It is a fitting introduction to the following pages of history and reminiscence to say something of the life and career of Charles Cochran Oakey, whose sudden death on March 17, 1908, seemed an untimely termination to the existence of one of the kindliest men that Terre Haute has known. Through these pages he has passed in review many of the men and women of the past century, and with his observations and comments has always mingled a kindliness and breadth of view that are reflections of his own character. He discusses men and events with a calmness and freedom from narrow prejudice that few men attain.

Mr. Oakey had lived in Terre Haute nearly half a century, and came to know the town and its people in a way that no one else did. He knew individuals closely enough to estimate characters, he was familiar with the streets and environments of homes and business places to a degree that enabled him to picture such scenes with his pen, and his knowledge of thousands of events and curious and interesting incidents enabled him to lend charm and variety to every item of narration and description that he attempted. His studies into the past caused him to see accurately and intimately the old town of Terre Haute while it depended for its commercial prosperity on the river and canal and the National road, and the splendid men of that time rose before his eyes as he described them. To the writer of this brief memoir it seems that Mr. Oakey has succeeded in that very difficult task of reproducing the scenes of the past with their proper atmosphere.

Mr. Oakey had been engaged in the preparation of material for this History of Terre Haute and Vigo County since the summer of 1907. As a matter of fact, he had been collecting data of a local historical nature for years, and it was one of his cherished purposes to complete a work of this nature. A few days before his death Mr. Oakey had given to the public press a statement concerning the history, which it seems proper to repeat in this connection, as being in the nature of an author's foreword.
PREFACE.

"In the historical part of this work," the author explained, "it is designed to cover the early history of the county and city in a fresh and attractive way, with such portions of the early history of Indiana and of the Indian period and the geological as have a connection with the genesis of Terre Haute. The unique incidents of its early life, and the rise of the institutions which gave Terre Haute its great start—such as the National road, the Wabash and Erie canal, and the old State banking system—will be treated as interesting and necessary stories.

"Sketches of individuals of former interest will be given more fully than has yet been done, and a full view of Terre Haute in war times will be attempted. The early bankers, doctors, lawyers and merchants, the churches, schools and manufactures need, and will receive, more attention, and surely the city, which loved fine horses seventy-five years ago, ought to give a chapter to the great horses and famous drivers who have been known here during the last thirty-five or forty years. It will be interesting to show that the old town never was French, that it did not get its name from a bluff, and where the majority of the founders came from; how the Quakers, southerners and northerners jostled each other at the beginning. But there is a great deal of interest in the old town and a great deal that has happened in the new town since the war."

In addition to the historical part prepared by Mr. Oakey, the biographical part of the two volumes, embracing biographical sketches of hundreds of the best known people of the county and city, which will necessarily include mention and details of the early families to be found nowhere else, will be of great value and interest.

In one of his entertaining sketches of men and incidents of war times, Mr. Oakey has told something about his father, James Oakey, and his ancestry. Charles C. Oakey was born in Knox county, Illinois, in 1845, but received his early training and education in Philadelphia, where was the family home from his early boyhood. A youth of sixteen, he came to Terre Haute in 1861, and therefore was an observer of the war times which he describes. He began a business career, and for many years was in the dry-goods business, being proprietor of the store which has since grown into the Root Dry Goods Company. However his delight in describing men and events, in telling through the public prints the things he saw better than other men, early led him into the field of newspaper writing. For many years he was editor of the Terre Haute Express, and was editorial writer for its successor, the Star, and then for the Tribune. The personal charm and character of the man pervaded his writings, and many have noted with regret the absence of his editorials. A truthful and merited tribute was paid him by the local press in saying that "His loss is felt by a host of friends, for every one who came in touch with the man knew
that he had met some one who could be depended on. His integrity was unquestioned, for honesty seemed rooted in every fiber of his being.” One of Mr. Oakey’s interests in the city was as promoter and an official of the Terre Haute Fair and Trotting Association.

Mr. Oakey married in 1868 Mrs. Sarah Wood Edsall, who survives, with two daughters, Mrs. Cornelia Edsall Benjamin and Miss Isabelle Ogden Oakey. His family life was ideal, and it is by the intimate associations of home and personal friendships that he bound his life in the memory and affection of others. For many years he had been an official of the First Congregational church, which he joined during the pastorate of Lyman Abbott.