

**OF HIMSELF AND
OTHER THINGS**

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Of Himself and Other Things by James H. Baker

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UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

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PREFATORY NOTE.

This volume contains the writer's history especially as related to educational influences, his experiences with high school and university, and his connection with certain important movements for reform in school and college. It includes views in the field of education, politics, and philosophy, thoughts on current events, and opinions on world reconstruction. The apology for the venture is found in the introduction. The "personal tributes", taken from "Appreciation of Services" issued by the Regents of the University of Colorado in 1914, would be omitted, were the book offered to the public; but, since it is privately printed for a limited distribution, this matter is included as an Appendix. It simply "completes the record," as might properly be done were the biography written by another hand. In this personal review certain ideas are frankly repeated, and some characteristic things in previous writings are reproduced as classified extracts. Call them dried specimens together with an aftermath of the first crop.

The University Club,
Denver, Colorado,
October 13, 1922.

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I INTRODUCTION.

Why?

"Bill Nye" used a favorite anecdote in his public entertainments. He had a dog that in his ramblings came across a pail of plaster of paris of the right consistency for immediate use. He thought it edible and inviting, and, since he had never seen any before, he ate a good deal. The result was "a plaster impression of himself, taken by himself, from an interior view". It may be that no biography is complete without the interior as well as the exterior view. If "a different universe walks under your hat and mine", universe A may wish to contribute to B's possible interpretation of A. It may be presumptuous to suppose that B considers the matter worth while or even thinks about it at all, and only a great man can proclaim, like Sam Johnson, that he would prevent the writing of his life by taking the life of the suspected biographer. If a man writes his life himself, he thereby, as it were, takes his life in his hands. Why write it, unless you have a history undoubtedly worth recording? is a natural question. But minor values may be worthy of a degree and extent of interest. A memorandum of events and thoughts, made by some humble ancestor, is treasured in the family. A somewhat noteworthy career reaches a larger circle. The genius commands wide interest.

Comment

If biography were limited to the "great men I have met" or personal touch with political movements, to discoveries in science or creative thinking in philosophy, to reflections of literary or poetic genius, the defendant could offer little evidence and the verdict would favor the possible reader. We would turn only to the Williams the Silent, the Huxleys, and the Tennysons for the interest, insight, and influence which biography offers. If a life has led to nothing but disappointments and disillusionments and baffled hopes, to despair at the closed door of undiscovered truth, and to sweeping pessimism, however great may have been the man's opportunities and extent of acquaintance, his distinction of birth and position, it should never be recorded. Surprise and regret followed Tennyson's "Sixty Years After", because the faith and hope of youth had not reappeared in the setting sun. A recent autobiography disappoints, spite of its original quality, because of its monotonous minor key. Longfellow's "Morituri Salutamus" and "Aftermath", for their sweeter tone, are in grateful contrast.

An Answer

In advancing years, one may yield to pessimism, or fall into indifference, or write belated poetry, or become actively reminiscent. The first alternative is hopeless, the second deadly, the third futile. The last has the virtue of encouraging mental longevity, and of giving