

# **SOCIAL HISTORIANS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649374670

Social historians by Harry Aubrey Toulmin

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**HARRY AUBREY TOULMIN**

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HISTORIANS**



# SOCIAL HISTORIANS

BY

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

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RICHARD G. BADGER

THE GORHAM PRESS

BOSTON

TO  
MY MOTHER AND FATHER  
THIS BOOK IS  
AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

## INTRODUCTION

**T**HE South with its romance, first, of political power and, then, of defeat and sorrow has always attracted attention, but never more so than now when to its unique and absorbing history it has added a marvelous resiliency and a regnant optimism. It seems now on the eve of unprecedented prosperity. Coincident with this good fortune of slow but assured growth, there has come an unexpected and surprising political upheaval that has suddenly thrust Southern men, and specifically University of Virginia men, into conspicuous leadership and power. Our interest, therefore, inevitably and instinctively turns from the past with its determined record to the immediate future with its unusual opportunities and unsolved problems. "What will the South do with them?" is the question uttered or unformulated;

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and to this question, the answer not of conjecture but of fact is anxiously awaited.

While we wait we are not remiss in inquiring into the recent history of the South and especially into its social upheavals and readjustments and its present condition. Of these things history has comparatively little to say ; for history delays until the passage of time shall have thrown into clear relief the life it records. By that time the events of significance have become separated from the conditions that made them possible and seen in perspective are so prominent and important that they alone seem worthy of preservation. It is for this reason that we constantly revert to contemporary letters and diaries and biographies and, especially, fiction for the right revelation of the social and domestic life of the people.

But success in giving a true value to this intimate, personal, and moulding element of our literature depends, in the last analysis, upon the knowledge and sympathy of these writers. This knowledge and sympathy must not be the result of a detached and objective study; however con-



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trolled this may be by calm and even justice or however directed to a right understanding. On the contrary any true picture must come from intimate knowledge and sympathy based upon personal experience and long associations. In so far as writers are the legitimate spokesmen for their people, in so far are they protected from misrepresentations and authorized to speak without any reserve save that dictated by good taste.

But there is at least one other requirement for writers who essay interpretations of life in a community or section, or, for that matter, any interpretation at all, and that is that besides being intelligent and appreciative they must be skillful in utterance.

It would, indeed, be difficult to find a group of writers more fully meeting these conditions than these "Social Historians" as they are aptly called by Mr. Toulmin. They are all writers of keen and penetrating intelligence, and of distinct and noteworthy ability and talent. With possibly one exception, they are intimately sympathetic and frankly appreciative in their work. Their

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writings are none the less sound and reliable because fascinating in literary structure and finish; and from them may readily be had a true and adequate picture of the life they so skillfully portray.

Moreover the South is so imperial in its territorial sweep that there is little overlapping in the regions or classes covered by these writers. On the contrary they supplement one another, though all of them together do not fully represent this whole section. They are, however, thoroughly representative in character and afford abundant material for sound conclusions. The judgments of Mr. Toulmin may not always be accepted in full, but they are based on first-hand consideration of the books under discussion and supported by well-grounded reasons.

It is a source of great pride and pleasure that our young men are becoming more and more interested in our American writers, and that out of our colleges and universities are coming intelligent and enthusiastic students of present-day conditions and literature. Mr. Toulmin, at present a student

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in the University of Virginia, has commended himself by his maturity of thought, force of intellect, and earnest interest in the things of the mind. Though he has elected to follow an exacting profession, the Law, he may yet achieve in the realm of literary criticism that larger success of which this first volume is a promise and prediction.

CHARLES W. KENT.

April 13th, 1911.