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THE ADDRESSES OF THE PRESIDENTS OF THE AMERICAN
HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION, 1946-1960

by

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B.A. Montana State University, 1954

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1961

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INTRODUCTION

In 1884 the American Historical Association was founded. In its annual meetings since that date the president of the Association has read his presidential address. The honor and the opportunity of speaking to an audience of distinguished historians who represent that profession in the United States has not failed to produce outstanding addresses by men already noted for their great ability. The Presidents have used this occasion in various ways. Some stated their philosophy of history; others attacked what they found objectionable within their discipline.

For example, late nineteenth century proponents of "scientific history" such as Andrew D. White, Henry Adams, and George Burton Adams have spoken of nature's immutable laws and their hope of discovering them in the careful sifting of the past.¹ It was their hope that through careful research and analysis of the past the historian might find the basic forces that mold mankind and society. These forces, once identified, could be tested until their proven validity would permit the historian not only to recognize the real causes of past occurrences, but also to predict future developments. In short, they hoped for significant insight that would transcend the past and clarify the future.

James Harvey Robinson spoke for the values and the expanding

¹Michael Kraus, The Writing of American History (Norman, Oklahoma, 1953), pp. 157-176, for a summary of the rise and significance of the "Scientific School."

studies of what he called the New History.² The New History meant to expand the historian's view from one focused upon the course of politics and the clashes engendered by state rivalries to one where social evolution, scientific progress, intellectual turmoil, and artistic expression cast their meaningful shadows to give more depth to the picture. It was less a call for that which was new, but rather a desire to be more inclusive. As man is a creature not dedicated wholly to politics, parties, and warfare, history could not be written unless it dealt with all that was meaningful in man's existence. The historian, then, had to look beyond the actions of parties to the reasons why men gave their energies in order that these actions might occur.

Carl L. Becker and Charles A. Beard presented a relativistic concept of history.³ These men held that truth was relative. The historian should question the basis of the selection of fact. Since objective truth is nonexistent in history, one must then make an assumption and proceed to select facts and to write history relative to this assumption. They would then abandon any rigid criteria of history allowing the individual to write history according to his philosophy.

The list of presidents is impressive. There is no doubt that it contains the names of men who were leaders in their field who spoke not only for themselves, but who presented contemporary currents of thought moving with the historical profession. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that if one were interested in historical thought he could profitably

²For James Harvey Robinson, see Ibid., pp. 175, 223, 366-367.

³The best analysis of the historical philosophy of Beard and Becker can be found in Cushing Strout, The Pragmatic Revolt in American History: Carl Becker and Charles Beard (New Haven, 1958).

make a study of the presidents' addresses.

Historians and Their Craft: A Study of the Presidential Addresses of the American Historical Association, 1884-1945, by Herman Ausubel, presents a systematic analysis of the presidents' thoughts extending through the changes and contrasts that are evident in sixty-one years.⁴ It was not the purpose of Ausubel's study to analyze intricately each personality, nor to trace the evolutions of their careers. Neither was it intended to express the entirety of the historical thinking of any president. No attempt was made to illuminate the origins of the theories or to account for their development. The study limited itself to an analysis of ideas found in the presidential addresses.⁵ Thus Ausubel's book is organized within six topics: "Facts in History," "The Science and Philosophy of History," "Individuals in History," and "The Content of History." Proceeding chronologically, each address is examined over and over again with differing emphasis according to the topic of that particular chapter.

Dealing with the "Immediate Usefulness of History," Ausubel found that the presidents were more interested in the present than in the past. It was their hope that by studying the past, solutions to present social problems might be found. Few seemed prone to study history for its own sake.⁶ This present-mindedness continued from the early period through the first World War, the depression, the New Deal, and World War II.

⁴Herman Ausubel, Historians and Their Craft: A Study of the Presidential Addresses of the American Historical Association, 1884-1945 (New York, 1950).

⁵Ibid., p. 12.

⁶Ibid., p. 17.

The issues engendered by these military and economic crises tempted the historian to enter the melee armed with bludgeons of historical facts sharpened to cut through the maize of upheaval and difficulties.⁷

Since the presidents were insistent upon problem solving, it seemed logical to Ausubel that they would then emphasize literary style in historical writing in order to carry their message to the layman. In his chapter, "History as Literature," however, he found that while some presidents were enthusiastic proponents of the stylistic aspect, most of the presidents simply assumed that good writing is basic. One president stated that history had been literature in the past and he expected it to remain so. Others warned of the dangers of over-emphasis on style, and charged that historians might confuse or hide essential truths under a cloud of purple rhetoric.⁸

On the other hand, Ausubel discerned, these presidents also came to the conclusion that the gathering of endless data is a rather pointless endeavor unless some contemporary significance of such information were the end result. The stringing out of facts was not necessarily good history. Presidents speaking of the selection of facts seemed more in favor of choosing them according to present needs; few were for letting the past determine what was important or trivial.⁹

Turning from the presidents' views about facts to their statements concerning the philosophy and the science of history, the author

⁷Ibid., pp. 56, 86.

⁸Ibid., p. 148.

⁹Ibid., p. 148, 188.

discovered that few presidents made this the main topic of their address. True, there were urgings to find patterns, tendencies, continuity, laws, and God as there were also suggestions that historians refrain from crystal ball gazing and be content to work with the reality that once was. Pleas were heard for including the findings of other disciplines such as sociology and economics. But, on the whole, the presidents did not venture into the heady but nebulous atmosphere of theory, fearing to tie their reputations to the easily deflated balloon of philosophy. Such men as Edward P. Cheyney with his laws and Charles Beard with his act of faith did sail up and out; the majority, however, kept their feet firmly on the ground.¹⁰

The topic of "Individuals in History," like that of the "Philosophy and Science of History," was not extensively discussed by the presidents. Ausubel notes that even though these historians lived through a period studded with overwhelming personalities like Theodore Roosevelt, Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, Hitler, and Stalin, they did not succumb to the great man theory of history. To be sure, there were those who mentioned the individual's relation to the possibility or impossibility of formulating a science of history; and some who worried about the treatment individuals received from zealots and iconoclasts. The majority of the presidents, however, glanced briefly at or passed over the individual and gave more attention to other subjects.¹¹

Another category in Ausubel's subject breakdown is the presidents' treatment of "The Content of History." Here the author states that there

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 189, 221.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 256, 299.

was no real conflict. The presidents did not oppose a broad view of the past nor richness of content. Many presidents before James Harvey Robinson clearly indicated that history was not limited to politics and wars.¹²

Summarizing his study of these speeches, Ausubel concluded with the following generalities: The presidents, not wanting to appear the inmates of ivory towers, emphasized that they, like the sociologist and psychologist, could find answers to current problems. In doing so, the tendency was to make what mattered now important in the past. History, if it were to be used, should be readable, should possess literary merit; it should not be a deadening list of undigested facts. The standards of selecting facts tended to show again an attitude of present-mindedness. Even though the historians favored the finding of meaning, few delved deeply into the philosophy and science of history. There was unanimity of opinion on the broadness of historical thought which excluded any serious support for the great man theory of history. Neglected topics that were worthy of consideration by the presidents were: "the classroom teaching of history, historical craftsmanship, the techniques of research, the contributions of archaeology to history, the study of historical causation, social class approaches to the past, statistics as a historical tool, the impact of fascism and communism on historiography, and television in relation to the popularization of historical knowledge."¹³

In the fifteen years since Ausubel made his study, the presidential

¹²Ibid., p. 330.

¹³Ibid., pp. 359-362.

addresses have continued. Their quality has not diminished. The last fifteen presidents have, like their predecessors, dealt with the perplexities and conflicts that disturb them and their colleagues. It is of value, therefore, to examine what these presidents have said in order to analyze contemporary historical thought as expressed in their addresses.

In doing this, it seemed wise not to follow necessarily the structure of Ausubel's work. His study covered sixty-one years; this investigation deals with fifteen. Some points that were discernible in the analysis of sixty-one years cannot be adequately viewed in fifteen. It has seemed best to organize the addresses according to the four main topics about which the presidents spoke most extensively. These topics are: "History and the Historian," "The Training of the Historian," "Areas Needing Investigation," "What Good is History?" The discussion of each topic will be developed chronologically. Not all presidents spoke about all the topics; some devoted their address almost exclusively to one, while others touched upon several.

CHAPTER I

HISTORY AND THE HISTORIAN

The fifteen presidential addresses from 1946 to 1960 have been directed, to a large extent, to a general analysis of the criteria of history and the values of the historian. Topics of this nature that were discussed with varying points of view were: the possibility of objectivity, the broadness of history, research, specialization, present-mindedness, the danger to scholarship in writing for the public, and the need for a guiding philosophy.

These presidents, who have spent many years writing and teaching history, have also puzzled over the goals of the historian and those factors that hinder their achievement. As could be expected in any endeavor where thinking men have freedom to disagree, there was a large measure of differing opinions. The emotions, of course, were tightly constricted upon academic vocabulary, yet they were felt and were, at times, impassioned. Because these men have achieved fame and prominence, and consequently respect; because their thoughts are not curtailed by problems of salary, tenure, or general acceptance by the academic community, these speeches are candid statements not only of the basic problems concerning history and the historian, but also the nuances of the effects caused by the problems. In short, the history profession has chosen these men to speak both for them and to them. The presidential speeches, then, should represent the quintessence of American historical scholarship in the mid-twentieth century.

The first president who spoke of history in general terms was Kenneth Scott Latourette in his address, "The Christian Understanding of History."¹ Latourette, at the outset, admitted the difficulty the historian encounters in his search for historical truth. The records he has to use are faulty; his judgment in accepting or rejecting various data is subject to bias as is his interpretation of that data. The historian cannot completely escape the influence of the present nor of the past. Latourette believed that the historian, recognizing his dilemma, seeks, as a means of resolving it, a system of values that might guide him towards better results. The historian should, therefore, examine the Christian understanding of history. It was Latourette's belief that this understanding would enable the historian to come closer to truth and fulfill his desire to find a framework that rests upon reality.

The Christian understanding centers upon God. God, as the progenitor of all things, transcending all time, guides this experience we call history. Although man has the power to accept or reject God's love, history is the story of the Almighty's reaching out to man. Time may cease before the tale is ended, but there is no doubt as to its final goal for God is omnipotent; man's full story has a rendezvous with eternity.

It is Latourette's interpretation that God gave man freedom of choice in regard to the undeserved love that He offers him. That love which is part of God himself became flesh, was crucified, and even now

¹Kenneth S. Latourette, "The Christian Understanding of History," The American Historical Review, LIV, No. 2 (January, 1949), pp. 259-276.

effects the course of history via the person of the Holy Spirit.

The Christian understanding of history is opposed to those doctrines that see in history the gradual perfecting of man. Although not denying that change can take place, if one judges progress by the approach mankind has made in being like God--as God showed himself through Jesus--very little progress can be claimed.

According to Latourette, the Christian understanding indicates that many historians have missed the most important happening of history, the crucifixion, and have emphasized secondary occurrences. Another distinction of this Christian understanding is that it sees the individual as having the utmost importance. God is not interested in cultures and empires which are transitory, but in the individual who has a portion of the eternal. If one were to accept the Christian understanding, his conception of time would have to change since mankind's goal is to be found in the realm of the eternal kingdom.

Conyers Read in his address, "The Social Responsibilities of the Historian," also acknowledged the necessity of a guiding philosophy in the writing of history.² He defined history as "the memory, recorded or unrecorded, of past human experience." Admitting the undesirable necessity of dividing the field of knowledge that is encompassed in history and the specialization of scholars in these divisions, Read indicated the artificiality of such structuring. Specialization can be carried to a point where it no longer serves society. The monograph writer could be an example of overspecialization. For it was Read's

²Conyers Read, "The Social Responsibilities of the Historian," The American Historical Review, LV, No. 2 (January, 1950), pp. 275-285.

opinion that this type of writing served society less with its narrow approach than does the writing of textbooks, for example, that have a broad approach.

Research and writing have been over-emphasized, in general, by historians. Read's conviction was that good teaching had been slighted and good teachers unrewarded. Teaching of history has as its principal function not the recruiting of future professional historians, but the education of the majority of students who look to history for guidance. Teaching that does not meet this need of the majority of the undergraduate students, at least, could be labeled "a form of self-indulgence" not worthy of public funds.

Read did not deny the need for the greatest possible care in the sifting of information to find that which is truthful. The chief difficulty comes after a body of facts has been established. In the selection and interpretation of those facts, the human element creeps in to influence historical writing according to an individual's bias. That bias imposes varying interpretations of the past, Read felt was undeniable. This accounts for the continual rewriting of history. It is caused not so much by the finding of that which is new, but rather by asking different questions about the old information.

It is in this area of interpretation that there is danger for society and an obligation for the historian. Those who prescribe to ideologies that oppose the values our society holds as essential and valuable have written, and are writing, interpretations of history that make the past the servant of their persuasion. Starting from what they hold to be important and true, the interpretations are written to

substantiate the theory. Read's opinion was that, since society tends to formulate action according to the way it views the past and the lessons of the past, these interpretations can be said to be of great import in the capturing of men's minds and in the fashioning of the future. The American historian, then, has an obligation to defend his way of life in the interpretations of history that he writes.

This is not to say that the past must be mutilated to fit an ideology, but that the historian should have a guiding philosophy, a set of assumptions that one might call a theory, "a good working hypothesis." Progress in social history, or the lack thereof, is to be judged according to this hypothesis. The lack of such a guide leaves history only an arrangement of facts without meaning.

Since the historian "actually finds in the past what he looks for in the past"; and since "he selects and arranges and emphasizes his factual data with reference to some pattern in mind, some concept of what is socially desirable, and he follows the evolutions of society with constant reference to that objective..." it is easy to see why Read found the possession of a social philosophy to be of the greatest necessity to the historian if he were to best serve society.

Samuel Elliot Morison in his address, "Faith of a Historian,"³ indicated that he had not worried himself about the finding of historical laws of general application, but had been more concerned in stating the truth about the past as he saw it. He warned of the danger to truth that the attempts of artistic writing present, regretting that "Historians of

³Samuel Elliot Morison, "Faith of a Historian," The American Historical Review, LVI, No. 2 (January, 1951), pp. 261-275.

repute have sold their skill for a mess of royalties." No one without a sense of dedication to truth should write history, for history is separated from other writing by its function of finding the truthful past. While most historians would agree that they search for truth, what denotes historical truth is a matter of debate.

Morison admitted the difficulty one faces in objectivity when working with the past. But still he set the goal for the historian as being one where he is to find the reality of what occurred and the reason for it. The historian must be honest enough to change his point of view when the facts demand it. In Morison's opinion, it is not to be denied that the historian's philosophy will have much to do with his interpretation of the facts in spite of his efforts to avoid it. This should not be cause for despair; it is a call to work harder to gather the glimpses of reality that can be slowly brought into focus.

As strong an influence as his philosophy might be, Morison warned the historian not to allow it to sweep him off his feet. Although the historian will make judgments according to his particular frame of reference, he must not be subservient to it, but rather be its master, taking it to task when need be and stating what he finds to be truthful that works against it. He must understand, even if he disapproves; he must honestly portray men whose actions alienate him. History as an "act of faith" would not meet this requirement.⁴

The historian is to "illuminate the past." He must do this with a devotion to honesty, a sense of balance, and intellectual integrity

⁴Morison is referring to the address by Charles Beard, "Written History as an Act of Faith," The American Historical Review, XXXIX, No. 2 (January, 1934), pp. 219-231.

that allows him to place before the public lessons from the past that might influence the public to act in a manner he does not personally condone. A history that is not written with intellectual honesty will not long endure, according to Morison, but will be remembered only as an example of special pleading.

In writing history the scholar should attempt to show not only the factual occurrences, but also the passions that are a part of the past. The historian is urged to write with verve as long as this does not upset his sense of balance.

The historian that Morison would see, then, is a scholar of incorruptible intellectual integrity, one possessing a sense of balance when working with history. His obligation is to tell the truth about the past when he finds it whether it agrees or disagrees with his particular philosophy. It was doubtful to Morison that the historian should start from a premise and then interpret history accordingly.

Morison's plea for balance was followed by another given by Robert Livingston Schuyler in the address, "The Historical Spirit Incarnate: Frederic William Maitland."⁵ Maitland was chosen as exemplifying the qualities that a historian should possess. His attitudes, beliefs, and scholarly way of writing were to serve as standards for those who wish to achieve an orientation to the past that is not guilty of being unbalanced.

Part of that orientation can be seen in Maitland's attitude towards the events of his lifetime. He felt that his major responsibility

⁵Robert Livingston Schuyler, "The Historical Spirit Incarnate: Frederic William Maitland," The American Historical Review, LVII, No. 2 (January, 1952), pp. 303-322.

lay in the study of the past. Although he was very interested in the events that took place during his life, he did not allow that interest to interfere with his study of history. This dedication to history did not close his mind to the possibility of change; it made him more tolerant of change but, at the same time, less prone to condemn ideas or institutions that were old merely because of their age. He did not worship the past for he neither judged it nor eulogized it.

This scholar could express himself admirably both in lecturing and in writing. His lectures were not a dry pouring forth of fact but had in them humor, even dramatic qualities. His written expression was also of high calibre, for as a craftsman, he knew the techniques of prose and the necessity of choosing one's words wisely. But even though he had the ability and the humor to write in the popular vein, he did not allow this ability to become an excuse to leave out the necessary proofs and details that scholarship requires. Although he chose not to be a popularizer, he did not disdainfully regard those men of talent who were.

When writing, Schuyler's exemplary historian was in complete control of his facts and could, because of this control, generalize accurately with great insight. These were not the easy generalities devoid of specific example, but they were sketched with facts to show their validity. This was a man dedicated to truth, and he worked intensely with great care to find it.

When others delved into the realm of philosophy, Maitland was not a scoffer, yet in his work there is not to be found any preoccupation concerning universal historical laws. He was too much a historian

for that. He was also too much a historian to allow his specialty, the history of law, to narrow his vision. He accepted the necessity of the structuring of information in varying disciplines so as to allow for a more dexterous use. But this historian was not blind to the fact that the truly meaningful mosaic of history is one formed by the combinations of the disciplines.

Schuyler's ideal historian was not one who insisted that the past can be evaluated only according to a relationship with the present. Although he knew that one cannot completely strip himself of the influences of his own time, the events of the past were to be understood and made meaningful by knowing the milieu in which they took place and not by reading the present into that environment. What one finds in the past he should report. If it be vague then the report should be vague and not guilty of false bright illumination. Maitland believed that the historian would miss the mark of accuracy if he tried present-minded judging of the past, for the actions of men are tied to the times in which they took place. What appears inhuman now might have seemed kind then; or quite the opposite.

The historian who would follow Schuyler's ideal would have balance. He would be principally interested in history. He would both write and lecture well. His control of the facts would enable him to generalize accurately. He could specialize, but that specialization would not cause him to lose sight of the broadness of history. He would not be guilty of present-mindedness. He would not give up his attempts to live up to the ideals of scholarship.

James G. Randall, like Schuyler, also spoke of what a historian

should be in his address, "Historianship."⁶ Randall believed that history cannot be avoided, that it is a part of the way in which the public thinks. The public, in its appraisal of history, is too prone to give vent to its emotions according to what is presently popular or unpopular. There are many fluctuations in the public mind, often with little cause.

The historian knows that within his discipline changes in interpretation occur; they are sometimes an improvement. But, unlike those of the public whose changing attitude might be haphazard, those of the historian should be made according to the standards of scholarship.

Part of the standards of scholarship, in Randall's opinion, is the ability to be objective. This does not imply that the historian must keep debating every side of the question and come to no conclusion. It does mean that when a conclusion is reached it is the logical culmination of a thorough investigation of the facts. It is to be acknowledged that complete objectivity is difficult, indeed if not impossible. But even if this is so, there is no reason why the struggle to achieve it should be abandoned. The scholar has the obligation to continue the quest. For there is no one to definitely judge what is the absolute truth.

It means that the very strength of historical scholarship lies in the free market of findings and generalizations where the only enforcement is that of recognized validity and the only sanction that of competence plus integrity.

Much that the public reads in the field of history is not produced by the historian, according to Randall. To write history correctly one

⁶James G. Randall, "Historianship," The American Historical Review, LVIII, No. 2 (January, 1953), pp. 249-264.

must have the training, experience, and humility that is the culmination of years of effort. The scholar who should be communicating to the public the fruits of his studies is caught in a dilemma. The public is hardly of a mind to read history for history's sake; it is not so much interested in facts as in the generalizations proceeding from these facts. The scholar who will not compromise his work by oversimplification or by unfounded generalization is in danger of not being read. On the other hand, much that is general enough for the public does not meet the specific requirements of the scholar who feels that the historian should generalize only as far as his facts take him. Beyond that point he might venture an opinion, but it must be carefully labeled. The popular writer may deviate from these requirements; the historian should not.

There is more that is dangerous within the topic of generalizations than those made to gain a reading public. Another aspect is the giving of too much credence to such ideas as human nature, economic determinism, and psychoanalysis. These concepts should be used when they validly are supported by the facts, but it is a "questionable method...to set up a super-historical formula as a preconceived principle and to apply it for reshaping a whole episode of history."

Randall thought that part of the function of a historian is to destroy unfounded popular generalizations. The public should know the falseness of such ideas, e.g., that wars have relieved the pressures of growing population.

Another function of the historian, according to Randall, is that of being a teacher who is not intent upon indoctrinating, but stimulating

within his students a respect for standards. Listed among these standards are:

clarity, objectivity, tolerance, discrimination, a sense of proportion, insistence upon freedom of thought, authenticity, caution as to conclusions, wariness as to excessive generalization combined with readiness to state conclusions fairly reached.

Louis Gottschalk, who followed J. G. Randall, addressed himself to approximately the same subject in his talk, "A Professor of History in a Quandary."⁷ Gottschalk felt that the major contribution of the historian to society was to be found in his particular type of thinking, his historical-mindedness. The historian's data and his literary style, as important as they may be, are secondary when compared with the historian's particular set of values.

Gottschalk stated that historical-mindedness is subject to debate between those who maintain that it is defined as the seeing of the past as it existed; and those who, with equal sincerity, maintain that it is the relating of the past to the present. Rather than accept one and reject the other, Gottschalk found that both are necessary; and the historian must choose which of the two he will emphasize. The degree of emphasis is crucial, particularly when the historian is attempting the question of inevitability in history. The opinion one has concerning inevitability depends largely upon whether he is looking at an act when it happened and as it was perceived contemporaneously, or whether he views it with the final outcome and ultimate effect of the act in mind. Again, on questions of morality, particularly where historians

⁷Louis Gottschalk, "A Professor of History in a Quandary," The American Historical Review, LIX, No. 2 (January, 1954), pp. 273-286.

make value judgments, both orientations must be kept in mind.

Accepting that the historian is neither to be completely present-minded nor strictly a reporter of the past exactly as it was, Gottschalk felt that society expected the following from the historian:

The inference, therefore, seems inescapable that society demands from the historian not only (1) that he keep the records of man's past, and (2) that he constantly check, correct, and keep as precise as humanly possible the remembrance by past generations of their present and past, but also (3) that he constantly check, correct, and keep as precise as humanly possible the remembrance by the present generation of its past, (4) that he attempt contrasts and comparisons of historical episodes, situations, and institutions in order to build stringent categories of man's recurrent experiences, and (5) that he propose generalizations that may have validity for some of the categories of past experiences.

Historical-mindedness, then provides the historian with the ability to select from the available data that which is more reliable. He then judges if and where that information fits into the general picture; or if it can be categorized as a unique or singular event. By this means the historian can ascertain the veracity of generalizations. The outstanding aspect of historical-mindedness, in Gottschalk's opinion, is the insight into human affairs that the study of history brings; it is the ability that enables the historian to delve into an analysis of the "genetic forces" in the development of man.

The address, "Intellectuals and Other People," by Merle Curti was not devoted exclusively to the historian and history.⁸ Rather, Curti spoke of scholars in general. He did, however, refer to the responsibilities of the historian. The historian is to defend the crucial duty

⁸Merle Curti, "Intellectuals and Other People," The American Historical Review, LX, No. 2 (January, 1955), pp. 259-282. Discussed more fully in the chapter, "Areas Needing Investigation."

of scholarship in the discrediting of superficial, inaccurate thought. He is to protect the freedom to think from the relentless limiting forces on such freedom in American society. The historian's major weapon in this battle is his knowledge of the tradition upon which free expression and thought are founded. And the people can be stirred by the historian to support that tradition.

The proper attitude of a historian towards the past was expressed by Lynn Thorndike in his address, "Whatever Was, Was Right."⁹ When the historian peruses the past he had best leave the standards of his time behind. Thorndike thought that what was correct in the past must be judged according to the criteria of the past. What was acceptable then may not be so now; but at the time it was reasonable and should so be seen even though we would presently find such action reprehensible.

Further, when the historian gathers data about the past he ought to consider not only the information for which he can find proof, but the unproven as well, and even specious accounts. It was Thorndike's opinion that false documents about historical personalities can at least lead us to a better understanding of the age in which they were written.

The historian should not think of the past as a happier golden era compared to our age of iron as did Henry Adams;¹⁰ nor should he see history as marking a path of progress as did Conyers Read. According to Thorndike, some historians are too prone to condemn past beliefs that they do not understand, beliefs whose profound influence they cannot gauge. The historian should reject the temptation of feeling secure about the

⁹Lynn Thorndike, "Whatever Was, Was Right," The American Historical Review, LXI, No. 2 (January, 1956), pp. 265-283.

¹⁰Henry Adams, Chapter on "The Dynamo and the Virgin," The Education of Henry Adams (Boston and New York, 1918), pp. 379-390.

advancements of his time and perhaps shuddering over the brutalities of the past. Neither should he be so certain that the knowledge of the present was not also part of the knowledge known in the past.

Thorndike suspected that there was some advancement in the past periods of decline and some retrogression in the periods of advance. The historian should, therefore, be wary of the reformer who has become so singularly focused on his particular idea that he hears no other and is blind to established values. These men would seek changes merely because they feel change is progress. They fail to understand that what has endured for years may have done so because of its good qualities. In conclusion, Thorndike believed that the more the historian knows of the past, the less he is tempted to call it names.

If the historian is to think according to Thorndike's motto, "Whatever Was, Was Right," there can be no moral criteria. One is to judge, simply, whether the action fits into the picture of its time; whether it found its impetus from that which preceded; and whether it helped to engender that which followed. The historian then bases his interpretation of the accepted data upon the effect it had within its own period and the periods that followed.

Dexter Perkins' address, "We Shall Gladly Teach," emphasizes, as the title implies, the historian as teacher.¹¹ According to Perkins, there is perhaps too much attention given to research and not enough to teaching. Of course, both are important; to be a good teacher of history one must continue to do research. But a sense of balance between the two

¹¹Dexter Perkins, "We Shall Gladly Teach," The American Historical Review, LXII, No. 2 (January, 1957), pp. 291-309.

must be maintained. In teaching, the historian has an outstanding opportunity to communicate his values and knowledge. In Perkins' opinion, too often research, which is now emphasized, will continue while the lectures are allowed to become hackneyed, read from old notes in a dry routine manner.

There is another aspect of "the present attitude towards research" that Perkins questioned. He thought that possibly the historian had concentrated so intently upon communicating the findings from his research to a few specialist colleagues that he had rendered himself unable to communicate with a larger audience, the public. It should be noted, he thought, that many of the men that popularly write in the field of history are not trained historians.

Perkins had another question that might be asked of research. Is all research of value per se? He felt that before starting a piece of research, the historian should ask himself if the work has sufficient relationship to and/or will contribute to the extension of a more profound understanding of history. Some studies might indeed have the effect of discouraging bold thoughts rich in insights. When compared with a narrow approach to an already limited field that has questionable value to history in the large, the reviewing and re-interpreting of a broad area of known facts might prove to be more fruitful.

The primary function of the historian in teaching, Perkins continued, is the transference of his particular manner of viewing the past. "For history is in the last analysis a point of view; and the undergraduates who listen to us, long after they have forgotten the facts we communicated to them, will remember the point of view."

Part of the values that historians should communicate to their students is the broadness of history. History cannot be limited to the office of solving present problems, but includes all that touches mankind. The students should absorb the stimulating experience that the very broadness of history presents. To achieve this appreciation of the extensiveness of history, Perkins advised the historian to acquaint the student with various periods of history by analyzing their numerous facets. In doing so, it would be possible to underline the periods of greater import.

Perkins warned his associates that history will have more interest to the student if it has not been too dehumanized. Certainly there can be over-emphasis of personalities; the trend, however, seems to be moving in the opposite direction. It is one of stressing forces, not people. The student should view history as a means of meeting the stimulating personalities of the past. Thus they may know the influence of many exemplary personalities with whom they could not come into contact in their limited living experiences.

Perhaps if the historian were to teach in a manner by which he transmitted his values as well as his facts, he might find that more members of the public would turn away from the glib, superficial generalities they often accept. As a result, the unscrupulous would have to think twice before attempting to use his pseudo-history to hoodwink the public.

Perkins' experience as a teacher led him to the conclusion that students do not like historians to be indecisive in their judgments. It was his belief that when the historian feels the facts warrant it, he should state his opinions and defend his generalities. On the other hand, the historian should also know when a generality is not to be made. He

should have the boldness to make conclusions where appropriate, but the balance to avoid rashness. What the students ought to see is the scholar thinking honestly, intently, considering divergent views in order to come to a conclusion that is valid. And they should see the historian applying this type of thought to public problems as well as academic ones.

In the teaching of history the historian should not be the inflexible defender of the status quo. The students ought to be made aware that change is inevitable. Instead of imparting a dread of change the student might better learn to acquiesce in the unavoidable. The student had better be taught to analyze and to make way for constructive change even effecting cherished institutions.

Perkins felt that in any period of history the historian teaches, he ought to present both the conservative and the liberal view. The student should be aware of the attitude of those who welcome change, have confidence in man's ability, and who also tend to be doubtful of the established institutions. The same student ought to understand as well the view of those who are suspicious of renovations, suspect human capabilities, and are fearful of the destruction of that which is of proven value. Any historical judgment of the past must be presented with a balance of these two ideas in mind.

It was Perkins' opinion, then, that the historian is to teach more than simple facts:

...we shall be influential in proportion as we think about the values that we wish to communicate as well as about the facts that we wish to communicate. We must make the past more vivid and the quality of man's adventure more deeply understood; we must interpret the past broadly, in the spirit of a man to whom nothing human is alien; we need not be afraid to speak of moral values, to be sensitive and compassionate, or to exalt

wisdom and goodness; we must set the example of a sound intellectual and moral balance, or a broad view of human values; we must make the processes of the mind in seeking truth so fair, so understanding of various opinions, and yet so clear that they will command respect and deserve imitation.

William L. Langer, the next president of the American Historical Association, chose to emphasize the use of psychology in history. In his address, "The Next Assignment,"¹² he did mention that the trend of the historian to become immersed in his "conservatism" was a limiting factor upon progress within the discipline. What he deemed necessary were new conceptions, new orientations. One of these new directions that seemed most fruitful was the broad area of psychology.

The historian received one clear statement of advice from Walter Prescott Webb in his address, "History as High Adventure."¹³ That was: "Don't take original ideas into a graduate school." Throughout his address, which was an account of how he arrived at his "original ideas," there was the advice, though not implicitly stated, to follow one's own star. Webb seemed to be indicating by the repeated references to his unorthodox methods, that he achieved not in spite of his actions, but because of them. Even though he warned the graduate student not to follow his example, one might easily assume by the tone of his address that he would be very pleased if he did. He stated that he began late in his studies, that he did not really earn his Ph.D., and that he achieved his

¹²William L. Langer, "The Next Assignment," The American Historical Review, LXIII, No. 2 (January, 1958), pp. 283-304. Discussed more fully in the chapter, "Areas Needing Investigation."

¹³Walter Prescott Webb, "History as High Adventure," The American Historical Review, LXIV, No. 2 (January, 1959), pp. 265-281.

greatest success in an area in which he had not received any formal instruction.¹⁴

Allan Nevins had a great deal more to say about history and the historian in general than did Langer and Webb. His address, "Not Capulets, Not Montagus,"¹⁵ had as its theme the conflict between the non-professional writer of history and the professional. That history was once great literature Nevins proved by referring to Parkman and other nineteenth century historians who enjoyed a large audience. History is not popular now; few if any historians can claim to have the appeal of their more successful predecessors. Nevins analyzed the reason for the shrunken public that history has today. It is caused by the dehumanizing of history. He felt, as many presidents who spoke before him, that the theme of modern histories has often been the appraisal of forces and not the force of personalities. The public, when it tries to read the professional historian's work, finds that his detailed research and abstract ideas mean little or nothing to him. The public then turns to the popular writer who seems to make more sense, or at least seems to be more interesting.

Nevins thought that the people who made up the reading public wanted history to meet these requirements:

They expect the book they read to meet certain fundamental requirements, which, in an ascending order of

¹⁴It is interesting to note that while the author found Professor Webb's address the least provocative, recent historiographers acclaim him for rather daring iconoclastic insights. See, for example, H. Hale Bellot, American History and American Historians (Norman, Oklahoma, 1952), pp. 218-240.

¹⁵Allan Nevins, "Not Capulets, Not Montagus," The American Historical Review, LXV, No. 2 (January, 1960), pp. 253-270.

importance, I would enumerate as four.

One is that history shall be offered in God's plenty, so that it shall be available for every need, taste, and mood...The second basic prescription is that a considerable part of history should be written with gusto; written with a delight that communicates itself to style...A third requirement is that a great part of history shall be assimilable to current needs ...The fourth and cardinal requirement is that the history offered a broad democratic public should not be dehumanized;...

The difference between the professional and non-professional writers would not be so grave if it were not for a feeling of "animosity" between the two. Nevins felt that the professional historian tends to distrust the quick results the non-professional achieves. The historian has the greatest respect for accuracy and the patience to do the detailed research that accuracy requires. The professional attitude is often that the popular writers' work is intriguing, interesting, and even amusing, but it is not history.

In Nevins' opinion, the popular writers react to the professionals' attitude with the following criticism--the professional historian is well versed in the techniques of research; he is careful to screen his facts judiciously; he is usually accurate; however, as important as these virtues are, the professional historian often lacks the ability to see insights, to employ his imagination. It is possible for a historian to have undisputed facts and yet miss the mark so far in interpreting this data that his generalities are erroneous. It is also possible for a man not so aware of details to make mistakes with them and still have his generalities come close to the truth. Further, the popular writer also attacks professional historians who tend to inhabit ivory towers and write of affairs in which they take no part.

Nevins indicated that he agreed with most of these criticisms. If the historian can criticize the popular writer for his unsystematic work, the non-professional can point to the historians who write immature works in order to keep their positions or to gain a promotion. He can indicate, too, that some mature scholars, who have much to say, remain silent knowing they cannot reach the perfection by which they would be judged if they were to write.

Nevins' advice was that the friction between the professional and non-professional writer of history be ended. Since the professional historian is organized he has the greater responsibility to approach the men who labor in the same field and to offer them better tools so they might work more accurately and plow deeper. The public needs the information and the guidance the historian has to offer. This, said Nevins, the historian should humbly give.¹⁶

Bernadotte E. Schmitt in his address, "With How Little Wisdom," did not concern himself directly with a philosophical analysis of the difficulty the historian encounters in his search for truth. But Professor Schmitt's speech does demonstrate how hard it is to seek out the truths of history.¹⁷

Schmitt's address outlined the difficulty the historian encounters when trying to write the diplomatic history of World War I and World War II. To the uninitiated, the prospect of writing a diplomatic history of such

¹⁶A full exposition of Professor Nevins' approach to history can be found in his book, The Gateway to History (New York, 1938).

¹⁷Bernadotte E. Schmitt, "With How Little Wisdom," The American Historical Review, LXVI, No. 2 (January, 1961), pp. 299-322.

a recent time might seem an easy task. Many of the documents of the various governments involved have been printed, concerning World War I, and much has been printed, and is being printed, that deals with World War II. With such a wealth of documents the task ought not to be demanding.

Schmitt soon indicated that the preceding idea was illusionary. While it is true that the governments have published many of their documents, they have not always been willing to publish them without discriminate editing. Some documents have been withheld altogether. Others underwent changes that, while rendering them less offensive, made them less than accurate.

The Germans, for example, followed this practice in the publication of the Grosse Politik, volumes that were to contain the diplomatic documents up to World War I and the period preceding it. Friedrich Thimme, the editor, admitted, according to Schmitt, that there was some selection and edition of documents so as not to endanger Germany's foreign policy in 1928.

Other governments might be similarly suspect. . As a result,, Schmitt admitted that his composition,¹⁸ as well as others by diplomatic historians who based their research on the documents that came out immediately following the start of World War I, must now be judged as having little value.

Joined with the difficulty of some dubious accounts there is the problem that not all governments have published their documents. Belgium, Italy, and Yugoslavia have not presented their records. Russia has printed

¹⁸Bernadotte E. Schmitt, England and Germany, 1740-1914 (Princeton, 1916).

much but in limited areas. It can be surmised, therefore, that no definitive diplomatic history of World War I can be written until at least the majority of the documents are available and their veracity tested.

The question may be asked: Was not Mr. Schmitt emphasizing too heavily the importance of diplomatic documents? Could one not use the newspapers as a source of information? Here again, Schmitt emphasized the difficulty of finding that which is accurate among that which is specious or sensational. During the first global conflict the state departments were less willing to confide in the press than later generations convinced of the necessity of good public relations. While the newspapermen did struggle to discover the facts as they saw them, they were probably less well-informed than were the diplomats--who were themselves confused, at least during the early stages of World War I.

While there was much better coverage of the news during the period that led up to World War II and including the war itself, the historian still cannot feel that he knows exactly what went on. Many of the German documents have been destroyed. Russian documents are very limited and may well be suspect. Although England and the United States have published many of their documents and have opened at least part of their files for research, there still remain enigmas which current research cannot solve.

Schmitt indicated that perhaps a better way of writing diplomatic history would be to do so after having had the experience of participating in the state department or the foreign office. If the historian could do this, he would soon become aware of just how many things of importance are not written down; much that guides the diplomat depends upon tacit

agreement among the men in office. There are the do's and don'ts that everybody knows, but which no one transcribes. They may stem from the man in the White House; or they may originate in respect to the particular composition of the Congress which, after all, controls the purse strings.

If this is true of the United States, it is also true of other countries. Schmitt maintained that there have been times in England, as well as here, when the executive has made decisions without consulting the foreign office. Hitler also made decisions and communicated them afterwards to his official who had responsibility in that area.

After presenting the complexities of writing accurate diplomatic history, Schmitt summarized his reactions as follows:

As a historian, I do not complain that there are lacunes in the evidence. Part of the fun of writing a book on diplomatic history is becoming aware of the gaps and the questions and then trying to close the gaps and find the answers. Diplomatic history can be awfully dull, especially if the complete record is spread out before you.

* * * * *

The discussion in the presidential addresses of history and the historian can be summarized with the following general statements: There seemed to be a general agreement that the goal of true objectivity is unobtainable. Yet, one must strive for this ultimately unobtainable goal; and how one should strive for it engendered much discussion but no real agreement. No one suggested that history could do without attempted objectivity, at least in regard to establishing what is fact and what is false. But there were some who stated that beyond this point, the influence of one's philosophy held sway; that one picks his facts to support what he believes is important and truthful in history; that,

therefore, history in its essence is philosophy; it is the servant of the value system of the men who write it. History, according to this attitude, is not only the search for the actualities that existed; it is also the interpretation of these occurrences according to a thinking man's philosophy, or even, if you will, his religion.

There were others who found this idea abhorrent, as one that does not, or perhaps should not, belong in the discipline. They also admitted that absolute objectivity is illusory. But rather than despair of its capture, they gloried in the attempt to approach it as closely as humanly possible. History to some of these men was, simply stated, the search for the reality that once existed. They urged the scholar to keep his philosophy under close guard for fear it would escape and kill the truth he is trying to capture. They considered that generalizations were necessary; they were, in fact, the scholars' obligation. Generalization ought not to be made according to personal bias concerning what one hoped to find in the past; rather, they should be the logical summation of carefully documented facts. The generalizations should be worded with the necessary qualifying statements to make them acceptable. Historians not following this careful procedure in the formation of their generalizations would be guilty of a serious lack of balance.

There were some who did not find themselves in full agreement with one particular point of view, but who had, as they saw it, a blend of many. These viewed objectivity as illusive, but they had no argument with those who would have their history philosophical, nor with those who would insist that history is a cautiously interpreted factual account. Both, they believed, are necessary for a balanced approach to history.

There should, in fact, be many types of history to meet the many needs and tastes of those who take time to read it.

Another topic that the presidents discussed, again showing diverse views, was whether one wrote history according to the needs of the present or as a memory of the past prepared for present-day reading. Those who prescribed to the opinion that they find facts and interpret them according to a philosophy, or perhaps better-stated "an act of faith," seemed to feel that they were not writing history to meet present needs but were transcending from the past through the present, and perhaps, into the future.

For those who see history as the recovery of the past, the writing of history according to contemporary values is an act of distortion dangerous to truth. If any present needs are to be served by history it should be a product of seeing the past as it was and not by twisting the view to make what matters now important then. A historian does not search for answers; he looks for historical facts. If the facts once found provide good counsel that meets the present need, that is fortuitous.

There were others who believed that the historian, because of his special training, had an obligation to write with the needs of the present in mind. Since society is so deeply perplexed and needs direction it turns to the historians for guidance. Guidance, although difficult to achieve, should be available in historical writing. Whether the historian is to base his information on new questions asked about the past, or whether he finds his answer by rigorously attempting to see the past as it saw itself, really matters not. What does matter is that the historian does not inhabit an ivory tower; his work should effect the present as

does the learning of other disciplines.

Several of the presidents considered the problem posed by the ever-growing accumulation of knowledge with which the historian, as well as other scholars, must come to grips. One response to the problem of how to cope with such vast amounts of data has been the creation of new disciplines and specialties that examine with different emphasis information that has been traditionally considered a part of history. Most of the presidents acquiesced in the practical necessity of this new structuring that does, after all, facilitate a more systematic utilization of the information, but still they pondered over the danger that this condition presents for the historian. The historian is forced to specialize; but in this specialization lies the danger that he might be tempted to think that the information that is to be found in the new disciplines, or even in other specialties, is beyond his ken, forgetting that history is the mistress of all aspects of human experience. It is not important whether we call segments of that experience economics, anthropology, or psychology. Insofar as they serve to illuminate man's past, they are history. The historian must visit all these divisions as a man talking with several witnesses, each one telling a tale, none of them having the absolute truth. He must listen to them all and then attempt the complete story.

In addition, there were some who expressed their doubt of the value of the monograph writer who enters deeper and deeper into an ever narrowing field of study. To some of the presidents, the danger of this type of study lies in becoming lost among minutiae. The historian or the student engaged in such activity may lose sight of the larger aspects of history. A few questioned whether this type of study has produced

valuable information, or whether it has become a means of holding one's position, being a sort of formalized action that one goes through to earn promotion.

Others indicated that monographic writings have furnished some of the needed facts of history and tend to clarify that which was vague. Some warned that a historian should not be content to dedicate himself to monographs, but he should also write of sectional, national, or international history using an extensive approach. Scholarship demands a knowledge of details but also requires the ability to put these details to work to support important generalizations.

Another source of concern with which several presidents dealt was the feeling that history had become too impersonal. These presidents felt that in the past few decades the influence of other disciplines, such as economics and psychology, had fashioned history into an account of forces acting upon man rather than the story of men acting. They felt that, to a large extent, this dehumanizing of history accounts for the limited audience that scholarly histories have enjoyed. Historians themselves are to blame for this loss of influence. They have given to the layman, who is principally interested in personalities and generalizations, profound analyses of forces and ideas that leave him baffled, uninterested, and unfulfilled. The public, to answer its curiosity about the past, has turned away from the trained historian and looks to the popular writer who takes into account the needs and desires of the public. Some presidents, then, urged that the historian be more aware of the public's interests and needs; that he write at least some history accordingly. There should be fewer histories for the fellow historian and graduate

students and more for the average man.

Others saw in this attitude great danger for academic standards. The desire to be read is natural, but one might tempt the historian to oversimplify that which is by its nature complicated. They admonished their fellow historian to avoid the pitfall of trying to make themselves readable by allowing unfounded generalities and spellbinding inaccuracies. The historian can become so involved with style and the business of writing that his history suffers. The popularizer may sell well, he may be intriguing, but much of what he passes off to the public is not history but an inaccurate tale of bygone days.

There was the indication that there has been an over-emphasis on research within the discipline and a lack of appreciation of the importance of teaching. The belief was that it is in the classroom that the historian has his greatest opportunity to influence the public. It was not that the researcher should not teach nor that the teacher should not do research; the scholar should do both. It was, however, a call to come to a better balance in regard to them both.

Several presidents wondered whether or not the teacher of history had over-emphasized mere factual knowledge. They did not indicate that facts were unimportant. Yet, they suggested that many of the facts would soon be forgotten. Would it not be better, they argued, to teach the historian's point of view, his particular set of values, that the student would tend to remember. Would not these points of view and values be of greater aid to the individual all through his life? According to this point of view, there was not only to be better teaching but more emphasis on philosophy in the classroom.

CHAPTER II

THE TRAINING OF THE HISTORIAN

Since the presidents had a great deal to say concerning the values that the historian should have, it was logical that they would also have ideas of how the historian is to be trained in order to gain these values, these necessary perspectives. Not all the presidents had specific advice to give. Some presidents, however, did feel the need for changes in the type of training the students are getting and had definite suggestions concerning the modifications that should take place.

Conyers Read showed an interest in improved pedagogical techniques after noting that not enough importance has been given to the teaching of history as compared with the writing of history.¹ He went on to ask the question of just how the graduate student is being taught to teach. In Read's opinion, it is in teaching that the historian makes his greatest contribution to society. In spite of this fact, he contended that many of the college professors look upon pedagogical instruction with less than a respectful attitude. Implicit as the need for changes in the training of the graduate students was, in Read's criticism, he did not offer any concrete suggestion as to how this change was to come about. Perhaps he felt that emphasizing the need for pedagogical training was enough.

Samuel Elliot Morison also spoke briefly of training the historian.²

¹Read, The American Historical Review, LV, No. 2, pp. 275-285.

²Morison, The American Historical Review, LVI, No. 2, pp. 261-275.

His remarks posed a very negative view of the methods courses. In his opinion, it was of little importance what particular method a student was taught as long as he learned the "necessary tools of research, a sense of balance, and an overriding urge to get to the truth." He stated that he himself would not engage in teaching such a course and added tartly that those who do teach such courses do not back them up with writings that show their own capabilities as historians. Perhaps one can legitimately find in his attitude a paraphrase of the old saw that those who can do, and those who can't teach, or at least teach methods courses.

Since Morison felt that a sense of balance was of prime importance to a historian he did offer a hint of how a young historian might achieve it. It was to be accomplished in acquiring a posture of humility when criticizing one's colleagues; and applying to oneself the same skepticism as would be directed to others.

Louis Gottschalk dealt more specifically with the training of the historian.³ After having stated that the most important ability that the public expected a historian to have was a particular way of thinking called historical-mindedness, Gottschalk went on to indicate a way of teaching to better insure that the student could gain this coveted mental discipline.

Gottschalk soon had become disgruntled with the standard type of history course that he used to teach. The type of course he referred to was an area study that included the usual marshaling of facts in an orderly form. This manner of teaching history did not allow enough room for generalization nor for the use of a comparative approach. He therefore tried organizing his courses differently. One attempt in his search to

³Gottschalk, The American Historical Review, LIX, No. 2, pp. 273-286. Actually, Professor Gottschalk dealt with this subject several years earlier in his volume, Understanding History: A Primer of Historical Method (New York, 1950).

find better results was to chart the development of particular problems through many periods of history. This and other techniques, he felt, met with limited success so that he was glad to have the opportunity to teach a course in historiography. After having taught basic courses, experimental courses, and courses on historiography, Gottschalk came to the conclusion that he did have a tentative solution to the problem of training the historian.

Gottschalk's ideas were, he admitted, neither new nor unique; the type of study was already in use in other universities. His suggestion was that one should balance the basic studies of regional and period history as well as instruction in the techniques of research. Coupled with the latter studies, however, the trainee should devote part of his time to studying the historian. All three could be presented as separate courses or by using an interwoven approach, but Gottschalk envisioned a three-stage program.

The first stage would consist of basic history courses. This type of course, he suggested, probably ought not to have such a large part to play on the graduate level unless it tended to break down the "place-time-limitations" and examine particular difficulties or developments throughout history. The second stage would be devoted to the study of research. There need not be many such courses for much could be learned by means of careful supervision during the writing of the thesis. The last stage would receive greater attention than it had previously. This is to be the study of selected historians. In this course the particular frustrations and limitations of the historian could be studied as well as the ways in which prominent historians attempted to cope with the problems

of their profession. Different historical philosophies could be appraised; and operating procedures of research could be observed in another dimension. The selection of the historians could be flexible, perhaps entailing not one course, but several. The organization might be that of choosing the historians who have dealt with a particular problem, or those who wrote under the influence of a similar philosophy. Or, one could select a list of outstanding historians, no matter what their specialty, philosophy, or general approach.

Gottschalk's advice was that the graduate students have a more organized study of the way in which some of the outstanding historians have approached the problems one encounters in the studying and writing of history.

The problem of training the historian also attracted the attention of Dexter Perkins.⁴ Perkins puzzled over the selection of the candidate for graduate school as well as their training. His first thought was of the necessity for more fellowships for the graduate student. He echoed the lament of teachers in general that there was not enough compensation for the education and work involved. If the finances were available, the recruiting of worthy candidates would be a great deal easier.

In the selection of the candidate for further study, Perkins felt that too much attention was given to grades. There are many examples of students who had only fair or even poor grades in undergraduate school who have demonstrated themselves to be admirable graduate students. Perkins, therefore, urged that prospective historians be judged not only by

⁴Perkins, The American Historical Review, LXII, No. 2, pp. 291-309.

grade points, but also by appraising their character, their personality.

Once the candidate is chosen, more emphasis should be placed on pedagogical instruction. Perkins suggested that the student be observed and stimulated to better effort. The common sense requirement of speaking so that one can be understood, as well as other seemingly obvious necessities in methodology, need at least some illumination.

There is another aspect in training the historian to teach that Perkins thought to be of importance. The candidate should not view teaching as a necessary sideline activity that he must go through in order to earn enough money to continue his research and writing. The student should realize that teaching is an integral part of his career and that failure in teaching could have a grave effect upon his career. Any recommendations that the graduate school is to give to a prospective employer should include an analysis of the candidate's teaching ability. To further their success in teaching, Perkins suggested that each student of worth should have the opportunity of preparing and giving a series of lectures of the type he would normally be expected to give in fulfilling his teaching responsibilities.

Although Perkins accepted the general examination for the doctorate as having merit, he did warn that often such an examination puts too much stress on the students' memory. Granting that a good memory is desirable, Perkins held that it was no more important than are the qualities of being humane, showing verve, and having insight. The choice of the students who will, after all, teach should include a consideration of other qualities besides an impressive memory.

* * * * *

The presidents who spoke about the training of the historian stated that not enough emphasis was being given to the teaching of history. Too many historians are research-minded to an extent that it is detrimental to teaching. To counteract this trend there was the suggestion that the graduate student be made to realize the fact that teaching is a major function, and if he should fail to be effective it might well have the gravest effect upon the success of his career.

CHAPTER III

AREAS NEEDING INVESTIGATION

The presidents, in the course of their addresses, indicated that there were several areas that needed investigation. These suggestions were offered, perhaps, in the hope that some scholar might find them of enough merit to investigate further. Frederic Jackson Turner once made a suggestion for further study to this same body that led to a veritable avalanche of research, books, monographs, and theses.¹ One suspects that some of the presidents hoped this phenomenon might repeat itself.

The first of the presidents with a suggestion for further investigation was Thomas J. Wertenbaker in his address, "The Molding of the Middle West."² He felt that historians have not given enough emphasis to the role that the Piedmont region of the eastern states had played in the development of society in the West. He deduced that four forces forged the "Atlantic Civilizations" that in turn gave rise to the civilization of the Midwest. These forces were: "The force of inheritance, the force of local conditions, the force of continued contact with Europe, and the force of the melting pot." Each section of the Atlantic states, after the formation of their own civilization, sent their representatives over the mountains in waves of immigrating people. It was these

¹Frederic Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," delivered at a special meeting of the American Historical Association at Chicago, July, 1893, in connection with the World Columbian Exposition.

²Thomas J. Wertenbaker, "The Molding of the Middle West," The American Historical Review, LIII, No. 2 (January, 1948), pp. 223-234.

representatives--particularly from the Piedmont--who fostered democracy in the Midwest. The frontier was but one force in its development. After all, democracy had come westward from Westminster Hall.

Wertebaker's thesis, then, is that the older sections of the United States had a far greater influence on the civilization of the New West than is now realized. He thought that the transference of civilization from the original settlement to those of the Midwest needed further study. Since sectionalism is an important aspect of modern American culture, the origins and development of the sections are, therefore, worthy of deeper analysis. Historians have few studies of this current of civilization--the flow from section to section--and thus know little of the effect on the new settlements or of the extent to which local conditions caused variation in its expression.

Samuel Elliot Morison observed that fifty years ago the particular orientation that American history books presented was that of the "Federalist-Whig-Republican" tradition.³ Few books deviated from this interpretation; Democratic leaders, with very few exceptions, did not meet with approval. The present trend is the reverse of its predecessor. The more liberal view is now receiving a major emphasis. In Morison's opinion, the latter tendency is overdone. The unbalanced trend seems to be engendering "a sort of neo-liberal stereotype." What he thought was needed to bring the present approach into balance was a history of the United States "...written from a sanely conservative point of view..." All of the United States history should be re-examined. The catalytic agent in the performance of this task should be the conservative tradition.

³Morison, The American Historical Review, LVI, No. 2, pp. 261-275.

James G. Randall found other areas in need of investigation.⁴

It was his thought that although many historians have spent much time studying wars and the causes of wars, they have not studied the wars that have been prevented. The factors that have caused wars, we have sometimes recognized; of the factors that prevent war we know less. His suggestion, then, was that a study should be made of the periods of conflict that did not develop into an active state of hostilities--and why.

Randall had another suggestion concerning warfare. If the historian should study the causes that keep the peace, he should also know better the factors that engender bloodshed.⁵ Randall remarked that it was not enough to search diplomatic documents for the causes of war. Nor ought one be over-awed by what has been held to be war's inscrutable complexity. It appeared to Randall that too much attention and perhaps acceptance has been given to large generalities in the causation of warfare. The talk of nations that are by nature more aggressive, or even of "cosmic" forces, has crowded out an investigation of such factors as "militaristic megalomania" and "a perverted sense of bigness." Probably more investigation of causes of this nature are needed if the truth is to be known.

Randall continued his suggestions for further study by noting that no one had investigated the effect of "unhistorical notions in the

⁴Randall, The American Historical Review, LVIII, No. 2, pp. 249-264.

⁵Mr. Randall, of course, has his own interpretation as to the causation of the American Civil War. It may be found in his book, Lincoln the Liberal Statesman (New York, 1947), pp. '36-64.

international field." His thought was that if a statesman or a diplomat accepted the idea that war is unavoidable, or if he were convinced that a preventative war is a useful tool, his actions in a time of crisis might very well show the effect of such fatalistic and opportunistic thinking.

Finally, Randall urged an investigation of the false idea that liberals ponder and dream, but are incapable of consummating their thoughts by action. These men have been called unrealistic, while realistic has been an adjective given to men lacking in vision. There needs to be, according to Randall, a thorough clarification of this misconceived stereotype of the liberal man.

Merle Curti in his address, "Intellectuals and Other People," had several suggestions for investigation concerning the intellectual.⁶ He stated that the American people were paradoxical in their attitude towards the intellectual. Although they have shown a respect for learning and a faith that all men are capable of being educated, they have had, at the same time, a suspicion and a lack of respect for learning that was not practical. Part of this lack of respect came from our European heritage where there were vestiges of it interwoven within a tradition that valued learning. Curti pointed out another cause of the anti-intellectual current. There were those of the clergy who held suspect any knowledge that might lead men away from God. He also indicated that the frontier was a third factor. On the frontier the man who could produce the necessities of life, as well as the man who brought in trade goods or

⁶Curti, The American Historical Review, LX, No. 2, pp. 259-282.

provided capital, was respected. The scholar who fulfilled none of these functions was a superfluous item. Primary teachers were necessary for the three "R's"; but men in the upper reaches of the academic profession were not seen as being either vigorous or virile.

Many of the early democratic movements in America saw the man involved in intellectual pursuits as being of the rich and high-born. The politicians were not slow in taking advantage of the feeling, often resorting to the technique of branding their opponent as intellectual and hence an enemy of the people. The intellectual, they held, had no part in the common man's struggle and therefore took no interest in helping the common man.⁷

Curti thought that there was some validity in this accusation in that the intellectual had not sometimes bothered himself with the people's problems. But he felt that before anyone could accept the statement as a truism, he had better take another look at the facts. If there were those intellectuals who opposed such events as the Revolution, there were others who fought for it. Intellectuals have been leaders in other fights such as the struggle for equality of the races in our country. It cannot be said that the intellectual has taken one stand; he has taken many. According to Curti, the actions of the intellectual in the conflicts we have had needs further study. He believed that the intellectual would be seen not so much as a man apart, but as an individual acting for and against a myriad of ideas. Intellectuals have not been the Olympic spectators of society's struggles; they were part of it.

⁷This address was given three years after Adlai Stevenson's first defeat in the presidential elections.

Another area that needed investigation, according to Curti, was the attitudes of the intellectual towards the business world. There was at one time, on the part of the intellectual, a disdainful view of business affairs. This attitude seems to be changing of late. A study of the intellectual's reaction to businessmen and other social groups might bring profitable results.

The intellectual has viewed the American people with varying degrees of approval and disapproval ranging from haughty condescension to unrealistic idealization. Curti urged that the intellectual's opinion of the people be better known.

There has also been, in Curti's opinion, a tendency to suspect intellectualism on the part of the intellectuals themselves.⁸ This anti-intellectual thinking on the part of some intellectuals has several causes. There are those who suspect the delving into obtuse ideas merely for the sake of speculative thought. This, they feel, is carrying the use of the intellect to an unprofitable extreme. There is another group of intellectuals who give more credence to such irrational qualities as instinct and intuition which tend to devalue the conscious mind. And there has been some corroboration for these attitudes borne out by some investigations that the rational process is influenced by many irrational forces. These ideas and others have lessened the respect for intellectualism within the very group that carries its standard. Curti believed that this phenomenon warrants further investigation.

Curti was of the opinion that a general anti-intellectual feeling

⁸See, for example, Jacques Barzun, The House of Intellect (New York, 1959).

has been growing recently. Part of the cause for this growth he attributed to the cold war and the instances of proven disloyalty on the part of some intellectuals. He admitted that others analyze the cause as being one that is the natural outcome of the maturation of recognized basic patterns of thought and action in our society. And still others indicate that mass media advertising has taught the people to think in stereotype patterns that are in themselves prohibitive to analytical thought. The public now expects and tends to judge a man on his ability to get along with others. This, of course, requires a certain amount of conformity. Intellectuals have often found themselves in the position where they are not willing to acquiesce in that conformity, thereby causing friction. It was Curti's thought that these causes for the intensification of anti-intellectualism needed further study.

The last two suggestions of Curti dealt with a need for investigation of the effect that military service has had upon the intellectual; and the part that intellectuals played in the labor movement. Curti stressed the fact that many intellectuals at one time had influence among the laboring groups and that some had worked with unions as well as other organizations, only to come away disillusioned.

William L. Langer's address, "The Next Assignment," was dedicated to urging the historian to undertake a new dimension in his studies.⁹ It was Langer's opinion that history is not in the future going to become more extensive in view of its present elasticity. Rather, history will have to become more intensive. The historian will have to know not only

⁹Langer, The American Historical Review, LXIII, No. 2, pp. 283-304.

the actions and thoughts of the past, but he will also have to probe deeply into the cause of the actions and thoughts--and these causes can only be discovered by an amalgamation of old disciplines and new modes.

Langer found it disturbing that historians have paid so little attention to new techniques that other scholars have accepted as providing new insights valuable to their research. Historians have, in general, neglected the findings of psychology. This is partly due, in Langer's opinion, to the historian's conservatism and partly due to the fact that historians tend to see themselves as being, at least to an extent, psychologists in their own right. Furthermore, some historians have maintained that psychology is too unsure, subject to conjecture, and, in short, not a true science. Langer regretted this attitude and noted that psychology and psychoanalysis have not only influenced other sectors of the scholastic world but have their expression in the artistic world as well.

Langer's particular interest in this neglected discipline was not what he called "classical or academic psychology," but was centered more upon the utilization of psychoanalysis. The first use of psychoanalysis that he considered was in the writing of biography. Langer noted that some historians have criticized the use of psychoanalysis on occasions because there was not enough known about the childhood of the person in question. The cause for this criticism was that previously the formative period of childhood had been held to be of crucial importance. Accordingly, if one believed this to be true, any attempt at psychoanalysis without the necessary information concerning the early years could be considered a risky venture. Langer emphasized, however,

that presently knowledge about one's childhood is not thought to be as vital as it once was in the analysis of an individual. One can learn a great deal about a person using information that is known about his later years. The historian should not hesitate in taking advantage of the tool of psychoanalysis merely because he does not know all the events that occurred in his subject's childhood.

Langer pointed out that generally the historian is more interested in groups than in the individual. He called to the historian's attention that there has developed in psychology a study of the group mind. He admitted that there is more to be done in this area by the psychologist, but he indicated that the techniques for attempting such a study are now available for the historian.

In his thinking concerning the group mind, Langer questioned whether any significant modification of group psychology or culture can be attributed to "some severe trauma suffered in common, ...whether whole communities, like individuals, can be profoundly affected by some shattering experience." He hoped that someone could ascertain if there were certain emotions common to all the members of one society. Perhaps the historian could find an experience that engulfed a people so extensively that its effect permeated the thinking of the individual and the society in which he lived.

There is a need for such an approach, in Langer's opinion, in the study of the great plagues that swept Europe. He stated that the plagues engendered a type of thinking that was not typical before their advent. The changes in thinking, as well as the gigantic loss in population, were the cause of modifications in the economic and social pattern of European

society.

Langer also drew attention to the moral breakdown that accompanied the plagues. He observed that some members of the afflicted society viewed the disease as God's punishment and turned to prayer and supplication to end his wrath. Other emotional responses were a widespread sense of dread and a feeling of nearing doom. The death dances, as well as the brutally realistic pictures of the dead, showed that men, even more than before, saw the proof of the brevity of life with painful clarity.

The psychologist, Langer pointed out, has said that when men come into difficulty with forces that cannot be controlled, they tend to look to charms and magic in order to resolve their problems. This pattern of action would, in his opinion, account for the revived interest in religion that accompanied the visitation of the plagues. It was Langer's suggestion, then, that an investigation be made of the psychological effect of such great losses of life and its accompanying sense of dread. He did not infer that this type of investigation would find all the answers to the historian's questions, but he did believe that it is an area worthy of further study.

Bernadotte E. Schmitt stated that there were two areas in the field of diplomatic history that required investigation.¹⁰ Due to the propaganda war that followed World War I, many of the governments published their diplomatic documents (severely edited) relating to this conflict. One of these collections, the Grosse Politik, has been alleged to have been edited and censored in order to protect later German foreign policy.

¹⁰Schmitt, The American Historical Review, LXVI, No. 2, pp. 299-322.

The veracity of that claim can now be proven or disproven by the scholar who will be willing to check the German files from 1871 to 1914 which have been microfilmed after their capture at the end of World War II. Schmitt urged that this investigation be undertaken and that it examine at least points that are now disputed.

The other area of investigation that could be profitably studied are the minutes of the directing body of the Paris Peace Conference. Although he indicated that of late some work has been done with these records, Schmitt felt that a "definitive work" was yet to come.

* * * * *

The presidents, then, had several suggestions that might be looked into by other scholars. They covered many fields and topics. Wertebaker would have the flow of civilization from the East westward better known. Morison desired the balancing effect of history written according to a conservative orientation. Randall wondered about the causes that both prevent and initiate wars. He also urged a fairer treatment of the liberal men in history. Curti's thoughts concerned the place of the intellectual in American civilization. His wish was to know where the intellectual had influence and how he viewed society as well as the view society had of him. Curti would know the causes of anti-intellectualism in the United States. Langer's hope was that the historian would make use of psychology and, particularly, psychoanalysis. He felt that a study of the psychological effects of the plagues in Europe would be valuable. Schmitt with his suggestion concerning the investigation of the accuracy of the Grosse Politik and the utilization

of the minutes of the directing body of the Paris Peace Conference indicated possible work in the field of diplomatic history.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY: WHAT GOOD IS HISTORY?

It was almost inevitable that the presidents would in their addresses express their beliefs concerning the value of history. A businessman like Henry Ford might proclaim that "history is bunk;" but no man could devote his life to the study of history without giving thought to this problem. The Presidents, therefore, spoke of the purpose of history as naturally as the artist speaks of the purpose of his creation.

Their analyses fall into five interdependent categories in which they saw that: (1) history served as a judge of progress; (2) history was also a means of finding answers to present problems; (3) history was a study wherein men could find balance, being less likely to be caught up in the sweep of false generalities; (4) history was a means of creating an attitude that enhanced a peaceful transition from the old to the new in the changing patterns of human existence; (5) history was a study that induced an orientation and values that are conducive to better living and constructive action in a free society.

Conyers Read dealt with the first of these categories.¹ He felt that people still used the past to justify and support their present modes of thought as well as their particular institutions. People, generally view their existence with regard to their forebears, and they do not want to speculate on a future without the continuance of well-known

¹Read, The American Historical Review, LV, No. 2, pp. 275-285.

social patterns. In short, they tend to want a beginning that sets the goals, a present that expresses the struggle for the goals, and a future that envisions the fulfillment of the goals.

Read remarked that even the enemies of western values--e.g., Communists--had recognized the people's need to see the continuity of life. The Communist historians answered that need with a simple story that could be quickly grasped and widely disseminated. The historian of the democratic West, on the other hand, has an obligation to write history that will give our people the criteria to judge their progress and achievement. He is to recognize and set forth the established values of our society; to interpret history by measuring the approach to these values as an indication of progress; the lack of nearing realization of the values is to be considered a sign of faltering. The people reading such history would not only have the assurance of an orientation to the past and an understanding of the present, but a sense of direction for future action as well. If a history were to do this, it would, according to Read's criteria, be achieving a vital function of clarifying the steps that have carried mankind towards progress and illuminated the steps that trod a backward path.

James G. Randall, like Read, was cognizant of the people's desire to have an orientation in time and a means of judging their progress.² He noted that the public does not read history to glean a quantity of unrelated facts, but seeks an explanation of man's experience and a judgment whether that experience has led or is leading in a progressive direction. Having not lived in the past nor read the records of the

²Randall, The American Historical Review, LVIII, No. 2, pp. 249-264.

past, they expect to find in the history that they read a judgment of what has been accomplished.

Allan Nevins was another who acknowledged that the people were in need of the assurance and direction that history can give.³ The wars and the cold war have left them confused and questioning. They desire a way of finding meaning in all that has happened as well as wanting a rekindled faith that morality and liberty will triumph over tyranny and oppression. The historian who can give meaning to an experience that has often appeared to be a brutish waywardness on the part of humanity might help a disorientated generation.

One may observe, however, that not all historians believe in progress. There are those who seem to prefer the French saying that the more things change the more they are the same. It is of interest to note that the idea of progress was rejected by many of the presidents. Not all of them believed that history is to serve as a literary weather vane pointing out the shifting currents of man's past.

Morison disagreed that history had as its purpose the influencing of the present or the future.⁴ The historian who picks the goals for society and fires salvos of facts hoping to bombard the people until they move in the direction of those goals, is misusing history. To Morison, history written with the idea of delineating the present and future path of progress is nothing more than a preaching text that picks its facts in order that the prophet might be made to appear unerring. He attacked social history, in general, for its inability to come up with any other

³Nevins, The American Historical Review, LXV, No. 2, pp. 253-270.

⁴Morison, The American Historical Review, LVI, No. 2, pp. 261-275.

theme but the accounting for what could be called the evolution of progress.

Sidney B. Fay, who had searched history consciously seeking the development of a pattern of progress, found none.⁵ He found rather progression, retrogression, and even stagnation. If history is to show the way of progress, Fay has betrayed his trust for he denied that progress was in any way the natural outcome of cosmic forces; he denied that it flowed steadily like a stream to the sea. He admitted only that man probably had the capacity to improve himself if he worked steadfastly with an awareness of what he meant to achieve.

Not all the presidents thought that history was useful only as a measuring device of progress; others expressed the opinion that history also served as a source of answers to the problems that besiege mankind.

Gottschalk had the most to say concerning the value of history in finding answers to humanity's problems.⁶ He was quick to emphasize that the problems of which he spoke were not current ones--e.g., national defense--but rather the recurring dilemmas that confront mankind. Gottschalk believed that if answers were to be found, they would be discovered by the trained historian who can sift the past with the tools of his profession, thereby seeing the patterns of the problems and what has seemed to be an effective way of dealing with them. These "answers" should then be presented to the public.

Other presidents saw in the better dissemination of history a

⁵Sidney B. Fay, "The Idea of Progress," The American Historical Review, LII, No. 2 (January, 1947), pp. 231-246.

⁶Gottschalk, The American Historical Review, LIX, No. 2, pp. 273-286.

means of protecting the public from harmful, erroneous generalization.. Perhaps more attitudes than might be admitted can be traced to an inherited intellectual milieu that has as a part of its fabric historical judgments not based on fact, but on emotion. One could easily look to the "damn yankeeism" of the South as an example of this phenomenon.

Randall thought that one of the historian's major contributions was the destroying of "vicious generalizations" that misguide humanity.⁷ Perkins also spoke out against the tendency of the public to be swayed in their judgment concerning contemporary difficulties by a partisan generalization that is not supported by the facts.⁸ In his opinion, a judicial use of history by the common man would render a rigid interpretation of the past more difficult. The demagogues who point to the lesson of history would have to point with greater care for fear of being discovered in the act of distorting history in order to justify their cause.

Another value of history, according to the presidents, was that of rendering the individual more flexible in the consideration of society's organization. Those who have studied history will tend to see that change in human institutions is inevitable. They will be less tempted to fight all change as being bad per se, but having noted that institutions must be modified to meet the necessities of a changing time, the transition from the old to the new will be facilitated. When such transition breaks down and men who hold differing views are intransigent, the conflicts that are often the result of such an impasse tend to be highly destructive.

⁷Randall, The American Historical Review, LVIII, No. 2, pp. 249-264.

⁸Perkins, The American Historical Review, LXII, No. 2, pp. 291-309.

A society that maintains its flexibility should have a better chance of survival. History can help to create an orientation towards the conception of change wherein one neither blindly worships it nor neurotically fears it.

Perkins was one of those who held this opinion.⁹ He stated that students should not view change emotionally, but rather with a sense of its inevitability. They could then concentrate upon seeing that change is of benefit to their society, knowing that not all change is progress nor all steadfastness productive.

Randall also was cognizant of this "function of the historical sense."¹⁰ He felt that it enables men to see that certain ideas are now out of date and should be changed. He pointed out that in our society that which is new may have been erected within that which is old. The transition can follow a natural path to maturation without necessarily engendering violence. Any system that has become rigid will require explosive action in order to achieve necessary alterations. To the extent that history aids the individual to recognize that which is out of tune with the times and to peacefully eliminate it, history contributes to an orderly growth of society.

History is of importance because of the standards that it can teach the professional historian, the student, and the discriminating public. Randall indicated that the basic values of the historian are, in reality, the same values that make for a good citizen. The standards

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Randall, The American Historical Review, LVIII, No. 2, pp. 249-264.

that he estimated as being valuable both to the historian and the citizen were:

...clarity, objectivity, tolerance, discrimination, a sense of proportion, insistence upon freedom of thought, authenticity, caution as to conclusions, a wariness as to excessive generalization combined with readiness to state conclusions fairly reached.¹¹

Perkins saw that history was worthwhile in that it, like philosophy, was a force counteracting the trend of specialization.¹² Men have found themselves divided by the demands of their specialties. History helps the individual to break down the false divisions and to know more about all segments of humanity. The thrill and the obligation of knowing more about the whole of mankind may be learned in this study that embraces all that men do.

History's value, according to the presidents, does not completely lie in the transference of knowledge, but to a larger extent is to be found in the effect that historical knowledge has upon the orientation of the people. It can help them decide their direction and ascertain their progress. It can make the occurrence of social change less a tragedy and more a fact of life. It may provide answers to the people's problems. It has within its study values that would help to create a better man who is not chained to the narrow limits of his personal experience.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Perkins, The American Historical Review, LXII, No. 2, pp. 291-309.

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