

Comment by the Editor

HISTORY IS PAST CULTURE

Institutions, wars, rulers, plagues, and accidents: these constitute the normal substance of standard history. The story of the past has emphasized heroics. In the long perspective of the modern view of ancient times, only the deeds of the most audacious tyrants and noblest prophets seem conspicuous enough to notice. Monuments and the remnants of substantial public works direct attention to dynasties and governmental power. Such superficial traces of fame and labor divert consideration from the achievements of the race to the glory of the leaders.

Valid history ought to be more than a hollow shell of circumstantial notoriety. Beneath the ostentatious husk of privilege lies the kernel of general human experience. The daily lives of men and women constitute the true story of our heritage. Remarkable exploits of a few may symbolize the common doings of the many; but the significance of the record is in the reality instead of the sign. War and peace, church and state, school and factory are but the manifestations of prevailing social forces.

The vitality of the past, like life itself, is intangible. Whatever is enduring can be found in the thoughts, ideals, and spiritual resources of the people. If history is to be a dependable guide for civilization, the subtleties of experience must be explained.

Iowa pioneers were more than farmers and merchants. The distinction of the Commonwealth they founded is to be sought not so much in political methods, economic advantages, or military victories as in religious zeal and faith in education. Social and cultural progress, though neglected, is probably more significant than exciting campaigns or financial depressions. Let the character of our people be revealed in the chronicles of our churches, schools, and customs.

To students of social relations belongs the grave responsibility of interpreting the past — for history is what the teachers say it is.

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