

## Comment

There are evidently several purposes that may be subserved by book reviews. The marks of a good history or biography are accuracy, worth-while content, evidence of insight, and readability. A reviewer should evaluate any work of a historical nature in relation to these points. Book reviews in which writers merely exploit their own views, or praise the work of authors of volumes reviewed, or attempt to promote sales, or exercise their talents for clever writing, or indulge in stinging comments are of little value. So many reviews are published that really aid no one desirous of learning the true nature of books before ordering or reading them, that all students or readers of history and biography owe much to the *American Historical Review* and the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* for the many pages devoted to careful evaluations of historical publications. The responsibility of the editors of these scholarly quarterlies is therefore very great in relation to the selection of reviewers, while that of the reviewers is even greater.

Those who write reviews of historical books may be roughly divided into two classes—college men who have had training in research and who are more or less specialists in the fields of the works reviewed, and literary men or journalists who are not trained investigators and who do not, as a rule, possess special knowledge of the fields in which the volumes reviewed fall. The most interesting results appear when trained historians review the historical writings of journalists or when journalists review the carefully prepared monographs of historical workers.

A choice excerpt from a notice written by a university professor about a journalist's work on an American political writer of the times that "tried men's souls" follows:

In the last analysis, the book is a moderately effective piece of propaganda, from the pen of one who has been an able purveyor of that commodity himself, and who, perhaps naturally, uses that medium for expressing his interest in and admiration for an illustrious predecessor.

A literary man of a western mountain state writes with equal skill of a scholarly monograph which recently came from the press of an eastern university:

New York emerges from the welter of colonies and the confusion of the revolutionary war, not as a glorious poem, not as a struggling group of heroic colonists, but as a well dissected frog pinned to a board and properly diagrammed. Historians who object to the inroads of regionalism into history, may be delighted with the deadly mannerisms peculiar to history with which Mr. ——— makes his sally toward the realm of literature, through the long, flat, dry deserts of academic prose.

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The twelfth volume of the *Dictionary of American Biography* appeared recently. The value of this important work increases as publication progresses. Students of Indiana history will find sketches of many of the leaders who have played parts in the state's history in the volumes that have been brought out to date. The task of selection and rejection is one of magnitude and difficulty, not only in regard to the biographical sketches to be included but also in regard to the authors who are to write them. The job has been so well done that one hesitates to raise any questions. One would, nevertheless, like to know by what process or by whose advice the list of lives to be included or excluded for any state is made out. It would also be interesting to know by what method those in charge of this great undertaking decide on the list of authors. It would seem that the editor and his assistants would need the advice of persons in each state who may be supposed to know something about who is fitted to write this or that biographical sketch. Assuming no knowledge of what is true in regard to other states, it would not be hard to demonstrate that several men in Indiana who could have given material aid to the editors have not been consulted.

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The roll-call by counties of membership in the Indiana Historical Society presented on another page of this issue reveals an interesting situation. It should make good copy for newspapers all over Indiana. One tenth of the counties have no members in the Society. A number of others can boast of but a single member each. Many libraries of the state are subscribers to the *Indiana Magazine of History*, but it seems that only two of the counties with no members in the Society have library subscriptions to the *Magazine*. It is true that a good many Indiana newspapers are on the exchange list of the *Magazine*. In this way, perhaps two or more of the zero counties receive the *Magazine*. The Indiana Historical Society is

worthy of support, and no county in the state should have fewer than ten members.

It is almost unthinkable that any library in Indiana should be without the publications of the Society or the *Indiana Magazine of History*. The sad truth is that a very considerable number of the libraries of the state have no file of the *Magazine* and are not now subscribers. Nearly all libraries that receive the *Magazine* are direct subscribers paying \$2.00 per year. It should be understood by libraries that institution memberships in the Indiana Historical Society are available to all of them at \$3.00 per year. Libraries carrying such memberships will receive the *Magazine* and in addition the *Bulletins* and *Publications* of the Society.

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Contributors to this issue: Elmore Barce is a lawyer of Fowler, Indiana, and a writer in the field of Indiana History who is well known to our readers. Christopher B. Coleman is the Secretary of the Indiana Historical Society. Being a native of Springfield, Illinois, he grew up in an environment that caused him to acquire a vivid interest in the "prairie years" of Lincoln. Leola Hockett is the Secretary of the Wabash County Historical Society. Martha Alice Tyner is a teacher of history in the Huntington, Indiana, public schools. Julie LeClerc Knox, a frequent contributor, is a teacher of Latin in the Crawfordsville High School. She was born and reared at Vevay, Indiana, and has long been interested in the Hoosier towns situated on the Ohio. Miss Emily King Anderson lives at Centerville, Indiana. William Lowe Bryan is the President of Indiana University.