

any concrete amelioration: experience has taught me that what I want today will only upset me if I get it tomorrow. But to give us hope is surely not the same as to embrace despair. The show remains engrossing, though it is no longer exhilarating. The horror of week after next will at least be a new one. It may be any one of ten dozen: I find myself vaguely eager to know which it is to be. Thus I advise against suicide. Life may not be exactly pleasant, but it is at least not dull. Heave yourself into Hell today, and you may miss, tomorrow or next day, another Scopes trial, or another War to End War, or perchance a rich and buxom widow with all her first husband's clothes. There are always more Hardings hatching. I advocate hanging on as long as possible.

The Nature of Man

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CHARACTER, by A. A. Roback. \$5.50. 8½ x 5¼; 595 pp. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company.

IN THIS huge and heavily documented treatise Dr. Roback makes a gallant effort to differentiate character as a psychological entity from character as an ethical quality. But does he succeed? I doubt it. Here is his final definition of character: "An enduring psychophysical disposition to inhibit instinctive impulses in accordance with a regulative principle." Well, if this regulative principle is not ethical, then what is it? And if inhibition is not, at bottom, an ethical act, then what kind of act are we to call it? The plain truth is that character, however it may be approached, always resolves itself on examination into a pattern of the subject's habitual reactions to moral situations. It is not a gauge of his character to determine how he reacts to situations of other sorts. He may show, for example, a talent for escaping from mazes worthy of a laboratory rat, or a capacity for playing with words worthy of an editorial writer on *Variety*

or the New York *Herald Tribune*, and yet leave us completely ignorant of his character. But if it turns out that, having necked his neighbor's wife, he tells, we know a great deal about his character instantly, and if it develops that he tells without having necked we know even more.

A man of solid character is not necessarily one whose habitual reactions accord with the precepts of Holy Writ, nor even with those of the Revised Statutes; he is simply one whose reactions are dependable. His ethical scheme, whatever it is, must be immovable, or nearly so. He must be the same today, tomorrow and next week, whether the winds be fair or foul. It is, indeed, this quality of dependability that makes life in human society bearable: if we could not be reasonably sure of our fellows' acts, life with them would become impossible. A breach of trust is thus the most anti-social of all crimes—but for some curious reason, to me unknown, the legal codes of the world, when they punish it at all, punish it only lightly. In most of its forms, *e.g.*, adultery, it is scarcely more than a laughing matter. To steal \$2 is an act frowned upon by the law everywhere, but to betray a confidence and break a heart is no worse, legally, than to fail to brush one's teeth.

But let me not set up a row with Dr. Roback, for his book, despite a somewhat pedestrian style, is immensely interesting and valuable. He has raked the whole literature of the world for light upon his theme—not only the scientific literature, but also the swell letters—, and himself he has contributed a great deal of shrewd observation. It is the best work upon the subject that I have ever encountered, and I commend it unreservedly to all those who have any interest in the mysteries of the human mind. Why he omits his bibliography I don't know. Twice he speaks of it, but it is nowhere to be found.

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