

*Chapter Six*

A CHANGE OF CLIMATE

§ 1

THE processes of social change are continuous and endlessly complex. To contrast the manners and morals and customs of one historical "period" with those of another is surely to over-simplify and almost surely to exaggerate. Yet the social climate does alter, just as the seasons do change—even though the shifts in temperature from day to day may be highly spasmodic and Detroit may be enjoying its "first day of spring" while Philadelphia is being swept by a blizzard. Looking back, one notices various contrasts between the social climate of the nineteen-twenties and that of the nineteen-thirties; and one notices, too, that most of these changes did not become clearly marked until about the year 1933, when the New Deal came in and the Eighteenth Amendment was repealed. It is almost as if the people of the United States had walked backward into the Depression, holding for dear life to the customs and ideals and assumptions of the time that was gone, even while these were one by one slipping out of reach; and then, in 1933, had given up their vain effort, turned about, and walked face-forward into the new world of the nineteen-thirties.

The post-war decade had brought to America a sharp revolution in manners and morals—a revolution the shock troops of which were a younger generation addicted to knee-length skirts, hip flasks, mixed drinking in the speakeasy, petting in the parked car, uninhibited language, a second-hand knowledge of Freudian complexes, and a disposition

to defy their more puritanical parents and ridicule the whole Puritan tradition. Already by the end of the nineteen-twenties the revolution was playing itself out, at least in the centers of population where Puritanism had been most readily undermined. The older generation were gradually becoming accustomed to the outlandish ways of their progeny and relaxing somewhat their own codes of conduct, and the younger generation were getting older and learning the practical advantages of moderation. By the time of the Panic, the "Flaming Mamie" of the coeducational campus, though she still won admirers, was a little less likely to be regarded as a portent of the future than as a relic of the past. As the nineteen-thirties got under way, the change in the climate became clearly discernible.

Not that there was any measurable increase in abstinence, continence, or modesty; indeed there were some areas—some Middle-Western towns, many country villages—where the proprieties of an earlier day had been only slowly broken down and the sound of breakage was still loud; where the behavior of the "young married set" at the Saturday night rout at the local country club was more abandoned than ever, and where parents were comparing horrified notes about that appalling "new" phenomenon, the tendency of girls of fifteen and sixteen to come back from high-school parties smelling of gin and disturbingly rumpled. Said the Lynds of their findings in "Middletown," ". . . one got in 1935 a sense of sharp, free behavior between the sexes (patterned on the movies), and of less disguise among the young. A high-school graduate of eight years ago, now in close touch professionally with the young people of the city, was emphatic as regards the change: 'They've been getting more and more knowing and bold. The fellows regard necking as a taken-for-granted part of a date. We fellows used occasionally to get slapped for doing things, but the girls don't do that much any more.'"

Yet in the country at large there was a change of mood, a change of emphasis. The revolution was being consolidated. The shock troops were digging in in the positions they had won.

A neat measure of this change was offered in Hornell Hart's study of social attitudes in *Recent Social Trends*, which appeared at the beginning of 1933. Mr. Hart set forth the results of a careful statistical study of the beliefs and points of view reflected in the magazines of the country at various times. This study showed that the rebellion against the traditional code of sex morals—or, to put it another way, the rush of sentiment in favor of sex freedom—had reached its peak in the years 1923-1927; and although the magazines contained more discussions of family and sex problems during 1930 and 1931 than at any time during the preceding years, the tone was on the whole more conservative. In the year 1930 the magazines expressed more approval of marriage and family life, more approval of "comradeship, understanding, affection, sympathy, facilitation, accommodation, integration, co-operation" than in 1920.

If the change of mood became more striking as the years rolled by and the Depression deepened, one may ascribe this to a number of causes: the fact that any idea palls after a time, any bright new revolution begets doubts and questionings; the fact that young Mr. X, whose alcoholic and amorous verve had seemed so brilliantly daring in 1925, was now beginning to show not altogether attractive signs of wear and tear; the fact that Mrs. Y, who had so stoutly believed in her right to sleep where she pleased and had been sure that she didn't care with whom Mr. Y slept, had found she couldn't take it after all and had marched off to Reno; the fact that the Z children were having nightmares which the school psychiatrist attributed to the broken home from which they came; and the fact that the younger

brothers and sisters of the X's and Y's and Z's were tired of seeing their elders carom against the furniture and make passes at one another, and concluded that these old people were a messy lot. But the most important reason for the change was probably the Depression.

Hundreds of thousands of young people who wanted to get married could not afford to. The song "I Can't Give You Anything But Love, Baby" dated from 1928, but it might well have been the theme-song of the nineteen-thirties. The marriage rate per thousand population fell from 10.14 in 1929 to 7.87 in 1932. (Likewise the birth rate per thousand population also fell, from 18.9 in 1929 to 17.4 in 1932 and 16.5 in 1933—the 1933 figure reflecting, of course, largely the economic conditions of 1932.) When it was so difficult to marry, an increase in pre-marital sex relations was almost inevitable. "A confidential check-up of one group of more than two dozen young business-class persons in their twenties," reported the Lynds, "showed seven out of every ten of them, evenly balanced as to sex, to have had sexual relations prior to marriage." The huge sales of contraceptives—totaling, annually, according to various authorities, from an eighth to a quarter of a billion dollars, and transacted not only in drugstores but in filling stations, tobacco stores, and all sorts of other establishments—were certainly not made only to the married.

Yet the new state of affairs was hardly conducive to a frivolous or cynical attitude toward marriage and the family; and it pushed into the forefront of attention a relatively new problem: what was to be the future of the jobless young man and his girl, who loved each other deeply and really wanted to marry? Were they to postpone marriage and live resolutely apart? Or prevail upon their families to support them, perhaps letting them live in the spare room or the attic or some other corner of a parental home?

Often the elders could ill afford to feed another mouth;



and many a father who had slaved and scrimped for years, dreaming of retirement, and who now wondered how long his own job would last, blazed with anger to hear that young Harry had brought home a bride to consume the family savings. There were other elders who could well afford to shelter a young couple but who had been brought up to believe that no self-respecting young man married until he could support a wife, and who would cling to this idea, talk about a spoiled generation, tell how *they* hadn't *thought* of marrying till they were making forty dollars a week, and refuse to countenance any such nonsense. As a result, many young couples accepted as an alternative to immediate marriage an occasional night in a cheap hotel room or an auto-tourist cabin (many of these tourist cabins accepted, knowingly or innocently, a large proportion of local traffic). Hating the furtiveness of such meetings, hating the conventions which made them furtive, these young couples nevertheless felt their behavior was right—a response to necessity.

To many others, even less fortunate, the jobless children of jobless parents, the wandering nomads of the Depression, hitch-hiking through the country, riding the freight cars, sex became something that you took when you could; marriage was too remote to think about. Yet even here there was something new about the mood. There was little sense of a change in the moral code being willfully made, little sense that stolen love was "modern" adventure. The dilemma was practical. One managed as best one could, was continent or incontinent according to one's individual need and one's individual code, whether of morals or aesthetics or prudence or convenience. If the conventions were in abeyance, it was simply because the times were out of joint and no longer made sense; but that did not mean that one might not long for wedded security.

Among the hatless and waistcoatless young men of the college campuses, with their tweed coats and flannel slacks,

and among the college girls in their sweaters and tweed skirts and ankle socks, there was little of the rebellious talk about sex and marriage that had characterized the nineteen-twenties, little of the buzz of excitement that had accompanied the discussion of Freud and Havelock Ellis and Dora Russell. Whether there was less actual promiscuity is doubtful: a study of 1364 juniors and seniors in 46 colleges and universities of all types from coast to coast—made by Dorothy Dunbar Bromley and Florence Haxton Britten—showed that half the young men and a quarter of the girls had had pre-marital sex intercourse. The striking thing was that there was less to-do about sex. One's personal affairs were one's personal affair. As the editors of *Fortune* said in their account of the college youth of 1936: "As for sex, it is, of course, still with us. But the campus takes it more casually than it did ten years ago. Sex is no longer news. And the fact that it is no longer news is news."

The Depression also cut the divorce rate sharply: it dropped from 1.66 per thousand population in 1929 to only 1.28 per thousand population in 1932. Divorces cost money; and besides, in times of stress the fancy is likely to be less free. There was a good deal of pious talk about the way in which couples were re-united in love by hardship, but it is likely that in most cases what the hardship did was to subordinate everything to the stark necessity for getting along, love or no love. After the worst years the divorce rate rose again; no great reform had been effected; people who couldn't get on still separated when they must and could. Yet here again there was a change in emphasis: a more widespread sense of the damage inevitably done by a wrecked marriage to the children and to the separated partners themselves. It was perhaps significant that a public-opinion poll taken by *Fortune* in 1937 showed a majority against easy divorce. A similar poll in 1936 showed 63 per cent in favor of the teaching and practice of birth control, and in

1937 as many as 22.3 per cent approved of pre-marital experience *for both men and women*: there was no return to the old Puritan code. Yet there was a strong disposition to protect going marriages.

In short, although there was considerable public acceptance of pre-marital sex relations as inevitable and not sinful, and a tendency to approve of what one observer had called "a single standard, and that a low one," nevertheless marriage seemed to have become more highly prized as an institution than in the nineteen-twenties. The family seemed to have become more highly prized as an institution. "Sixty per cent of the college girls and fifty per cent of the men would like to get married within a year or two of graduation, and fifty per cent of each sex would like to have children soon after marriage," reported the editors of *Fortune* in their 1936 survey. The fact that the college girls of the nineteen-thirties were more eager for early marriage than those of the nineteen-twenties was noted by many college administrators. These same undergraduates and their contemporaries were on the whole less scornful of their parents and of parental ideas, less likely to feel that family life was a mockery, than the young people of ten years before.

Not only had the Depression made them more respectful of a meal ticket and of security; they had become pre-occupied with other things besides intimate personal relationships, as we shall presently see.

## § 2

The vagaries of fashion are so haphazard and are influenced by so many business expediencies that one cannot ascribe them wholly to changes in the social climate. Yet in their main outlines they at least provide suggestions worth correlating with other evidences of the social trend.

If, for example, the women's fashions of the nineteen-

twenties called for short skirts, a great reduction in the weight and cumbersomeness of clothes, a long-waisted, flat-fronted figure, and short hair cut in a Dutch bob or shingled almost like a boy's, surely here was a hint that women had become tired of the restrictions and responsibilities of conventional maturity and wanted a freedom and gaiety that they associated with immaturity: not the freedom of an old-fashioned little girl, sheltered and innocently pretty, but of an aggressively "modern" one—hard-boiled, "sophisticated" (to use a favorite complimentary term of that day), and ready to carry on with the boys. If the mannikins in the shop-windows and the sketches in the department-store advertisements gave the well-dressed woman a hard, blank, world-weary expression, here again was a hint as to the feminine ideal of the nineteen-twenties: she was a girl who, even before her figure had ripened, had become old in experience, had passed beyond the possibility of shock or enduring enthusiasm. And if, during the early years of that decade, the tail coat was a rarity among men and the dinner jacket was the standard wear even for the most formal occasions, here was a hint that the men, as well as the women, were in revolt against dignity and formality. In the nineteen-twenties, Americans wanted to be boys and girls together, equipped for a wild party but refusing to let it be thought that even the wildest party would arouse in them more than a fleeting excitement.

Now notice what happened later. Already before the end of the nineteen-twenties the tail coat was coming in again, with all the dignity that it conveyed. By 1929 the women's evening dresses were tentatively reaching for the floor—and for an effect of graciousness impossible to achieve with a knee-length gown. By 1930 they definitely were long—to remain thus, actually or virtually sweeping the floor, for the rest of the decade. And the women's daytime dresses gradually lengthened too until by 1933 they reached to within

a foot or even nine inches of the ground. The severe helmet hat of 1929, pulled down on the back of the head, gave way to a variety of styles all of which sought at prettiness, pertness, a gentler or more whimsical effect than had been aimed at in the 'twenties. Women's hair, too, became less severe, was curled at the back of the head more gaily. Ruffles came in, bows, furbelows, with nostalgic hints of the prettiments of long-dead days. Gone was the little-girl long-waisted effect; the waist returned where it belonged.

As for the flat figure, that was abandoned too. Said *Vogue* in April, 1932, "Spring styles say 'CURVES!'" By 1933, when the amply contoured Mae West was packing the motion-picture theatres in "She Done Him Wrong," Lily of France was advertising "the new boneless Duo-Sette," saying, "It beautifully emphasizes the uplift bust," and Formfit, illustrating a new creation with pictures of young women whose breasts were separately and sharply conspicuous, was calling attention to "the youthful, pointed, uplifted lines it will give you." The flat-breasted little girl of the nineteen-twenties had attained maturity and was proud of it; indeed so striking was the change between the ideal figure of 1929 and that of 1933 that one might almost have thought a new anatomical species had come into being.

There was a subtle change, too, in the approved type of femininity as represented in the department-store advertisements and the shop-window mannikins. The new type of the early nineteen-thirties was alert-looking rather than bored-looking. She had a pert, uptilted nose and an agreeably intelligent expression; she appeared alive to what was going on about her, ready to make an effort to give the company a good time. She conveyed a sense of competence. This was the sort of girl who might be able to go out and get a job, help shoulder the family responsibilities when her father's or husband's income stopped; who would remind them, in her hours of ease, of the good old days before

there were all-determining booms and depressions, the sentimental old days which Repeal itself reminded them of; and who would look, not hard, demanding, difficult to move deeply, but piquantly pretty, gentle, amenable, thus restoring their shaken masculine pride.

Nothing stands still, and as the years went on new changes took place. So many more women of the upper and middle classes were working now than had worked in the pre-Depression years that in their daytime costumes simplicity and practicality were in demand. The prevailing style of hairdress for younger women (a shoulder-length or almost shoulder-length page-boy or curled bob) was likewise simple—and incidentally very lovely: in years to come it may be that one of the most charming recollections of the nineteen-thirties will be of hatless girls striding along like young blond goddesses, their hair tossing behind them. (One recalls the complaint of a young man that almost every girl appeared good-looking from behind: it was only when he overtook her that disillusionment came.) When in the fall of 1938 an attempt was made to get women to put their short hair up, it only half-succeeded: it was too hard to manage.

Yet the impulse toward old-fashioned decoration, frivolity, and impractical eccentricity was all the time at work. There were attempts to re-introduce, in evening dresses, such ancient encumbrances as the bustle and the hoop skirt. Ruffled and pleated shirtwaists—with jabots—reappeared. The sandal idea, winning a rational approval for evening wear, was carried over irrationally into daytime wear, so that during the latter years of the decade half the younger women in the country were equipped with shoes with a small hole in front, which presented a stockinged toe to the eye and offered easy entrance to dust, gravel, and snow. As for the hats of those same latter years, here the modern

principle of standardized functional utility surrendered utterly to the modern principle of surrealist oddity.

There were huge hats, tiny hats, hats with vast brims and microscopic crowns, hats which were not hats at all but wreaths about the hair; high fezzes perched atop the head; flat hats, dinner-plate size, which apparently had been thrown at the wearer from somewhere out in front and had been lashed where they landed with a sort of halter about the back of the head; straw birds' nests full of spring flowers, hats with a single long feather pointing anywhere—but why continue the interminable catalogue of variations? It was characteristic of the times that a woman lunching at a New York tearoom in 1938 took the bread-basket off the table, inverted it on her head, and attracted no attention whatever.

Maturity, too, began to pall. Gradually the skirts became shorter and shorter (except in the evening); by 1939 they had retreated almost to the knees. "Little-girl" costumes, "girlish gingham," "swing" outfits "adapted from skating skirts" were bidding for attention, and the massive president of the woman's club was wondering whether she should try to insert herself into a bolero suit and put one of those bows in her hair. Apparently the old-fashioned little girl was becoming the standard type of the new day—unless the fashion makers should succeed in their attempt, late in 1939, to make her a grown-up old-fashioned woman (at least after nightfall), with a bustle, a wasp waist, and a boned corset startlingly like that in which her grandmother had suffered. Whether the new fashions would last or not, and just what they signified, it was still too early to predict.

### § 3

At thirty-two and a half minutes past three (Mountain Time) in the afternoon of the 5th of December, 1933, the roll call in the ratification convention in Utah was com-

pleted, and Utah became the 36th State to ratify the Twenty-first Amendment to the Constitution, repealing the Prohibition Amendment. A telegram went off to Washington, and presently the Acting Secretary of State and the President declared that Prohibition was at an end, after a reign of nearly fourteen years.

Crowds of men and women thronged the hotels and restaurants waiting for the word to come through that the lid was off, and when at last it did, drank happily to the new era of legal liquor. They thronged, too, to those urban speakeasies which had succeeded in getting licenses, and remarked how readily the front door swung open wide at the touch of the doorbell. But the celebration of the coming of Repeal was no riot, if only because in most places the supply of liquor was speedily exhausted: it took time for the processes of distribution to get into motion. And as for the processes of legal manufacture—which for distilled liquors are supposed to include a long period of aging—these were so unready that an anomalous situation developed. The available liquor was mostly in the hands of bootleggers; even the legal liquor was mostly immature. Among the people who, during the first days and months of repeal, rejoiced in at last being able to take a respectable drink of "good liquor" instead of depending upon "this bootleg stuff," thousands were consuming whisky which consisted simply of alcohol acceptably tinted and flavored. To a public whose taste had been conditioned for years by bootleg liquor, good bush needed no wine.

Drinking, to be sure, did not become legal everywhere. Eight States remained dry—all of them Southern except North Dakota, Kansas, and Oklahoma. (These states received—at least in the years immediately following repeal—very little assistance from the Federal government in protecting their aridity.) Fifteen States made the selling of liquor a State monopoly—though seven of these permitted



private sale under varying regulations, most of which, in a determined effort to prevent "the return of the saloon," forbade perpendicular drinking and insisted—at least for a time—that drinkers be seated at restaurant tables.

Despite these qualifications, the change in the American *mores* which began in 1933 was tremendous.

Hotels and restaurants blossomed with cocktail lounges and taprooms and bars, replete with chromium fittings, mirrors, bright-colored modern furniture, Venetian blinds, bartenders taken over from the speakeasies, and bartenders who for years had been serving at the oyster bar or waiting on table, and now, restored to their youthful occupation, persuaded the management to put on the wine list such half-forgotten triumphs of their ancient skill as Bronx and Jack Rose cocktails. So little building had been going on during the Depression that the architects and decorators had had almost no chance for years to try out the new principles of functional design and bright color and simplified furniture; now at last they had it, in the designing of cocktail lounges—with the odd result that throughout the nineteen-thirties most Americans instinctively associated modernist decoration with eating and drinking.

Hotels in cities which in days gone by would have frowned upon the very notion of a night club now somewhat hesitantly opened night clubs with floor shows—and found they were a howling success. Neat new liquor stores opened—in some States operated by government authority, in others under private ownership. It took some time for customers to realize that it was no longer necessary for a man carrying home a package of rum to act the part of a man carrying home a shoe box; and in some towns where the dry sentiment was still strong, there were men who continued to patronize bootleggers rather than subject themselves to the embarrassment of walking into the State liquor shop.

Restaurants which in pre-prohibition days would never have dreamed of selling liquor installed bars and made prodigious sales; the tearoom proprietor wrestled with her conscience and applied for a license; and even the Childs' restaurants, unmindful of their traditional consecration to dairy products, pancakes, and calories, opened up slick circular bars and sold Manhattans and old-fashionedes. And if most of the metropolitan speakeasies withered and died, if the speakeasy tickets grew dog-eared in the pocketbook of the man-about-town and at last were thrown away, if the hip flask became a rarity, if the making of bathtub gin became a lost art in metropolitan apartment houses, and the business executive no longer sallied forth to the trade convention with two bottles of Scotch in his golf bag, so many bright new bars appeared along the city streets that drinking seemed to have become not only respectable but ubiquitous.

For a time there was a wishful thought among those of gentle tastes that when good wines became more accessible a good many Americans would acquire fastidious palates. G. Selmer Fougner, Julian Street, Frank Schoonmaker, and other experts in the detection and savoring of rare vintages preached their gospel of deference to the right wine of the right year, and for a time ladies and gentlemen felt themselves to be nothing better than boors if they did not warm inwardly to the story of how somebody found a little French inn where the Château Latour 1929 was incomparable. But the crass American nature triumphed; pretty soon it was clear that even in the politest circles whisky was going to be the drink in greatest demand.

Whether there was more drinking after repeal than before cannot be determined statistically, owing to the obvious fact that the illicit sale of liquor was not measured. The consensus of opinion would seem to be that drinking pretty surely increased during the first year or two, and probably

increased in quantity thereafter, but that on the whole it decreased in stridency.

"Less flamboyant drinking is the present-day rule," said the *Fortune* survey of youth in college in 1936; "there is no prohibition law to defy, hence one can drink in peace." There were signs here and there of a reaction against drinking among the boys and girls of college age; observers reported some of them, at least, to be less interested in alcohol than their elders, and were amazed at the volume of their consumption of Coca-Cola and milk (Coca-Cola, long the standard soft drink of the South, had followed its invasion of the campuses of the Middle West by extending its popularity among the young people in the Northeast as well). The American Institute of Public Opinion, taking a poll in 1936 as to whether conditions were "better" or "worse" since repeal, or showed no significant change, arrived at a singularly inconclusive result: 36 per cent of the voters thought things were better, 33 per cent thought they were worse, 31 per cent saw no significant change: not only was the division almost even, but there was no way of knowing what each voter may have meant in his heart by "conditions" being "better."

One change was manifest: there was now more mixed drinking than ever, just as there was more smoking by both sexes. (In the six years from 1930 to 1936 the production of cigarettes went up from 123 billion to 158 billion, while the production of cigars decreased a little and that of smoking tobacco increased a little.) In fact, a phenomenon which had been conspicuous during the nineteen-twenties, when women smokers invaded the club cars of trains and women drinkers invaded the speakeasies, appeared to be continuing: there were fewer and fewer bars, restaurants, smoking cars, and other haunts set apart for men only: on the whole men and women were spending more of their time in one another's company and less of their time segregated

from one another. Perhaps it was not an altogether unrelated fact that most men's clubs were still somewhat anxiously seeking members throughout the nineteen-thirties and that many of the lodges were in dire straits. Was it not possible to infer that the male sex, for one, was enjoying mixed company too well to want very urgently to get away from it? Possibly the cause of feminism was triumphing in a way which the earnest suffragists of a generation before would never have expected—and at which they might have been dismayed.

And what became of the bootleggers? Some of them went into the legitimate liquor business or other legitimate occupations, some of them went into business rackets and gambling rackets, some joined the ranks of the unemployed—and a large number of them went right on bootlegging. For one of the most curious facts about the post-Repeal situation was that the manufacture and smuggling and wholesaling of illicit liquor continued in great volume. The Federal government and the States, in their zeal to acquire revenue from the sale of liquor, had clapped upon it such high taxes that the inducement to dodge them was great. Year after year the Internal Revenue agents continued to seize and destroy stills at the rate of something like 15,000 a year, and straightway new ones sprang up. In his report for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1938, the Commissioner of Internal Revenue, reporting that only 11,407 stills had been seized, noted, "This is the first year since the enactment of the Twenty-first Amendment that there has been a decline in illicit distillery seizures." Likewise rumrunning—or, to be more accurate, the smuggling of alcohol—continued to provide a headache for the customs officers and the Coast Guard; in February, 1935, more than a year after Repeal, the Coast Guard found twenty-two foreign vessels lying at sea *at one time* beyond our customs waters, waiting for a chance to sneak in.



*Picturer, Inc.*

**HE CAPTURED THE HEADLINES**

General Hugh S. Johnson, head of the NRA, who during the latter part of 1933 was (with the possible exception of the President) the most publicized citizen of America



*Otto F. Hess*

THE BIG APPLE

Taken at Glen Island Casino, New Rochelle, N. Y., 1938

So easy was it to operate illicit stills, to store bottles and counterfeit labels and counterfeit revenue stamps and alcohol cans in separate places, bottle the illicit liquor, transport it in trucks or automobiles equipped with traps, and offer a liquor store or saloonkeeper a consignment of spurious liquor at a bargain, that a year or two after repeal the best expert opinion was that anywhere from fifteen to sixty per cent of the liquor consumed in the United States was bootleg.

Were the American people glad that they had ended Prohibition? Apparently they were. A *Fortune* Quarterly Survey made late in 1937 showed that only 15.1 per cent of the men of the country and 29.7 per cent of the women wanted complete Prohibition back again. Even combining with this dry group those who were in favor of prohibition of hard liquors but would permit the sale of wine and beer, there was still approximately a two-thirds majority in favor of a wet regime. Americans might or might not think "conditions" were "better," but they did not—most of them—want to reopen the question.

Here and there a new wave of dry sentiment appeared to be forming. In Virginia, for instance, a scholarly book on the effects of alcohol, which was to have been distributed to the schools as a public document, came to the shocked attention of the WCTU at the end of 1937. Because the book contained such statements as, "It has been proved that we cannot abolish drinking by legislation nor frighten a person into sobriety" and "small quantities [of alcohol] may favor digestive activities," the WCTU exerted pressure on the legislature and the whole edition was solemnly burned in the Capitol furnace. In most communities, however, what had been a lively issue till 1933 had dropped almost completely out of the focus of general public attention, as if settled once and for all.

Could it really have been true, the men and women of

1939 asked themselves, that in 1929 Prohibition had been the topic of hottest debate in American public life?

#### § 4

We come now to a series of changes in everyday American life during the nineteen-thirties which might seem at first glance to have been unrelated, but which combine, perhaps, into a sort of pattern—a pattern of relaxation.

1. *The five-day week.* During 1931 and 1932, when factories and business offices were short of work, there were very general reductions in hours—intended partly to “spread the work” and partly to appease workers whose pay must be reduced. When the NRA codes came into being in 1933 and 1934 these reductions were continued or extended. After the NRA was abolished most of them—though not all—were continued. The result was that millions of people, rich and poor, found themselves with Saturdays free during part of the year if not all of it. A study made by the National Industrial Conference Board in 1937 showed the extent of the five-day week: out of 2,452 companies (mostly manufacturing companies) reporting, 57.3 per cent had a five-day week for their wage earners, 45.3 per cent had a five-day week for their clerical workers, and 7.5 per cent reported a five-day week but did not specify what types of workers were included. “While five years ago the five-day week was exceptional,” summarized the report, “it has now become quite general.” Business offices followed a similar pattern in the larger cities (especially New York); and although few shops were closed on Saturdays, there was an increasing tendency among them to stagger the hours of their employees.

Perhaps no change that took place during the decade more sharply altered the weekly routine of millions of men and women. It altered the pattern of automobile and



train traffic too, increasing the Friday rush out of the cities, decreasing the Saturday rush. I recall a certain train which until the Depression used to leave New York for Westchester County in two crowded sections every Saturday noon; by 1933 it was running in one modest section, so thin was the Saturday traffic—and presently a second section was added to one of the Friday evening trains. The two-day week end was supplanting the day-and-a-half week end. On Saturday mornings, especially in summer, the business districts of the larger cities were coming to wear a Sunday aspect. Quantities of people had gained new leisure—quite apart from those millions upon whom an unwelcome idleness had been thrust. The long slow trend toward shorter work periods and longer play periods, a trend which had been under way in America for as long as any living man could remember, had been sharply accelerated.

2. *A democratization of sport.* To the aid of men and women who had more leisure and less money came the relief and public-works agencies, putting millions of unemployed men to work building motor parkways, public bathing beaches, playgrounds, and other conveniences for people who were looking for sport. According to the 1935 *Year Book of National Recreation* the number of public bathing beaches, public golf courses, ice-skating areas, and swimming pools in 2,204 communities had already *doubled* since 1925. Some of these new facilities were built on a modest scale, but others were huge: Jones Beach on Long Island, for example, as magnificent an example of enlightened public planning as the decade produced, could and did comfortably accommodate one hundred thousand people or more on a sunny Sunday in midsummer.

Consider what happened to the game of golf. The Depression hit the private golf clubs hard. As many as 1,155 clubs had belonged to the United States Golf Association in 1930; by 1936 the number had been reduced to 763—

and this despite frantic drives for new members, special summer-membership schemes, and other rescue devices. The golf clubs of the country were said to have lost something like a million members since 1929. But the number of municipal golf courses grew from 184 in 1925 to 576 in 1935, and there were over a thousand courses—most of them probably private-club courses which had gone bankrupt—now operating on a daily-fee basis. In short, expensive golf had lost ground; inexpensive golf had gained.

In general the simpler and less pretentious sports made the best headway. Although school and college basketball, professional baseball, and college football were still pre-eminent as sports to watch, nevertheless in the older colleges and schools they attracted a somewhat less devout interest than in earlier years. Let the editors of *Fortune* (writing in 1936) summarize one element in the change: "The football star, the crew captain, the 'muscular Christian' from the college Y.M.C.A., the smoothie from the big prep school who becomes track manager, the socially graceful prom leader—these still have honor and respect. But the intellectually curious person, who used to be considered queer or 'wet' unless he had extra-intellectual characteristics to recommend him, is climbing past the conventional big man. Englishmen, long accustomed to spotting future under-secretaries of the Foreign Office . . . on visits to Cambridge and Oxford, have remarked on this mutation in American campus leadership, and are inclined to set 1932 as the date at which the mutation became apparent." Meanwhile there was a significant increase, in many colleges and schools, in the interest taken in *playing* games such as soccer, lacrosse, rugby, squash racquets, and tennis, which existed without benefit of massive stadia.

In the country at large, the game which made the biggest gain in popularity was softball—that small-scale version of baseball which had once been known chiefly as "indoor

baseball." Coming into its own at about the beginning of the decade, it grew so fast that by 1939 there were said to be half a million teams and more than five million players of all ages; there were numerous semi-professional teams, there were world's series matches, and among the semi-professionals were girls' teams, the members of which delighted the crowds by wearing very abbreviated shorts but occasionally sliding to bases nonetheless. The Depression also brought minor booms in such sports as bicycling and roller skating. The bicycling boom began as a fad in the Hollywood area in the winter of 1932-33 (when it gave California girls a fine excuse for putting on "trousers like Dietrich's") and spread widely during the next two or three years, chiefly, perhaps, because it was inexpensive.

The simultaneous skiing craze was a more complex phenomenon. For country dwellers who lived where the terrain and winter temperature were suitable it was inexpensive; for city dwellers who had to carry their equipment long distances, it was not. Perhaps one secret of its rise was the increasing vogue of winter holidaying, which itself had a complex ancestry (the discovery of the delights of winter holidaying in the warmth of Florida or California, the rising popularity of winter-cruising and of motoring outside the country to escape from Prohibition, the shortening of the work week, the secularization of Sunday and the rise of the week-end habit, etc.). At any rate the skiing craze grew rapidly during the Depression, stimulated in 1932 by the holding at Lake Placid, New York, of the winter Olympics. The Boston & Maine Railroad had made such a success of the experiment of running Sunday "snow trains" into the comparatively wide open spaces north of Boston that by 1937 snow trains or snow busses were running out of New York, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Portland, San Francisco, and Los Angeles; department stores were importing Norwegian specialists and building ski-slides; the Grand Central Station

in New York was posting prominently in its concourse the daily temperature and snow data for a dozen skiing centers in New England and New York, and rural hotelkeepers in icy latitudes were advertising their unequaled skiing facilities and praying nightly throughout the winter for the snowfall upon which their fortunes depended.

The skiing craze was beyond the means of the urban poor and was geographically limited; nevertheless it confirmed in one respect the general trend. More Americans were getting out into the sun and air; learning to play themselves instead of simply paying to see others play.

Women were purchasing strange new play garments, ranging from shorts to beach pajamas, overalls, slacks, and "play suits." More and more men were going hatless in summer, to the anguish of the hatters. For that matter, more and more men were going waistcoatless and soft-collared and garterless and undershirtless; it is said that when Clark Gable, in the undressing scene in "It Happened One Night" (1935), disclosed that he wore no undershirt, the knitwear manufacturers reeled from the shock to their sales. The bathing suit top had been generally discarded. Men at play were even beginning to break out into bright-colored play-shirts, slacks, and shorts. By 1939 one saw men of conservative taste strolling unabashed through summer-resort villages in costumes whose greens and blues and reds would have drawn stares of amazement in 1929.

In short, so far as the tension of the times would permit, Americans were apparently learning to relax.

3. *An increase in bridge playing.* If one superimposes upon a graph of business conditions during the decade a graph showing the taxes collected on playing cards, one notices an odd variation. While the business index was plunging into the depths from 1929 to 1932, the index of playing cards manufactured, after dropping between 1929 and 1930, actually *rose* between 1930 and 1931, only to sag

thereafter and never recover to its 1931 point. The year 1931, it will be recalled, was the year when Mr. and Mrs. Ely Culbertson played contract against Sidney S. Lenz and Oswald Jacoby in a green-and-rose drawing-room at the Hotel Chatham in New York, with favored spectators peeking at them through a screen, star reporters clustering in a neighboring room to study the play-by-play bulletins, and direct news wires flashing to an eager public the narrative of some rather indifferent play. Throughout the following year Culbertson's books on bridge ranked high among the best sellers.

For a long time bridge had been a standard after-dinner sport among the adult prosperous; but now its vogue was spreading. The Lynds reported that in "Middletown" there was much more bridge played in 1935 than in 1925; there was more playing for money; the game had reached down through the high school to children in the sixth grade; and it was invading the working class, "spreading there first through the women's groups and then more slowly to a more resistant group of men, who prefer their pinochle and poker."

4. *An increase in gambling.* Allied, perhaps, to the increase in bridge playing was a notable increase in the number of gambling devices made accessible to the American people. Most of these were devices for wagering a small amount of money in the hope of a big return, and their rise may have been due largely to Depression desperation—the wild hope of winning in a gamble what the ordinary processes of the economic system stubbornly withheld. But they bore witness also to that weakening of the Puritan traditions which helped bring Repeal, the week end of motoring or sport, and the bridge vogue.

According to Samuel Lubell, the business of manufacturing and operating slot machines, punchboards, pinball games, jar deals, and other similar contrivances for separat-

ing the public from its nickels grew during the Depression to giant proportions, and in 1939 "its annual take was somewhere between one half and three quarters of a billion dollars—between ten and fifteen billion nickels"—as much money as was spent annually in the shoe stores. There was nothing new in principle about the slot machine, the improved model of which looked like a cash register and was known as a "one-armed bandit": the founder of the leading company engaged in manufacturing them had begun business in 1889 and had died in 1929, a millionaire. Slot machines had had a bad reputation, having been widely in the control of gangs and dependent for operation upon political "fix," yet they continued to flourish widely, sometimes one jump ahead of the police, sometimes with police connivance. And in 1932 a new game, pinball, was introduced which could be played simply for fun, at a nickel a turn, as well as with gambling intent, and it swept the country: pinball boards were to be found in unmolested operation in drugstores, tobacco stores, hotel corridors, cafés, and all sorts of other places. It was based upon the old game of bagatelle: the player shot marbles out of a chute and watched them run down a slope into holes partially protected by pins. The punchboard and jar games—the latter invented in 1933—also prospered; between 1933 and 1939 some two million jar games were sold.

A quite different kind of gamble was represented in the tremendous American participation in the Irish Sweepstakes, a lottery inaugurated in 1930 on behalf of a group of Irish hospitals, and conducted with such honesty and efficiency that within five years it had become the most successful lottery in the world. Although a Federal statute made lottery information unmailable in the United States and this at first prevented newspapers from printing accounts of the Sweeps in their mail editions, the ban on news publication was later relaxed, every Sweeps drawing became

a front-page story, and Americans grew used to reading of janitors and unemployed chefs into whose astonished hands a hundred and fifty thousand dollars had dropped. Many of the tickets sold in the United States never reached Ireland; but if, in the drawing for the 1933 Derby, over six and a half million tickets were in the drum (as was estimated) and 214 of the 2,404 winners (or more than one in fifteen) were American, one may reasonably guess that there may have been over four hundred thousand Americans whose tickets actually got into that particular draw.

Nor should we forget, in any survey of the trend, the relaxation in many States of the laws against race-track betting; the "Bank Night" device of drawing for cash prizes in the movie theatres—a device introduced by Charles Urban Yeager in the Egyptian Theatre at Delta, Colorado, and the Oriental Theatre at Montrose, Colorado, in the winter of 1932-33, and subsequently copyrighted by him as it spread to thousands of other theatres, which by 1937 were paying Yeager's firm a total of \$30,000 to \$65,000 a week; the game of bingo (or beano, or keno), which became immensely popular as a money-making entertainment for churches, and in various forms was widely played in movie theatres and elsewhere, till in 1938 some people were referring to it as the most popular money game in the country; and possibly the pathetic epidemic of chain-letter writing which spread from Denver all over the United States in 1934-35 ("Scratch out the top name and send a dime"). Nor has this brief survey taken account of various older gambling devices which persisted, sometimes in new guises and under new sponsorship—as did the numbers racket when Dutch Schultz, the liquor racketeer, took over its management in the Harlem section of New York and systematized it during the last days of Prohibition.

In 1938 a Gallup poll revealed that during the preceding year an estimated 29 per cent of the American people—

meaning, one supposes, adults—had taken part in church lotteries (presumably including bingo parties), 26 per cent had played punch boards, 23 per cent had played slot machines, 21 per cent had played cards for money, 19 per cent had bet on elections, 13 per cent had taken sweepstakes tickets, 10 per cent had bet on horse races, and 9 per cent had indulged in numbers games. There were no Gallup polls in the preceding decade, but one wonders if any score even approaching that would have been made in the nineteen-twenties—unless, perhaps, playing the stock market and buying Florida real estate had been included in the gambles.

## § 5

Yet despite all these manifestations of gaiety, relaxation, and sport there was a new tension, a disquiet. For the Depression had wrecked so many of the assumptions upon which the American people had depended that millions of them were inwardly shaken.

Let us look for a moment at the pile of wreckage. In it we find the assumption that well-favored young men and women, coming out of school or college, could presently get jobs as a matter of course; the assumption that ambition, hard work, loyalty to the firm, and the knack of salesmanship would bring personal success; the assumption that poverty (outside of the farm belt and a few distressed communities) was pretty surely the result of incompetence, ignorance, or very special misfortune, and should be attended to chiefly by local charities; the assumption that one could invest one's savings in "good bonds" and be assured of a stable income thereafter, or invest them in the "blue-chip" stocks of "our leading American corporations" with a dizzying chance of appreciation; the assumption that the big men of Wall Street were economic seers, business forecasters could fore-



cast, and business cycles followed nice orderly rhythms; and the assumption that the American economic system was sure of a great and inspiring growth.

Not everybody, of course, had believed all of these things. Yet so many people had based upon one or more of them their personal conceptions of their status and function in society that the shock of seeing them go to smash was terrific. Consider what happened to the pride of the business executive who had instinctively valued himself, as a person, by his salary and position—only to see both of them go; to the banker who found that the advice he had been giving for years was made ridiculous by the turn of events, and that the code of conduct he had lived by was now under attack as crooked; to the clerk or laborer who had given his deepest loyalty to “the company”—only to be thrown out on the street; to the family who had saved their pennies, decade after decade, against a “rainy day”—only to see a torrent of rain sweep every penny away; to the housewife whose ideal picture of herself had been of a person who “had nice things” and was giving her children “advantages,” economic and social—and who now saw this picture smashed beyond recognition; and to the men and women of all stations in life who had believed that if you were virtuous and industrious you would of course be rewarded with plenty—and who now were driven to the wall. On what could they now rely? In what could they now believe?

One might have expected that in such a crisis great numbers of these people would have turned to the consolations and inspirations of religion. Yet this did not happen—at least in the sense in which the clergy, in innumerable sermons, had predicted it. The long slow retreat of the churches into less and less significance in the life of the country, and even in the lives of the majority of their members, continued almost unabated.

The membership rolls of most of the larger denomina-

tions, to be sure, showed increases. Between 1929 and 1937-38, for example, the Roman Catholic population increased from 20,203,702 to 21,322,608—a modest gain. The Methodist, Baptist, and Lutheran churches also grew in numbers. Yet membership figures are a notoriously uncertain measure of religious vitality. As regards the large Protestant—or nominally Protestant—population of the country, the observations of the Lynds, returning to “Middletown” in 1935 and contrasting the religious life of the city then with what it had been in 1925, offer probably a fairer measure.

The Lynds found some imposing new churches in “Middletown”—products of the hopeful days of the Big Bull Market—but inside the churches they saw little visible change. “Here, scattered through the pews,” they reported, “is the same serious and numerically sparse Gideon’s band—two-thirds or more of them women, and few of them under thirty—with the same stark ring of empty pews ‘down front.’” The congregations seemed to the Lynds to be older than in 1925, the sermon topics interchangeable. Consulting the ministers, they gathered such comments as these:—

“The Depression has brought a resurgence of earnest religious fundamentalism among the weak working-class sects . . . but the uptown churches have seen little similar revival of interest.”

“There has been some turning to religion during the Depression, but it has been very slight and not permanent.”

From a local editor they gleaned the possibly revealing comment that “All the churches in town, save a few denominations like the Seventh Day Adventists, are more liberal today than in 1925. Any of them will take you no matter what you believe doctrinally.” They quoted as typical of the attitude of the “Middletown” young people toward formal religion the comment of a college boy on Christian-

ity: "I believe these things but they don't take a large place in my life." Their analysis concluded with the judgment that religion, in "Middletown," appeared to be "an emotionally stabilizing agent, relinquishing to other agencies leadership in the defining of values."

The preponderance of evidence from other parts of the country would seem to sustain this judgment. Put on one side of the balance such phenomena as the upsurge of intense interest, here and there, in the refined evangelism of the Oxford Groups led by Dr. Frank Buchman, and their "Moral Rearmament" campaign in 1938-39; put on the other side the intensified hostility of radicals who regarded the churches as institutions run for the comfort of the rich and the appeasement of the poor; recall how briefly the stream of Sunday-pleasuring automobiles was halted by the men and women straggling at noontime out of the church on Main Street; compare the number of people to whom Sunday evening was the hour of vespers with the number of people to whom it was the evening when Charlie McCarthy was on the air—and one can hardly deny that the shock of the Depression did not find the churches, by and large, able to give what people thought they needed.

## § 6

Yet in the broader sense of the word religion—meaning the values by which people live, the loyalties which stir them most deeply, the aspirations which seem to them central to their beings—no such shock could have failed to have a religious effect. One thinks of the remark of a young man during the dark days of 1932: "If someone came along with a line of stuff in which I could really believe, I'd follow him pretty nearly anywhere." That remark was made, as it happens, in a speakeasy, and the young man was not thinking in terms of puritan morality or even of Christian piety, but

in terms of economic and political and social policy. For such as he the times produced new creeds, new devotions.

But these were secular.

Their common denominator was social-mindedness; by which I mean that they were movements toward economic or social salvation—whether conceived in terms of prosperity or of justice or of mercy—not so much for individuals as such but for groups of people or for the whole nation, and also that they sought this salvation through organized action.

In political complexion these secular religionists ranged all the way from the communists at one end of the spectrum to the more fervent members of the Liberty League at the other. They included the ardent devotees of technocracy, Upton Sinclair's "Epic," Huey Long's "Share-Our-Wealth," Father Coughlin's economic program, the Townsend Plan, the CIO, and, of course, the New Deal. Of the way in which the battles between them raged—and the whole battlefield gradually moved to the left, so to speak—we shall hear more in chapters to come. At this point it need only be remarked that most of the new religions of social salvation did not gather their maximum momentum until after the New Deal Honeymoon was over; or perhaps it is more accurate to say that the New Deal, during its Honeymoon, gathered up or overshadowed nearly all of them. It was during the next two or three years that the fires of zeal burned most intensely: that one man in three at a literary party in New York would be a communist sympathizer, passionately ready to join hands, in proletarian comradeship, with the factory hand or sharecropper whom a few years before he had scorned as a member of Mencken's "booboisie"; that daughters of patrician families were defiantly marching to the aid of striking garment workers, or raising money for the defense of Haywood Patterson in the long-drawn-out Scottsboro case; that college intellectuals were nibbling at

Marx, picketing Hearst newsreels, and—with a flash of humor—forming the "Veterans of Future Wars."

How completely the focus of public attention had become political, economic, and social, and how fully the rebelliousness of the rebellious had turned into these channels, may be suggested by the fact that H. L. Mencken, whose *American Mercury* magazine had been the darling of the young intellectuals of the 'twenties, lost ground as it became evident that Mr. Mencken, though liberal in matters of literature and morals, was a tory in matters of politics and economics—until by 1933, when he resigned his editorship, the new highbrows were dismissing him airily as a back number. Nor did the intellectuals rise in furious defense of freedom of expression when the Catholic Legion of Decency imposed a censorship upon the movies in 1934-35. They were tired of all that, and their protests were faint. They had turned to fresh woods and pastures new.

## § 7

Underneath the tumult and the shouting of argument, underneath the ardor for this cause or that, there remained, however, gnawing doubts. The problems were so bewildering, so huge. The unsettlement of ideas had been so shaking. Things changed so frightfully fast. This plan, this social creed, looked all right today—but would it hold tomorrow? To many Americans, if not most, the complexity of the problems, the hopelessness of arriving at sure solutions, were so great that no social ardor could really move them. While the social salvationists marched in earnest procession toward their various goals of revolution or reforms, these others stood silent and bewildered by the roadside. Something had gone wrong with the country but they didn't know what, couldn't figure it out, wondered if anybody could figure it out.

Toward the end of the decade, when Archibald MacLeish published his *Land of the Free*, through the poem he introduced the recurring words, "We don't know—we can't say—we're wondering. . . ." and observers who had talked with numbers of the drought refugees said that these very words were constantly on the refugees' lips. So it was with innumerable others whose lives had been overturned by the Depression, and with still others who had suffered no bitter hurt themselves but realized that something queer and incomprehensible was happening to the community. They didn't know; and they were likely to fall back into apathy or fatalism, into a longing for a safe refuge from the storm of events.

To quote the editors of *Fortune* once more (speaking of the majority of college students, not the intellectual minority): "The present-day college generation is fatalistic . . . the investigator is struck by the dominant and pervasive color of a generation that will not stick its neck out. It keeps its shirt on, its pants buttoned, its chin up, and its mouth shut. If we take the mean average to be the truth, it is a cautious, subdued, unadventurous generation, unwilling to storm heaven, afraid to make a fool of itself, unable to dramatize its predicament. . . . Security is the summum bonum of the present college generation." This sort of caution was not confined to the campuses. One saw it in business men: "We used to feel pretty sure about what would happen. Now we don't know what will happen." One felt it in the constant iteration, in economic discussions, of the word "confidence"—which enters the vocabulary only when confidence is lacking. One detected it in the strength of the movements for old people's pensions, in the push for social security. The sons and daughters of the pioneers might hazard their small change on bingo or the one-armed bandit, but they did not want life to be a gamble.

Except during the hopeful interval of the New Deal



*Pictarea, Inc.*

**J. P. MORGAN AT THE WITNESS TABLE**

This picture was taken at the Senate Munitions Committee hearing in 1936. Left, Frank Vanderlip. Right (behind Morgan), George Whitney of J. P. Morgan & Co.



*Pictures, Inc.*

**BLACK BLIZZARD COMING!**

Looking along a western Oklahoma highway in December, 1935,  
as a cloud black with powdered topsoil rolls up



Honeymoon, when hope suddenly and briefly rode high, through the shifting moods of the American people ran an undercurrent of fear. They wanted to feel certainty and security firm as a rock under their feet—and they did not, and were afraid.