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Comment

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Comment by the Editor

HISTORICAL ADJECTIVES

He who writes the history of his own times should be temperate in the use of adjectives. Not that such a useful part of speech should be proscribed entirely, but merely confined to the positive and comparative degrees. The superlative is likely to make a rare herb out of a common weed, or convert a private achievement into a national triumph. Words like first and last, local and universal, best and worst, forever and never have no place in a true chronicle, for they will be proved false by the next generation.

Contemporary events assume an importance of the moment far beyond their permanent significance. When people were buying a million bicycles a year during the hard times of the nineties, some writers hazarded the opinion that horses would soon disappear from the highways, that public health would improve, and that standards of morality would be distinctly elevated. What was at first supposed to be a popular fad promised to become a prominent factor in the economic system. Time-honored industries, like sewing machine and carriage works, were transformed into

bicycle factories. While the saloon-keepers complained about the decline of liquor sales, a preacher, confronted by empty pews, suspected that certain members of his congregation were coasting downhill to a "place where there is no mud on the streets because of the high temperature." In their enthusiasm for bicycle riding, men neglected to go to the barber, and so that business suffered because a shave omitted for a day is lost forever.

A close view of events, no less than of persons, is apt to magnify some of the features. Many of the observations concerning the social and economic consequences of bicycling were greatly exaggerated. The superlatives of the nineties have diminished in the perspective of higher powered times.

J. E. B.