

# Indiana Historical Society

By CHRISTOPHER B. COLEMAN

Volume X, Number 4, of the *Indiana Historical Society Publications* was issued in November under the title of "Un-edited Letters of Jonathan Jennings." Dorothy Riker of the Historical Bureau contributed a brief chronology, a genealogy, calendar, and notes. These make a substantial supplement to the official and semi-official Messages and Letters of Jennings edited by Logan Esarey for Volume III of the *Governors Mes-sages and Letters* of the *Indiana Historical Collections*, pub-lished by the Indiana Historical Commission in 1924. Ninety-nine letters and other documents emanating from the first governor of the State of Indiana are included. A notice of this publication will appear on other pages of this *Magazine*.

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The William Henry Smith Memorial Library of the Indiana Historical Society has recently obtained a miscellaneous collec-tion of early Indiana papers coming from William H. English through Captain William E. English and Mrs. William E. Eng-lish Prince. Frank J. Prince, executor of Mrs. Prince's will, placed with the Society historical material, relating mostly to the English family, left by Mrs. Prince's will to be given to such an organization. The Smith Library has also acquired from Mrs. Charles S. Medbury of Des Moines, Iowa, a com-plete set of the "Millennial Harbinger," edited by Alexander Campbell at Bethany, West Virginia. This periodical contains a vast amount of information about religious conditions and movements in Indiana between 1827 and 1870. This material, however, will not be available for use until the Smith Library is established in the new Library and Historical Building.

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A challenge comes out of the "Depression" to those inter-ested in history. Now that the political campaign of 1932 is past, it can be seen that a fundamental factor in our depressed condition is the disparity between our progress in mechanical and scientific achievements and our progress in social control. Science has prolonged human life and exploited new elements and forces; machinery has multiplied production, and man's power and possessions have correspondingly increased. So little progress, however, has been made in the organization of

human relationship, in what is technically called social sciences and is popularly known as wisdom, that we have at last tangled ourselves up in a snarl from which there is no ready release. The ultimate responsibility rests upon the failure of our civilization to develop through history, economics, and other social sciences an enlightened control of conduct and of natural forces. It is opportune, therefore, in the circle of historians to inquire into the status of history in the general debacle.

In the last two generations history has become one of the major subjects in education. It has also enlisted the services of a great many writers outside of academic circles. National, state, and local organizations have been formed by those supposedly devoting more or less of their time to its cultivation. It must be confessed, however, that the results have not as yet been commensurate with those attained in the realm of machinery and natural science. Certain errors of statement have been corrected; certain gaps have been filled; and certain individuals and movements have been illuminated by detailed research. That our understanding of the past has been either greatly increased or greatly deepened, however, cannot be asserted. The contribution which has been made to enlightened leadership is not very apparent. The impression one gets from a survey of the field is that most of the historical work being done consists in communicating to the young in imperfect form the accumulation of ideas and facts handed down from the last generation. The comparatively few historians who make significant additions to our knowledge of the past work in detachment and pit the surface here and there but make no organized constructive attack upon the task of explaining the present or guiding the future by an understanding of the past.

Historical societies ought to do better than this. They should serve as clearing houses in which duplication of work is avoided and stimulation of effort upon intelligently coördinated and constructive studies is afforded. High school, college, and university faculties ought to take advantage of such societies, not only as a means of broadening their field of instruction, but also as a means of specializing historical work, each in its own institution, so far as it can wisely be done, to the end that each may lead out into undeveloped and distinctive fields of study in which significant results may be hoped for.

Hereditary patriotic organizations might easily contribute

to the same result. In the present crisis and in the present state of historical science, there is no excuse for those who are organized as descendants or participants in great movements of the past, using such organizations as a means of social pleasure or preferment or as a mere gratification of pride of ancestry. They ought to line up with others in doing historical work connected with the movements in the light of which they bask. The study of immigration into America, of the significance of the American Revolution, and of similar movements, would be the means of important contributions to an understanding of American institutions and the development of effective agencies for improvement. The many societies organized on an hereditary basis which have come into existence might easily coördinate their efforts along these lines through historical societies. A comparison of numbers and prestige might make such a statement seem incongruous but in the long run it will be found that the real justification for hereditary patriotic societies is historical. Unless they tend to make the American people more historically minded, they will do more harm than good.

The conclusion of the whole matter is that historians and would-be historians should acknowledge their share of responsibility for our backwardness in intelligent political, economic, and social organization and buckle down to the task of making history shed more light than it has upon the problem of human welfare.