

SOAR Curricular Material #13

History in the Making (April 1917—Original version)

We are living in an age when much is made of the study of history. The several schools clash here as in other fields—when methods and rules of procedure are discussed—but now such controversies have fallen into the background. Today a world movement is taking place which takes precedence over all other incidents in past ages. Considered only as a war in its immediate physical aspects, the European conflict is most amazing display of all time. All past wars are in significant dimensions compared with this. The efforts of the Roman empire look like mountain feuds, and the grand army of Napoleon appears no greater than a puny regiment of high school cadets, when compared to the gigantic war which is being waged across the waters, and which has now crept into this land also. But what means this unprecedented display of military prowess? Can our historians explain all? As soon as men recovered from the blow of astonishment, the country was flooded with explanations, which do not explain. Men profoundly long for, but have by no means attained, to a full understanding of the underlying causes. We are still groping in the darkness, and until a full light is thrown upon the news which we receive, mistakes are bound to be made. Here is an unrivalled opportunity for those who study history. We are dealing with the world's greatest movement and men who understand wide-reaching causes will be needed to present an adequate explanation. It is true that history is usually not fully written up until ages after the period under consideration, still, here is the opportunity for an exception to that rule. Yet when we look at the facts we can decide nothing, we can draw no certain conclusions. We cannot even ascertain entirely whether the events were the effect of purely individualistic causes or of purely economic causes, and we cannot ally ourselves with any of the schools which so confidently explain history up to our time. After we have studied for any length of time we may be just as bewildered as in the beginning. The full and true account of the causes of this war may not be obtained for decades yet, but meantime, it is quite profitable and most absorbing to study history in the making.

~~E.W.S.

Document-Based Questions

- 1) What is the main idea of this passage?
- 2) Who is the audience of this piece?
- 3) What is the purpose of this excerpt? (to inform, persuade, entertain, etc.?)
- 4) What are some of the implications in history that make it difficult to determine the actual cause of the conflict in Europe according to the author?
- 5) What is the significance of the title to this piece? How does it fit in relation to the excerpt?