BOOK REVIEW

Title: History and Historical Research
Author: C. G. Crump
Publisher: George Routledge and Sons Limited, London and New York
Year of Publication: 1928
Pages: 178
ISBN: 0-8337-5041-0 (Hardcover Back)
Price: $143.56 (Hardcover)

Reviewer: Fatimah Dembo Bello
DOI: https://doi.org/10.63725/ahj.v7.i1.11

I came across this very important book during my Masters' Degree days and as a prospective historian who would go to the field to conduct research for the M. A. Dissertation, I found the book quite indispensable and also drew the attention of my course mates and henceforth, any advanced history student to it. The book precisely, is a guide to historical methods including some invaluable advices to the prospective historian especially as it concerns topic selection, where to find materials, the importance of taking notes, as well as developing and writing a thesis. The emphasis of the book is on how the historian could acquire the necessary skills (including language proficiency) needed for historical research, the ability to overcome impartiality and imbibe the art of objectivity.

The book has five chapters and the discussion is centered on them. The author in the first chapter which he tags 'The Enquiring Mind' discusses the mind of the historical enquirer or the mind of the worker who has never attained any confidence in his own methods. He makes it clear that it is the role of the beginner to practice honesty and fearlessness in expressing the opinions he may form or possess. He notes that some of the qualities needed to construct a model mind of the researcher are; imagination, ingenuity, the use of a full mind, etc. and that the condition for these to exist is a well-stocked mind and a body of knowledge. In essence, Crump highlights that there are two kinds of minds viz; the 'Systematic

Minds' and the 'Disorderly Minds' noting that each has its advantages and everybody is a mixed of system and disorder. But he emphasizes that the 'mind must be free to experiment'. Chapter two entitled 'The Discovery of a Subject' succinctly explains some of the methods which the beginner may use to discover the subject/topic which he desires to write on. The author thus, highlights on the principles or rules to be observed in discovering the topic of one's choice. The first of these rules is that the subject must be one that can be treated in a monograph, secondly; it must possess historical value, thirdly; it must possess the quality of novelty which will compel the researcher to make discoveries and to add to the sum total of historical knowledge and finally, the subject must suggest questions that can be answered - there must be material existing and accessible, on which the study of the subject can be founded.

Chapter three entitled 'The Search for Materials' is divided into two sections which deals with the 'discovery of materials' on the one hand and 'how to use them' on the other. The author maintains that one cannot do without the other for the simple and clear reason that without the knowledge of the materials, the researcher cannot be sure that he has chosen the right materials to collect. Therefore, the author highlights that all materials may be divided into two classes: primary and secondary sources. He explains that primary sources are those sources which give first information attainable of the facts - they are the source of the stream of information, while secondary sources are those sources that are derived from primary sources which are either known to exist or are discoverable. He further emphasizes on the importance of criticism in the use of all materials, in his words 'the researcher should not regard them as ultimate authorities behind which he ought not to try to pass'. Chapter four is tagged 'notes and the making of them' where the author emphasizes on the importance of notes and notes taking. He noted that 'for man as he is, notes are an unfortunate necessity and no part of a researcher's work is harder than the making of them'. Therefore, notes may be meant for use in the research that is being pursued or may be meant for future reference. The author sums up this chapter by saying that the making of all notes is only justified when they are made as an aid to the memory and when they record

things worth remembering. The last chapter titled 'the final statement' forms the concluding part of the book and here, the author emphasizes that the business of the beginner should not be to write like others, but to write like himself. This may be thought to be an easy thing but it is really a great and difficult adventure only to be accomplished slowly and in most cases, imperfectly because as he comes to his task of writing, he is hampered by his accumulated notes and it is only a natural consequence that he should fall back and confine himself to a mere reproduction of his notes, trusting rather to his facts than to his powers of expressing them.

The author deserves commendation for the effort in venturing into a difficult aspect of the academics i.e. research. He quite succeeded in making the prospective historian (the beginner) to identify and understand the complex processes involved in any academic research. Although the book may look small, it provides invaluable and indispensable information to researchers generally and historians in particular especially those who are beginners in the academics. In fact, if the prospective researcher will put at the back of his mind all that the author has explained, suggested and advised, he will have little or no problem in carrying out his research. His advises and suggestions are still very useful to the young researcher even though the book was written in 1928. However, the author seemed to contradict himself by disputing the fact that a historian could be objective when he stated that it is impossible for the historian to discover facts and present them as they are to the reader and that language is responsible for that (i.e. the selection of words). Since objectivity is central to a historian's role, it is mandatory for the prospective historian to learn this art as early as possible. Again, he sounded discouraging to the beginner who aims at adopting the qualities of impartiality and objectivity when he emphasizes that 'the pursuit of them is an adventure too high and that any beginner who aims at them, will hamper himself and fail to achieve them'. It should be emphasized here that, these qualities do not just develop by themselves but are acquired by the individual. In addition, the author while highlighting the rules to be observed in selecting a topic mentions that the subject/topic must have material existing and accessible. The observation here is that,

what happens to those subjects or topics for which materials or data is not readily available? Of course, there are subjects yet to be explored; does it mean that if the student discovers such subjects he should not go for them because there are no materials on them? All researches begin from somewhere. Similarly, on the importance of making notes, the author ought to have emphasized its necessity because of the tendency of human memory to forget.