



## INTRODUCTION

DURING the present century many new approaches to the problems of social anthropology have developed. The old method of constructing a history of human culture based on bits of evidence, torn out of their natural contacts, and collected from all times and all parts of the world, has lost much of its hold. It was followed by a period of painstaking attempts at reconstruction of historical connections based on studies of distribution of special features and supplemented by archæological evidence. Wider and wider areas were looked upon from this viewpoint. Attempts were made to establish firm connections between various cultural features and these were used to establish wider historical connections. The possibility of independent development of analogous cultural features which is a postulate of a general history of culture has been denied or at least consigned to an inconsequential rôle. Both the evolutionary method and the analysis of independent local cultures were devoted to unravelling the sequences of cultural forms. While by means of the former it was hoped to build up a unified picture of the history of culture and civilization, the adherents of the latter methods, at least among its more conservative adherents, saw each culture as a single unit and as an individual historical problem.

Under the influence of the intensive analysis of cultures the indispensable collection of facts relating to cultural forms has received a strong stimulus. The material so collected gave us information on social life, as though it consisted of strictly separated categories, such as economic

life, technology, art, social organization, religion, and the unifying bond was difficult to find. The position of the anthropologist seemed like that satirized by Gœthe:

Wer will was Lebendig's erkennen und beschreiben,  
Sucht erst den Geist heraus zu treiben,  
Dann hat er die Teile in seiner Hand,  
Fehlt leider nur das geistige Band.

The occupation with living cultures has created a stronger interest in the totality of each culture. It is felt more and more that hardly any trait of culture can be understood when taken out of its general setting. The attempt to conceive a whole culture as controlled by a single set of conditions did not solve the problem. The purely anthropo-geographical, economic, or in other ways formalistic approach seemed to give distorted pictures.

The desire to grasp the meaning of a culture as a whole compels us to consider descriptions of standardized behaviour merely as a stepping-stone leading to other problems. We must understand the individual as living in his culture; and the culture as lived by individuals. The interest in these socio-psychological problems is not in any way opposed to the historical approach. On the contrary, it reveals dynamic processes that have been active in cultural changes and enables us to evaluate evidence obtained from the detailed comparison of related cultures.

On account of the character of the material the problem of cultural life presents itself often as that of the interrelation between various aspects of culture. In some cases this study leads to a better appreciation of the intensity or lack of integration of a culture. It brings out clearly the forms of integration in various types of culture which prove that the relations between different aspects of cul-

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ture follow the most diverse patterns and do not lend themselves profitably to generalizations. However, it leads rarely, and only indirectly, to an understanding of the relation between individual and culture.

This requires a deep penetration into the genius of the culture, a knowledge of the attitudes controlling individual and group behaviour. Dr. Benedict calls the genius of culture its configuration. In the present volume the author has set before us this problem and has illustrated it by the example of three cultures that are permeated each by one dominating idea. This treatment is distinct from the so-called functional approach to social phenomena in so far as it is concerned rather with the discovery of fundamental attitudes than with the functional relations of every cultural item. It is not historical except in so far as the general configuration, as long as it lasts, limits the directions of change that remain subject to it. In comparison to changes of content of culture the configuration has often remarkable permanency.

As the author points out, not every culture is characterized by a dominant character, but it seems probable that the more intimate our knowledge of the cultural drives that actuate the behaviour of the individual, the more we shall find that certain controls of emotion, certain ideals of conduct, prevail that account for what seem to us as abnormal attitudes when viewed from the standpoint of our civilization. The relativity of what is considered social or asocial, normal or abnormal, is seen in a new light.

The extreme cases selected by the author make clear the importance of the problem.

FRANZ BOAS