

HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

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Historical evidence by H. B. George

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H. B. GEORGE

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EVIDENCE**

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HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

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PREFACE

THERE are elaborate books on historical method in various languages ; but so far as I know there are none which sum up shortly the different sources of historical information, and the principles that should guide the inquirer in estimating their evidential value, first as enabling him to ascertain the facts, and secondly as guiding him in making the inferences reasonably deducible from those facts. I have endeavoured to do this as briefly as possible, and with no more illustrations than seem necessary to make the principles clear. I have carefully avoided expressing opinions on disputed historical questions, because I think that one great merit of historical study is that it trains men to compare more or less discrepant statements, and to draw their own conclusions, confident or hesitating according to their estimate of the evidence.

H. B. G.

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Chief fields of evidence:		
Law, Science, History.		
Law, its business being to settle disputes, lays down rules.		
Science and History, seeking to ascertain truth, can accept any testimony, <i>quantum valeat</i> , and form tentative judgements.		
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CHAPTER I

WHAT IS EVIDENCE ?

ALL the world reads, or is supposed to read, more or less of history, partly in order to get some idea how the political and social conditions of the world as we know it have grown up, more perhaps for the aesthetic and moral interest attaching to great men and great events. Even for the sake of this superficial acquaintance with the past, it is worth while to inquire by what means history is constructed. The most casual reader can hardly fail to notice that there is sure to be more or less of discrepancy between any two narratives of the same events, differences perhaps in the statement of facts, certainly in estimates of character : and it is neither difficult nor unprofitable to discover why this so frequently happens. Those who take history more in earnest, studying it for the sake of the mental training derivable from it, *a fortiori* those who aspire to extend the boundaries of historical learning, will fail of their purpose unless they begin by realizing what historical knowledge is, whence it is derived, and how far it differs from other branches of human knowledge.