

knowledge is a dangerous thing, for historians as for others.

There is an inclination (at least on the part of one contributor) to be too cavalier in dismissing "mere narrative history." He granted its value as "entertainment" but doubted its contribution "toward building a body of scientific knowledge about human behavior." Though Parkman and Henry Adams (to take two of the best of the "narrative" historians) were without benefit of advantages enjoyed by later social scientists, can we truly say our volumes display greater knowledge about human behavior than theirs? Desirable as it is to increase our scientific knowledge about human behavior let us not depreciate the artist to whose vision is often revealed human secrets locked against the tools of the social scientist.

Many years ago Carl Becker, himself a strong supporter of "the new history," suggested to a colleague in a tone of mild irritation it was time to produce some of it instead of proposing to one another how it should be written. Possibly the same thought occurred to participants in this enterprise. Indeed some of them have attempted to practice what is preached. Bulletins such as this will surely prompt historians to study their respective fields with greater penetration. More and more the tendency will be to study problems rather than periods. But eventually the effort must be made to synthesize separate studies into a comprehensive narrative. When that work is produced, will our familiar landmarks—the American Revolution, the French Revolution, etc. etc.—look very different than they do now? It will be worth waiting for.

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Stories on Stone: A Book of American Epitaphs. By Charles L. Wallis. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954, pp. xv, 272. Illustrations and indexes. \$5.00.)

Largely uninscribed in history books is the variety of beliefs and experiences which make up the lives of ordinary people. Out of the innumerable lives and events of this unrecounted history, a single life or a particular event may be illuminated, partially and arbitrarily, by the inscription on a grave.

In this collection of epitaphs Charles Wallis has brought together with a pleasant and informative commentary some 750 inscriptions from American cemeteries. Although epitaphs in general employ traditional forms and sentiments, they are more often than not altered to personal circumstance: Individual attainments, weaknesses, desires and attachments, as well as the whole range of emotional reaction enter into their idiom. Often the comments are blunt and free of the conventions of tact and etiquette within which daily life is hemmed; they express, without restraint, personal hatreds, accusations of crime, extreme egoism, cynicism and even indifference. At the same time, love, faith, grief and individual heroism are amply recorded; the style may be pompous or it may have the awkward simplicity that is so effective and moving in much folk art.

Religious sentiments range from bright cynicisms such as "Haine Haint" to quiet assurance such as that expressed on a grave in a Friends' cemetery: "I See Daybreak." In between is the whimsical questioner: "Went Away/Mar.22,1921/I Wonder/Where He/Went." Aside from religious sentiment, good deeds or qualities of character may be chosen to record. Sometimes all the memorable aspects of an individual may be listed indiscriminately: "A truthful child, mild tempered, quiet disposition, nearsighted, strong mind." Crimes may also be selected; the dead do not forgive the ill deeds of the living, nor the living the ill deeds of the dead. A New Hampshire grave recalls: "Henry N . . . Murderer of/Sevilla Jones," while the grave of Warren Gibbs in Massachusetts accuses his wife of poisoning the oysters. Those who died unnatural deaths are usually immortalized by them. One cannot fail to be impressed by the marvelous death of one lady of the "Old West": "Margarita/Stabbed by a Gold Dollar." But the ridiculous and the recriminative are matched by epitaphs of simple pathos and dignity, as these lines on the grave of a young mother: "You must talk to the children/as I should have done had I/lived."

As in much folksong, there is no avoidance of the morbid. Indeed, the treatment of morbidity may be extremely effective. An epitaph on a child's grave in Massachusetts expresses almost a despairing compulsion to view the horror of death: "Oh would that I could lift the lid and peer/within the grave and watch the greedy worms/that eat away

the dead." Rime may give an unintentional "Charles Addams" kind of humor to a horrible death: "How shocking to the human mind/The log did him to powder grind." Characteristic of these epitaphs is the faculty evident in folk art generally, which combines almost in the same breath and without comment, the sublime with the ridiculous, the individual with the 'made to order,' the fantastic with the ordinary.

The author's commentary which threads these inscriptions together, although at times stilted, adequately fills in the factual background. The book is organized rather loosely by subject matter and the type of sentiment involved; a geographical index at the end of the book is convenient for locating all epitaphs cited from one area. The work makes no pretenses of being other than a pleasant afternoon of reading; it is not directed towards the professional folklorist, although it may well be suggestive to him.

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List of National Archives Microfilm Publications, 1953.
(Washington: The National Archives, 1953, pp. vi, 98.)

Preliminary Inventory of the Central Office Records of the National Resources Planning Board. Compiled by Virgil E. Baugh. Preliminary Inventories, No. 50. (Washington: The National Archives, 1953, pp. v, 66.)

Preliminary Inventory of the Records of the Office of Labor of the War Food Administration. Compiled by Harold T. Pinkett. Preliminary Inventories, No. 51. (Washington: The National Archives, 1953, pp. v, 18.)

Preliminary Inventory of the "Old Loans" Records of the Bureau of the Public Debt. Compiled by Philip D. Lagerquist, Archie L. Abney, and Lyle J. Holverstott. Preliminary Inventories, No. 52. (Washington: The National Archives, 1953, pp. v, 91.)

Preliminary Inventory of the Records of the Bureau of Agricultural Engineering. Compiled by Nathan Reingold. Preliminary Inventories, No. 53. (Washington: The National Archives, 1953, pp. v, 28.)