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That Noble Dream

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## NOTES AND SUGGESTIONS

### THAT NOBLE DREAM

In a thought-provoking paper read at the last meeting of the American Historical Association Mr. Theodore Clarke Smith laid his colleagues under a deep obligation.<sup>1</sup> His essay is not only significant for its intrinsic merits; it indicates an interest in problems of historiography that have been long neglected. If it had been merely expository, it might well be accepted without further analysis as opening the way for an extension of thought along the same lines. But it is in spirit and declaration challenging as well as descriptive, monitory as well as narrative. Mr. Smith makes a division between scholars affiliated with the Association. He insists that they must be, broadly speaking, grouped under two banners and that there is a gulf between them which cannot be bridged. One group, with which he ranges himself, had "a noble dream", and produced sound, creditable, and in many cases masterly works on American history. Although he does not say that the opposition is ignoble, unsound, discreditable, and weak, that implication lurks in the dichotomy which he makes.

The issues presented by Mr. Smith transcend personalities and call for the most thoughtful consideration that the intelligence of the Association can bring to bear upon them. Is there in fact a deep-seated division in the Association? Has a battle line been drawn in such a fashion that members must align themselves on the one side or the other? Is it impossible to find a synthesis that will reconcile apparent contradictions or suggest a suspension of judgment, at least for the time being? Are the facts employed by Mr. Smith to illustrate his thesis so precisely accurate in every case as to be beyond amendment in a quest for "objective truth"? Surely these questions are of more than passing importance. They concern the young members of the Association and the fate of the society. They invite us to stop for a moment to review the assumptions on which historical work is to be done in the future; and perhaps answers to them may reveal some overarching hypothesis or suggest a healing diffidence, at least.

The division which Mr. Smith makes in the Association seems to be positive and sharp. On the one side are the scholars who have made

<sup>1</sup> *Am. Hist. Rev.*, XL, 439-449.

“the impressive output of sound, creditable, and in many cases masterly, works on American history during the period under review” [1884–1934]. The works of this class of scholars “are dominated, from monograph to many-volumed work, by one clear-cut ideal—that presented to the world first in Germany and later accepted everywhere, the ideal of the effort for objective truth”. Theirs was “a noble dream”, now threatened with extinction, and the hope is expressed that members of this school may go down, if necessary, “with our flags flying”. “In that case, it will be time for the American Historical Association to disband, for the intellectual assumptions on which it is founded will have been taken away from beneath it.” Here then is a clear-cut ideal, a noble dream, and the American Historical Association was “founded” on it. And who are the men who threaten this ideal, dream, and Association? They are writers who do not “consider it necessary to be impartial or even fair”. They are partial and doctrinaire. Especially doctrinaire are those who resort to an economic interpretation of history. Among the menaces to the old and true faith, mentioned by Mr. Smith, is James Harvey Robinson who once flatly declared that what is called “objective history” is simply history without an object, and proposed that historical knowledge be used to throw light on “the quandaries of our life today”—to facilitate “readjustment and reform”. Here are the contending parties of light and darkness.

The dichotomy so presented seems to involve ideal, method, and belief in the possibility of achievement. Scholars of the Old Guard desired above all things to search for “objective truth”. Were the men whom Mr. Smith puts on the other side of the fence opposed to the ideal of the search for truth? Is the scholar who seeks knowledge useful to contemporaries wrestling with “the quandaries of our life today” unconcerned about the truth of that knowledge? His end may be different but surely he does not seek falsehood or believe that false history can be serviceable to the cause posited. Nor can it be said that the student who tries to penetrate the pageant of politics to the economic interests behind the scenes is necessarily hostile to the ideal of the search for truth. Conceivably he might be as much interested in truth as the scholar who ignores or neglects the economic aspects of history. As far as method goes, those scholars who are placed in opposition to the noble dream may be as patient in their inquiries and as rigorous in their criticism and use of documentation as the old masters of light and leading. In intentions and methods, therefore, no necessary antagonism appears to arise.

Now we come to achievement—to the possibility of finding and

stating the objective truth of history. Here we encounter something more difficult to fathom than intentions or methods. We encounter questions which run deeply into the nature of the human mind, the substance of history as actuality, and the power of scholarship to grasp history objectively. Beyond doubt, scholars of competence can agree on many particular truths and on large bodies of established facts. But is it possible for men to divest themselves of all race, sex, class, political, social, and regional predilections and tell the truth of history as it actually was? Can Mr. Smith's noble dream, his splendid hope, be realized in fact? That is the fundamental issue at stake.

This theory that history as it actually was can be disclosed by critical study, can be known as objective truth, and can be stated as such, contains certain elements and assumptions. The first is that history (general or of any period) has existed as an object or series of objects outside the mind of the historian (a *Gegenüber* separated from him and changing in time). The second is that the historian can face and know this object or series of objects and can describe it as it objectively existed.<sup>2</sup> The third is that the historian can, at least for the purposes of research and writings, divest himself of all taint of religious, political, philosophical, social, sex, economic, moral, and aesthetic interests, and view this *Gegenüber* with strict impartiality, somewhat as the mirror reflects any object to which it is held up. The fourth is that the multitudinous events of history as actuality had some structural organization through inner (perhaps causal) relations, which the impartial historian can grasp by inquiry and observation and accurately reproduce or describe in written history. The fifth is that the substances of this history can be grasped in themselves by purely rational or intellectual efforts, and that they are not permeated by or accompanied by anything transcendent—God, spirit, or materialism. To be sure the theory of objective history is not often so fully stated, but such are the nature and implications of it.<sup>3</sup>

This theory of history and of human powers is one of the most sweeping dogmas in the recorded history of theories. It condemns philosophy and throws it out of doors. As practiced, it ignores problems of mind with which philosophers and theologians have wrestled for centuries and have not yet settled to everybody's satisfaction. As developed

<sup>2</sup> If the historian could do this, then so far as he covers the past there would be nothing left for posterity to do. The task of writing the history of countries and periods could be definitively discharged. To that extent students would have no work before them except that of reading the masters. A new historical treatment of an age would be as unthinkable as a new multiplication table.

<sup>3</sup> Karl Heussi, *Die Krisis des Historismus* (Tübingen, 1932), pp. 1-21.

into Historicism (it may be well to Anglicize *Historismus*), it takes on all the implications of empiricism, positivism, and, if not materialism, at least that rationalism which limits history to its purely experiential aspects. If sound and appealing, it is nonetheless an all-embracing philosophy of historiography, even though it denies philosophy.

Although Ranke contributed powerfully to the growth of this historical theory, and claimed to be writing history as it actually had been, he did not in fact follow the logic of his procedure to its empirical conclusion. He opposed the philosophic method of Hegel—that powerful thinker who boldly attempted to grasp the scheme entire—and at the same time Ranke conceived history as, in some strange manner, “a revelation of God”. But he did not openly employ this belief in selecting and arranging “objectively” the facts of history as it actually had been. He did not think that man could know God as history, but he imagined that man could see “God’s finger” in human affairs and dimly grasp God’s handiwork in history. In history, as Ranke conceived it, God stood there, “wie eine heilige Hieroglyphe, an seinem Äussersten aufgefasst und bewahrt”.<sup>4</sup> History was “der Gang Gottes in der Welt”. In the true spirit of Lutheran piety, Ranke flung himself down before the impenetrable mystery of things: “Allgewaltiger, Einer und Dreifaltiger, du hast mich aus dem Nichts gerufen. Hier liege ich vor deines Thrones Stufen.” Yet he fain would write history, so enclosed in mystery, as it actually had been, impartially, from the critical study of written documents. He rejected philosophy, proclaimed positive history, and still was controlled by a kind of *Pantheismus*.

Ranke could write history, certainly, with a majestic air of impartiality and say that he had written as it actually had been. For example, he could write of popes in a manner pleasing to both Catholics and Protestants of the upper classes. He doubtless believed that he was telling this history of the popes as it actually had been. Did he realize his claim? There is stark validity in the Jesuit objection that Ranke avoided the chief actuality of the story: Was the papacy actually what it affirmed itself to be, “an institution of the Son of God made man”, or was it a combination of false claims, craft, and man-made power?<sup>5</sup> How could Ranke avoid that question and yet even claim to be writing history as it actually was?

I make no pretensions to knowing Ranke as he actually was or his

<sup>4</sup> Friedrich Meinecke, *Die Idee der Staatsräson* (Munich, 3d ed., 1929), pp. 469 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Benedetto Croce, *History: its Theory and Practice* (New York, 1921), p. 300. “*Terminus non datur.*”

motives in writing the kind of history he chose to write. But records are available to establish the fact that he did not abstain entirely from those hot political controversies which are supposed to warp the pure thought of the empirical historian. In directing the *Historisch-Politische Zeitschrift* he chose a way between French constitutionalism and that extreme Prussian conservatism which would yield not a point to democratic aspirations. After the July Revolution Ranke favored a confederate law against the political press and political literature—a proposition that must have pleased Metternich and Gentz, who opened their archives to him.<sup>6</sup> After the March upheaval of 1848 Ranke came vigorously to the support of Frederick William IV in resistance to popular demands for a constitution based on democratic principles. On this occasion the “impartial” historian proved to be a bulwark for Prussian authoritarianism—against which so many “impartial” historians in the United States wrote vigorously in 1917–1918. Ranke also rejoiced in the events of 1870–1871 “as the victory of conservative Europe over the Revolution”, showing that he could not completely separate his political from his historical conceptions. Persistently neglecting social and economic interests in history, successfully avoiding any historical writing that offended the most conservative interests in the Europe of his own time, Ranke may be correctly characterized as one of the most “partial” historians produced by the nineteenth century.

Whether Ranke was fully conscious of what he was doing himself, he was able to see that other historians were writing from some angle of vision. He once said to George Bancroft: “I tell my hearers, that your history is the best book ever written from the democratic point of view. You are thoroughly consistent; adhere strictly to your method, carry it out in many directions but in all with fidelity, and are always true to it.” In making this statement, Ranke expressed the hope that it would not make Bancroft angry.<sup>7</sup> Bancroft was not certain that this was “high praise”. Shortly afterward he declared: “I deny the charge; if there is democracy in history it is not subjective, but objective as they say here, and so has necessarily its place in history and gives its colour as it should. . . .” Is it possible that Ranke, who was quick to discover subjective ideas in Bancroft’s writings, was totally unaware of the fact that he might be writing from the point of view of the conservative reaction in Europe? If he never applied the criterion to himself, then he was

<sup>6</sup> *Historische Zeitschrift*, XCIII, 78.

<sup>7</sup> M. A. DeWolfe Howe, *Life and Letters of George Bancroft* (New York, 1908), II, 183.

doubly “partial” and utterly devoid of any sense for reality and humor.

If, as Mr. Smith says, the “objective” method of Ranke and his school was “accepted everywhere”, it is due to history as it was to record that the conception was subjected all along to a running fire of criticism by German historians, even by those “von Fach”. Leaving aside the penetrating skepticism of Schopenhauer (who certainly was no mean thinker) and the critique of Eugen Dühring, we find searching examinations of the theory and logic of Historicism by German scholars in the early issues of the *Historische Zeitschrift*, and in the writings of Droysen, Ottokar Lorenz, Bernheim, and Lamprecht, for instance.<sup>8</sup> There were not wanting at that time historians “die in naiver, selbstgewisser Technik ihre Historie trieben, ohne zu ahnen, an welchen theoretischen Abgründen sie sich bewegten”; but many German scholars early went behind Ranke’s formula and challenged its validity. They did this long before a host of critical thinkers fell upon it during the opening years of the twentieth century.

And if the Ranke formula or theory of history was accepted in the United States by members of the American Historical Association, as Mr. Smith states, it is not quite in line with the facts in the case to say that it was “everywhere” accepted. Was it in reality adopted as the official creed of the Association in the good old days before ignoble, doctrinaire, and partial students appeared upon the scene? Surely the creed was never drawn up and signed by all faithful members. Whether the majority were acquainted with the philosophical discussion that had long raged around it and threw themselves positively on the Ranke side seems to be a statistical problem not yet solved. Hence judgment should be suspended.

Pending the determination of this historical fact by research, one item in the story may be cited—the presidential address delivered at the opening session of the American Historical Association in 1884 by Andrew D. White. Ranke was yet living. Did Mr. White commit himself or the Association to Historicism or the Ranke formula? Emphatically, he did not, as any member can discover by reading again that noteworthy address. In fact Mr. White, with mature wisdom, recognized both sides of the problem of historiography: the special, the detailed, the verified, the documented—and the philosophical. He said categorically: “While acknowledging the great value of special investigations . . . to historical

<sup>8</sup> Heussi, p. 24. On Ranke’s substitution of Universal History for the Philosophy of History, Henri Sée remarks: “Conception, qui, aujourd’hui, nous parait de pensée assez pauvre, depuis que l’horizon de l’historien s’est singulièrement élargi.” *Science et philosophie de l’histoire* (2d ed., Paris, 1933), pp. 20-21; citing Ernst Troeltsch, *Der Historismus und seine Probleme* (Vol. III, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Tübingen, 1922).

knowledge in individual nations, it is not too much to say that the highest effort and the noblest result toward which these special historical investigations lead is the philosophical synthesis of all special results in a large, truth-loving, justice-loving spirit."

"Bearing on this point, Buckle, in a passage well worthy of meditation, has placed *observation* at the foot of the ladder, *discovery* next above it, and *philosophical method* at the summit." In this spirit Mr. White declared that at the annual meetings of the Association there ought to be a session or sessions dealing with special studies, and also a session or sessions "devoted to general history, the history of civilization, and the philosophy of history". He recognized the dangers of the latter—"looseness and vagueness"—but thought that the consideration of both aspects of history would contribute to a sounder development of each. "These difficulties", Mr. White warned us, "the Association must meet as they arise."<sup>9</sup>

Nor did the first President, Andrew D. White, see in the use of history as an instrument of "social control" the perils to scholarship lamented by Mr. Smith. On the contrary, Mr. White closed with an exordium in line with the thought later expressed by James Harvey Robinson, whose ideal Mr. Smith puts on the other side of the fence from "a noble dream". Mr. White proposed no neutral, value-free history. "Certainly", he said near the close of his address, "a confederation like this—of historical scholars . . . ought to elicit most valuable work in both fields [special and philosophical], and to contribute powerfully to the healthful development on the one hand of man as man, and on the other to the opening up of a better political and social future for the nation at large." This is asking historians to do what James Harvey Robinson suggested: bring historical knowledge to bear "on the quandaries of our life today".

Henry Adams was also once President of the American Historical Association. He cannot be placed among those who have recently invaded the circle of the pure faith and threatened to destroy the Association by "the final extinction of a noble dream", driving Mr. Smith and his adherents to consider the frightful alternative of going down "with our flags flying". Did Henry Adams limit the function and thought of the historian to Historicism, the Ranke formula, or neutrality in the face of life's exigent forces? Members who care to know before they take sides in a discussion of the theory of history must read the letter which Henry Adams, as President of the Association, wrote to his col-

<sup>9</sup> American Historical Association, *Papers*, I, 49-72.



leagues as long ago as 1894.<sup>10</sup> There he invited the members to consider what a science of history would look like and the devastating challenge which it would make to the church, the state, property, or labor. Mr. Adams, with amazing foresight, predicted a crisis in Western economy and thought, and warned his colleagues that they “may at any time in the next fifty years be compelled to find an answer, ‘Yes’ or ‘No’, under the pressure of the most powerful organizations the world has ever known for the suppression of influences hostile to its safety”.

One more colleague may be mentioned. Mr. Smith has referred to H. L. Osgood as holding to the “high ideals” of the school which now seems to be threatened by doctrinaire writers. Mr. Osgood was, as Mr. Smith says, expository, analytical, and for the most part impersonal. Did Mr. Osgood imagine himself to be writing history as it actually was? His ambition was more limited. He sought to tell the truth, as best he could, about certain aspects of history. Did he imagine himself to stand outside the *Zeitgeist*? Not for a moment. Mr. Osgood had been one of my masters, and shortly after I presented him with a copy of my *Economic Interpretation of the Constitution* I asked him whether it offended him or appeared to be *ultra vires*? His response was positive. He said in effect: “Men of my generation grew up in the midst of great constitutional and institutional debates and our interest turned to institutional history. Profound economic questions have now arisen and students of the younger generation, true to their age, will occupy themselves with economic aspects of history.” Far from deeming this interest reprehensible, Mr. Osgood regarded it as “natural” and proper. Near the end of his life he spoke to me of the heavy hand of time that lies upon all our work, dating us, revealing our limitations.

How many other members of the older generation did in fact think their way through the assumptions and convictions enclosed in Mr. Smith’s “noble dream” and accept it whole heartedly? The data for answering that question are not at hand. How many watched carefully the development of the critical attitude toward Historicism in Europe at the turn of the century, and especially after 1914? Materials for answering that query are not available either. Judging by the files of the *American Historical Review* and the programs of annual meetings such philosophical issues have received scant consideration, little exploration and examination. Judging by the writings of American historians slight attention has been given to the intellectual problems involved in the

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, *Annual Report*, 1894, pp. 17-23. Reprinted in *The Degradation of the Democratic Dogma* (New York, 1920), pp. 125 ff.

choice of subjects, the selection of facts, and the construction of monographs and many-volumed works. If there has been any real searching of historical minds and hearts in the United States, any fearless and wide-reaching inquiry into preliminary assumptions, tacit or deliberate, any procedure save on the level of ingenuous convictions, historical literature bears only a few evidences of its fruits. If engines of skepticism and verification have been mercilessly applied to what passes for constructive thought, as distinguished from eclecticism and documentation, news of the fact has not spread far and wide enough in the American Historical Association to make a profound impression upon its proceedings. Some countervailing evidence may be cited, no doubt, but the exceptions would seem merely to prove the rule. It may be that the major portion of American scholars in the good old days imagined that they could discover and know the objective truth of history as it actually was, but there is good reason for thinking that a large number of them did not labor under that impression respecting their activities and powers.

Having indicated some grounds for holding that Historicism is not and never has been "accepted everywhere" as the official creed of the American Historical Association, it is now appropriate to inquire whether the Ranke formula is valid in itself. Can the human mind discover and state the "objective truth" of history as it actually was? Space does not admit even a brief summation of the voluminous literature dealing with this conception and demonstrating, if not its delusive character, its rejection by scholars and thinkers of high competence in Europe. Those American students who care to examine the history and nature of the European revolt against Historicism may find guidance in Croce, *History: its Theory and Practice*, in Heussi, *Die Krisis des Historismus*, and in the numerous works cited by Heussi as supporting evidence. In these volumes is presented the development of historical thought which culminated in the rejection of the Ranke theory and its formulation as Historicism.

At this point only a bare outline of the argument is possible, but it may be given, very inadequately, in the following propositions:

1. The idea that history took place in the past as actuality outside the mind of the contemporary historian is accepted as the common-sense view.
2. The historian is not an observer of the past that lies beyond his own time. He cannot see it *objectively* as the chemist sees his test tubes and compounds. The historian must "see" the actuality of history through the medium of documentation. That is his sole recourse.

3. The documentation (including monuments and other relics) with which the historian must work covers only a part of the events and personalities that make up the actuality of history. In other words multitudinous events and personalities escape the recording of documentation. To realize the significance of this, as Heussi says, it is only necessary to consider an effort to describe the battle of Leipzig alone, to say nothing of the Napoleonic wars or the history of the Roman Empire.

4. Not only is the documentation partial. In very few cases can the historian be reasonably sure that he has assembled all the documents of a given period, region, or segment. In most cases he makes a partial selection or a partial reading of the partial record of the multitudinous events and personalities involved in the actuality with which he is dealing.

5. Since the history of any period embraces all the actualities involved, and since both documentation and research are partial, it follows that the total actuality is not factually knowable to any historian, however laborious, judicial, or faithful he may be in his procedures. History as it actually was, as distinguished, of course from particular facts of history, is not known or knowable, no matter how zealously is pursued "the ideal of the effort for objective truth".

6. The idea that there was a complete and actual structurization of events in the past, to be discovered through a partial examination of the partial documentation, is pure hypothesis, as Th. Lessing shows in his *Geschichte als Sinngebung des Sinnlosen*.

7. The events and personalities of history in their very nature involve ethical and aesthetic considerations. They are not mere events in physics and chemistry inviting neutrality on the part of the "observer".

8. Any overarching hypothesis or conception employed to give coherence and structure to past events in written history is an interpretation of some kind, something transcendent. And as Croce says, "transcendency is always transcendency, whether it be thought of as that of a God or of reason, of nature, or of matter".

9. The historian seeking to know the past, or about it, does not bring to the partial documentation with which he works a perfect and polished neutral mind in which the past streaming through the medium of documentation is mirrored as it actually was. Whatever acts of purification the historian may perform he yet remains human, a creature of time, place, circumstance, interests, predilections, culture. No amount of

renunciation could have made Andrew D. White into a Frederick Jackson Turner or either of them into a neutral mirror.

10. Into the selection of topics, the choice and arrangement of materials, the specific historian's "me" will enter. It may enter with a conscious clarification of philosophy and purpose or, as Croce says, surreptitiously, without confession or acknowledgment.

11. The validity of the Ranke formula and its elaboration as Historicism is destroyed by internal contradictions and rejected by contemporary thought. The historian's powers are limited. He may search for, but he cannot find, the "objective truth" of history, or write it, "as it actually was".

Now we come to the validity of an antithesis of the Ranke formula—the economic interpretation of history. Is it partial, in the sense that it does not cover all the events of history? It certainly is. Surely none will contend that it could be otherwise than partial in its scope. Is it "the correct" interpretation of history? If the word interpretation is taken to mean "explanation", then neither it nor any other historical hypothesis can be regarded as valid and final, on the ground that in the nature of things—documentation and the human mind—the past as it actually was cannot be known. If the word be taken, however, in a manner equally admissible under linguistic usage, to mean simply the writer's version, construction, or conception of his subject, then an economic interpretation is merely what it professes to be—a version, not the absolute truth, of history.

Seekers after truth in particular and general have less reason to fear it than they have to fear any history that comes under the guise of the Ranke formula or Historicism. It bears its own warning. A book entitled *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution*, like every other book on history, is a selection and an organization of facts; but it serves advance notice on the reader, telling him what to expect. A book entitled *The Formation of the Constitution or The Making of the Constitution* is also a selection and organization of facts, hence an interpretation or conception of some kind, but it does not advise the reader at the outset concerning the upshot to be expected.

Does an economic interpretation, open and avowed, violate the "ideal of the effort for objective truth"? Not necessarily. The historian who searches out and orders economic aspects of life, events, and interests may possibly be as zealous in his search for truth as any other historian searching out and ordering his facts in his way. Is the student who seeks an economic interpretation more partial, in the sense of partisan-

ship, or more doctrinaire than the historian, who assumes that he can know the past as it actually has been? Not necessarily. He may conceivably view the structure of classes, their ideologies, formulas, projects, and conflicts as coldly and impartially as any disciple of Ranke that the American Historical Association has furnished.

Did the economic interpretation of history, as Mr. Smith alleges, have "its origin, of course, in the Marxian theories"? I cannot speak for others, but so far as I am concerned, my conception of the economic interpretation of history rests upon documentation older than Karl Marx—Number X of the *Federalist*, the writings of the Fathers of the Republic, the works of Daniel Webster, the treatises of Locke, Hobbes, and Machiavelli, and the *Politics* of Aristotle—as well as the writings of Marx himself.

Yet I freely pay tribute to the amazing range of Marx's scholarship and the penetrating character of his thought. It may be appropriate to remind those who may be inclined to treat Marx as a mere revolutionary or hot partisan that he was more than that. He was a doctor of philosophy from a German university, possessing the hallmark of the scholar. He was a student of Greek and Latin learning. He read, besides German, his native tongue, Greek, Latin, French, English, Italian, and Russian. He was widely read in contemporary history and economic thought. Hence, however much one may dislike Marx's personal views, one cannot deny to him wide and deep knowledge—and a fearless and sacrificial life. He not only interpreted history, as everyone does who writes any history, but he helped to make history. Possibly he may have known something. At least the contemporary student, trying to look coldly and impartially on thought and thinkers in the field of historiography, may learn a little bit, at least, from Karl Marx.

But that does not mean that any economic interpretation of history must be used for the purposes which Marx set before himself. It may well be used for opposite purposes. It has been. It may be again. Or it may be employed as the basis for impartiality and inaction on the ground that a conflict of mere material interests cannot be a matter of concern to virtue itself. In other words there is nothing in the nature of an economic interpretation of history that compels the interpreter to take any partisan or doctrinaire view of the struggle of interests. In fact such an interpretation of the Constitution is less liable to invite a surge of feeling than Mr. Smith's interpretation that the formation and adoption of the Constitution was "a contest between sections ending in the victory of straight-thinking national-minded men over narrower and

more local opponents". An economic interpretation does not inquire whether men were straight-thinking or crooked-thinking. It inquires not into their powers of mind or virtues, but into the nature and effects of their substantial possessions. Nor is it necessarily in conflict with Mr. Smith's conclusions. It pushes the inquiry one step further than he does. It asks how it happened that some men were national-minded and others were local-minded, and perhaps throws some light upon the subject.

What conclusions, then, may be drawn from this excursion, hurried and cursory, into historiography, for members of the American Historical Association? In my opinion, they are as follows: The formula of Ranke and its extension as Historicism do not and have never formed an official creed for the Association. From Andrew D. White down to the present moment there have been members who have believed that the wider and deeper philosophic questions involved in the interpretation of history should be considered as having an importance equal to, if not greater than, the consideration of documentation, special studies, and writings done on the assumption that history "*wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*" can be known and expounded by historians. The Ranke formula and Historicism are not the official creed of the Association and ought not to be, for they now lie amid the ruins of their own defeat. Nor are the other creeds placed in antithesis to the "noble dream" by Mr. Smith deemed official. They should not be. No school that makes pretensions to exclusive omniscience or exclusive virtue, that claims to know history as it actually was can long escape the corroding skepticism that search and thought bring to it. It is undesirable to invite the Association to split over two absolutes. It is not necessary for any member, fraction, or group, however large or small, to feel that a war to the hilt is on and that the one or the other must go down with, or without, "flying colors".

The task before the American Historical Association seems to be something other than that of deepening a division artificially made. The collection, preservation, and publication of archives must be carried on with ever increasing zeal. All the engines of criticism, authentication, and verification, so vigorously used by the German school, must be employed with all the powers of intelligence available. Monographic studies must be promoted. But this is not enough.

The philosophic side of historiography, as Andrew D. White warned the Association, must also receive the consideration required for all constructive work in historical writing. The effort to grasp at the totality

of history must and will be continued, even though the dream of bringing it to earth must be abandoned. This means a widening of the range of search beyond politics to include interests hitherto neglected—economic, racial, sex, and cultural in the most general sense of the term. Certainly by this broadening process the scholar will come nearer to the actuality of history as it has been. The distinction between particular facts that may be established by the scientific method and the “objective” truth of history must be maintained, if illusions are to be dispelled.

Still more pressing, because so generally neglected, is the task of exploring the assumptions upon which the selection and organization of historical facts proceed. In the nature of things they proceed upon some assumptions concerning the substance of history as actuality. We do not acquire the colorless, neutral mind by declaring our intention to do so. Rather do we clarify the mind by admitting its cultural interests and patterns—interests and patterns that will control, or intrude upon, the selection and organization of historical materials. Under what formulas is it possible to conceive history? What types of controlling patterns are to be found in the declarations of historical writers, in the diverse opinions of the world at large, and in the works of historians already before us? Instead of waging a war, followed by victory or defeat, we need to provide for the Association’s annual meetings a section or sections dealing with the assumptions and procedures of historiography. What do we think we are doing when we are writing history? What kinds of philosophies or interpretations are open to us? Which interpretations are actually chosen and practiced? And why? By what methods or processes can we hope to bring the multitudinous and bewildering facts of history into any coherent and meaningful whole? Through the discussion of such questions the noble dream of the search for truth may be brought nearer to realization, not extinguished; but in the end the members of the American Historical Association will be human beings, not immortal gods.

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#### AN EFFORT TO IDENTIFY JOHN WHITE

IN observing the three hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the first English colony within the limits of what is now the United States, the question of the identity of John White once more arises. He appears in the pageant of American history about the year 1584, slips off the stage nine years later, and apparently vanishes. Whence he came,