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Comment

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Comment by the Editor

BIOGRAPHY

Biography is history in the singular. Yet history, though it is based upon biography, is not the plural of it. Biography is perpendicular; while formal history is horizontal and cuts athwart the lives of men and women, destroying the continuity of their careers. Any chronicle of events deforms biography, for the character and deeds of people are distorted when displayed only in glimpses amidst distracting scenes upon a crowded stage. History is apt to make puppets of men to do the bidding of cause and effect.

In another sense biography may be conceived as the soil from which civilization has sprung. Since every human achievement has been rooted in the life of some man or woman, every idea, no matter how abstract or general, has been ultimately personal. Religion and government result from the action of personality upon the relations of God and man. The most amazing discovery of science is after all only the creature of someone's intellect. And what is art but the expression of the soul of the artist?

The charm of personality is what gives biography its perennial appeal. It is not so much what a man does as what he is that perpetuates his memory.

Character is the immortal element in any human life.

To portray the spirit of the subject truly is the height of biographical achievement. It is not necessary to embalm a man's career in several volumes: a vivid portrait may be sketched with a few illuminating anecdotes and a clear analysis of character. Vitality is essential to pen portraiture. If biography is to attain its proper place in literature, let biographers take heed of the consummate skill of the writers of fiction who make their heroes live.

J. E. B.