

Richard Tupper

Introduction.

If a man writes a book, especially a book about some historical character, there are at least two things that should be made clear to his readers. First, why he writes; second, what authority or authorities he has for the statements that he makes. For at the best, when a man writes history, seeing that he cannot leap backward in time, his work is a kind of sifting process, a task that involves much comparing and rejecting, selecting and weighing, enlarging and narrowing, according to his ^{superior} first-hand knowledge, or according to some special light he may have gained by close study in the effort to get at foundation truths. Now Mr. Black is in the position of a man who saw a growing belief that struck him as peculiar, perhaps inaccurate, and decided that now or never was the time to clinch matters, before the last actors disappeared from the scene. So he went to work, saw straight, and set down without any trimmings what he saw and what he heard. And having seen, he brought a judicial mind to the weighing and sifting process.

When you come to consider, what is known as history must necessarily be a mass of inaccuracies, what with that unfortunate habit we all have of giving a cap and a stick to a plain tale before sending it on its way. When I say that, I have in mind other unfortunate habits; the habit of idealizing not only those who achieve greatness or fame, but also those with the criminal tendency, by which characters presently appear theatrical and insincerely posed, sometimes misshapen, always super-normal or sub-normal; also that other trick of sickly sensationalism which distorts matters according to sectional or national or class view points so that some idolize the slayer and others the slain; also that trick of brute lying whether the lying be done around the winter stove of a cross-roads grocery, in the administrative office of some newspaper whose aim seems to be little more than the providing of ~~the~~ readers some new sort of mental dissipation, or in exalted places where those in power distort for diplomatic or political reasons; in short, there are so many springs of inaccuracy, more or less potent, that it is folly to attempt to list them. At any rate because of them, much of what is called history comes very, very close to fiction.

I spoke of bias, national and sectional, and had in mind the remark of one of my sons who exclaimed at the different view points gained from school histories as used in the north and the south, especially in the period of the Civil war. And another thing was in my mind. It was the ^{recent} receipt of a letter from a lady who is very active in southern patriotic societies, whose novels have approached the best-selling class; in that letter she wrote that the slayer of Lincoln was not killed, as some of us hold, but lived to a ripe old age. That belief is not uncommon in the southern states, for that heroes or semi-heroes die like ordinary men is hard to believe, apparently. Thus Kitchener, and Parnell, and Lenin, and Oscar Wilde were all reported to be living after their deaths. But with the belief in Booth's walking the earth under another name went another that the slayer was a high-souled enthusiast and patriot who carried out his plan with logical consistency and who has not received justice at the hands of historians.

Now observe, the lady was no amateur. She had studied Lincoln material closely, for the most of her books had to do with that character. To be sure, because of force of numbers opposed to her view, the opinion she held might be set aside as not worth serious consideration. But then majorities hardly count, accepting as they do what is told them openmouthed and without question. And to hold a statement to be true because it is widely believed, is, to say the least dangerous. For example, as a boy, like countless thousands of others of my age, ~~ixgrrrx~~ accepting things taught by well meaning but inaccurate history teachers, I grew up holding Samuel Adams in high esteem as a man of rectitude, of motive, of delicacy of ~~xxxxxx~~ responsibility, and it came to me with a shock when I read, in Hosmer's Life of ^{Samuel} Adams that he was a ~~xxxxxx~~ careless and rather thriftless malster, short in his accounts as tax-collector, and, in spite of his fiery eloquence, not at all the sort of man I would hail as hero. Nor did I suspect that the early patriots were given to tarring and feathering, putting their opponents into rooms in which there was a fire on the hearth and then stopping up the chimney, stoning suspected people, to leave unmentioned other acts of hooliganism, all of which you may verify for yourselves if you will take the trouble to go through the American Archives, fourth series. Nor was there any hint that the

patriots were so barbarous, so unjust and unfair, that John Adams exclaimed against those on his own side, in a letter to his wife, saying: "A mind susceptible of the feelings of humanity, a heart which can be touched with sensibility for human misery and wretchedness must relent, must burn with resentment at such outrageous injuries." (John Adams' Familiar Letters to His Wife, page 20.) That was written when Richard King, seeking legal redress against the mob, was assailed, had his property and books and papers destroyed by patriots disguised as Indians. And every student of American literature knows how James Rivington, the publicist, was treated and how for his life's sake he had to flee to a war ship. Or coming to more recent times, we recall statements made in the United States Senate by the Hon. R. F. Pettigrew of South Dakota, having to do with water cures, whipping torments, sun punishments and other atrocities in connection with the Phillipine campaign, all of which were kept out of history books. So it would seem that we are as busy as ever in distortion and falsification and the manufacture of inaccuracies, and are leaving enough to occupy the minds and engage the activities of posterity.

It is into one of those tangles that Mr. Black has plunged, setting himself to thoroughly investigate one little incident in history, though not for a moment suspecting the ramifications that he found. But once suspecting them he rolled up his sleeves and went to work. His authorities were everything and anything. He went wherever there was a clue, read every possible piece of printed matter and looked at every get-at-able photograph. He visited places and took measurements, and, incidentally collected a vast amount of material. On all that he brought to bear an admirably trained intellect, and, as a side issue he gave careful consideration to Booth's motives. As a result, he came to question the slayer's sanity, Not that Booth was a raving lunatic, shouting and tearing and smashing and foaming at the mouth - had he been that he would have been less dangerous. But he was on the border line, one of those fellows of supreme egotism playing the part of reformer, as also was Guiteau who killed Garfield, and Czolgosz who slew McKinley.

From that mass of information Mr. Black has selected that which is salient, expanding considerably, though by no means

unnecessarily the story that appeared serially in the Dearborn Independent. That the book is one of special interest is true, therefore it can expect no ~~sky~~ rocket career. But other books of special interest, lightly regarded in their time of publication have been found tremendously valuable by posterity as supplying definite starting points for later investigators and students - the Saewulf record for instance, or Holinshed's England, or Sewall's diaries. For the essential qualities in all of them were truth and accuracy and painstaking investigation, which qualities are most certainly in the present volume. And in the writers named there was sound commonsense which meant not only a collection of facts, but a scientific ~~presentation~~ ~~xxxx~~ habit of mind in the presentation of them. Mr Black's work commends itself to me because of evidence of those very qualities.

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