

Comment by the Editor

THE MATERIALS OF HISTORY

Historians who delve into the prehistoric find few materials and only scattered records. They view a limestone cliff, and tell of the time when Iowa was under the sea; they reconstruct a race of men from fragmentary skulls and thigh bones; they visit the Valley of the Kings, and vitalize the reign of Tutankhamen from an inspection of his tomb. They deal with symbols, as all historians should.

The annalist of the present age has a different problem, for records of modern life are without number. The harmony of events, like the organization of matter, defies understanding and yet compels contemplation. To produce cosmos from chaos is the alchemy of modern history.

He who undertakes to review all events, to read all accounts, to discover all causes, and to perceive all effects, in order that he may produce a complete and truthful image of the times, attempts the impossible. Selection is his task. It is for the historian to choose significant facts, to interpret the symbolism of events, to dwell upon typical characters, to write literature—in short, to be an artist as well as a scholar.

Abundance of material has its advantages. Think of the newspapers. What an infinite variety of sub-

jects they cover. With what detail events are described, and how rich is the comment.

Consider the service of photography. The eye of the camera sees all and never forgets. It beggars all language in the realm of description. The most trivial snapshot may be of great value, while the utility of an aërial view of a battle or city is beyond calculation. As for the movies, they verily challenge mortality. Death has lost its meaning to history; for those who are dead still live and move and have their being.

Even sound can now be preserved. The past may be heard as well as seen. He who runs need not read: he may simply look and listen.

J. E. B.