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Comment

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Comment by the Editor

THE ELEMENTS OF HISTORY

History is a marvelous fabric of human affairs woven from the records of the past. People and places and time furnish the substance of which it is made. No one of the elements by itself is sufficient; but, combined with the others to constitute the warp or woof of the cloth of life, each tells its share of the story.

Human experience is the vital part of history. Except for the thoughts and deeds of man, time would have little significance; for the measure of time is the duration of life and the rate of its flight depends on a person's achievement.

A day to childhood seems a year,
And years like passing ages.

Locality, too, without people is only a spatial abstraction, just as sound without ears to interpret is no more than ethereal vibration.

In history, nevertheless, events should have locality and date. Answers to the questions when and where are quite as pertinent as statements telling who. The factors of time and place contribute certainty and lend perspective to the hopes and fears, the thoughts and acts of humankind throughout the ages everywhere.

The design of any historical fabric depends on the weaver. With the threads of fact he can fashion the pattern however he pleases. It is all a matter of emphasis. In biography the dominant element is the career of a person, though the dates of his life and his place of abode are also presented. History may also be written from the viewpoint of place. Such are the records of land titles and the annals of cities or counties or States — like the exploits of generations of people depicted on a single tapestry. So, too, the story of a day or a month or a year might be told, involving men and women at the ends of the earth and unified by time.

THE FACTOR OF TIME

In the writing of history the factor of time is very important, although not always prominent. It is the warp upon which is woven the woof of people and places. Beneath the surface of appearances can be found that all-pervading, ever-present element of time, binding into proper sequence and relation the portrayal of human traits and actions.

People may differ in race and culture and creed, while places are as varied as nature can make them, but under every sky and in every land that silent, illimitable thing called time remains the same. It is universal. The present instant is simultaneous throughout the world, and passing, joins the common heritage of the past.

Time is a permanent element — the fixed factor of

history. Viewpoints may change, conditions may vary, new facts may be found, and even the actors may shift in the scenes, but the dates remain unaltered. It is fitting that time should be the distinctive feature of history. In the words of Austin Dobson:

Time goes, you say? Ah, no.
Alas, time stays; we go.

J. E. B.