The historical method in ethics and other essays

Handyside John
THE HISTORICAL METHOD IN ETHICS
AND OTHER ESSAYS
THE HISTORICAL METHOD IN ETHICS
AND
OTHER ESSAYS

BY

JOHN HANDYSIDE
M.A. (Edin.), B.A. (Oxon.)

LATE LECTURER IN PHILOSOPHY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL
AND
SECOND-LIEUTENANT IN THE KING’s (LIVERPOOL) REGIMENT
18TH BATTALION

LIVERPOOL
THE UNIVERSITY PRESS
LONDON
CONSTABLE AND COMPANY LTD.
CONTENTS

BIографICAL NOTE . . . . . . . vii

THE HISTORICAL METHOD IN ETHICS . . 1

THE ABSOLUTE AND 'INTELLECT' . . 40

SYSTEM AND MECHANISM . . . 72
BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The papers here brought together are all that remains of the work of one of the acutest and most thoughtful of the younger generation of philosophical teachers. Their author fell in the war, being one of those who counted his life a little thing to give in so great a cause. He was thirty-three when he died, and he had published next to nothing in his lifetime. These three essays were found in their present form among his papers. The first and longest was clearly intended for publication, either by itself or as part of a larger work on ethics; the other two bore traces of having been originally prepared for some Philosophical Society, but both would have been sent as articles to the philosophical reviews by any one with a less exacting standard of work than Handyside. The three are now published together, both for their own intrinsic value and as a tribute to his memory.

John Handyside was born at Leith in 1883 and received his school education at the Royal High School of Edinburgh, of which he was Dux in 1899. In the autumn of that year he entered the
University of Edinburgh, and as soon as he reached the philosophical classes his vocation was clear. After carrying off all the distinctions open to undergraduates, he graduated M.A. with First Class Honours in Mental Philosophy in April 1903, and in the autumn of the same year gained the Ferguson Philosophical Scholarship open to graduates of the four Scottish universities. Edinburgh awarded him in succession a Baxter Scholarship and the Sir William Hamilton Fellowship, and the funds thus placed at his disposal enabled him to continue his studies at Oxford. He gained an Exhibition at Balliol, and subsequently won the Jenkyns Exhibition in the subjects of the school of Literae Humaniores. He graduated B.A. with a First Class in 1907, and in the following year he was elected to a Prize Fellowship at St. John’s College.

So impressed had I been by the promise of Handyside’s work that I kept my Junior Assistantship open a year for him till he should have taken his Oxford degree; and he returned to Edinburgh in that capacity in the autumn of 1907. He held the position for four sessions, being given latterly the status of Lecturer, and lecturing independently to the Honours men on Advanced Logic and on Spinoza. On the basis of his distinguished academic record and his successful teaching experience in Edinburgh, he was appointed in 1911 to the independent Lectureship in Philosophy in the
University of Liverpool. His new work lay mainly in the direction of ethics and political philosophy and proved sufficiently absorbing, combined as it was usually with a tutorial class for workpeople under the University Extension Board. For one session at least, owing to the illness of Professor Mair, the main burden of the philosophical department was laid upon his shoulders, a severe test for a young man, but one which served to show the genuine stuff of which Handyside was made. He was also Examiner in Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh at the time, and I remember admiring the way in which, without fuss or complaint, he accepted and efficiently carried through all the additional work thrown upon him. When the war broke out, Professor Mair's health was not yet fully restored and Handyside remained at his post for the first year; he literally could not be spared. But he was restless, for he had heard the call. During the session he sought to prepare himself as far as possible by training with the O.T.C., and in July 1915 he received a commission in the 16th King’s Liverpool Regiment. In a letter written at the time he expressed vividly the sense of peace which this decision brought with it, the complete cessation of all anxieties about the future. After nearly a year’s training in England, he was sent to France towards the end of June 1916, and attached to the 18th King’s Liverpool Regiment. It was the
opening of the battle of the Somme. On July 16th he wrote to me, 'I have now been out for some weeks, chiefly at an interesting point of the line, where I learnt what it is like to go across the open under shell-fire, both by day and by night; but now back in rest billets.' Three months later, on the morning of October 18th, he was mortally wounded, 'while gallantly rallying his men in a particularly awkward and desperate situation.' 'It required,' said one of the messages, 'a truly brave man to do what he did under very adverse circumstances.' He was carried to the aid-post of his battalion, and after a few hours was sent further back to an advanced dressing-station, but all that could be done was to alleviate the pain of his wounds. He was himself perfectly conscious of his situation, and remained wonderfully cheery and brave. He was able to dictate to the padre a letter of farewell to those at home. 'Do not be broken-hearted,' he said in a tender message to his mother; 'it is curious how little one minds dying, for oneself, but how much for you.' So he sought to comfort her; for himself he was content.

To these few facts it may be sufficient to add the concluding words of Professor Mair's sympathetic notice at the time in the University of Liverpool students' magazine: 'In the place where he lived and worked for nearly five years,' he wrote, 'it is needless to say much of the qualities of our dead