

the seventeenth century. Some such compend in Latin is almost certain to have given William Shakspeare some part of that "taste of . . . ancient . . . History . . . : We find him very knowing in the customs, rites, and manners of Antiquity" for which Pope praised him, though as to what one it was, I have not even a respectable guess.<sup>4</sup>

But about the time Shakspeare began formal composition in upper school, he would also read more or less actual classical history, which would serve for moralizable subject matter in both his prose and verse composition. Since the history was interspersed with orations, it also furnished models for that branch of industry. Originally, at least in the Ipswich-Paul's system, history was distinguished as a separate type. For there, as shown by Wolsey's instructions in 1528, the boys were to read epistles in the fifth form out of eight, then in the sixth "History, of *Salust*, or of *Caesar's* Commentaries," poetry in the seventh, oratory in the eighth. Reorientation upon types of composition made of history a subject state. Epistles, themes, orations, in prose and verse, cared for the compositional types, and history became a vassal to these.

In the early period, the Erasmian mode of teaching epistles, which was the first type of formal composition, determined the position of history in the compositional sequence. In his text of 1522, Erasmus demands interesting subject matter for the epistolary efforts of the boys.

For in these the more willingly the boys are exercised, so the more effectively. That will happen if they are either novel, or humorous, or in any other way connected with the interests of boys. These must be sought either from the fables of poets or from the historians, unless as frequently happens, the life of mortals should suggest some new thing.

He then shows how to use the poets, beginning with Ovid, the first of them.

But those things which are gathered from the historiographers come even nearer to truth, and so bear more fruit nor much less pleasure.

Erasmus then suggests how to moralize these stories from history for compositional purposes.<sup>5</sup> There is nothing peculiar about the Elizabethan attitude toward history; it was a natural outgrowth of the general moral objective of composition, and Erasmus had shown how

<sup>4</sup> Chytraeus, D., *De Lectione Historiarum Recte Institvenda. Et, Historicorum ferè omnium Series, & Argvmenta, breuiter, & perspicuè exposita* (Argentinae, 1565) gives an excellent conspectus of the source historians, sacred and profane.

<sup>5</sup> See above, pp. 240 ff.