

COMMENTS ON THE DEATH OF ISRAEL SMITH CLARE (Historian)

By Hon. A. G. Seifert

It seems to me proper and fitting that we devote a few minutes of tonight's meeting to the character and writings of Lancaster County's foremost world historian whose remains were laid to rest in the narrow tenement of the dead the other day.

I am not aware that Israel Smith Clare was ever a member of this society or that he at any time wrote any history for publication in our historical pamphlets.

As a writer of World history he has, however, given his native county a pre-eminent name that is an honor to this society in general and to the county in particular.

I had known Mr. Clare for more than fifty years. I only knew him in a general way and not intimately until six years ago. Since that time I had occasion to come in daily contact with him and learned to know him better than many others.

During this period his environments were such that he cared but little to converse with any but those who thought along the same line as he did. Current events and the World's history of the past were ever uppermost in his mind.

Israel Smith Clare had a unique somewhat eccentric one-track mind. His reading and remembrance of what he read was a compilation of historical events from the dawn of the World's recorded time. What he read stuck to his tenacious memory and when he started to write history he had dates, causes, events and details at his command that amazes the reader, so it seems almost improbable that a human brain could contain so much of world events. He had a distinct style of his own in diction. It was clear and concise. His facts were marshalled in chronological order so the reader was never lost in evolved sentences that were meaningless to the ordinary reader. He knew but little of anything but history and the causes that led up to the event. Nor did he care for anything else. His whole world was history. The human race was his stage and the actors, the nations of the World. With these he played in relating what each did or tried to do. He saw the whole panorama and painted word pictures of the rise and fall of kings, queens and empires. He dealt with events and facts in a deliberate unromantic way. He had none of the charming romance of a Parkman or verbosity of a Macaulay.

Some of his writings that are not so well known to many of us, though local as they are, you will find in the "Rostrum" a monthly magazine founded by Clare and Whitson in 1901 and published for eleven months, when for want of financial support, it was discontinued. "Queen Victoria and King Edward VII, by Clare, was the first number's leading article. The Queen's death inspired him to write it and it is one of the best short histories published at the time of the Victorian age.

"Russia the Marplot and Oppressor" is another of Mr. Clare's productions that contains not only history but is a real literary master-piece of interest of the once great and mysterious Russian empire.

"The Panama Canal", "The Birth of the Constitution" and "The British and Dutch in South Africa." These five subjects are all from the pen of Mr. Clare and are the leading articles in the eleven numbers of the "Rostrum." Four of these topics were prominent events at the time and in no other publication did I find a better exposition of the great world problems of the first year of the present century.

His monumental, "Universal World History" in fifteen volumes is undoubtedly his greatest work and has given him his greatest fame. One word on his tombstone beside his name should be his epitaph: "Historian."

A human life born in obscurity with but limited opportunities for an economic or literary success in the battle of life is one of destiny and but

little understood. Mr. Clare was a specialist in history. He achieved fame as an historian but he left this world with no more than what he brought into it, from a material viewpoint. He went the way of the common lot of earlier great writers whose names are those of the best we have in literature. They suffered privations, comforts and the necessaries of life. Some of them died an early death because they starved themselves so that what they wrote might live after them.

Our friend Clare was hungry many a day for he had not a penny to buy bread. Yet, when the end came as a patient of charity, the press of the State gave him more space on the front page than the richest man or woman that passed to the Great Beyond from this country. Why? Because there are higher and better things in this life than money. The worth of human nature appreciates that fact when it forgets the selfish, sordid, mercenary things that perish. Honor and Fame will live when the material affairs are no more.

Mr. Clare lived much of his time little better than a tramp. He died like a pauper and was buried like a Prince, for his friends honored him more for his wonderful talents that made the World richer in literature and history. He left the World in the same way that he came into it seventy-seven years ago; with nothing.

Peace to his ashes.

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