For some years past the scientific study of primitive peoples has experimented in a variety of directions for new methods of investigation. Criticism of the comparative method, of which Sir James Frazer is recognised as the foremost exponent all the world over, has been directed mainly against the fragmentary character of its evidence when torn from its context.

In this book Dr Benedict offers an alternative method of approach. The aim of the investigator, she maintains, should be the discovery in the diversity of cultures of the "configuration" of each—i.e. the cultural drive in group and individual which determines the characteristic reaction to stimulus in any and every situation in life.

"This anthropological study is fascinating to read and the author's conclusions are of great practical interest. It is a book which can be vigorously recommended to the general reader. It is highly encouraging to everyone who seeks to make changes in the prevailing patterns of our own culture."

—Raymond Mortimer, The New Statesman
By the same Author
RACE AND RACISM
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The three primitive peoples described in this volume have been chosen because knowledge of these tribes is comparatively full and satisfactory and because I was able to supplement published descriptions with many discussions with the field ethnologists who have lived intimately with these peoples and who have written the authoritative descriptions of the tribes in question. I have myself lived several summers in the pueblo of Zuñi, and among some of the neighbouring tribes which I have used to contrast with pueblo culture. I owe a great debt to Dr. Ruth L. Bunzel, who learned the Zuñi language and whose accounts of Zuñi and collections of texts are the best of all the available pueblo studies. For the description of Dobu I am indebted to Dr. Reo F. Fortune's invaluable monograph, *The Sorcerers of Dobu*, and to many delightful conversations. For the North-West Coast of America I have used not only Professor Franz Boas's text publications and detailed compilations of Kwakiutl life, but his still unpublished material and his penetrating comment upon his experience on the North-West Coast extending over forty years.

For the presentations here I am alone responsible and it may be that I have carried some interpretations further than one or another of the field-workers would have done. But the chapters have been read and verified as to facts by these authorities upon these tribes, and references to their detailed studies are given for those who wish to consult the full accounts.

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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 archaeological 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 method, 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 Goethe:

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 culture 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 abnormal attitudes when viewed from the standpoint of our civilization. The relativity of what is con-