scylla of an untenable theory of history as an objective compilation of facts, of the unqualified primacy of fact over interpretation, and the Charybdis of an equally untenable theory of history as the subjective product of the mind of the historian who establishes the facts of

history and masters them through the process of interpretation . . . But our situation is less precarious than it seems . . . The historian is neither the humble slave, nor the tyrannical master, of his facts. The historian is engaged in a continuous process of moulding his facts to his interpretation to his facts. It is impossible to assign primacy to one over the other.

The historian and the facts of history are necessary to one another. The historian without his facts is rootless and futile; the facts without their historian are dead and meaningless. My first answer therefore to the question, What is history?, is that it is a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past."

From what I have said about the nature of our subject, history, it should be obvious that the historian has a great responsibility. Dean Inge once perceived this when he referred to "historians, to whom is vouchsafed the power denied to Almighty God, of altering the past."

Let us examine more closely the origins of the prejudices and bias expressed in history. Bias is a preconceived opinion, a judgment, formed without due consideration of facts or arguments — a leaning of the mind.

In the modern world prejudice is most evident as a form of antipathy towards people of a different colour, language or religious group. These prejudices are revealed in attitudes based on irrational thinking, incorrect information or simply ignorance. A group is often prejudged without sufficient evidence or acquaintance. Prejudice is frequently the consequence of mistaken beliefs e.g. confused thinking about *race* and *culture*; it is still widely believed that the non-white races are prone to violence and cruelty and are innately inferior. This is one of the stereotypes.

History has contributed to the existence of prejudices and stereotypes because so much historical writing in the past has been ethnocentric or Europe-centric; history has been interpreted from the European or white man's point of view. Histories describing the contacts between European powers and the peoples of Asia and Africa — the history of European imperialism — have been presented as a struggle between liberty and oriental despotism, or between the enlightened influences of western civilization and black savagery. Little if any mention is made of our oriental heritage. The history of Asia has been written, declares an Asian historian "as if it were a footnote or appendix to the history of Europe."

In the interpretation of African, especially South African history, non-whites have been presented as threats or problems to the whites, and not as the subject of history in their own right. The preface to the new Oxford History of South Africa asserts that recent histories of South Africa illustrates the difficulties.

'Nearly everyone of them embodies the point of view of only one community. The group focus is seen in the structures of the works as well as in the interpretations they give to events. They are primarily concerned with the achievements of the white people in South Africa, and their relations with one another . . . Where their works differ from each other is in their assessment of the policies which whites have adopted in grappling with such problems (caused by the non-whites).

The study of African history is a relatively new field. The source materials are rather limited, but in spite of this all kinds of books on Africa have flooded the market in recent years. Many of these still reflect the traditional European viewpoint about Africa, a viewpoint that stems from a deep-seated racist ideology. The texts fall into two main categories: books which mainly describe the important role of Europeans in Africa, paying little attention to African achievements, and, secondly, the 'external influence' school which emphasizes the influence of Europe on Africa. Although there is increasing evidence provided by archaeologists of the achievements of indigenous Africans, readers are still being fed on colonist ideology.

Another common example of racial and religious prejudice which has characterized the European version of history is the treatment of the subject of the rise of Islam and the Crusades. Textbooks tend to emphasize the religious and militant fanaticism of the Moslems. Although it is true that the Moslems established an empire by conquest, their successes came not only from the sword, any more than that of the Christians. Too little is said in history books about the contributions of the Moslems to Western civilization, that is the value of the cultural contacts between East and West as a result of the Crusades. Western children may still believe that all Moslems are warlike and dangerous. The impression created in the minds of our pupils is that the most important aspect of the contact between Islam and Christianity was war. This is fostered by the manner in which the history of the Crusades is presented. In legends and textbooks the crusades have been romanticized — it is the story of 'civilized Christians fighting righteously against the barbarians.' For two centuries the Mediterranean world was darkened by a cloud of hatred, and this hatred was conjured up in the name of God. One modern historian, Stephen Runciman, claims that the 'whole movement was a fiasco' and a 'tragic and destructive episode.' Another asserts that 'high ideals were besmirched by cruelty and greed, enterprise and endurance by

a blind and narrow self-righteousness, and that the holy war itself was nothing more than a long act of intolerance in the name of God.'

The importance of textbooks in shaping attitudes towards other groups and nations has long been recognized, and hence the efforts made for many years by the League of Nations and UNESCO to encourage the mutual revision of textbooks. Textbook writers have sometimes been responsible for the wilful distortion of history, but it is mainly through ignorance, carelessness and condensation that school books distort history. The shorter the book the more rigorous the selection of facts has to be and so the more biased they become. Kitson Clark has pointed out that the comparison of textbooks with secondary sources reveals the devastating effects of condensation:

> 'how stark and meaningless a fact can be without the background which should explain it; how peremptory and dogmatic a statement becomes without the argument by which the author originally justified it, or how misleading a quotation can be which has been bandied from hand to hand until it is infinitely removed from its original context.'

Consider the transformation which takes place from the time a statement is taken from a book to become part of a pupil's notes, and finally how it may appear in dreadful caricature in a pupil's answer to an examination question.

We cannot write history — we cannot teach history — without leaving out something. Academic history is less simplified than school history, but both are simplified and both are to that extent untrue or biased.

History in schools has often been used to inculcate basic values so that young people will become good citizens committed to a certain way of life; in countries which are parliamentary democracies historical knowledge is regarded as important because it may provide a foundation for democracy, that is history is used to develop in pupils the conviction of the value of democratic political processes. But, if we approve of the propagation of democracy, can we condemn the Russians when they use history to develop a commitment to Communist ideologies?

We abhor indoctrination — mental conditioning, but there are educationists who believe that social cohesion is a requisite for the survival of any culture and nation, and that the commitment of the masses to the same basic values is therefore necessary. History is one means of creating a loyalty to national institutions. On the other hand, the historian will reason that if we use history to build allegiance to a system of values, it will be impossible to train pupils in critical judgment. These are two points of view which cannot be reconciled: they involve two different approaches to the writing and teaching of history; if the historian wishes to prove through history the value of a certain political system, there will be a tendentious selection of historical data and generalizations with this object in mind, but if a critical and objective study of history is to be encouraged, a more scientific approach to history is essential.

> 'Ideological assumptions profoundly affect conceptions of the functions of history teaching.' (E. H. Dance.)

The conflict between using history for the development of critical faculties and the use of history for imbuing loyalty to the cultural values of a society is a serious one in this modern world with its conflicting ideologies. Each group with its different systems of values is distinguished from the other by its concept of objectivity and impartiality. The meaning of the term objectivity in relation to history teaching is usually confined within the political framework in which it is to be applied. (Dance, E. H. in a UNESCO publication 1955).

The teaching of national history has during the 19th and 20th Centuries predominated in the schools of all countries as a UNESCO report shows. This is as true of democratic countries of the West as it is of Soviet Russia where the teaching of national history is the pivot of the entire programme to arouse Russian patriotism.

We cannot deny that the teaching of national history has value; it may legitimately be used to develop an intelligent understanding of contemporary society and the national community, and even to foster a healthy form of patriotism which, however, does not include intense nationalistic feelings — chauvinism — which has been engendered in some countries. 'My country, right or wrong.'

Unfortunately, in South Africa widely divergent views are held by history teachers in English and Afrikaans-medium schools on this very issue of the value and importance which is attached to national history. This is one of the symptoms of the separatist trends in history teaching in this country. Unfortunately national history approached with the object of arousing patriotism cannot be taught with objectivity.

While on the subject of the content of school syllabuses, mention must be made of the growing popularity of contemporary history in schools, especially in Great Britain. In South Africa we teach amongst other topics, political developments leading towards the establishment of the Republic of South Africa, policy towards

the Bantu, Coloureds and Indians since 1948 and the colonial revolution in Africa since 1939. It is not possible within the limits of this paper to discuss the arguments for and against the inclusion of this field of history in the school curriculum, but it is relevant to mention the problem of bias and lack of perspective which is certain to be encountered. One of the obvious objections to the teaching of contemporary history is that the teacher or historian lacks detachment in describing the events through which he has lived; he is writing as a participator, rather than as a detached spectator. As participators, writers have personal interests and group loyalties; they may be swayed by political beliefs and even strong feelings of nationalism. The consequent distortion of history may be conscious or unconscious. Because of the relevance of contemporary history, and its high emotional charge, it is asserted, the subject cannot be taught without bias.

Apart from the historian's involvement, the influence of some governments is an important factor: the release of documents may be controlled to present its policies in a favourable light. In the case of Russia the government controls the actual writing of recent history because history books are produced through state agencies and must conform to Communist Party policy; revisions of textbooks are frequent in order that the content of books should keep pace with the shifts in the Party's interpretation of history e.g. after the death of Stalin the policy was to denounce Stalin and the cult of personality. Teachers in schools rely on offiical textbooks and must toe the party line.

Kitson Clark has reminded us that those who oppose the teaching of contemporary history because the passions excited by contemporary events are so strong that no one can be trusted to handle them with impartiality, forget that it is equally difficult to write objectively about some remote periods of history. A glance at the problems of any century since 1500 will prove this.

> 'Many of the passions and prejudices which darken the mind today did not begin yesterday; they strike back through the centuries to imperil judgments about whatever events they touch. There are some conflicts which since they began have never been cold e.g. the conflict between the churches which started at the Reformation.' (page 2).

Distortions produced by bias are potentially present in any attempt to write history. No historian should deny the probability of its presence in himself or in any historical work he may use. It is of course more difficult to control bias when it is the result of passion excited by issues which are still alive, but this may be as true of the history which took place in past centuries as it is true of the history that appears in the morning newspaper.

Historians and history teachers should no longer believe it possible to achieve an 'authorized version' of any period or problem. While they will attempt to avoid excessive bias, they will regard all history, as already suggested, as 'interim reports' only. Hence in the teaching of contemporary history the emphasis should be on the questions asked rather than the conclusions reached. There should be discussion rather than insistence that schoolboys should learn a body of knowledge for examination purposes.

Readers of history, including many teachers, use books uncritically, and consequently do not recognize bias in its various forms. UNESCO agencies in examining textbooks use both *qualitative* and *quantitative* analysis of texts. The quantitative analysis provides information about the amount of space allotted to significant topics in textbooks. The allotment of space to various topics, epochs of history and the histories of different countries, reveals the importance which writers attach to the topics. 'Space allocation is an indication of priority values with writers and publishers,' and these differences do have an influence on young readers. This type of analysis has the advantage of being objective, but it has limitations because space allocation may be the consequence, not of the author's bias, but of the emphasis required by the authorities who make syllabuses, or it may be the influence of the demands made by external examiners. Auerbach in his 'Power of Prejudice in South African Education' has analysed textbooks used in the Transvaal and produced significant statistics, but he has also shown that the same amount of space can be used in different ways by different authors:

> 'one emotively charged sentence or illustration may remain in the mind of a child more vividly and more permanently than a longer factual paragraph.' (page 23)

The selection and omission of facts are fundamental operations in the writing of history, but this process of selection has to be controlled by a scholarly intellectual discipline. The tendentious selection or omission of material is an important source of bias and a means of distorting or falsifying the truth. Bias may be transmitted positively or negatively: positively, by supplying false information, and negatively, by omitting the point of view of a group or suppressing significant and relevant information. (Hawarden, page 38).

Dance has explained this biased selection by saying:

> 'Each people tends to recall and record the things which are congenial to itself, and to forget or ignore those which are favourable to foreigners (or other groups). What is lacking in all countries is the will to see things the other way round.' (p. 21-2)

Lack of balance also occurs in our textbooks when an author fails to give more than one side of a controversial question. A report on the mutual revision of textbooks in Nordic countries published by UNESCO in 1950 suggested the following criteria in examining texts:

> Isolated facts, even though accurate, must not be given unless the whole context is adequate, in order that the general resultant impression will be sound.
>
> If agreement cannot be reached as to a neutral and objective statement about a debatable point, then a fair statement of the view of every country concerned must be given.
>
> No really important event must be left out because it once bred ill-feeling between two groups of people, but care must be taken to present such matters in a factual and fair way.

Even historical maps and atlases are sometimes characterized by an imbalance which stems from bias. A recently published atlas of South African history devotes 26 of its 40 pages to the Great Trek, while other major developments in our history are either glossed over or completely ignored.

Whereas the quantitative analysis of texts is concerned with the adequacy of subject matter, *qualitative* analysis is concerned with the manner of presentation — how it is said and the quality of the historical research. There are three aspects:

1. *Biased wording:*

Language may be used with emotive effect so that the reader may draw false conclusions from the facts even though the facts are accurate. Emotive language 'enlists the reader's sympathies on one side without presenting any arguments which could give a rational basis to the conclusions.' (Lewin — Symposium, p. 33.) There are many adjectives and adverbs and even nouns commonly used in history which may become emotively charged or imply moral judgments, e.g. murder, notorious, treachery, massacre, outrage, victims, faction, clique, primitive, naturally, unfortunately.

Part of the training we should give young people in the use of language is to make them aware of the complex quality of words. Valuable experience will be gained if pupils are given practice in the objective reporting of events which they have experienced or witnessed and in the critical comparison of varying accounts by different observers, the detection of errors in statements and arguments.

2. *Quality of research:*

Earlier in this paper attention was drawn to the importance of interpretation in history and the continual need to reappraise men and events as new information is brought to light and new explanations offered by historians who attempt to approach controversial questions with an open mind. The interpretations offered in many South African textbooks, however, have been based on the works of pioneers in South African historiography e.g. Theal, Cory and Preller who, in the words of Professor J. A. Gallagher "blazed the trail but sometimes missed the way." The interpretations of these earlier historians are often accepted uncritically and are still enshrined in many of our textbooks while the writings of later historians W. M. Macmillan, J. S. Marais, Keppel-Jones and C. W. die Kiewiet are hardly known in our schools. A UNESCO report has stated that the shortcomings of textbooks are often less due to underlying designs of propaganda than to a *time-lag* between the actual historical research and the teaching of history at a primary or secondary level. Many authors resort uncritically to old reference works and so traditional errors are perpetuated and gain authority by mere repetition.

3. *The capacity for appreciating the best and most significant in the culture and history of other countries or groups.*

Reference has already been made to the fact that full justice has not been done in our textbooks to the contributions of the East to civilization. A French critic has pointed out that there is a striking disproportion between the attention devoted to European expansion and colonization in Asia, on the one hand, and the great Asian civilizations on the other. I must be fair; the fact that the history of cultures in the Far East is not included in South African syllabuses, and therefore not found in textbooks, explains why teachers do not teach the subject.

The history of colonialism in the East has left unhappy memories, but while we may appeal to educators of the West to do justice to the religions and cultures of the East, educators of the East should make sure that their books and courses do justice to the West. They should present a fair and balanced picture of the West

as it is today — not as it was 100 years ago. The West has become more tolerant, humane and respectful of the rights of others.

A few examples of bias in the interpretation of South African history will illustrate the points already made.

The period of fifty or sixty years before the Great Trek (1775-1835) is a most significant one in South African history because it was a time when relations among racial groups in the Colony reached the dimensions of a problem; attitudes towards race relations and ideas about the treatment to be meted out towards non-whites were debated by colonists, officials and missionaries. It is an important period because our judgment of later historical periods will be influenced by our judgement of the controversies of this earlier period.

The conflict on the Cape eastern frontier between the two streams of migration is an important theme in South African history. I refer to what used to be called the 'Kaffir Wars' — now replaced by the term frontier wars. It is impossible to discuss the problem in any detail but attention must be drawn to the fundamental cause of the struggle: for generations the picture of frontier conditions presented in our schools was that of thousands of barbarous and marauding Xhosa crossing recognized colonial frontiers in order to kill European farmers and steal their cattle. Research by Professor J. S. Marais has shown that it was really the white man who was the invader and not the Xhosa who were in fact defending their lands from invasion by Boers and later British soldiers and settlers. The fundamental cause of the frontier struggle was the desire for grazing land on the part of two groups of catttle farmers — the Boers and the Bantu. It was basically a struggle for land.

The subject of the Hottentots is another topic, where a reappraisal of events and policies is needed. If we assume, as textbooks often do, that Hottentot farm labourers were well treated by their masters, the actions and policies of the government and missionaries would appear to have been unjust and motivated by malice towards European farmers, as Mrs. Lewin points out. But Professors Macmillan, Keppel-Jones and Marais have shown that there is a great deal of evidence that Hottentots were ill-treated by farmers. The two incidents of the Black Circuit and the Slagters Nek rebellion are often quoted as examples of the legitimate grievances of European colonists against an unsympathetic government. The fact that some of the charges brought before the court were not proved and that the colonists had suffered inconvenience by being brought to court have been stressed in order to prove that an injustice had been done to white men. The real significance of the Black Circuit was that it was an application of the rule of law: colonists had been taught the lesson that all men, regardless of colour were equal before the law, and that the weak and ignorant were entitled to equal justice with the strong.

What is the true significance of the Slagters Nek rebellion? It is incorrect to interpret the episode as an heretic effort by white frontiersmen to protect themselves against a government which was alleged to favour non-whites. The rebellion, according to Marais, should be seen as 'nothing else than the resistance of certain frontier colonists to the new conception of justice, which was gradually becoming effective.'

The legislation which culminated in the passing of Ordinance 50 in 1828 is usually interpreted from the colonists' point of view. The sympathies of pupils are enlisted for the farmers and the policies of Dr. Philip are discredited. One should not ignore the fact that this ordinance aroused great resentment among frontiersmen, for they feared an increase in vagrancy and a serious labour shortage, and they protested against the principle of equality between white and non-white which the ordinance had established. The passing of the ordinance was nevertheless a real step forward — not a major disaster for the Colony and not the beginning of South Africa's native problem, as the writer of one school textbook has asserted. The ordinance was a turning point in the history of the Colony for there were no further discriminating laws against the Coloured People.

The traditional accounts of the anti-slavery movement in our textbooks present the slave laws and the emancipation act of 1833 as another series of blunders on the part of the British government; as I see it, the crusade against slavery represents one of the most glorious chapters in the annals of the British Empire. While we should not neglect to mention the financial losses suffered by slave owners, the merits of the anti-slavery legislation deserve to be emphasized in our schools.

In studying the relations between the Bantu and the Boer Republics or between the Bantu and British Government in the period after the Great Trek, one notices again the tendency to present South African history as the history of the White people. Other peoples, whether they be the various Bantu tribes, Hottentots, or Indians, figure in our history merely as obstacles or problems. In the period after the Great Trek the struggle for land between whites and non-

whites was intensified and spread over a larger area; it was not confined to the Cape eastern frontier. In the accounts of the wars between the Basuto and the British and later the Orange Free State Republic, the Basuto are usually regarded as the mischief-makers. The truth is that the Basuto had every right to the land in the Caledon River valley. A study of the physical features of Basutoland will reveal how little arable or grazing land the Basuto had. Once again the fundamental cause of the Basuto wars was the growing shortage of land created by the growing herds of the Basuto people at a time when the Boers were infiltrating into the Caledon River valley.

In the Transvaal and Natal the story was the same. Boers and Britishers were encroaching on Bantu lands. In Natal a mere handful of 20,000 British colonists came to possess six million acres of the best land, while millions of Bantu were left two million acres of inferior land. In the Transvaal the Boers were pressing on the frontiers: Professor de Kiewiet has shown how grazing concessions given to European farmers were later converted into permanent ownership and the tribes refused access to water-points. The Bapedi under their chief Sekukuni are one example of a people who were gradually dispossessed of their land and made trespassers on their own soil. In Zululand the growing unrest in the 1870's may also be attributed to a serious land-hunger made worse by drought and cattle disease. In recent years historians like Reginald Coupland and Furneaux have re-examined the causes of the Zulu War, and have shown that Cetewayo and the revivalof Zulu militarism were not the only cause of hostilities. The war was the result of British imperialism — Britain's determination to assert her supremacy in South Africa.

I have emphasized the need for a new interpretation of South African history in explaining relations between whites and non-whites in South Africa's past. It is equally important that we should re-examine the accounts of British-Boer relations in the period after the Great Trek. On a recent visit to the Old Fort in Durban I found further proof that Englishmen need to view some historical events from the other camp. On one plaque commemorating the gallant defence of the British garrison in 1842 there are words to the effect that the garrison by their courage had preserved the Colony of Natal for the British Empire. Another plaque to commemorate the famous ride of Dick King refers to the 'insurgent Boers'. Anyone who knows their history will perceive the inaccuracy and bias of the statements. Natal at the time was a Boer Republic and Britain had persistently refused to assume responsibility for the government of the area around Port Natal. It is necessary for us to discuss the rights and wrongs of British interference in Natal, but let us not assume that Britain's actions were always justified.

Britain's intervention in the diamond fields dispute is another topic in which the writer and teacher of history should be completely honest. It would be dishonest to pretend that Britain interfered only because of a sense of responsibility for the maintenance of peace in a troubled area.

Britain's imperialism, supported by a realization of the strategic and economic value of the diamond fields, cannot be glossed over.

Britain's annexation of the Transvaal was also prompted, not by her concern for the weakness of the Transvaal or a fear that the republic's native policy would embroil the other South African states in war, but by her fear of the growing strength of the Transvaal which might become a threat to British supremacy in South Africa. Annexation would lead to confederation, it was hoped, and prevent the danger of foreign interference in a divided South Africa.

The period of South African history following the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand offers a fertile field for historical research and a reappraisal of men and events. We are fortunate in having two excellent studies of this period to guide us in our teaching. I refer to the recent publications of Professors Marais and le May. Their studies of the causes and course of the South African War are both candid and corrective. Marais has unmasked the role of the British Colonial Office in the Jameson Raid, and the responsibility of aggressive British imperialism in the person of the impatient Milner for the outbreak of war in 1899. Professor le May's work is valuable for the frank account it provides of events from the commencement of the war until the grant of self-government to the republics in 1906-7. His book describes with candour the blunder of the British authorities in establishing the concentration camps and in resorting to the desperate measure of burning down farms. The book is also a shrewd analysis of the relationship between the war, and its aftermath when Milner failed in his policy of anglicization, and contemporary Afrikaner nationalism.

These are but a few examples of topics in South African history which we should study again in the light of recent research and in the interests of historical accuracy.

Can anything be done to eliminate bias? If history is to have life, it must be written down

from a point of view, and the historian cannot help being involved in his subject. The search for utter objectivity leads the historian into the path of the matter-of-fact chronicler, and even then it cannot be shaken off — it clings to the chronicler in his act of selection (D. B. Heater, p.32 "Since 1945").

Something can be done, however, if a greater awareness of the problem can be created amongst teachers and students of history. Some universities do present reappraisals of controversial topics and students become aware of recent research, but this process of reorientation must be taken further — it must be related to the teaching of history in schools. University courses will also be improved if students in their second and third years were introduced to the study of historiography. Even senior pupils might be given an introduction to the historian's craft.

Our teachers are too dependent on the textbook which is in most cases the principal source of information or authoritative guide. To our uncritical pupils the printed pages represent the prescribed syllabus which they have to master in order to pass the examination.

Are our textbooks of the best quality? What are we doing in South Africa to improve history textbooks? South Africans have shown little awareness of the work achieved by national and international organizations overseas. One of the most remarkable achievements is that of the Brunswick International Schoolbook Institute in Germany which is devoted to research and the collection of archives necessary for the improvement of textbooks. There are also research institutes in India and America which have perfected the statistical measurement of textbook qualities and prepared the way for the improvement of books.

The revision of South African history textbooks is vital. Writers of history have a great responsibility. Kemal Ataturk once declared:

> "Writing history is as important as making history. If the man who writes history is unfaithful to the man who makes it, Truth is betrayed and Mankind pays the penalty."

Because it is impossible for a writer to be completely objective, it is a healthy sign when history books in English and Afrikaans are criticized in the press and teachers' journals. Teachers are becoming alive to the dangers lurking in textbooks and are consequently handling with greater caution the books in use.

We need an institute for the improvement of textbooks in South Africa — a clearing house of information which will encourage the analysis, the appraisal and revision of existing materials, and also promote the publication of new books by providing a centre where samples of books, bibliographies and source materials would be made available. The clearing house would be responsible for publicizing the results of textbook analysis so that authors, publishers, teachers, educational officials and public leaders will be kept informed.

A new spirit is needed in history teaching: there must be a will to seek the truth regardless of consequences. There is also a need of imaginative understanding of the lives of other groups whose history is being studied. Dance has stated that —

> "'The basic problem of bias in history books is how to think ourselves out of the milieu in which we have been reared, to force ourselves into points of view which are strange to ourselves but familiar elsewhere." (History the Betrayer, p. 45.)

History taught impartially will help to dissolve inter-group tensions and teach the student *how* to think rather than *what* to think. (Laurence in the Star, 2nd April, 1968). If we do not attempt to teach history in this way, then the warning of Paul Valery, the French poet, is necessary.

> "History is the most dangerous subject ever distilled in the human laboratory — it inflames past hates and keeps old sores running."

RECOMMENDED READING

Auerbach, F. L. The Power of Prejudice in South African Education. Balkema.

Bibby, Cyril. Race, Prejudice and Education. Heineman.

Boyce, A. N. Teaching History in South African Schools. Juta.

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Henderson, J. L. (Editor). Since 1945. Methuen.

Hawarden, E. Prejudice in the Classroom. S.A. Institute of Race Relations.

Carr, E. H. What is History? Macmillan.

Lewin, E. South African History and Western Civilization. Symposium 1962-3.

Lauwerys, J. A. History Textbooks and International Understanding. UNESCO 1953.

Walsh, W. H. An Introduction to the Philosophy of History. Hutchinson.

Van Jaarsveld, F. A. The Afrikaner's Interpretation of South African History. Simondium Publishers.

Burston, W. H. and Thompson, D. (Editors). Studies in the Nature and Teaching of History. Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Burston, W. H. Principles of History Teaching. Methuen.