

## SOME BIBLIOGRAPHICAL DESIDERATA IN AMERICAN HISTORY.

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It is not necessary to argue before this Society the importance of bibliography, or to plead for the recognition of bibliography as a substantive part of historical research or publication. The historian who to-day aspires to writing of the larger sort, the production of definitive histories as distinguished from monographs, is not only grateful for, but must depend very largely upon, the bibliographical investigations of others; while the learning involved in the preparation of a comprehensive and adequate bibliography, even of a small topic, is sometimes quite as great, and hence quite as worthy of honor, as that required for the production of a narrative, a biography, or a formal treatise. The editing of documents has long been regarded as a worthy historical performance, and there is no reason why the critical editing of titles, when done with equal precision and range, should not be equally esteemed.

The purpose of this paper is to call attention briefly to certain of the more pressing bibliographical needs in the field of American history. I intentionally omit all consideration of the numerous bibliographies of small subjects, or of parts of large subjects, many of them highly meritorious, which have appeared in recent years; and I also pass by, as having quite a different aim, the selective and more or less popular bibliographies with which almost every writer of historical pretensions feels it necessary to round out his volumes. What I am concerned with, rather, is certain larger and much more

serious undertakings; not lightly to be entered upon, indeed, but very much in need of being done. The plain fact of the matter is, that, with the enormous mass of historical material in the American field now available, and the portentous annual increment of publication, we are seriously in danger of being swamped in the effort to manage any considerable part of it; or, what is worse, of losing the sense of historical perspective altogether, and of assuming that we are really writing history when we are editing somebody's journal, or publishing the annals of some local church, or tabulating the prices of commodities a century or two ago. And since we may be assured that the publication of such material will go on, gaining in scope and significance from year to year, we must in some way keep abreast of it; which means that we must prepare to do a great deal of systematic and comprehensive bibliographical work.

I earnestly hope that it will not be considered presumptuous, or in the least in derogation of the courtesy which should always exist in the relations of learned societies, if I call attention first of all to a work which, in the field of historical bibliography, has as yet neither rival nor superior. I refer to Winsor's "Narrative and Critical History of America." If I had to dispense with all the older books of American history that could be got on without, I could let most of them go, with only moderate grief and tears, save three: Richard Hildreth, for the as yet unrivalled comprehensiveness and accuracy of his information; Moses Coit Tyler, for the searching insight of his "Literary History of the American Revolution"; and Justin Winsor, for his "critical essays" and general bibliographical notes. In the breadth and sureness of Winsor's bibliographical knowledge, as well as in the ease with which he handled it, his scholarship, like his volumes, was monumental.

Yet the twenty-five years that have elapsed since the publication of the "Narrative and Critical History" began have witnessed enormous changes in both the

character and bulk of American historical material. Much that was then in manuscript has been printed, and some, unhappily, lost; many books once authoritative have been superseded; new books have poured forth like a flood; monographic series have been created and multiplied. The statements of Winsor's bibliographies can no longer be accorded the measure of authority which they once had. In certain other respects, too, the work has come to seem old; for example, the arrangement of the notes is not always such as to facilitate their use, and the indexes are inadequate.

I am well aware that anyone who to-day suggests the issuance of another co-operative history, invites denunciation as a disturber of the public peace. Yet I frankly wish that, so far at least as the bibliographies are concerned, we might have a new edition of Winsor, or a work which bibliographically, at least, should be comparable to it. The task is a large one, and not every historical scholar is competent to engage in it. Perhaps the suggestion should best come from our friend and neighbor, the Massachusetts Historical Society, with the co-operation of a number of whose members the original work was carried through; but in view of the fact that the President of that Society has said grace over our own new cornerstone, and that we have furnished a large part of the Mather Diary which that Society is now printing, it would not, I am sure, be thought unbecoming in the American Antiquarian Society to express its interest in the rejuvenation of a work which, after all the wear and tear of time, is still the greatest single product of American historical scholarship and a treasured possession of the learned world.

A second urgent need is for a bibliography of American newspapers and other periodicals. The importance of newspapers as historical sources has been, if not underestimated, at least scantily recognized, by historians; and with the exception of our associate, Professor McMaster, few writers of comprehensive histories have made either extended or systematic use of them. Yet

I have come to believe that neither our political nor our social development can be truly set forth until the wealth of data hidden in newspapers and magazines has been opened up and made available. It is to the newspapers that we must go, for example, to complete our information about the growth of colonial commerce, manufactures, and agriculture; the influence of English politics on the political activities and public opinion of the colonies; the progress and character of the Revolutionary agitation of the eighteenth century; the reasons for the success of the Federal Constitution, one of the most interesting topics awaiting its finished treatment; and about the nature and growth of slavery. In the nineteenth century, one must seek largely in newspapers and magazines the origin and history of such great religious agitations as the Unitarian movement, or the movements of social reform which multiply after 1815 in the East and the West, or the influence of European thought upon the great flowering period of American literature, or those great international reactions of culture and social activity which more and more have brought the American and the European mind to common ground.

If the bibliographical undertaking which I first mentioned is one which we, as a Society, might offer to share with the Massachusetts Historical Society, a newspaper bibliography is pre-eminently our own task; since nowhere else is there a collection of such material comparable to our own. I do not underrate the magnitude of the work; it is, perhaps, the most considerable undertaking of a bibliographical sort that now needs to be done, although a well-organized co-operative plan would lighten the labor. Once definitely accomplished, however, and with the partial or complete files now extant located and listed, the historian would be in a position to begin the work, which we all realize has got to be done, of writing large sections of American history over again, as well as of taking up numerous important topics which as yet, for lack of such assistance, lie neglected.

What has been said about newspapers and magazines applies with equal force to early American statute law. Having had in preparation, for what is coming to seem a good many years, a collection of the English statutes relating to America, fortified with references intended to show the influence of those statutes on the laws of the colonies and states, I have had much occasion to feel the great lack of a comprehensive bibliography. The material is widely scattered, some of it is of exceeding rarity, the editions are numerous and confusing, and some of the bibliographical problems intricate. Yet in scarcely any field to-day are more interesting and substantial results to be had than in the field of American legal history. Whether the laws of the colonies be regarded as part of an English inheritance, or as a reflection of social conditions, or as an effort to delimit or coerce a future social development; or, as in New England, when mingled with Calvinistic theology and the Pentateuch, as an heroic attempt to justify the ways of God to man, it is to the statutes that we must go if we would discover why many things were as they were. As a whole, this is a class of material hitherto comparatively little drawn upon, and often regarded as closed to any save the highly trained lawyer. There is here an opportunity for a scholar, apt in bibliography as well as competent in legal knowledge, to point out the extent and whereabouts of the few hundred volumes in which the history of American law and jurisprudence, as well as of our political institutions and opinions, is in large part recorded; and thus to pave the way for a history of American law.

A fourth desideratum is a bibliography of American travel. At Brown University we have for some years been buying all the books of this class that came in our way; and the collection, supplemented by those of the John Carter Brown Library and the Rhode Island Historical Society, may in time become tolerably complete. I could hardly mention a more interesting task than the preparation of such a bibliography would be.

It has much of the fascination of discovery, not to speak of the perennial interest of learning what our neighbors and guests have thought about us. The bulk of such material of English and American origin is considerable, while the titles in French, German, and other languages run far into the hundreds. The German travel literature is peculiarly rich and voluminous, particularly for the later eighteenth and earlier nineteenth centuries; and even a superficial acquaintance with it shows an extensive field of recorded observation into which few historians have entered. The wide-spread interest in Europe, especially in Germany and France, from the years of the Revolution to 1850, in what was going on in America, and the influence of American ideas and achievements upon political, economic, and philosophical thought in Europe, is a subject which will some day be developed, and upon which the travel literature will throw indispensable light. Incidentally, the extent to which foreign observers, and, for that matter, American observers also, have borrowed from one another, or padded their pages with data whose printed source they failed to acknowledge, is historically worth knowing; as fully, for example, as we already know about Carver and Chateaubriand.

Akin to the travel literature in importance, and historically best considered in connection with it, is the considerable amount of writing about America by Europeans who never visited it, but who derived their impressions of the country and its people from the travel narratives of their countrymen, or the pages of a few documents or early histories. If the often inaccuracy of this literature disposes one to think it of relatively small significance, we should remember that the historian has to deal with ideas as well as with events; with popular impression as well as with demonstrable truth; and that in the field of international relations, as well as in those higher realms of learning and culture which ought to know no geographical boundaries, what America was supposed to be has often been quite as determining a

factor as any assured knowledge of what America actually was.

Less voluminous, but still ranging over pretty much the whole field of American history, and greatly needed by the student, would be a bibliography of town, city, and county histories, and of printed local records. In no class of historical material, perhaps, is there greater variation in quality, method, and permanent value. Many local histories are little more than aggregations of material, thrown together with little skill or intelligence, the work of compilers-with more zeal than discernment; yet preserving in their ill-printed pages a priceless wealth of data, tradition, formal record, or documents. Others, again, are the ripe work of mature and well-trained scholars, who for the love of history have told the story of their town or county in worthy literary form and scientific spirit. Not even the worst of them, I feel confident, can be neglected, or fails to include much that posterity ought to know. The work of the historian would be greatly facilitated by the publication of a complete list of such books, containing not only the usual bibliographical information, but also a critical analysis and appraisal; for in bibliography it is not enough to know what has been printed; we want to know also whether or not it has been printed well, or is in truth what it purports to be. In the same class, of course, and properly to be included in the same exhibit, is the scanty list of printed local records. A colored map showing the towns, cities, and counties whose histories have been written or local records published, would be very informing.

On the subject of the Indians I have no special knowledge, but a comprehensive bibliography of works on that subject is a much-needed addition to our historical helps. The problem here seems to be mainly one of critical evaluation. Rather more, I venture to think, than in any other department, the scientific studies of recent years have rendered obsolete a considerable mass of earlier writing; and a further considerable quan-

tity, if not wholly obsolete, is no longer authoritative as a whole. A good deal of the newest and most reliable data has to be sought in relatively unfamiliar quarters, or in extended series of publications, like those of the Bureau of Ethnology or the Peabody Museum, which still lack comprehensive indexes; while another large portion must be sought in languages other than English. A critical bibliography of this important literature would seem to be a work well worth undertaking, and an appropriate one in the present state of knowledge of the subject.

I have left until the last two historical fields which, though of limited chronological extent, are seriously in need of bibliographical treatment. One of these is the American Revolution. It is entirely natural that the years of our birth as a nation should retain for us perennial interest, and that the stream of publication should flow steadily on. The literature of the American Revolution is immense, and of the greatest variety: statutes, proclamations, judicial records, legislative journals and documents, town records, records of provincial congresses, of committees of correspondence, of committees of safety, newspapers, pamphlets, broadsides, sermons, printed narratives, military and naval records, diplomatic correspondence, personal letters, diaries and autobiographies, and maps. Many important sources exist in a number of editions, varying appreciably in completeness, accuracy, or editorial method; others still remain in their original issues, carefully housed in a few libraries, beyond the reach of the majority of workers. There is hardly any part of the field in which the study of new classes of material—such, for example, as newspapers or sermons—is not throwing new light on old topics, and changing correspondingly our opinions regarding them. Yet there is still a great deal that must be known before the true story of the American Revolution can be written. Such are the state of public opinion before and during the war; the civil history of the States and local communities during

the period of hostilities; and the economic conditions in the country throughout the period. The material for the study of these questions exists in print, at least in quantity sufficient to serve as a basis for conclusions and generalizations; but we need a bibliographer to make it available. In the correlation of the great masses of European documents which are now, thanks to the Bureau of Historical Research of the Carnegie Institution, being industriously explored, with what is already accessible in this country, there is a work which may well attract any scholar or learned society that cares for large things. With all the work that has been done upon it, the period grows upon our hands the more we study it. We are eager for every tool and implement that will help us to dig to the foundation of it, or take the measure of its every part, or view it from every possible angle. I have sometimes thought that if only I could understand why Washington and Franklin sided with the Revolution rather than with the mother country, when they were free to take either course, I might with more confidence hope sometime to understand American history.

The other field in which bibliographical guidance is greatly needed is the Civil War. Here again, as in the American Revolution, the material with which the historian must acquaint himself covers almost every form of printed record; but the bulk of the material far exceeds that relating to any other epoch. Besides the Federal and State governments, whose official documentary publications number thousands of volumes, and the military historians, who have poured out a torrent of regimental and other histories, there is also available a large literature of reminiscence and biography. If one may judge by the current catalogues of second-hand collections and auction sales, there is still a robust demand for Civil War literature; while the offerings of the last two or three years suggest that some pretty large accumulations are being worked off. I confess to a feeling that the value of much of this literature is

in inverse proportion to its bulk; but whether that be so or not, there is great need of a critical guide to the thousands of volumes in which is recorded the history of our great civil struggle. Now that the war has become, for most of us, an historical fact rather than a personal experience, the task of critical appraisal has been made easier, and libraries may buy with more discernment and assurance.

It is always interesting to observe the channels in which, from generation to generation, the writing of a people's history seems successively to flow. The conception of history as a whole is, for most of us, too large and too vague; it is easier and more satisfying to single out the one or two aspects of a great subject that most appeal to us, and to study and write about them. Thus, in American history our historians have principally concerned themselves with political and constitutional questions; with the addition, in New England, of ecclesiastical issues and controversies. So far as political development goes, that has been treated mainly on its national side; and the great question of slavery has been handled most commonly as a question of politics. With the exception of early cartography, no other aspect of the subject seems to have engaged persistently the attention of a considerable number of scholars, or been accepted by the schools and the public as the kind of history that ought to be written.

Nevertheless, I think we are all coming to see that this limited conception of the historical field needs to be much enlarged. Thanks largely to the leadership of Professor Turner, the history of the West is beginning to be written, but a great deal more must be done in that direction before even the political side of our national life will be fully understood. With the exception of national finance, our financial history as a whole has been little explored. We have no more than touched the fringes of our economic and social history, notwithstanding that economic influences have undoubtedly been very potent in shaping political and constitutional

issues. On the economic aspect of negro slavery we still need a great deal more light. We have hardly any first-rate state history, and very few good town or city histories; while as regards ecclesiastical history and legal history, those two domains have hardly been entered at all. The number of definitive biographies of American public men is very small, perhaps less than twenty-five. If one steps into the fascinating realm of what may be called the history of ideas, and seeks to know the evolution of American culture or the place of the American mind in the world of thought, he must for the most part grope his way without guide or map. It should be a chastening reflection that the most searching and thoughtful book yet written on the American Revolution, the "Literary History" of Moses Coit Tyler, should still be almost the only representative of its class.

All of this means, of course, that the study of American history is rapidly enlarging its scope, entering new fields as well as reworking old ones. The greatest obstacle, as I see it, is just now the lack of critical bibliography to show us exactly what our historical riches are, and where they are. With all the numerous agencies already at work, there are still important tasks waiting to be done. The larger ones, very likely, are necessarily co-operative in their nature; the lesser ones are well within the powers of individual workers. I venture to hope that in these important undertakings this Society may take a worthy share.

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