

# In Memory of Franz Oppenheimer

By OTTO JULIUSBURGER

**B**ECAUSE of long and intimate association with the basic sociological principles of Franz Oppenheimer [author of *The State*], I wish to express, in a few thoughtful words, some of my recollections of this deceased friend.

During the eighteen-forties Rudolf Virchow (for whom Oppenheimer in the course of sociological investigations expressed great admiration) undertook a thorough study, on the spot, of the hunger-typhoid epidemic in upper Silesia. Not satisfied, with treating individual cases where the disease had already broken out, he concentrated his attention on the social aspects of his task. He wanted to introduce practical methods of at least mitigating the abnormal life-conditions of the populace, i.e., of declaring systematic, all-out war on pauperism, housing shortage, undernourishment and alcoholism. According to Virchow, disease is simply life under abnormal conditions. Virchow's genius enabled him to see straight to the root of all evil and disease. He did not overlook, over and beyond the individual, the latter's integration with and dependence upon the society of which he is a part.

## Purified Drinking Water Halted Munich's Plague

Until the advent of Pettenkofer, the celebrated professor of hygiene, it was the custom in Munich to fight typhus only through treatment of individual patients. At that time thousands were stricken and hundreds died every year in Munich, as the dreaded pestilence claimed its victims. Pettenkofer attacked this as primarily a social problem, and when by providing the city with pure drinking water and adequate sewerage he had cut off the plague at the root, the epidemic simply disappeared, and ill-famed Munich became a healthy city. Pettenkofer used to say that to achieve any great sociological improvement, the level of a whole people's standard of living had to be raised, exactly as in economics or in culture. "In these words is the incalculable superiority of sociological or social medicine over that of the individual very clearly expressed," wrote Oppenheimer, the congenial physician and sociologist, with Muller-Lyer, in his remarkable book, *The Sociology of Suffering*.

Oppenheimer had begun his career as an interne in one of Berlin's worst slum districts, and often had to stand helpless at the bedside of a tuberculosis patient. From this apprenticeship in individual therapy emerged the great social or sociological physician, who not only recognized the pauperism and terrifying lack of living quarters in the metropolis, but also laid bare the roots of their origin. Yet far from being satisfied therewith, he likewise proposed a sovereign remedy, described in some of his many big-calibre books. Oppenheimer was one, with Virchow, Pettenkofer, and Muller-Lyer, of the immortal pioneers in social therapy. Let us re-

joice in this four-cornered constellation, precious souvenir of the Germany that was, and is no more.

## Recognition Came Late

We should not forget that Oppenheimer was also closely associated with the famous surgeon Schleich, who when he first described his local anaesthesia before the Medical Society of Berlin, was jeered at and roundly ridiculed for his

pains; later, he was awarded high honors for his immortal discovery.

Particular mention must also be made of Oppenheimer's extremely psychological studies in Vol. I of his *Sociology*, where he really "digs into" the subject to reveal to us his uncommonly fine observation of psychological phenomena in both individual and social fields. Here is also a genealogical table of great value, enumerating the various psychical steps in the development of the science—an outstanding analysis, the importance of which I wish especially to emphasize. Oppenheimer, following Schopenhauer's voluntaristic psychology, begins naturally, in his "genealogy," with the fundamental concepts of the lack of energy and of its surplus. Energy here, of course, is used not in a moral sense but only in the psycho-physical sense of Energetics. With Oppenheimer the "we" consciousness plays a very remarkable and leading role.

From the psychical department and attitude of the relevant group, and the intellectual community of which it is a part, manifold mental and emotional impulses penetrate a given individual consciousness passing then into the more or less clarified "we" consciousness, which nevertheless still vibrates smoothly with the "I" predisposition.

Oppenheimer's remarkable personality is indicated in this characteristic "sample" from one of his last letters to me in 1941:

"I am determined to hold fast to LIFE, if necessary with my teeth, until the Powers of nonsense and damnation are finally beaten to the ground . . . I am always hard at work. You may rest assured that I will neglect *nothing* that might open the eyes of the politicians to what *must* happen. Perhaps it may help. The Opposition is powerfully organized and entrenched, and we are so few, and possess only the good weapons of Truth and Reason. I respect all of that, in the sense that I do not insult people who believe in it or think they believe in it, but for me, I refuse to have any part on it."

The great thinker, the kind-hearted, just man, the pure, strong personality embodied in Franz Oppenheimer has passed the boundary between Time and Eternity. His works live after him, a fruitful blessing to posterity.