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*Joys of Discovery – Historical Research and Writing**

LEROY R. HAFEN**

History is the record of man's sojourn on earth. It encompasses not only his aspirations, achievements and progress; but also his discouragements, his shortcomings, and his failures. The many branches of history treat and emphasize various phases of the subject, such as the economic, political, social, and military aspects of human development.

What passes for history is often folklore, myth, or legend. These each have their interest, their appeal, and their place; but that place is primarily in literature, not in history, although, as we shall see in a moment, good history is also literature. However, nothing in fiction, no fruits of the imagination, can equal in interest what actually occurred. The great English historian, George M. Trevelyan, said of the basic events of history: "Just because it really happened, it gathers round it all the inscrutable mystery of life and death and time. Let the science and research of the historian find the fact, and let his imagination and art make clear its significance."

In some respects history is a science. It seeks for accuracy, exactness, and truth. But dealing with humans and their attributes, the historian cannot set the stage and repeat an experiment, as is possible in chemistry, physics, or other sciences. So history falls short of the accuracy of science. But what it lacks as science it achieves as art. For in a real sense history is an art, akin to poetry, painting, sculpture; specifically, it is a form of literature. The *ideal* in history is not only to have dependable facts, but an artistic and intriguing presentation. Thus the study, the writing, and the teaching of history offer great challenges—an alluring opportunity.

History is so interesting that I am surprised you are not all historians. As a matter of fact, I believe all of you are, in a

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way. Some of you just tell stories of your youth to your grandchildren—and of course all of these tales are very accurate and unembellished. Some of you are ardent genealogists, and genealogy is a specialized branch of history. Much of the scripture you study is history. Some of you read, rather than write history; and history is never complete until it is read.

Historical work can be divided generally into two major undertakings: first, RESEARCH—the gathering of facts; second, WRITING—the synthesis of facts, the telling of the story.

Let us first consider RESEARCH IN HISTORY. This is the gathering and selection of information about what happened—the search for facts, the pursuit of truth. Research is detective work, and it has all the fascination and thrill of a detective's pursuit of clues. In research one tastes the *joys of discovery*. The pursuit of truth is the objective; in fact, the degree of truth attained is the measure of success in research.

The laboratories for historical research are the libraries, archives, and other collections of records. Where there are no records, it has been said, there is no history.

In the study of records, certain general canons of method have been developed. Scholars engaged in ancient and medieval history have found that many writings are not genuine or dependable. There have been forgeries of documents pertaining to land titles, church decrees, etc. So scholars have worked out what approaches a science in the matter of rules and methods of determining the authenticity of records. Langois and Seignabos have a textbook on methodology in medieval historical studies. I remember Professor Paetow at the University of California and his interesting examples of notable forgeries, and the ingenious methods of detecting forgeries.

We need not go into these problems here, for our subject and concern are of a later period. Students such as I, who are primarily interested in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, have a somewhat simpler problem and challenge. But common sense and experience have suggested certain rules for determining the dependability of modern documents.

We roughly classify written records into *primary* and *secondary* accounts. *Primary* sources are those written by participants or observers at the time of a happening. The contemporary letters written to relatives or friends, the official reports,

the diaries of the persons on the scene, and contemporary newspaper accounts are examples of primary sources.

How thankful we are for the diaries kept by history-minded persons. Many journals of explorers and of pioneers have supplied basic information for our historical works. My wife, Ann, well expressed this indebtedness in a poem commemorating pioneers on the Old Spanish Trail, and entitled it, "A Journal Speaks":

I am the voice of the exploring ages,
Eternal life of fingers turned to dust.
I am the Forever of man's will to tell,
A buckskinned link with tomorrow
Preserved by the acrid smoke of a campfire.

While his comrades snore in their earthy rolls
My creator—squinting, shivering—
Hunches over the dying coals to scrawl:

*Covered ten miles today—
Two hundred yet to go.
Left five mules by the trail.
No water and grass for camp.
Nor wood except Joshua burrs.
Chewed bullets to wet my mouth,
But that's no substitute for water.
Is all of California gold
Worth one day of agonizing thirst?
Heaven, pour rain tonight!*

The Journal, I—voice of questing man,
Gold of his pack,
Dust cry of a smothering mule.

Even persons who are present and report an event do not always agree. It is notorious that the witnesses of a fire or a dog fight do not tell the same story. So the historian endeavors to find as many contemporary accounts of an event as possible, and then by judging the objectivity and trustworthiness of the witnesses to come up with the most accurate account possible of what actually happened. And in some cases, with good diaries and letters, one can also learn the motive that impelled to

action. And motives are generally the most difficult problem for the historian to explain or establish.

As participants and observers of an event are removed farther and farther from the scene, they tend to become less reliable reporters. In other words, we learn that human memory is imperfect, that reminiscences are not nearly so dependable as accounts written down at the time. So reminiscent accounts—old man's tales—are always suspect.

Secondary sources are those written not by participants or witnesses, but by persons who get their information second-hand. Such writings vary greatly. There are the wild guesses and imaginings of writers of fiction at one end, and then extending through a long scale of writers of varying degrees of dependability, up to the responsible scholar who does thorough work and produces monographs that are our most dependable historical writing. Such works cite the sources used, indicate the bases for conclusions, and thus can be judged as to their competence. Such are the ideals for the theses and dissertations produced by our graduate students and by competent scholars.

My main purpose is not to discuss the canons of historical writing, but to give in a more personal way some experiences in historical work and to reveal the joys in this field of endeavor.

First let us look at *libraries* and *documentary sources*—the laboratories for historical work. In research, which for most of us is the most interesting and enjoyable part of the historical vocation, the principal labor is carried on in documentary collections. The great libraries of the nation and the world are the storehouses of the accumulated wisdom of mankind. How thrilling to visit the British Museum, one of the largest libraries in the world, and to see the vast historical sources gathered and stored through the centuries. The Bibliothèque Nationale in France and the Vatican Library of Rome are but representative of the great record accumulations available to us.

Individual libraries tend to specialize in certain fields. Inasmuch as my own interest has been Western American history, I have gone to the great repositories of documents and records in this area. The Bancroft Library at Berkeley and the Henry E. Huntington Library at San Marino are the most famous in California. The William R. Coe Collection at Yale University,

the Newberry Library at Chicago, and the Harvard Library also have outstanding Western sources. The various state historical societies have marvelous collections pertaining to their respective areas. The Missouri Historical Society at St. Louis is preeminent in the Western fur trade and early exploration materials. In the field of government documents, of course the magnificent National Archives are supreme. The Library of Congress, presumed to have a copy of every book published in the United States, is our largest and most inclusive library.

One could go on with a long list of libraries and their specialties, but this would hardly serve our purpose. It is enough to know that there are great libraries, available to the researcher, and that their doors are open to scholars.

For the full thrill, the researcher should visit the great repositories. At the National Archives the air-conditioned and specially lighted vault containing the original Declaration of Independence is raised up from the subbasement each day to be viewed by the long line of history-minded citizens who file alongside to view the immortal document. In the stacks of the Archives are the monthly reports of all the early military forts of the West, many of them still neatly folded and tied in red tape—the original for the popular term “red tape.” The maps and drawings of the earliest explorers and surveyors, the reports of Indian agents, logs of emigrant ships, even the weather reports are there. The National Archives are truly a treasure trove.

If one is interested in the greatest exploration tour of Western history, the Lewis and Clark expedition, it is a privilege to go to the Missouri Historical Society and see and even handle the little leather-bound book that William Clark carried to the Pacific and back, with its queer spelling but good drawings and maps. The lists of the fur traders pulling keelboats up the muddy Missouri ten miles a day to the mouth of the Yellowstone, the men and supplies packing out to the summer fur trade rendezvous in the central Rockies are there.

When we were doing research for our history of the Old Spanish Trail, which ran from Santa Fe to Los Angeles, we flew to Mexico City in 1946. There in the Hemeroteca Nacional we found the diary of the first packhorse trip from New Mexico to southern California. It was aggravatingly brief, but it did give the dates and the places of night camps; and from these we

were able to determine the route to a crossing of the Colorado River, to the Virgin and the Mojave rivers, and thence to San Gabriel Mission, southern California. This trace was mainly south of the Colorado and only its western end was along our Old Spanish Trail.

During the several years of our research we sought in vain for a contemporary and complete record of a trip over our trail. Regretfully we wrote at the end of our book manuscript that we had been unable to find a diary of a complete journey over the route. Finally, when our book was almost ready to go to the publisher, Yale University issued a large volume describing its manuscript holdings. Among these we noted the listing of a diary by Orville Pratte and among the names mentioned enroute was the Sevier River. We knew at once that this journey was through Utah and over the Spanish Trail. Immediately we obtained a microfilm copy of the diary, and when we saw its importance, got permission from Yale to publish the rare document. We added it as a final chapter to our volume and were happy.

How exciting to find a fugitive bit of information in some obscure library or collection, some long-sought fact that explains conditions or solves puzzles, some obscure name or report in a faded newspaper, a rare pamphlet with significant information. A few months ago we saw a pamphlet recently purchased by the Huntington Library. It was a blank-verse account of the Mormon sufferings in Missouri written by James Mulholland, the scribe to whom the Prophet Joseph Smith dictated the early part of his life history. The pamphlet was published at Nauvoo in 1841, a few months after the unfortunate death of the young author, age thirty-five years.

All searches are not fruitful. Sometimes after a long pursuit, you arrive at the right place, only to find that thoughtless descendants finally cleaned house last week and burned up grandpa's old box of letters and papers that had cluttered the attic these many years.

Sometimes you run up against a blank wall, as I did *literally* on one occasion. Rumor had it that there was a lost mine in the high Sangre de Cristo mountains of Colorado, a *caverno del oro*—a cave of gold. A party was organized, supplied with long ropes and necessary equipment. It is a long story that my wife published some years ago, and that cannot be repeated

here. Suffice it to say that after descending on a hundred-foot rope into the black pit at the end of the cave, I finally reached bottom. There was only a blank wall of limestone. No skeleton chained to the wall as legend had said; no evidence of treasure. Only a broken rib in the difficult ascent was my reward for the trouble.

Ann ended her article, "Detective Historian," thus: "To the party the venture was disappointing. No treasure found. No headlines for the newspapers. No relic of the ancient conquistadores. But to the detective historian it was just another clue pursued, another myth exploded, another triumph for the scholar's code—to build history on fact, not on fossilized fiction."

Libraries are the laboratory and the workshop of the historian. These great institutions not only open their doors and welcome the scholar; they provide card catalogues and descriptive calendars of holdings, have competent and willing librarians and assistants, and often provide research rooms, study carrels or offices, microfilm readers, and photocopying devices to promote the search for truth.

A few institutions are not willing to open their archives, even to the most sincere and competent scholars. Some corporations and some families keep their records sealed. Some are afraid of lawsuits. Some have skeletons in their closets, something to hide. They are afraid of the truth.

On the more recent subjects, American historians supplement the library materials by interviewing pioneers or their descendants. Here, as indicated earlier, one must take the stories with due allowance because of lapses of memory and human failings. Experience has proved that the recollections pertaining to dress, home life, and the general flavor of the times are more reliable than those giving dates and the chronology of events.

During the depression of the 1930's in a W.P.A. historical project in Colorado—the first such in the nation—there were fifty workers out in the state interviewing pioneers, collecting data on the history of towns, churches, schools, and other features of local history. They sent in to me each week the results of their labor. The accumulated information produced several volumes of excellent source materials on the history of Colorado and its people. These personalized the dry bones of history.

Study on the Ground. Another line of research is pursued by the scholar who is not merely or exclusively an armchair historian. A person who retraces trails, visits historic sites, studies geography for the setting of an event, is well rewarded and is a happy historian. Only by such personal contact can he get the feel of his subject, understand what happened and why, relive the story, and thus be equipped to properly tell it.

After Mrs. Hafen and I spent a year at the Huntington Library, working on the Old Spanish Trail, we devoted a very profitable month in retracing the crooked packhorse route that extended from Los Angeles to Santa Fe. We followed the dry bed of the Mojave River, visited the yellow alkaline Amargosa River that flows into Death Valley; we refreshed ourselves in the desert at Resting Spring; we located the original water pool, bubbling up with sand, in what is now a headhouse of the culinary supply of the city of Las Vegas, Nevada. In less than an hour we sped across the creosote-covered plain from Las Vegas to the Muddy River, a desert stretch of fifty-five waterless miles that were once strewn with the bones of horses that died of thirst and fatigue. We followed the roily Virgin—on the banks of which I spent by boyhood—and its Santa Clara branch, to the notorious Mountain Meadows, once a beautiful grassy retreat for failing pack mules and tired horses. We took the dirt trail from Little Salt Lake, up Red Creek Canyon and crossed Cedar Mountain to the Sevier River; followed this stream some distance; took the trail to Fish Lake, where Kit Carson made such a large catch of trout, over the Wasatch Mountains at the head of Salina Canyon, and traversed Castle Valley. We crossed the Green River, where packs were formerly rafted and horses swam the current; over another barren desert to a crossing of the Colorado River at present Moab; up Spanish Valley, and on to Charles Redd's La Sal Ranch—to be feasted at his annual beef sale party—across southwestern Colorado near Mesa Verde and Durango, to the Chama River, to quaint, rustic Abiquiu, perched on the side of a hill, and finally to Santa Fe.

Here was one of the rewards of Western historical research. Similar trips have taken us over the Oregon and Santa Fe trails, the California and Mormon Trail, the Bozeman Trail, the Lewis and Clark Trail, the Pony Express and stagecoach trails, and many less famous routes. The sites of battlefields

lured us; some Western ones are the Little Bighorn, Sand Creek, Summit Springs, Tongue River, Pierre's Hole, and Glorieta Pass.

We have also visited the Plains of Abraham, where heroic Montcalm and Wolfe both died at the gates of Quebec in the climax of the struggle between France and Britain for control of North America. At Saratoga, one of the "Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World," we toured the historic ground where occurred the turning point of the American Revolution. What an impressive monument one sees there. Benedict Arnold, you may recall, was the hero of the battle. But because of his later treason, he has a most tragic monument. In his previous patriotic campaign against Quebec he had been wounded in the lower leg. So, the monument at Saratoga shows in relief this booted leg against the side of a saddle. The name was not considered worthy to be inscribed on the monument; but the leg that was wounded in the true service of his country is preserved in stone on the battlefield of Saratoga.

The battlefields of Yorktown, of Antietam, of Vicksburg, and of Gettysburg, and many others have drawn us to their shrines. To such as these Eastern sites I went as a history teacher, to get atmosphere and sentiment, but not as a historical researcher or writer.

We have picked up bullets, arrowheads, and other mementoes of famous battlefields and historic places of the West. We have visited the sites of the sixteen famous rendezvous of the fur trade and most of the dozens of forts of the period. I was at Champoeg, Oregon, in 1943, for the centennial celebration of establishment of the first government in Oregon. We were at the centennial of the founding of Fort Sutter at Sacramento, California, in 1939; and the quartocentennial of the *entrada* of Coronado into New Mexico, celebrated at Santa Fe in 1940. We traversed the overland stagecoach route and were entertained at the Pioneer Trails Association gathering in Julesburg, Colorado, with a buffalo steak dinner in 1946. And so on and on, for several years. Indeed, research and vacation trips make a wonderfully enjoyable combination.

Often it is only by studying the ground that one can settle certain historical controversies. For example, the site of the first rendezvous in the Rockies has long been in dispute. The written records are scant and say merely that the site was twenty

miles up river from the mouth of Henry's Fork of Green River. But the question was: Up which stream, the Green or Henry's Fork? An examination on the ground showed that twenty miles up Green River is a barren, narrow valley incapable of sustaining the several hundred horses of a big trading camp. Twenty miles up Henry's Fork, a little above present Manila, Utah, at the mouth of Burnt Creek, was and is a fine, large, grassy meadow that met the requirements for a summer rendezvous. Thus was the decision obvious.

The route of the unfortunate Death Valley Party of 1849, in its journey from Salt Lake to southern California, could be determined only by going by jeep, horseback, or on foot over the ground west of Enterprise, Utah. The jump-off from Mount Misery to the upper Beaver Dam Wash clearly shows why wagons could not follow the packhorse trail and why the majority turned back to follow Jefferson Hunt over the Old Spanish or Mormon Trail. The location of the route of the *packers* was verified by finding the initials of Henry Bigler's name cut in the canyon wall. This is the Bigler who kept the diary that recorded the discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill, January 24, 1849.

Farther on the Mormon Trail, Apostle Charles C. Rich's route (when his party turned back toward the Muddy River) is determined by the unique ten-foot-wide gash so strangely appearing through a mountain in the desert, easily recognized as the unusual phenomena they called "Arrow Canyon."

Jedediah Smith's route, in turning from the Sevier River to the south of present Richfield and going up the Clear Creek branch and on to Cove Fort, is easy to understand when one is on the ground and can see the difficulties of farther travel up the river canyon and the easy westward course of Clear Creek. Students who did not know the country have thought Smith continued up the Sevier River and went down Zion Canyon, an impossible route.

Studying the ground for the site of famous Fort Hall, near modern Pocatello, Idaho, is fascinating, as is the entire route of the Oregon Trail. When one looks at the foot-deep ruts cut by the grinding of iron-tired wheels in the solid stone beside the North Platte near Guernsey, Wyoming, or sees the cuts in the sod of western Nebraska, he is impressed.

If you climb to the top of Independence Rock, which rests like a giant granite turtle on the plain beside the winding Sweetwater, you have only to close your eyes for a moment to see the circling wagons of Oregon pioneers at the base of the rock, the oxen grazing on the green grass of the plain and a buffalo herd spotting the distant horizon. Only a slight switch of thought and the scene is changed to a white desolation, with half-covered handcarts surrounded by freezing and starving men, women, and children of Martin's belated company of Mormon pioneers struggling to reach Zion. The Sweetwater is covered with floating ice, and heroic boys of the rescue party from Salt Lake Valley are carrying weak women and crying children across the waist-deep stream.

Being on the ground sharpens the perception and spurs the imagination of those who study history and those who honor heroism. They can visualize courage.

WRITING HISTORY. Research is enjoyable, and one tends to continue on and on in its pleasurable pursuit. Some persist from a perfection complex that urges further study and definitive findings; others perhaps are merely postponing the arduous work of writing. But sooner or later the historian must conclude that his gathering is substantially complete, that he must get down to actual writing; otherwise his efforts are wasted—gone with the wind.

Assembling and organizing his facts, evaluating the materials, and arriving at conclusions are often difficult. Making a synthesis and applying generalizations require broad knowledge and an understanding of human nature. But the climax, the object of the whole undertaking in history, is an adequate presentation through the printed word.

There are two basic types of historical writing: the *monograph* and the general *synthesis*. The *first* is exemplified by theses and dissertations, which are devoted to limited subjects. These are thorough and exhaustive studies where extensive research seeks definitive answers to limited questions. Such labor is primarily concerned with ascertaining the facts. What is required here is thorough spade work, clear thinking, and accurate writing. Such work is usually written primarily for specialists; it is the basic material for the general historian. Such writings are not expected to be gems of literature. Good monographs are the sound building stones with which the fine edifice

of general history is erected. Such monographic history most nearly qualifies as being scientific.

The *second* type of historical writing is the narrative or analytical presentation. It is a synthesis of monographic writings and is devoted to broad treatments and generalizations of major phases or periods of history. This is the kind of writing that can and should aspire to literary excellence.

There has been a tendency for historians to suspect literary historical writing. For fictioneers have frequently jumped into the field and without doing the necessary research have burst forth with would-be history that is full of imagination and is easy reading, but is entirely undependable factually. On the other hand, not all dull history is dependable; and well-written history is not always inaccurate. It must be admitted, however, that the staid and plodding type of writing is often the sounder kind. But as Wallace Stegner has observed: "The laudable lust for absolute accuracy can lead to dullness, can cause a man to proffer a set of notes instead of a finished book, as if one did not write history, but collected it."

Garrett Mattingly, notable historian and adviser to the brilliant writer Bernard De Voto, wrote to his literary friend: "The function of specialists in the historians' economy, is to mine and smelt the ore out of which better men write history. I've done that kind of collie work for years," he says, "and have the callouses on my bottom to prove it."

The ideal is for a person of literary ability to take the required time to do the necessary research, and then produce history that is sound in appraisal, keen with insight, and also is crowned with artistic, literary presentation. Francis Parkman, devoting a lifetime to the study of France in America, was able to approach the ideal, a hundred years ago. He did thorough research, arrived at sound judgments, and then with authentic detail and lively incident presented a narrative of literary excellence, but with footnotes to nail down his facts.

Such a writer, in drawing a picture of the past, is an artist. He picks and chooses the facts and incidents that are significant and that will form and point up his picture. Like the painter, he is creating. With words he is making a portrait of a leader; or with poignant sentences he is visualizing a thunderous battle or a steaming political campaign.

If by clear thinking, keen interpretation, and good writing the historian is able to produce readable and thrilling history, he is the ideal craftsman or artist. Bruce Catton, distinguished modern historian, contends that "at its best history is more art than science. . . . Good history," he says, "is literature." A dull history may be sound; but to be great history it must not only be accurate, but be alive with images and action. Perfect history has not yet been written, but as students and teachers, we can hold before us the ideal and work toward its achievement.

The writing of a book is labor; and there are rewards for scholarship, and penalties for lack of it. Once a book is published, it is here to stay. You cannot recall the volume, or destroy the edition. An architect once said to a doctor: "I am at a great disadvantage, as compared to you. We all make mistakes; but you doctors bury yours, and mine continue to stare me in the face." The historian is like the architect; his mistakes and shortcomings live on and glare up at him from the printed page.

The author of a book has moved into a glass house. His errors are there for everyone to see. There are always the critics, especially the young ones who are cutting their teeth. The easy way to show their scholarship is to point out the lack of it in someone else. Job of old said: "Oh, that mine adversary would write a book." The writer is helpless; he cannot undo a sentence, or even a comma. He must endure the blast, the innuendo, or perhaps even ridicule.

But I guess this situation is as it should be. The fear of criticism has made many a writer more careful in his work and less hasty to burst into print with some illy-matured opus. A maxim of one of my famous old professors, Dr. Bolton, was, "Don't be in a hurry to publish." He was eighteen years doing his book on Escalante.

On the other hand, a perfectionist may be so cautious, so fearful of having missed something, so desirous of pursuing further some elusive lead, that his precious findings never do see the light of day. I know of one historical scholar who has worked for thirty years on a biography; he cannot seem to bring the work to fruition. I doubt that he will ever publish it. An old proverb says: "Alas for those who never sing; but die with all their music in them."

Another reaction to a book is this: A famous story is told of a young couple engaged in research. The wife was so enthused that she told her friends about her husband's coming book. They were pleased, so she told more and more friends. The couple got so many compliments and had so much pleasure from the prospect of publication that they never did finish the book.

Another experience. A friend of mine sent her book manuscript to a publisher. He kept it for months; and then years passed before the publisher gave her a definite report on the manuscript. Her friends kept asking when the book would be out. She became so embarrassed that she would cross the street to avoid her friends and their inevitable questions. Finally she moved from Missouri to Oregon to avoid the embarrassing inquiry. At last she recalled her book manuscript, sent it to another publisher, and this one immediately accepted and published it. The girl came out of hiding and has lived happily ever since.

Despite the risks and dangers of publishing a book, there are also immeasurable rewards. If the book is sound, a piece of mature scholarship, and is reasonably well written, it can be a continuing satisfaction. One can look on a good book on the shelf and know that it will, through reprintings, last almost forever. An author can thus have eternal life on earth.

The object of history is to present a true account, an honest appraisal. At times history writing has been debased and outraged. Hitler prostituted history into propaganda to further the legend of a superior race. Even some of our early American historians altered the facts, in an attempt to show that America was always right and Britain was wrong.

Some biographers have whitewashed their heroes until they are too pure for credibility. In presenting Church leaders some writers will admit no errors, paint the subject so pure and white that he is hardly human. Such biographical writing is a disservice to the subject. For no character is all white or all black. There is a wide strip of gray in all human beings, and a recognition of this fact makes writing believable, more accurate, and also more interesting.

A related problem in the writing of history is the question of passing moral judgment on characters and on institutions. There are two alternatives: Should the historian be a neutral and objective observer who ascertains what happened and calmly

records it? Or should he judge men and institutions and praise or condemn what he finds? Through the decades and the centuries historical writers have taken opposing positions about this problem.

When William H. Prescott wrote his monumental history of the conquests of Mexico and Peru, he dispassionately recorded the methods employed by Cortez and Pizarro and was inclined to excuse their cruelties and excesses by saying that men must be judged by the standards of their day, and that the inhumane methods of the sixteenth century should not be judged by the standards of a later century.

However, Prescott was severely criticized by Theodore Parker, who said that it is one thing to explain, and another to condone the crimes of the past. He went on to say: "In telling what has been, the historian is also to tell what ought to be, for he is to pass judgment on events. . . . History ceases to be a mere panorama. . . , it becomes philosophy teaching by experience, . . . while it tells the lessons of the past for the warning of the present and edification of the future."

In the 1880's Mandell Creighton published his volumes on *A History of the Papacy*. In them he recorded the deplorable activities of the popes during the late middle ages, but did this without censure or disapproval. He was brought to task by the great Catholic historian, Lord Acton, who hotly criticized Creighton for not sufficiently condemning the intolerance and the cruelty of certain ignoble popes. Acton gave this as his statement of principle: "The inflexible integrity of the moral code is, to me, the secret of the authority, the dignity, the utility of history." In other words, in his opinion, history should teach morality, not merely record events.

Ranke, the famous German historian, and his disciples in various countries have denounced moral judgment and set themselves the standard of simply recording what happened, with a minimum of comment, with neither approval nor disapproval.

And so the controversy has gone on. Professor Henry Steele Commager, outstanding history professor of today, in the February, 1966, issue of *American Heritage* discusses the problem of moral judgments in history writing and says: "The historian is not God. He is not called upon to judge the quick or the dead; indeed he is not called upon to judge. If he sets

himself up as a judge he changes the whole pattern of his intellectual and professional role, from one dedicated to objective inquiry, to one devoted to prosecution or defense."

The historian is not required to spell out in detail what is moral and what is not. If he presents the facts and tells the story fairly, his readers, who have moral standards of their own, can and will pass their own judgments.

But, however fully the historian may be committed to objectivity, he, like the judge and the statesman, is a creature of his race, his class, his religion, his education. He cannot escape these formative influences and achieve complete impartiality.

Commager concludes: "We should not confuse moral with professional judgment. In the field of his professional competence the scholar has the same obligation as the judge, the teacher, the physician, the architect. The judge who pronounces sentence, the teacher who gives a grade, the physician who diagnoses an illness, the architect who condemns a building, is not indulging in moral but exercising professional judgment. So the historian who, after painstaking study of all available evidence and after cleansing himself of all the perilous stuff which might distort his vision," makes a conclusion, he is rendering a professional, not a moral judgment, even though that judgment may have moral overtones. "It is equally exasperating," he contends, "to discover that scholars who may know more about their subjects than anyone else in the world, are still unwilling to share their interpretations or their conclusions with their readers. We want professional judgments from a doctor or a lawyer or an engineer; and we have a right to professional judgments from a scholar as well."

The writing of good history requires not only thorough comprehension of the facts and the sources, but a broad knowledge of human nature, a good understanding of psychology, sociology, and the relations and reactions of human beings to each other. Some knowledge of economics, technology, and the sciences also helps—but of course one person cannot have all the qualifications; he cannot be perfect.

In view of the great responsibility entailed by his role as historian, however, he is obligated to rise to the highest standard of which he is capable. He is expected not only to be competent in his field, but to be honest and conscientious.

Otherwise, he does irreparable harm to individuals and to groups. Honesty is essential; prejudice and unfair appraisals cannot be forgiven or tolerated.

Whether he likes it or not, the historian is sitting in the judgment seat, and every segment of the population, every nation, in fact every man, is entitled to justice at his hands.

A good historian makes us aware of the past; and if we are aware of the past, we better understand the present and are safer planners of the future.