

## Comment and News

The *Atlantic Monthly* for March (1929) carries an excellent article by George Alexander Johnston on the "New Biography". Emil Ludwig, André Maurois and Lytton Strachey are treated as the outstanding examples of phenomenal success in this kind of writing. These authors with the instincts of novelists, and possessing much the same skill in drawing characters and portraying dramatic events, have become biographers in competition with trained and untrained historians of the old school. Untrained and uncritical writers need not here be considered. These we shall have with us as long as publishers will accept their manuscripts and readers buy their books.

In regard to scholarly and critical biographers of the regulation type, certain it is that they are at a disadvantage when pitted against a Ludwig or a Strachey. Whether lacking a sense of the dramatic or not, they are unwilling to employ it extensively, knowing too well that no man's life is a series of thrilling episodes. From the literary angle, the sane reader tires of the power with which authors with the genius of the three above mentioned writers delineate character, certain that he is being presented with distorted portraits. He often longs for a plain statement of facts and a style that will leave him some opportunity to construct pictures of men and scenes for himself. The man with the gift of a novelist, who turns biographer, may sometimes be as much out of place as the prosaic, scholarly biographer who tries to produce a novel, except in the matter of financial returns from an indiscriminating public.

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Not only have present day readers access to a few unusual biographies by writers of rare talents, but they are confronted with a flood of books, biographical and historical, from the pens of journalists who have turned historians overnight. Their productions sell readily. Interesting and easy to read, the perusal of one volume calls for another to take its place. Our contemporary journalistic historians delve into a few sources with an instinct for news and select what readers are sure to enjoy. Almost before making a beginning, they all feel sure that they understand men and events of the past

better than any of the scholarly writers who have already made such "pitiful" efforts at writing. Any man, event, or time that the journalistic writer gathers no new material about, he writes up on the basis of what he remembers from school histories or what he has picked up incidentally. He writes just as fluently about what he does not know as about what he knows. He consigns men to the lowest depths or lauds them to the skies. Though most leaders were gray, he pictures them as either black or white.

How long will the present craze for the hurried, half-true, but entertaining books produced by such writers continue? Probably until real searchers for the truth develop the power to present their findings to the reading public in more appealing language. Perhaps workers in the field of history ought to be compelled to acquire experience in journalism prior to the perpetration of volumes on an unappreciative public. There would seem to be a greater need, at present, that journalists, who feel the urge to write history, should be required to take a course in historical criticism, before being permitted to feed their half-baked efforts to unprotected readers.

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Teachers in the public schools and even college professors are confronted with a danger that is usually unseen. The common belief that anyone who has acquired a certain amount of education will always retain at least that much is erroneous. Teachers can become uneducated while engaged in the process of teaching, and enough there are who travel this road. Teachers of history in senior and junior high schools are not free from this menace. They must read and reflect on something, however little, beyond what is required of them in the way of the daily preparation of lessons, or gradually lose value as teachers of history. The college teacher with a doctor's degree may be, and occasionally is, handicapped by the possession of the title. The attainment of the degree is a step that should mean a preparation for continued progress. It sometimes means the end of real endeavor.

To the high school teachers of history in Indiana a few suggestions may not be out of place. Large numbers spend summer sessions and other periods whenever possible in further study. To those who attend some university at every opportunity less need be said than to others. All can profit by

regularly reading one or more magazines of history. From this sort of reading there comes a stimulus that no teacher of history can afford to miss. University graduates engaged in presenting history to high school classes, frequently have good opportunities to study some phase or phases of local history. Many such teachers have the ability, or may easily acquire it, to do effective research of this kind. If only a few will look about them with seeing eyes and discerning minds, valuable source matter will be found in collections of old letters, in old newspaper files, and stored in the memories of older men and women. The process of collecting information from such sources will be worth while in itself. If after having collected, assimilated, and correlated a sufficient mass of material, a saving few will carefully prepare papers for publication in the *Indiana Magazine of History*, they will do themselves and all who are interested in the history of the State a real service.

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In the January (1929) issue of the *American Historical Review* appeared certain comment (p. 441) relative to the September (1928) number of our own quarterly. After mention of the principal articles included in that issue, this criticism followed: "It is submitted with all due respect and becoming humility, that this number of the *Magazine*, particularly the Beveridge article, carries more than its permissible quota of typographical errors." The *Editor* acknowledges with sorrow the entire justice of this comment. His spirit was weighed down with the burden of the designated errors for many days before his attention was thus kindly directed to them. He can only plead certain facts in extenuation of poor work done. It was necessary to rush the September number. The editor was new and the clerk was new. Many of the student printers employed by the University Press were new, and a few of the worst errors were made while others were being corrected. We can only hope for improvement in ourselves, and state that we were saddened to note that our great contemporary carried the erroneous title, "Economic Background of the Liberal Party" (*Liberty Party*, it should have been), as a heading through seven pages. We do not know the "permissible quota" for an error of this nature.

Professor Frank F. Hargrave of Purdue University has been working on the history of the New Albany and Salem Railroad for several years. He expects to publish a volume on this railway soon. This important line of communication and transportation was early completed to Michigan City, thus connecting the Ohio with Lake Michigan. It has for many years formed a part of the Monon system. There is much railroad history yet to be written, and Professor Hargrave's book will be welcomed.

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Miss Louise Phelps Kellogg has an article on "How the Northwest was Captured" in the February issue of *La Follette's Magazine*. For a number of years Miss Kellogg has been connected with the State Historical Society of Wisconsin as research associate. She has long been a student of George Rogers Clark, and we are glad indeed to present to our readers a short paper from her pen in this issue of our *Magazine*.

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Miss Katherine Heron of Connersville, Indiana, who is much interested in local history, and who has acquired a small but valuable collection of rare old newspapers and coins, recently prepared a series of articles on the "Early History of Franklin and Fayette Counties". The series consisted of six papers, which were published in the *Connersville News-Examiner*. The first article appeared in the issue of December 3, 1928, and the last in that of December 8. Much of the matter presented is based on documents in the possession of Miss Heron.

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Mrs. Jouett Taylor Cannon, Secretary of the Kentucky State Historical Society, presents some interesting matter pertaining to Abraham Lincoln, grandfather of President Lincoln, in the January (1929) number of the *Register*. Readers of the paper on Hananiah Lincoln by Louis A. Warren, which we print in this issue, will be interested in examining the matter furnished by Mrs. Cannon. The question taken up by her is: "Where did Thomas Lincoln, father of President Lincoln, get the money to pay for the Mill Creek farm in Hardin County which he purchased for cash in 1803"? In the

*Register* for January, 1924, Mrs. Cannon presented what she then thought to be a correct answer to this question. She now presents evidence which seems to cast doubt on her earlier conclusions. Incidentally, she has learned that Lincoln's grandfather, though not a scholar, was quite able to write his name and transact business in legal form. Another point of interest and worth noting is that the Christian name of Thomas Lincoln's mother, according to Mrs. Cannon, was "Bathsheba."

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The cover page picture of this issue is reproduced from Maurice Thompson's *Stories of Indiana* (p. 48), by the courtesy of the American Book Company of Cincinnati. In the original edition of this little book, a picture portraying Clark and his soldiers in the uniform of Washington's Continentals was used. With a very commendable desire to represent more correctly the appearance of the frontiersmen who marched with Clark, the picture, which we use, was substituted in a revised edition by the publishers.

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On February 25, one hundred fifty years after the event, the capture of Fort Sackville by George Rogers Clark was fittingly celebrated at Vincennes. The importance of the services of the hero of that exploit to the Nation then being born was not recognized for a hundred years. During the last half century a notable change has taken place, and due credit has now been accorded to Clark, Pollock, and others who participated in the remote but significant activities of the Revolutionary War in the West. Clark and his associates did not accomplish everything in the saving and holding of the Old Northwest. They must share the glory with Anthony Wayne, William Henry Harrison and others, who, in later years, supplemented their work. There is, however, honor enough for all.

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The annual meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association will be held at Vincennes late in April (25-27). The program promises to be very interesting. Indiana should be well represented. Many persons in the State, who are not members of this Association but who have a vital interest in the history of the vast valley of which Indiana forms a part, should become members at once and enjoy the Vincennes meeting.