

Comment and News

In bygone days, it was not uncommon for intelligent persons to speak of the "sobering truth of history". Within a limited circle, the reading of sane, unbiased accounts from the pens of patient investigators who seek only the truth is still a practice. How much of the real value of history comes to those who care only for historical narratives that "crackle and sparkle" it is difficult to say. There is no reason why scholars who have carefully sought out the facts of history should not "breath warmth and life into the dead bones", but one wonders whether the "new school" of writers so actively engaged in producing volumes of history and biography are not doing as much harm as good. Is it really true that persons above the moron grade who have an interest in the past can be induced to read only those histories and biographies that are replete with thrills? Such books are certainly not to be recommended solely because the authors write with grace and fire. It is not enough that a volume in the realm of history shall be gripping and entertaining. To be truly useful, to deserve reading, it must represent an honest effort to set forth the truth. It is the business of the historian to remove prejudice, not to create it, and a book that does not fulfill this requirement does not deserve to live.

Without being a prophet, one can easily foretell that many of the works that fall in the class styled the "New Biography" will not live. Books of this type are being extensively purchased by readers. Wide sales are attractive to publishers and authors alike, and biographies are coming thick and fast from the presses. Several dozens of new lives of persons whose careers were colorful, or that may be made colorful, will appear in the next two or three years. The reading public will tire of them in time and a demand will develop for saner treatments. The waters having been muddied by floods of hurriedly written volumes, there will be a call for a purer and steadier supply. The works prepared in response to this call will be different—neither as dull and stilted as the "Old Biography" nor as effervescent and unreliable as the "New Biography". There is a good day coming for the trained his-

torian who loves the truth and who will not depart therefrom, but who will expend constructive energy on writing as well as on research.

In each number of the *Magazine* there will be an attempt to review one or more histories or biographies. In the September issue there appeared a brief review of *The Tragic Era*, the latest book of Claude G. Bowers. In the present issue a review of a recent publication, *Life and Labor in the Old South* by Dr. Ulrich B. Phillips, is presented. It is not the policy to review or notice a wide range of works in the general field of American history, but it is hoped that some good may be accomplished through reviews or notices of a limited number of volumes that do not pertain to the history of Indiana.

The conclusion of an article in the *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* for October, 1929, "Reminiscence of the Rivers" by James A. Henderson, will interest Hoosiers who know something of the traffic on the Ohio River. Says Mr. Henderson:

Many people are of the opinion that the glory of the rivers has departed with the decline of the freight and passenger boats. If you were on Water Street [Pittsburgh] and could see fifteen or twenty steamboats departing, you would say the steamboat business is good. But looking out in the river, you see a towboat with eight or ten barges moving along. You don't think much about it. That boat with the ten barges contains more tonnage than fifteen or twenty of the old-time steamboats. Instead of a decline in the river tonnage it is far greater today than ever before.

The writer points out that in the old days, a great fleet of coal boats left for the South whenever there was a freshet. Because "none go South in our time many people are of the opinion that the coal business is ruined". Combatting this notion, Mr. Henderson declares that "there is one industrial concern that brings more coal into Pittsburgh harbor in one year than ever went down the Ohio in any single year". He adds this interesting statement concerning the present prospect of Ohio River navigation:

When the last two dams are finished this year [1929] making fifty dams in the Ohio River chain, Pittsburgh manufacturers will be able to ship their products every day in the year down the Ohio into

the Mississippi River to New Orleans to sea-going vessels that reach all the markets of the world.

Those who bring men of past eras into the present and attempt to line them up in reference to political, economic and social questions of our day often commit grievous errors. Writers, public speakers and representatives of patriotic organizations are too prone to assume that reformers, liberals and revolutionists of the past, could they be summoned to participate in present contests, would stand for just what they supported when they lived and walked among men. Of this there can be no certainty. Is it not more likely that an honest liberal of a bygone era would, if here, be an honest liberal now, and an honest conservative of another period an honest conservative now? It is the spirit in which a man performed in his time that must be understood in order to determine what position he would probably assume if confronted by the conditions of today. It is very probable that liberals and revolutionists of periods long past would quickly repudiate the arguments and actions of many of their worshipful followers or descendants of this day and hour, if there were any way to bring the matter to a testing.

There appeared a few weeks ago the first number of the *Hoosier Magazine*. This announcement number was devoted to Brown County. The second number, it is promised will relate to the same county, being a memorial issue dedicated to the late Theodore Clement Steele. Later issues are to deal with other counties of the State until each county has been honored with a number. The new periodical is to be published monthly by the Hoosier Publishing Company of Indianapolis. Mr. M. Z. Allen is to serve as managing editor, and Miss Mabel Sturtevant as assistant editor. The subscription price of the *Hoosier Magazine* is to be \$2.50 per year.

There will be published in March, 1930, as a separate pamphlet an index of the first twenty-five volumes of the *Indiana Magazine of History*. It will not be possible to furnish this free to subscribers, but copies will be sold at a reasonable price to all individual subscribers and to all libraries that

may desire to purchase one or more copies. The present issue rounds out the twenty-fifth year in the life of the *Magazine*, and it is believed that the proposed index will prove very valuable.

The proposed one-hundred dollar fund which is desired that it may be used to stimulate the writing of papers pertaining to Indiana History, is rapidly growing. The Editor's soul has been stirred since the September issue went forth by the receipt of one pledge of ten dollars. The plan to raise this stupendous sum was first announced in the June number. No response came between that issue and the next, so it is easily seen that the prospect of ultimate success has brightened. If pledges for ninety dollars are forthcoming, the Editor has agreed to supply another ten. Now that Dr. Christopher B. Coleman has joined him, only eighty dollars remain to be raised. It is not meant that the twenty dollars are in hand—the Secretary of the Historical Society and the Editor of the *Magazine* have not yet parted with the cash. They stand ready to do so at any time following recovery from their Christmas shopping, however, but eight other interested and affluent Hoosiers will have to come forward with pledges in order to cause either of the present subscribers to lay his contribution on the altar of Clio.