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# ELEMENTS OF HISTORY.

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## USES OF HISTORY.

1. **HISTORY** is a narrative of past events. The study of it is attractive both to the young and the old, to the unreflecting and the philosophical mind. It combines amusement of the deepest interest; the exercise and improvement of the best faculties of man; and the acquisition of the most important species of knowledge.

2. History, considered merely as a source of amusement, has great advantages over novels and romances, the perusal of which too often debilitates the mind by inflaming the imagination, and corrupts the heart by infusing what may justly be regarded as moral poison. Like works of fiction, history serves to amuse the imagination and interest the passions, not always, indeed, in an equal degree; yet it is free from the corrupting tendencies which too often belong to novels, and has a great superiority over them, inasmuch as it rests on the basis of fact.

3. The love of novelty and of excitement is natural to man; hence the general taste for history, though its details are not unfrequently painful. It affords a melancholy view of human nature, governed by the baser passions; and is, to a lamentable extent, little else than a register of human crime and calamity, of war and suffering.

4. A higher use of history is to improve the understanding and strengthen the judgment. It has been styled philosophy teaching by examples; or moral philosophy exemplified by the lives and actions of men. It adds to our own experience an immense treasure of the experience of others, and thereby enables us to enter upon the business of life with the advantage of being, in a manner, acquainted with it.

5. It makes us acquainted with human nature, and enables us to judge how men will act in given circumstances, and to trace the connection between cause and effect in human affairs. It serves to free the mind from many narrow and hurtful prejudices; to teach us to admire what is praiseworthy, wherever it may be found; and to compare, on enlarged and liberal principles, other ages and countries with our own.

6. History may be regarded as the school of politics, and, as such, some knowledge of it is indispensable to rulers and statesmen; it is also highly important to every citizen of a republic, in order to enable him to perform, in a manner honorable to himself and useful to the community, the duties of a freeman. By history we gain our knowledge of the constitution of society; of the reciprocal influence of national character, laws, and government; of those causes and circumstances which have promoted the rise and prosperity, or the decline and fall, of states and empires.

7. History shows us past ages, triumphs over time, and presents to our view the various revolutions which have taken place in the world. It furnishes us with the wisdom and experience of our ancestors, exhibits their living actions and enables us to profit by their successes and failures. It teaches us what has been done for the melioration of mankind by the wisdom of Greece and Rome, by modern literature and science, by free government, and by true religion.

8. It tends to strengthen the sentiments of virtue. In its faithful delineations, vice always appears odious, and virtue not only desirable and productive of happiness, but also favorable to true honor and solid glory. The reader of history learns to connect true glory, not with the possession of wealth and power, but with the disinterested employment of great talents in promoting the good of mankind.

9. True history has numberless relations and uses as an exhibition of the conduct of Divine Providence; and it presents numerous instances in which events, important to the welfare of the human race, have been brought about by inconsiderable means, contrary to the intentions of those who were the principal agents in them.

10. A knowledge of history has a tendency to render us contented with our condition in life, by the views which it exhibits of the instability of human affairs. It teaches us that the highest stations are not exempt from severe trials

that riches and power afford no assurance of happiness; and that the greatest sovereigns have not unfrequently been more miserable than their meanest subjects.

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## SOURCES OF HISTORY.

Some of the principal sources of history, independent of authentic records, or the narrative of those who were contemporary with the events which they relate, are the following:—

1. *Oral tradition.* From this source Herodotus derived the greater part of his history. It existed before the invention of the arts of writing, carving, and painting.

2. *Historical poems.* These are common among all barbarous nations. The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* of *Homer* were regarded by the Greeks as of historical authority; and they comprise the only history extant of what is called the heroic age of Greece.

3. *Visible monuments,* as pillars, heaps of stones, and mounds of earth, are used to perpetuate historical events among a barbarous people.

4. *Ruins,* as those of Egypt, and of the cities of Balbet, Palmy'ra, and Persep'olis, are lasting memorials of the power, opulence, and taste of the builders.

5. *Giving names to countries, towns, &c.,* has been used, in all ages, as a method of perpetuating the memory of their planters or founders.

6. *Coins and medals* are of great use in illustrating history, chronology, geography, and mythology, as well as the manners and customs of the nations of antiquity. These, however, belong to a people of some refinement. Ancient coins have been found buried in the earth at various times, in considerable quantities. Vast numbers are now preserved belonging to different ages. The most ancient of those of which the antiquity can be ascertained, belong to the 5th century before the Christian era.

7. *Inscriptions on marbles.* The most celebrated collection of marbles, made use of for the illustration of ancient history, is that which is now in the possession of the University of Oxford, in England, and which was brought

from Greece by the earl of Arundel, and from him called the *Arundelian Marbles*.

8. The most important of these inscriptions is the *Chronicle of Paros*, which contains the chronology of Athens from the time of Cecrops, B. C. 1582, to B. C. 264, at which latter period it is supposed to have been compiled. The authority of this Chronicle has been called in question by a number of learned men; but it has been supported by many others, and the chronology of Greece, at present most generally received, has been, in a great measure, founded upon it.

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## DIVISIONS OF HISTORY.

1. History, with respect to time, is divided into *Ancient* and *Modern*.

2. *Ancient History* is the history of the world from the creation to the establishment of the *New Empire of the West* under Charlemagne, A. D. 800. *Modern History* embraces all the time subsequent to that period.

3. Some historians, however, adopt the *Christian era*, and others the subversion of the *Western Empire* of the Romans, A. D. 476, for the dividing point between Ancient and Modern History.

4. A third division of history, which is often considered as distinct from ancient and modern, is that of the *Middle Ages*. This period comprises about a thousand years, from the 5th to the 15th century; or from the subversion of the *Western Empire* of the Romans to that of the *Eastern Empire*.

5. The Middle Ages embrace the time intervening between the extinction of ancient literature, and the appearance of modern literature. During this period Europe was sunk in ignorance and barbarism; hence it is often styled the *Dark Ages*.

6. Ancient History is distinguished by the four great monarchies of *Assyria* or *Babylon*, *Persia*, *Greece* or *Macedonia*, and *Rome*.

7. The Middle Ages are characterized by the origin and progress of *Mahometanism* and the *Saracen Empire*, the prevalence of the *Feudal System*, the *Crusades*, and *Chivalry*.

8. Modern History is distinguished by the invention of *gunpowder*, and the consequent change in the mode of war;

the discovery of *America*, and the extension of *commerce*; the invention of the art of *printing*, the revival of *learning*, and the diffusion of *knowledge*; also by the *reformation* in religion, and a variety of other improvements in the state of society.

9. History, with regard to the nature of its subjects, is divided into *Sacred* and *Profane*, *Ecclesiastical* and *Civil*.

10. *Sacred History* is the history contained in the Scriptures, and it relates chiefly to the Israelites or Jews. *Profane History* is the history of ancient heathen nations, and is found chiefly in the writings of the Greeks and Romans. *Ecclesiastical History* is the history of the church of Christ, or of Christianity, from its first promulgation to the present time. *Civil History* is the history of the various nations, states, and empires, that have appeared in the world, exhibiting a view of their wars, revolutions, and changes.

11. Sacred History goes back to the remotest period of time, and commences with an account of the creation of the world, which, according to the Hebrew text of the Scriptures, took place 4004 years before the Christian era; according to the Samaritan text, 4700; according to the Septuagint, 5872; and according to the computation of Dr. Hales, 5411. The computation according to the Hebrew text, which gives 4004 from the creation to the Christian era, and 1656 from the creation to the deluge, is the one commonly received in English literature, though many suppose that of Dr. Hales to be more correct.

12. The earliest profane historian, whose works are extant, is *Herod'otus*, who is styled the Father of History. His history was composed about 445 years B. C., and comprises every thing which he had an opportunity of learning respecting the Egyptians, Persians, Greeks, Ionians, Lydians, Lycians, and Macedonians, from about the year 713 to 479 before the Christian era.

13. With regard, therefore, to all the preceding ages of the world, which, reckoning from the creation to the time when the narrative of Herod'otus begins, comprise, according to the common chronology, nearly 3300 years, there exist no documents, with the exception of the Scriptures, really deserving the name of history. The accounts which have been given of the events of this long series of ages, comprising more than half of the time which has elapsed since the origin of the human race, were drawn up by writers who lived long after the transactions of which they treat, and were compiled from scattered records fragments, and traditions.

14. Our knowledge, of course, of the early history of the world, the first settlement of the different portions of it, the primitive state of society, and the progress of mankind in the remotest ages, is extremely limited. The Scriptures are the only authentic source of information on these subjects. The facts which they record, though not sufficiently numerous to satisfy curiosity, are yet, in the highest degree, interesting and important.

15. Some of the most remarkable events, previous to the commencement of profane history, recorded in the Bible, are the creation of the world, the fall of man, the deluge, the dispersion of mankind at Babel, the planting of different nations, the call of Abraham, the deliverance of the Israelites out of Egypt, and their settlement in Canaan.

16. The histories of *Greece* and *Rome* are far the best known, most interesting, and most important portions of ancient profane history.

17. There is much obscurity hanging over the history of the *Middle or Dark Ages*.

18. The portions of history best known are those which relate to modern civilized nations, during the last three centuries.

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[*The CHART OF HISTORY, which is found in this volume, together with the DESCRIPTION and ILLUSTRATION, beginning with 313th page, may now be advantageously attended to.*]

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[*For some remarks on Sacred History, and Tables of the History of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, see pages 319, 320, and 321.*]