

WHAT ARE THE SCHOOLS DOING ?

AN INDICATION BY ONE HEADMASTER

To answer the question in one page of print is impossible; all that can be attempted is to indicate sketchily one line of approach to history teaching.

Are we to regard a pupil as a vulcanite disc upon which the history teacher scores the tune to be reproduced at examination times, or something more than a mere receptacle and to develop in him an awareness of the past in his present environment? The former outlook emphasises factual memory only and breeds detestation of a subject that will be eagerly dropped immediately school days are over; the latter develops careful observation and a spirit of enquiry and provides a lasting pursuit, the interest in which will remain throughout a pupil's lifetime.

Its situation in Bromborough in Wirral provides my school with many advantages for this second method of approach, despite the fact that the district is growing so rapidly that all signs, except those of the very recent past, will soon be obliterated or rendered inaccessible. But the project is worthwhile and has resulted from children's questions. Such queries were "Why is the place called Bromborough?" "When and for what purpose was The Cross erected?" "Why are our streets so named?" and so on.

Thus to obtain an answer to the first question has led to a study of wells—the Petrifying, Shodwell (St. Chad's) and St. Patrick's—and of the doings of Aethelfleda, the Lady of the Mercians, and the foundation of her "burhs." In this way the Saxon v. Dane conflict became a real issue. The second query has yielded much of value. The Abbots of St. Werburgh's, Chester; Mediaeval markets and fairs; "Barnaby Fair, Barnaby bright, The longest day and the shortest night," though St. Barnabas's Day is on June 10th and hence "Give us back our eleven days" becomes a vital issue; the various proclamations announced from the steps of The Cross; these are some of the topics involved in the answer and embracing almost 700 years of the Country's history.

This line of approach makes History much more than a subject and entails visit, observation, measurement, drawing, modelling, recording, research, and written account. To the syllabus-loving teacher it is unattractive for measurable accomplishments are often lacking. Moreover it demands much more from the teacher—careful planning, wide reading, equable temperament, and optimistic but determined outlook. The guiding principle must be not "What will His Majesty's Inspector think about it?" but "Will it promote a continued study of history when schooldays are over?"