REVIEWS OF BOOKS

Historical Scholarship in America, Needs and Opportunities.

This little book may be described as an introduction to the profession of historical study as practiced in the United States, and it should be read by everyone who is in any way interested in that profession, including the donors of funds, the administrators of graduate schools, the deans of colleges, the heads of history departments, professors, instructors, the candidates for advanced degrees, and even undergraduate students. For its passages, which present the views of such leaders of the profession as Arthur M. Schlesinger, Charles W. David, Carlton J. H. Hayes, and John D. Hicks, to name only the chairmen of the several conferences held under the auspices of the committee, offer to the reader a diagnosis of the ills that afflict the profession and a great number of recommendations for its improvement.

Among the ills that afflict the profession the committee stresses the lack of rigor in study and examinations, the relatively little attention paid to the training of students in historical methods, the notorious deficiency in language equipment of candidates for advanced degrees and the lack of enforcement of existing language requirements, the inadequate training of historical scholars in allied fields and auxiliary sciences, the excessive emphasis upon the compilation of factual materials in arid monographs, and the generally poor quality of historical writing. Indeed, except for the laborious research for facts, the committee finds little to commend in American historical scholarship; it appears to be narrow in interest, unenlightened by intellectual understanding, and uninspired in aim. The circumstances which produce these unsatisfactory conditions arise in the methods of graduate instruction and in the state of materials for research. Too many graduate students remain too long under the tutelage
of one faculty, and often they are exploited rather than trained by its members. The paucity of materials in certain fields, the lack of satisfactory check lists for scattered materials, and the tendency for professors and students to follow along hackneyed lines of study combine to lower the quality of research. The most pressing difficulty before students and professors alike is the lack of funds. It prevents students from securing a thorough training, particularly in so far as that training can be received only by studying under scholars at different universities and colleges. The lack of funds circumscribes the activities of established scholars in various ways. It prevents them from undertaking significant large-scale researches, forcing them to produce articles that do little more than keep their names on the pages of the professional journals. It holds back constructive programs for gathering, cataloguing, and publishing materials. And it makes difficult the publication of any study which cannot be made commercially profitable.

The recommendations of the committee and its several divisions follow along the lines marked out by this diagnosis. The scholars in the field of ancient and classical history desire the formation of well-rounded collections of materials in all important libraries; they ask for the publication of all papyri as quickly as possible. Bound by the traditions of classical studies, they fear to adopt points of view arising in such newer fields as sociology and anthropology; on the other hand, they are particularly interested in economic history. The medieval historians also are wary of generalizations having an origin in newer points of view; they desire the large-scale reproduction of documentary materials. The historians of modern Europe deplore the lack of interest in social history; disagreeing with their colleagues in the ancient and medieval fields, they set forth a list of possible researches that may be undertaken in the light of new points of view. The American historians also point to neglected fields of research and call for the compilation of guides and the collection of materials to make possible the exploration of such fields. The committee looks to the improvement of training in methods, in allied fields, and in language equipment, for the intellectual betterment of the profession.
On the technical side of the profession, the committee's recommendations are twofold, first, in regard to materials, and second, with respect to the ways and means of study. The committee asks for the formation of union catalogues of the larger libraries, the making of a union check list of newspaper files, the compilation of calendars of materials for American history in the Netherlands, Scandinavia, Portugal, and South American countries as well as of those materials which are necessary for research in social and intellectual history, the development of a national library plan, and the training of archivists and curators. The better utilization of these technical materials may be secured, it is the belief of the committee, by rigorously excluding mediocre students from the graduate school, by providing more fellowships for first-year graduate students and larger stipends for traveling fellows, by accepting more freely credits earned under different faculties, and by exchanging professors more frequently among the better faculties. Publication difficulties must be met by securing funds that will make possible the production of researches that cannot be exploited commercially; scholars in all fields agree that there is a particular need for a monograph series that will present studies too large for the journals and too small for the book market.

At this critical moment in the life of American educational institutions when everywhere measures of retrenchment are the order of the day, it would seem that the administrative officers of colleges and departments might find some guidance in this diagnosis and these recommendations of the committee, so that economy may be made to contribute to the improvement of historical studies.

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When a book on American history holds a place for months as one of the six best sellers in the non-fiction group, it would seem that the interest of the American people in their past has increased or the author has produced a remarkable book.