

IN CASE OF MISFORTUNE

SINCE there are now special "dictionaries" concerned with nearly all important subjects, ought there not to be a "dictionary of misfortune"? It would doubtless be a dreary volume, but since misfortune, great or small, is an experience which overtakes all human beings at one time or another—indeed, there are many who regard their lives as one long misfortune—some sort of catalog of the inevitable might be useful if depressing reading.

It should not be a grim recital of the categories of misfortune, but a collection of fragments of autobiographies, telling the story of what has happened to particular people, and, more important, how the victims received and regarded their fate. We defend this idea, even if we stand convicted of shamelessly "negative thinking," on the ground that the most important test of a philosophy of life may well be its bearing on misfortune. At any rate, a philosophy which takes no serious account of misfortune is not a philosophy at all, but a collection of platitudes.

But how, in the first place, ought misfortune to be defined? Death is often said to be the greatest of misfortunes. This is arguable, but allowing the claim for a moment, is it always the same sort of misfortune? A man may suffer death for having too few principles, as in the case of a murderer; or he may be executed for having too many, as happened to Socrates. The murderer usually displays the standard reaction to the prospect of death: he fears it greatly and longs to escape. Socrates, on the other hand, while not exactly welcoming his death, did nothing to prevent it. It did not seem very much of a misfortune to him.

Misfortune, then, is in some measure the result of human attitudes. When what we fear or regard as evil comes to us, we suffer misfortune.

If we feared nothing and saw evil in no events (this latter is practically unimaginable), we could not experience misfortune. This approximates the Stoic point of view. As Marcus Aurelius put it:

If thou art pained by any external thing, it is not this thing that disturbs thee, but thy own judgment about it. And it is in thy power to wipe out this judgment now. But if anything in thy own disposition gives thee pain, who hinders thee from correcting thy opinion? And even if thou art pained because thou art not doing some particular thing which seems to thee to be right, why dost thou not rather act than complain? But some insuperable obstacle is in the way? Do not be grieved then, for the cause of its not being done depends not upon thee. But it is not worth while to live, if this cannot be done? Take thy departure then from life contentedly, just as he does who is in full activity, and well pleased too with the things which are obstacles.

Marcus must have been a great and wise man, for how else could he have been content with this? Suppose you have lost the funds set aside for your child's education gambling on the stock exchange? Or suppose you find yourself saddled with responsibilities you do not feel equal to, or are not naturally your own, yet must carry them out—and, in doing this inadequately, bring unhappiness to yourself and to others?

Or suppose, at the end of a long career of usefulness, you are endangered by, and finally suffer, public disgrace? That is what happened to Ferdinand de Lesseps, the eminent French engineer who, after winning world-wide fame by building the Suez Canal, lost both his fortune and his reputation when the five directors of the Panama Canal project, of whom de Lesseps and his son were two, were convicted of breach of trust and sentenced to five years' imprisonment. Although the sentence was quashed, the old engineer fell into dotage and died. Guilty or innocent, what can help a man to understand misfortune of this dimension?

There are really two problems, here. One is represented in immediate response to misfortune. How shall we *feel* toward it; or rather, how *ought* we to feel toward it, even though we are unable to do so?

It sounds pretty futile to talk about how a man "ought" to feel in regard to misfortune or anything else. Feelings have a way of confounding good intentions. One could argue that Marcus Aurelius has set us a splendid example, but we are not Marcus Aurelius, and, as many might honestly add after reading his book, don't want to be.

The trouble is, a man can't be indifferent to misfortune without being indifferent to a lot of things that most people like very much. In inviting attention to the question of human distinction, for example, Marcus exclaims, "How many pleasures have been enjoyed by robbers, patricides, tyrants!" In other words, do your tastes run to things that robbers, patricides, and tyrants are capable of enjoying, or do you get your enjoyment at another level?

Well, the problem of response to misfortune seems to be just about where Socrates and the Stoics left it, two thousand and more years ago. You can reduce your sufferings from misfortune only by reducing your attachments. This, as Paul Hutchinson pointed out in his article for *Life* (on the "Cult of Reassurance"), is likely to be especially difficult for Americans, who are committed to "more abundant living" as a national philosophy. "Their [Americans'] minds," remarks the *Christian Century* editor, "simply will not harbor this fact that all success is dogged by failure. We Americans must succeed. We cannot approach life with any other expectation." Even if there is virtue in the determination involved, this is not the best state of mind with which to confront misfortune.

The second problem has to do with the *reason* for misfortunes. Some misfortunes have obvious explanations, but others do not. Tragic events overtake the best of people. Good parents

have children who bring them everlasting pain. Children are born into circumstances which blight their entire lives, and how can the little children be blamed?

So, in this area, which may be termed "mysterious" or "irrational" misfortune, we are up against a difficult choice. We can say that all misfortunes have an explanation, but we are able to understand only some of them. Or, we can say that some misfortunes have an explanation, but that others do not—that they just "happen," and that it is foolish to try to assign a cause; a cause, that is, beyond the immediate mechanical explanation of the event. Marcus Aurelius, however, was of that high faith which is content to believe that a meaning lies behind everything—even evil and disaster:

We are all working together to one end, some with knowledge and design, and others without knowing what they do; as men also when they are asleep, of whom it is Heraclitus, I think, who says that they are laborers and cooperators in the things which take place in the universe. But men cooperate after different fashions: and even those cooperate abundantly, who find fault with what happens and those who try to oppose it and to hinder it, for the universe has need even of such men as these. It remains then for thee to understand among what kind of workmen thou placest thyself. . . .

Marcus resists any effort to extract from him an explanation of irrational events—apparently uncaused misfortunes, or unearned punishments. He makes light of them, as unworthy of a philosopher's sorrow.

Perhaps he had a theory he would not explain. At any rate, we lesser mortals are bound to puzzle over the problems of irrational or mysterious misfortune, since what a man thinks about the causes of what happens to him may go a long way toward shaping his attitude in relation to all experience—pleasant or unpleasant, good or ill-fortune.

One thing seems evident: a philosopher like Marcus Aurelius, or a courageous lover of his fellows like Socrates or Gandhi is never found

claiming that the universe has been unjust to him. He seems to take for granted that what comes is coming to him. And whether we agree with him or not, whether we are prepared to adopt the same philosophy or not, we honor such a man in our hearts. His magnanimity *touches* us, and the feeling with which we respond to such behavior gives the lie to cynical comments about the prejudiced lot apportioned to human beings in this life. Perhaps we should listen a little more to our hearts, when seeking for first principles upon which to base a philosophy. The unmediated responses of human admiration, respect, and, on occasion, love, may carry the best evidence of what really hides in the human breast, and what we aspire to become, even when, with a world of misfortune before us, we plead that we can find no great meaning anywhere.

Letter from **JAPAN**

TOKYO.—An unfortunate issue which has been smouldering for some time, with occasional flare-ups, concerns the United States Security Forces bases in Japan.

Since the signing of the American-Japanese Security Treaty and the subsequent Administrative Agreement on its implementation, there has been a series of incidents involving the local inhabitants, the Japanese Government and the American Security Forces. The Administrative Agreement made provisions for military bases, maneuver areas and firing ranges, among other things.

Local inhabitants have protested against the moral degradation around the army camps, the destruction caused farm lands and forests by the deployment of troops, and the dangers involved in the firing of live ammunition. Several major protest rallies have been held during the past few years by the villagers concerned in many parts of the country. And they have invariably been spurred on by Communist and other leftist agitators dispatched to the scene.

It is a mistake to call these demonstrations signs of anti-Americanism in Japan. Aside from the professional agitators, the villagers themselves are not being moved by conflicting ideologies, nor do they have any feeling for or against the United States. In some cases, they took action to chase out their Communist "helpers." They are, however, deeply attached to bringing up their children in a healthy atmosphere and to the preservation of their farmlands, forests, national monuments and parks.

The American forces, for their part, have set up their bases, maneuver grounds and firing ranges in accordance with the spirit and letter of the administrative accord with the Japanese Government. They are naturally surprised at the resistance offered by the villagers.

The Japanese Government has generally been caught in the middle and has had the unpleasant task of calming down the irate villagers and of offering explanations to the American forces.

For one thing, the Administrative Agreement was drawn up in an extremely loose manner, leaving a wide range for varied interpretations. This was a result of the fact that Japan was still under physical and spiritual occupation when the agreement was negotiated and the Government was reluctant to take a strong stand. The use of firing ranges, for instance, is allowed upon the "coordination" between the local authorities and the U.S. military commander. The American forces have interpreted "coordination" to indicate merely an exchange of notes; the local authorities insist there must be a conference and an agreement reached.

What is basic to this unfortunate situation is that Japan is a small, overpopulated country. There just isn't the space for large scale maneuvers nor for long-range firing. And it is almost impossible to isolate the military bases away from the villages and towns. As an example, a crash of a U.S. military plane invariably causes destruction to farmlands or to farmhouses.

Two recent squabbles are over the firing of guns in the Mt. Fuji area, a region which abounds in national parks, national monuments and hiking trails, and the extension of an airfield which would cut a town into two parts.

Most Japanese have no argument over the presence of U.S. Security Forces or the establishment of military bases, since they are part of a treaty entered into by the United States and Japan. But they do realize that this is at best an unnatural situation and that it would be in the interests of Japanese-American friendship to see the present set-up dissolved. In the meantime, however, it is essential to have the Administrative Agreement tightened up as a means of avoiding misinterpretation and to lay the basis for a clear-cut understanding of the geographical and demographical conditions of the Japanese nation as well as of those parks, monuments and mountains which the people respect and revere.

JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT

REVIEW

"THE SUN, THE SEA AND TOMORROW"

FOR those who would like to reflect, for a time, upon issues different from those raised by A and H Bombs and man's general inhumanity to man, we offer a volume bearing the above title, by F. G. Walton Smith and Henry Chapin. Dr. Smith is regarded as one of the world's foremost marine biologists and oceanographers—he is founder and director of the University of Miami's Marine Laboratory. Henry Chapin, according to the publishers of *The Sun, the Sea and Tomorrow*, "is a historian who has made a particular study of the lore of the sea, both mythical and, in recent years, scientific."

Much of what Dr. Smith and Mr. Chapin have to say will come as frightening news to readers. However, when the authors report that the earth is definitely running out of familiar foodstuffs, and call attention to the relationship between this growing shortage and the alarming increase in the world's population—at the rate of 70,000 persons per day—they are simply summarizing the conclusions of a number of specialists. William Vogt in his *Road to Survival*, and John Boyd Orr, when chief of the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, presented convincing statistics along the same line. While "food-faddists" and vegetarians have continually discussed ways in which future dietary lacks may be remedied, it is particularly impressive, now, to find similar views emerging from a thorough scientific survey of the relationship between ocean and land produce.

In the opening chapter Smith and Chapin begin to set the problem:

We intend to examine with a critical eye the potentialities of the sea, the extent of its natural wealth and its availability, as a last frontier, of relatively unexploited resource. But before we do this we must take a brief look at the situation we now face in regard to crops and minerals and sources of energy as affected by the pressure of modern populations. John Boyd Orr, former chief of the Food and

Agricultural Organization of the United Nations puts the problem quite simply: "The rising tide of population and the falling reservoir of food resources constitute . . . the greatest issue facing mankind today. There will be no peace in the world as long as half of its people suffer from hunger and poverty, knowing that food in abundance is entirely possible."

It takes approximately ten times more land to produce animals for meat consumption than is needed to raise a comparable quantity of vegetables on the same terrain, and this single fact becomes crucial in the light of population trends. Smith and Chapin continue:

The Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations has made a careful world-wide study of the problem of food supply for the leaping populations of modern times. In the first place it has discovered that the world consumption of meat at 50 million tons per annum is far from enough for the normal requirements. In fact, as much as two-thirds of the people on the face of the earth are failing to get the minimum protein requirements for a healthy body and mind. It would be necessary at once to increase meat production by 13 million tons to reach the minimum requirements of the world population in 1960, just a few short years ahead of us. This obviously can not be done, or probably even approximated, by any means available to us from presently developed agricultural areas or under the price arrangements that also inevitably govern production. So the question of catching fish becomes daily more important.

In the days of Columbus, the balance between foodstuffs and world population was maintained chiefly by death from famine, plague and infant mortality. After the opening of the New World to exploration, the immense natural resources made available ushered in an epoch in which death from food shortages was greatly reduced. Today, however, according to Smith and Chapin, we are "back where we started"—in a cycle similar to that preceding 1492. "It is easy," they write, "to be lulled into an attitude of mind which rejects the situation as unreal or exaggerated. We see around us, in the Western world, no great shortage of food or manufactured goods, except during the stress of war, and we listen with too little conviction to the voices of such men as Fairfield

Osborn, William Vogt and others who seek to bring the problem into public focus." The authors continue:

It is necessary to ask if it seems reasonable that in the next few decades the world can create new food and energy resources to give a decent chance of life to the millions of new souls crowding onto this planet. Between 1650 and 1950 the world population more than quadrupled. The western frontiers absorbed the shock. These frontiers are gone today. In another ten years the world food supply will have to be increased by at least 25 per cent in order merely to maintain our present totally inadequate ratio of supply.

It is the thesis of *The Sun, the Sea and Tomorrow* that it is mathematically possible to explore the "last frontier" and draw from it the needs of future decades. This will require not only tremendous technical accomplishments, and development of a new kind of fish husbandry to make the yield of marine life more accessible to man, but also demands, quite obviously, that men and women accustomed to meat-eating become willing to change or temper their habits. What a strange way for austerity to come to the western world! But there is no doubt that readers of Dr. Smith's and Mr. Chapin's volume will at the very least have moments of unease while forking up expensive steaks. We don't know what the vegetarians will have to say about the advocacy of eating fish, but since the harvesting of fish would not require the artificial and sometimes cruel handling of livestock, they might regard it as a step in the right direction.

We have never felt that dietary counsels are a natural province of MANAS policy, but, in view of the statistics supplied in this book, another passage by these writers seems worthy of attention. We don't know what has happened to the arguments insisting that meat is the best of all possible foods, but it is certain that Dr. Smith and Mr. Chapin are well aware of them and versed in nutritional science. They say:

The food that man lives by is roughly divided into carbohydrates and protein. The former give us ready energy and the proteins are the body builders. Potatoes and good red meat are their familiar

examples. Our most available carbohydrates are vegetables and they may be produced from a given area of ground in about a ten to one ratio over meat proteins. Thus one of our greatest difficulties in the face of a rapidly growing world population is to make more protein available to mankind. That is why our curiosity naturally turns to the oceans where 90 per cent of the world's possible food material is produced by nature. Fish is a concentrated protein diet with the advantage over some forms of protein produced on land that it contains all of the amino acids which are essential to our diet. In other words, under the sea is a vast ill-harvested and largely unexplored resource of food that is at least the equal, if not superior, in nourishment to the finest meats we can raise on land. Taking a world average of normal prices the fisherman receives a lower price for bulk fish delivered at the dock than does the cattleman for bulk meats off the range. It is obvious the world had better go fishing seriously.

Science, in analyzing the delicate chemistry of our bodies and their daily needs, has discovered that not only are certain calory-producing foods necessary to us but that they must be combined with other less obvious sources of energy and growth such as vitamins, mineral elements and oligo-elements, all of which have been found in fish and seafoods in general in sufficient quantity to make them a well-balanced diet for man. The additional presence of fat in fish provides energy and the vitamins A, D and the B complex are equally essential. Recent experiments at Harvard, especially as to vitamin A from fish livers, suggest that these natural vitamins may have beneficent properties that are lacking in the synthetic product. This simply means that fish is a well-rounded and natural food admirably suited as to quality for the task of solving present or future food shortages.

There are other advantages to fish as a primary diet for mankind. Much-needed minerals such as phosphorus, calcium, potassium and magnesium are found in the flesh of fishes together with adequate quantities of iodine, iron, and copper. This sounds rather mechanical but we can keep in mind that fresh fish is not only a delicious food if handled with reasonable skill but one of the most digestible forms of protein and quite as stimulating, pound for pound, as beef and, in most cases, a little kinder to the family budget.

Charles F. Kettering, of engineering fame, contributes the Foreword to *The Sun, the Sea and*

Tomorrow, indicating that it is in no sense a "faddist" book, but rather a sober evaluation of a situation involving both practical and ethical dimensions. Change your diet? Well, maybe a person can't or won't, but it is clear that with more of the sort of research on the food problem contemplated by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, few people will be able to remain in ignorance of the relationship between their own eating habits and the needs and welfare of future generations.

An interesting twist in this engrossing story is found in the fact that while the denizens of land—the animals we carve up for our tables—become poorer in minerals and vitamins with each passing year, the ocean is gaining in all of its life-giving and health-giving properties. So fish are getting better and better all the time!

COMMENTARY
"A ROOM OF HIS OWN"

WE seem to have done an injustice to "modern educational methods" here in the issue of June 15. In a discussion of the Buddhist doctrine of *Dhyana*, meaning "pacification, equilibration, or tranquilization," we quoted a Zen Buddhist abbot who observed that Occidentals seem to make no effort to conserve and replenish their nervous energy by means of quiet introspection; and we added the comment that "Here is a view of the resources of youth of which modern Western educational methods take little or no account." In this week's "Children . . . and Ourselves," however, Dr. Nelson N. Foote is quoted on research concerning the importance of privacy for children. He writes:

Suppose we find that periods of extended privacy during waking hours are conducive to the integration of personality. . . . If a family wants its children to become autonomous, it may find that one of the best ways is to provide each child with a room of his own, big enough and secure enough against intrusion to allow him the necessary "sessions of sweet, silent thought."

This is an occasion for a tribute to the scientific method. Not very many years ago, psychology paid virtually no attention to questions of this sort. The Behaviorist, for example, regarded the human being as a kind of intersection of sense impressions, producing the "conditionings" which are the man. The idea of "autonomy" is completely alien to Behaviorist psychology, which is intent upon showing that there is really no individual to *be* autonomous.

Now, however, psychological research tends to conclude that autonomy—a distinct individuality of one's own—is desirable for children, to prevent them from becoming "too suggestible, conforming and dependent upon others." So it may be said that honest observation and concern for human values is slowly bringing psychologists around to a view of human nature

and values which was affirmed in other terms by ancient religious teachers.

This is not to say "pooh" to modern psychology, indicating that it has all been much ado about nothing. Even if it accomplished little more than the rediscovery of the truths of ancient philosophical and psychological religions, there would still be the fact that these truths are now being assimilated by the West in the terms of its own genius and capacity for understanding. We might even say that such an approach is preparing the way for an attitude of mind which combines the best in both science and religion.

CHILDREN ... and Ourselves

A HELPFUL subscriber has sent us for examination a paper on Family Relations. This paper, reprinted from *Marriage and Family Living*, was first presented at an annual conference of the National Council on Family Relations. It was prepared by Nelson N. Foote, Director of the University of Chicago's Family Study Center.

It is not too difficult to guess why our correspondent feels that "Research: A New Strength for Family Life" may be of interest to readers of MANAS. Both criticism and appreciation seem called for. In the first place, psychologists and sociologists often impart a mechanistic sound to writing on the "social order," and Dr. Foote's terminology is at times typical. It is easy for the devotee of the social sciences to become so preoccupied with the "adjustment" of the individual to a preferred pattern that he may lose sight of the fact that some of the happiest and greatest of men have been serenely maladjusted.

Dr. Foote is not, however, we think, unaware of the need for sociology to recover from the "adjustment complex," for in the course of his paper he gives marked attention to the problem of "autonomy." All the same, at the outset, Dr. Foote employs terms that are apt to trouble those who fear too much conformity, too perfect a blending of the individual into the planned society of the future. Research in respect to human affairs is a two-edged sword. As in the case of Professor Kinsey's works, to which Dr. Foote refers, it is difficult to avoid setting up some sort of statistically based criteria for human success and happiness. We do need information in regard to all phases of human striving and conflict, but why should one's own standards of values be geared to what the majority wants or what the majority does? Why, that is, if we truly believe in this "sanctity of the individuality" the adherents of democracy are always talking about?

One thing is certain, however, and that is that greater research effort will be a part of the future.

Dr. Foote summarizes this trend at the beginning of his paper:

The notion has become quite general that family research is a good thing. In the several fields of professional activity having to do with the welfare of families—health, housing, home economics, law, counseling, education and recreation—the feeling is stirring that agencies ought to venture into one kind of study or another. People who give advice and information to others about family relations are increasingly constrained to claim scientific warrant for their assertions. Writers eagerly seek out research findings to retail in popular form. Even clergymen who used to find their traditional canons of truth quite sufficient for speaking confidently on domestic problems are now coming to express a need for bolstering their advice with tested knowledge. There is little doubt that the climate of opinion has never been more auspicious for family research.

Our next quotation from Dr. Foote approaches indirectly the problem of values. He writes that "the interest and expectancy of this welcoming public would all be very gratifying if family research were an end in itself, or if all that investigators had to achieve were to turn up findings as entertaining as those of Dr. Kinsey. It is sobering to realize that much more than that is demanded. Sooner or later the obligation to deliver the goods will fall due. And the goods at that point are not the bibliographies of publications which impress deans when promotions are being considered, but the good done to families as a consequence of the researches completed."

The difficult question, of course, involves determining just what constitutes "good done to families." And here, again, we see, even in Foote's paper, the tendency to assume, even if only for the moment, that a staff of experts is presently able to define the good life—or at least a better life than that lived by the majority. Note the terms, for instance, used in the following paragraphs—particularly the emphasis upon such words as "chemical equations" and "condition":

Now generalizations . . . are the very stuff of social science. They may be more or less empirical, more or less theoretical. That is, by analogy, they may be more like recipes or more like chemical equations, but in either event they specify antecedents and consequents.

A technical way of putting the fundamental question of all basic research is: What factors condition what outcomes? Unless we wish to remain at the level of simple description of the unique particulars of family behavior, we need to think in terms of how to make valid generalizations about *antecedents* and *consequents*.

Perhaps our anxieties are too highly strung at this particular juncture, but it does no harm to stop and think about the possible consequences of too much "leadership" by any group of experts in psychological fields. Then, we are made a little apprehensive by the general feeling-tone of some more of Foote's sentences, as for instance:

In recent years we have begun to accumulate a number of measures, of adjustment, solidarity, neighborliness, happiness, health, participation, success, maturity, adaptability, responsibility and competence. It is true that none of these has yet reached a wholly satisfactory state of refinement, but progress is constant, through the cooperation of dozens of researchers in dozens of places.

To repeat, the product which research is geared to deliver is the statement of the conditions under which desired outcomes occur (or undesired outcomes may be avoided). Our understanding of the interconnections of events may often outrun our application of these scientific generalizations, but the only really effective justification of research—the only argument that in the long run will persuade the rest of the world to maintain scientists in the style to which they want to become accustomed—is the contribution it makes to the common welfare.

But this is not, we hasten to add, the complete story, and it may be considered a very good omen that Foote himself gives definite attention to the need for more independent judgment. He remarks that the Family Study Center at Chicago, for instance, while considering various directions for further research, takes account of the fact that the areas covered by "health and intelligence" have now been considerably expanded. "They go on," he continues, "to include four more recently identified skills or abilities in dealing with other people: empathy, autonomy, judgment and creativity. Our current research deals with three out of these last four—to repeat, empathy, autonomy and creativity."

One discovers, further, that "autonomy" is not just a word to Dr. Foote, for the experimental studies in which he is greatly interested are designed to test all such "explicit hypotheses" as that privacy or "aloneness" is a necessary ingredient in the life of man. He writes:

Suppose we find that periods of extended privacy during waking hours are conducive to the integration of personality around definite themes. We may desire the latter as an outcome, because we find that children otherwise become too suggestible, conforming and dependent upon others. So by increasingly precise measurement of antecedents and consequents, we can begin to specify and reproduce the optimal conditions for the development of personal autonomy. This abstract generalization can in turn be translated into quite definite recipes, let us say, in house design. If a family wants its children to become autonomous, it may find that one of the best ways is to provide each child with a room of his own, big enough and secure enough against intrusion to allow him the necessary "sessions of sweet, silent thought."

Here we see that it is not impossible for the "teams of experts" to be concerned with attitudes and dimensions of living and striving that we habitually associate with aesthetes, radicals and philosophers. It is true that Dr. Foote's job, and the task to which he and his colleagues are devoted, is to acquire statistical data, but content and direction of research are presently seen to be fully as important as a highly developed methodology. We conclude with Foote's illustration of how the methods of science and the aims of liberal philosophy can be conjoined—though in doing so, we hope the experimental conditions are *discovered*, not artificially created:

If we want to verify our generalizations further, we can compare experimental groups of children under these conditions with control groups of children who have no privacy at home, and see which, all other things being equal, turn out the more autonomous. In this example, the relevance of family research for psychologists and parents becomes apparent

FRONTIERS A Criticism of Religion

THE *American Journal of Sociology* for May is the sixtieth anniversary number of this journal, in which the editor, Everett C. Hughes, celebrates the occasion by reprinting from files of past issues six articles representing the sociological approach to religion. All the papers are interesting, but the one by William G. Sumner, "Religion and the Mores," which first appeared in 1909, captured our attention by its somewhat devastating analysis of the content of religious "faith" as commonly practiced. Sumner was not only devastating on this subject—he was also a bit sullen, which is perhaps explained by the fact that he began his adult life as an Episcopal minister, a period which was followed, Mr. Hughes remarks, by "belligerent emancipation." Incidentally, Sumner, who died in 1910, was author of the expression, "the forgotten man," made famous many years later by Franklin D. Roosevelt, although Sumner had something quite different in mind. "The forgotten man," according to Sumner, an arch conservative, was meant to characterize the individuals who "bore the costs of the protective tariff, of government social services and of the increased wages secured through trade union activity"!

But whatever Sumner's political philosophy, his contributions to sociology are generally admitted to have been large. Such terms as *mores*, folkways, in-group and out-group, now commonplaces of sociological reference, originated in his writings. Meanwhile, the vigor of his "emancipation" from religion is evident in the critical force of his identification of religion as mores. He writes:

Does a Roman Catholic, or a Mohammedan, or a Protestant child begin by learning the dogmas of his religion and then build a life-code on them? Not at all. He begins by living in, and according to, the mores of his family and societal environment. The vast mass of men in each case never do anything else but thus imbibe a character from the environment. If

they learn the religious dogmas at all, it is superficially, negligently, erroneously. They are trained in the ritual, habituated to the usages, imbued with the notions, of the societal environment. They hear and repeat the proverbs, sayings, and maxims which are current in it. They perceive what is admired, ridiculed, abominated, desired by the people about them. They learn the code of conduct—what is considered stupid, smart, stylish, clever, or foolish, and they form themselves on these ideas. They get their standards from the standards of their environment. Behind this, but far behind it for all but the scholars, are the history and logic by which the mores are connected with the religious facts or dogmas, and when the scholars investigate the history and logic they find that the supposed history is a tissue of myths and legends and that the logic is like a thread broken at a hundred points, twisted into innumerable windings, and snarled into innumerable knots.

What of religion itself—the body of teachings which constitute its doctrine? Here, Sumner lets the prejudice born of experience limited to Western religion get the better of him, although there is enough truth in his comment to make it valuable.

Every religion [he declares] is absolute and eternal truth. It never contains any provision for its own amendment or "evolution." It would stultify itself if it should say: I am temporarily or contingently true, and I shall give way to something truer. I am a working hypothesis only. I am a constitution which may be amended whenever you please. "The faith once delivered to the saints" must claim to be perfect, and the formula itself means that the faith is changeless. A scientific or developing religion is an absurdity. But then again nothing is absolutely and eternally true. Everything must change. Religion is no exception. Therefore every religion is a resisting inertia which is being overcome by moving forces. Interests are the forces, because they respond, in men, to hunger, love, vanity, and fear, and the actual mores of a time are the resultant of the force of interests and the inertia of religion. The leaders of a period enlist on the side of either the interests or the resistance, and the mass of men float on the resultant current of the mores.

And there you are. No timid qualification here, no cautious equivocation. The man of science has spoken and the sheep and the goats of

the human species are properly classified. You put your notebook under your arm and go home to dinner.

But after admitting that this analysis may be nine tenths accurate, there remains the other tenth—the side of the question which Sumner ignored. What about the religion—Buddhism, for one, might qualify—which *does* present itself as a "working hypothesis"? Of course, a question of this sort requires a definition of religion or religious philosophy which is quite different from the one implied by Sumner, who quite plainly regarded religion as a collection of claims purporting to embody the final truth. If, however, this is a gross misconception of the true nature of religion—a misconception supported by the great mass of religionists as well as by most of its critics—then the entire subject ought to be reopened for investigation.

It is conceivable, for example, that religion has been properly defined only by the mystics, who contend that the truths which can be given formal expression can be no more than imperfect and inevitably fallible reflections of the transcendental reality they attempt to describe. It is conceivable that the truths of religion have accurate expression only in the language of symbolism and of paradox, and that even here, the relation between religious utterance and the ideal it represents can never be more than the sort of correspondence that exists between a two-dimensional diagram and three-dimensional reality.

But such a definition of religion, we shall be told, will never be "popular." The best answer to this objection is the criticism of popular religion found in the works of men like Sumner. Popular religion is religion made "easy," and religion made easy is either a tragic self-deception or a pretentious lie.

But popular religions, again, we shall be told, are inevitable. This may be so. If it is so, then such religions ought to be provided with avenues of escape from the confinements of orthodoxy—

with portals marked as plainly as possible, leading to the inward sort of religion represented by the mystics of all time. The fact of the matter is that the great religions do have such portals, but their significance has been largely ignored by the advocates and practitioners of orthodoxy. In the New Testament, the portal is indicated, even if obscurely, in a passage in Matthew:

And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them [the multitudes] in parables?

He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.

For whosoever has, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he has.

Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.

Is Jesus here a little hard on the masses? He may be hard on them, but not as hard on them as Sumner.

In the Hindu religion, the Vedas have the place of Divine Revelation. Yet in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, which may be compared with the New Testament of the Christian Bible for its authority among Hindus, there is this statement by the spiritual teacher:

"When thy heart shall have worked through the snares of delusion, then thou wilt attain to high indifference as to those doctrines which are already taught or which are yet to be taught. When thy mind once liberated from the Vedas shall be fixed immovably in contemplation, then shalt thou attain to devotion."

Is, then, the religion of the mystics—as distinguished from the religions of orthodoxy and conformity in belief—a religion without content? One thing is certain—the religion of the mystics is a religion without creed, and for this reason it offers little satisfaction to the "tough-minded" among men who want something they can "analyze" and expose to criticism. The religion of the mystics is a religion of inquiry, never one of conclusions or dogmas. This accounts for the

obscure and cryptic sayings in the literature of mysticism. Each cycle of mysticism produces its own unique vocabulary, and one of the interests of students of such matters is to discover the correspondences of meaning between one mystical tradition and another. But already, in the words "mystical tradition," we have the shadow of a subtle kind of orthodoxy, even in mysticism, intimating a preference for one vocabulary over another, not because it is better, but because it is familiar. The best mystical vocabulary, in these terms, is the one a man evolves for himself, which is possible only after the symbols of mystic communication have been replaced by actual experience, and then rendered once again into a living idiom.

It seems likely that the dogmas of religion are in some measure formed of the dead husks of ancient accounts of mystical experience, left by men who tried their best to prevent the externalization of what they had to say, but who could not control the zeal of followers ignorant of the difference between "teachings" and actual knowledge. The mystic does not teach "truth," but declares a method of reaching it, and even here he communicates with great difficulty. The founders of religions, on the contrary, confuse the method proposed with the end in view, and so attempt to establish the "immutable" orthodoxies which eventually are torn to shreds by iconoclasts, of whom Sumner is so good an example. The practices of religion externalized into dogma are easy to expose. Sumner observes:

. . . we are told that we must do a thing because the Bible says so, not because there is any rational relation between that act and self-realization. Nobody has ever done what the Bible says. What men have always done, if they tried to do right, was to conform to the mores of the group and the time. Monastic and puritan sects have tried over and over again in the history of the church to obey the gospel injunctions. They begin by a protest against the worldliness of the church. They always have to segregate themselves. Why? They must get out of the current mores of society and create an environment of their own within which the acts they desire to practice will be possible. They have always especially desired to create a

society with the mores which they approved, and to do this they needed to control coming generations through their children or successors. No such effort has ever succeeded. All the churches, and nearly all the Christian denominations have, until within a few years, resisted investigation of the truth of history and nature. They have yielded this position in part but not altogether; within a year we have heard of a movement in the Church of Rome to test and verify traditions about history and nature. So far, it has been suppressed. In the mores of today of all the intelligent classes the investigation of truth is the leading feature, and with justice, since the welfare of mankind primarily depends upon correct knowledge of the world in which we live, and of human nature. It is a very heinous fault of the ecclesiastical organizations that they resist investigation or endeavor to control its results. It alienates them from the mores of the time, and destroys their usefulness. The mores will control the religion as they have done hitherto, and as they do now. They have forced an abandonment of ritual and dogma.

In this passage, the reader is bound to wonder at Sumner's optimism in regard to "all the intelligent classes." Possibly, in 1909 the expectation of fearless "investigation of the truth" seemed justified by the prevailing mood in the world of learning. Sumner must have thought so, for he announced that the mores were then changing into an approval of such investigation. The passage of forty-six years, however, has not done a great deal to confirm his judgment. Instead, the "intelligent classes" (which sound a bit numerous in Sumner's context) have been unable to control the trend of the mores into the degradation of unceasing fears and the erosion of those moral and political freedoms which are supposed to be a major contribution of the liberal spirit to the modern world. In this perspective, the comment of the editor of the *American Journal of Sociology*, directed, perhaps, at Sumner more than at other authors reprinted in this issue, seems especially pertinent:

When we sociologists are mature enough to study our selves and our works with that combination of objectivity with curiosity which we achieve so easily in studying other lines of work, the chief theme of our study will be the relation of emancipation to knowledge and inquiry. Some grow emancipated

from the faith of their fathers just enough to want to run from it and to tear from their clothing all the name-tags of the past; others, just enough to turn in bitter attack upon the very faith that gave them the energy to make their mark in the world, and sometimes, in not accidental error, to turn poisoned weapons against themselves. Still others, having somehow conserved the energy and the spirit of the movements in which they were bred, have combined the sensitive knowledge of participation with a detachment which lets them see even dear things in their universal aspect. Many of the sociologists of the 1950's are emancipated from other faiths than those of Sumner, . . . At least one history of American sociology could be written on the basis of the various things succeeding generations have been partly emancipated from. When they are fully emancipated, it probably makes no difference.

The natural question, here, is, How shall we know when we are "fully emancipated"? If we could know this, doubtless, we should know everything that we need to know. One thing, however, seems certain: at the present stage of human development, there may perhaps be fully emancipated individuals, but never fully emancipated "groups." It is the notion that alliance with a group will somehow bring emancipation—whether the group be a "Holiness" sect or a political party, or, for more sophisticated souls, a learned profession—that makes the phenomena of religious belief and religious organization sources of such great confusion. Groups may be, and surely are, in some instances, the instrumentality to greater understanding, but their organization often becomes an impassable barrier to the realization of what it means to *know*, and, therefore, an enemy of truth of every sort.