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"So," said the cowboy, "I told him that he couldn't trade that way, that goods must be sold at a higher price than he paid for it."

"Well, what do you mean by a higher price?" the Indian asked me.

"Very simple. Let's say you bought a thing for a dollar. You must sell it for a dollar twenty."

"How can I sell it for a dollar twenty when it cost me only a dollar?"

"But that is exactly what trade means. You buy cheaper and you sell for more."

"That's fraud," he said. "You're advising me to deceive people."

"That's not fraud. You simply earn money, don't you understand? Make a profit."

But something strange happened to my Indian friend. He suddenly stopped understanding the most ordinary things.

"What do you mean, make a profit?" he asked.

"Well," I said, "justify your expenses."

"I didn't have any expenses."

"But still, you went to the city, you bought, you brought it here, you worked."

"What kind of work is that?" the Indian asked me. "To buy, to bring it here. That's not work. No, you're giving me bad advice."

It was simply impossible to convince him. No matter how hard I tried (said the narrator), nothing came of it. He was as stubborn as a bull, and he kept repeating one and the same thing. "You're advising me to do something dishonest." I tell him this is trade, and he tells me that in that case trade is a dishonest thing. And just imagine, he continued to trade that way just as he began.

### The Problem of Adolescence

This anecdote illustrates how difficult it is for anyone to see things through the eyes of people from another culture. To



"No, you're giving me bad advice"

one brought up in a co-operative society the attitudes of the commercial world seem wicked, while to a person accustomed only to the atmosphere of competition profitless exchanges seem childishly stupid.

So far I have been giving illustrations of the effect of custom upon the behaviour of people in simple cultures. It might seem that in a culture such as ours where a great variety of ways of life is permitted, the patterning effect of custom is lessened. But this is not so. The most that an individual can do in such complex cultures as our own is to choose the group that he prefers to live with, and whose customs he is willing to follow.

Take the problem of adolescence. A great deal of attention has been paid in recent years, particularly in the United States, to the study of the adolescent years. By many psychologists adolescence has been described as a period of mental stresses and strains, of conflicts, and of restlessness. It has been regarded as a period of doubts and indecision, of impatience with authority, full of problems for the adolescent himself and for his equally-bewildered parents. And some psychologists went so far as to state that this turmoil was inevitable, that it was

part of the natural process of growing up, and could no more be avoided than the physical changes which take place at the same time.

In contrast with some psychologists, the anthropologists familiar with the effects of the social environment upon human development thought that this was an erroneous belief, and that the psychologists, unable to see beyond the confines of their own society, were stating, as fundamental elements in human nature, certain characteristics which were due simply to the kind of society in which they happened to be living. The question was raised whether the difficulties of adolescence were caused by being an adolescent, or by being an adolescent in America?

### Coming of Age in Samoa

Margaret Mead's book, *Coming of Age in Samoa*, answers this question. She shows clearly that in a simple culture it is possible for the period of adolescence to be passed through quite uneventfully, without doubts and fears, without stresses and strain, without serious delinquencies, without problems of sex behaviour, and without conflict between different religious creeds and political beliefs. This is achieved because a primitive society has only one customary way of life. There are few choices to be made, so conflict is rare. By contrast, says Margaret Mead, "Our children grow up to find a world of choices dazzling their unaccustomed eyes. In religion they may be Catholics, Protestants, Christian Scientists, Spiritualists, Agnostics, Atheists, or even pay no attention at all to religion. This is an unthinkable situation in any primitive society. . . . Similarly our children are faced with a dozen different standards of morality: a double sex standard for men and women, a single standard for men and women, and groups which advocate that the single standard should be freedom, while others argue that the single standard should be absolute monogamy. Trial marriage, companionate marriage, contract marriage—all these possible solutions of a social impasse are paraded before the growing children, while the actual conditions in their own communities and the moving pictures and magazines inform them of mass violations of every code. . . . The Samoan child faces no such dilemma. Sex is a natural pleasurable thing. . . . Everyone in the community agrees about the matter; the only dissenters are the missionaries, who dissent so vainly that their protests are unimportant."

And so Margaret Mead's work shows clearly that characteristics which have been regarded as part of the natural course of adolescent development in America, are really only the reactions of the youth of that nation to a clash of customs which is so typical a feature of civilised society to-day.

Custom is indeed a shaper of men's lives, and there is very little that most of us individually can do to escape its influence. As John Dewey has said, the part played by custom in shaping the behaviour of the individual as contrasted with any way in which the individual can change custom, is as the proportion of the total vocabulary of his mother tongue to the number of words of his own baby talk that are taken into the vernacular of his family.

## YOUNG AMERICAN BEAUTY

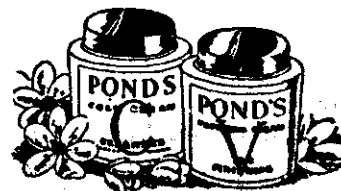


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