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## The Voice of the Phi Sigma -- 1952 --

Phi Sigma

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THE VOICE

PHI SIGMA - APRIL 1952



The Voice

Introduction

After my contribution (using the word loosely) to last years Voice, in which this Society so readily guessed my notorious character after the first five spoken words of two written pages, I approach the task of introducing this years Voice with some feeling of confusion. Confusion as to whether this second trial will permanently bar me from this learned group or whether Phi Sigma is getting so careless about its program that I should resign anyhow. If I'm the kind of people they have as members, perhaps I dont want to belong to such a group. In any event, Hazel stepped into this state of mind with an idea or two, being careful to stop short of work. The Voice, this year consists of six original essays. The subjects were the choice of the speakers. Humorous or serious treatment was likewise left to them. The time allotted was 10 or 15 minutes. The point is that these are original essays. This is our idea of what the Voice should be and we hope you like it.



"The dulle thoughts of another fellow" has special significance for us, being the title subject of many of Samuel Shaw Parks witty remarks before this Society years ago. I am sorry I did not know him. Jesse Parks Bonson has appropriately consented to share in the Voice with the "Dulle Thoughts of Another Fellow's Daughter." Jesse, you're up.

A secret thought of mine, unrevealed until now, is that an essay is 2 or 3 pages of beautiful writing, the meaning of which is usually quite obscure. And somebody better be obscure. However, I know that our next contributor will leave you in no such state of obscurity. He is clarity itself with meaning. I always enjoy listening to Herb Grassman and you will too, I know. Herb!

A wife, whose husband has a hobby is a happy wife, I always say. Actually, I don't always say that. In fact, I have never said it until this moment. But it sounds good and rings true, if the hobby isn't



blonds or week end golf. Perhaps I should put it this way - show me a happy wife and I'll show you a husband who lets her have her own way. Anyhow, here's that wife to tell us about her husband's hobby and it's interesting. Katherine Barr will now tell all.

I could deliver a little essay myself on why I like Phi Sigma. But not now. I do enjoy the ability of this group to treat the humorous as well as the serious. George Preucil has told me something of his talk, it's a theme that we should all consider seriously, it's timely and important. He who does not work, shall not eat - to quote an old-fashioned saying. George, the floor is yours.



Much has been written and discussed about the relationship of man to man. I'm sure you all remember the review of "All Men are Brothers" given a couple of years ago here



by Tony Frystak. Tonight, Tony is going to discuss one aspect of a different relationship, not <sup>of</sup> man to man, but of man to woman. "The Theory of Contrary Opinion" is his title. Tony, proceed.

#

Louise Laadt phoned me early this morning to say that the plumber woke her up, that she wasn't going out of town with Jimmie and hence would appear in the Voice, as scheduled. This was fortunate as her contribution is such that no one else could have given it. Louise, we are glad you are with us this evening.

Earl Meyer

April 18, 1952



THE IDLE THOUGHTS OF ANOTHER FELLOW'S DAUGHTER.

The Other Fellow's daughter wondered what she would write for the Phi Sigma's Voice.

She remembered the many contributions that the Other Fellow had made to the voice, she recalled many of the former members who had taken such an active part in the Society. She wondered what they would think of to-day's group, she felt sure they would be happy to know how well the club was progressing. Why are we so fond of Phi Sigma ?

A friend sent me a poem the other day and I think it could be applied to us in Phi Sigma

" Why are we friends ? Well I'll tell you why, 'twas all in the pattern that you and I should meet each other and learn to know, The wonders of friendship we treasure so, And I think God smiles from his heaven blue, On us who are making his pattern true." And another one, " Life is sweet because of the friends we have made, And the things which in common we share, We want to live on not because of ourselves, But because of the people who care, In giving and doing for somebody else, On that all Life's splendor depends, But the joy of this world when you've summed it all up, Is found in the making of Friends."

Phi Sigma have no meaning for us if we do not give it our best and feel proud that we belong to such an outstanding society. The friendships formed in this group should be among our prized possessions.

I have always been interested in the signs posted at our Railroad Crossing, STOP, LOOK, AND LISTEN. They would make a good slogan for our Life's Roads too. We could well take the thought imposed in that sign with us every where we go. It would be a good thing for all of us to stop in our mad rush, wearing ourselves out by trying to compete with the time table. Stop and reflect on the beauty of nature, even a blizzard is a beautiful thing to observe.

Then there is that word **look**. I recall the old admonition -- " look before you, leap." Before making decisions we would gain a great deal if we would look at the facts in the case and weigh them carefully. How much we might learn, that we do not, if we would but use our eyes --- keep looking for new discoveries, no matter where we may be. (See next page.)

Perhaps that last word in our sign is the most important. The listener doesn't cross the railroad until he is sure no train is in sight. Thousands have lost their lives because they did not listen. The habitual listener is the wise one. He listens to talk, often arguments, without saying a word, and he mulls this talk about in his mind and adds it to his bank of stored know-  
ledge, when <sup>he</sup> does speak he speaks with authority as he has listened.

Often in the forest I have stopped, looked about me, and listened, only to discover the source of my alert was a tiny songstress near by letting its heart run over in song. In nature



ture land this noted sign of "STOP, LOOK AND LISTEN" is put into practical use by every lover of the wild.

I am sure the Other Fellow would close with the words of Oliver Wendell Holmes, " I find the great thing in this world is not so much where we stand as in what direction we are moving."

The Other Fellow's daughter feels sure that Phi Sigma is moving in the right direction.

Jessie Parks Bonson.

Under Look add--By looking we think we have gained a new experience but in reality it is only an old one come to light. Looking gives us an open mind.



Contribution to The Voice  
Phi Sigma Night  
April 11, 1952  
(Herbert S. Grassman)

SOME 'ELEVATED' THOUGHTS

or

DISCOURSE ON THE "EL"

There is something about the Lake Street "El", if you get on it before it gets crowded, that is conducive to reverie, - what literary people call a brown study. I don't mean the kind that Bill Nye ascribed to one of his friends, who happened to be a married man with a wife and seven children. This poor man fell into a real brown study once, and while he was in it ran off with a girl with yellow hair, and didn't come out of it for more than two years.

The kind I mean - on a train for example - does lose awareness of externals, but they can and do break in when something happens suddenly, or noisily, above the level of jar and rumble you have got used to. The train I was on lurched hard as it gathered speed, and wrenched me loose from my thoughts. In the same instant I became conscious of a nearby conversation to my left. I had been sitting alongside the car facing the opposite windows, and the talk I began to hear came from the double seat whose back I was partly leaning against. It was serious talk, which I couldn't help but overhear, and I found myself moving away a little, not to get out of range, but to observe the speakers better.

Both were young men to me, in their early thirties or maybe a little more, interesting looking, but not what women would call handsome, and each in turn spoke and listened earnestly to the other, without interruption, surely a mark of maturity of control. Apparently, too, there was some education between them.

"So Alice insisted", the Gray Coat was saying, "that I take it in, and frankly I got nothing out of it. Nothing. Nor could she explain it, but she enthuses that it's 'stimulating', 'communicates feeling', and similar vague stuff. If this is modern art at its best, or at representative average, then modern artists are either screwy, or polishing a racket, - probably both. Doorknobs scrambled in blue eggs, which are floating in coffee, can't be art, whether you spell it with a small 'a' or a big one! Would you agree for once, Bill? "

"Well, maybe partly, " the other said, "though it's not just a question of all black or all white - goose egg or goose. But your mention of doorknobs just sparked another thought, Joe. Remember my taking a fill-in semester in Art Appreciation, and almost flunking that? Prof Martin labored hard at it, and I now recall some chatter that involved Chesterton's ideas about it. Particularly, he complained that people quarrel so much about the arts, which really involve taste, and yet fail to recognize beauty in everyday things. He was trying to arouse the sense of wonder, which is implicated



you know, and he does it with the thought that everything, had we eyes which really see, is amazing - even such ordinary things as the door-knocker, the doorknob, the foot-scraper, an umbrella stand, and so forth. Take the common foot-scraper as an example. Doesn't it bring up the whole idea that man walks upon the earth, in itself a routine and a mystery? The idea of the dignity of the house? The removal of things alien? The idea of purification or the purging of a person before entering upon another experience? The implied respect to cleaner things within the house? ~~Do you begin to see?~~

"All these things are quite obvious, and let's say that for a time we can imagine a whole generation of artists and imaginative people hanging around a particular door step. They keep staring at the foot-scraper, which can be argued is a good thing to do, because they are devoting themselves to absorbing thoroughly what can be learned from one particular aspect of the wonder of life.

"But supposing, Joe, that for one reason or another, chiefly fatigue after standing on the symbolical door step for a long while, they get a little tired of the symbolical foot-scraper, and turn their minds to the idea of getting into the house. So-o-o, they now begin to gaze, with the enthusiasm or goofiness of artists, on the door-knocker. You then have a whole new school of art that you could call the "door-knocker" school, which is concerned with pointing out a hundred other things of the same kind which are equally obvious and true: such as, for example, that the door-knocker is the message of man to man; that it is a symbol of communication, in itself wonderful, in that it brings an idea from the outside to generate another idea on the inside; that it is the trumpet blown by the hero, or by the knave, at the gates of the castle, which when entered will receive change and impart change. And of course a door-knocker is itself capable of all kinds of artistic treatment, like the one of Mr. Scrooge which turned into the face of Old Marley. Are you still standing up manfully, Joe?"

"No, - I mean yes, go ahead, Bill. I'm testing my patience."

"Thanks. Well, we could go on and on, and somebody might even give a course of twelve lectures on the door-knocker. But let's suppose the door-knocker school is, after a time, exhausted with the spectacle of door-knockers, and that some pass inside the house and transfer the same proceeding to the door mat, or the umbrella stand, or anything else, say umbrellas.

"Believe it or not, Joe, but a great deal can be said even about umbrellas, involving interesting ideas about sun and rain as friends and enemies of man; weather in general; the concept of shelter; and so on. And probably you will agree that it's natural and human for people to transfer their attention more or less from one thing to another; that the foot-scraper school should do its best and then be succeeded by the door-knocker school; and that afterward the umbrella school of art should come forth and hold the stage. Right?"

"But what we find is that the door-knocker man intensely resents the rise of any other school. He will turn around to violently kick the man on the floor who is smitten with foot-scrappers; or the person worshipping at the umbrella stand will grab an umbrella with which to hit the man worshipping



the door-knocker; and that's the kind of feuding which seems always to pervade the art world. The older generation dismisses the new school as contemptible, and the new school calls the older one irrational.

"I think it must be true that rationality isn't really involved in art. You can't prove that one door-knocker is more beautiful than another, nor can you demonstrate all the worthwhile things that ought to come to mind in a perceptive man when looking at an umbrella. You can only say that man, whose nature is emotional, is touched by these things; which makes it silly for one set of people, because they happen to be drawn by the accident of their particular make-ups to the beauty of the umbrella, to quarrel with the people who prefer the beauty of the foot-scraper. Both are unfortunate in not being able to appreciate both. Speaking generally, though, if art is expected to be representational, like color photography, then a lot of people are going to continue to feel indifferent, or disappointed, or scornful, or hoaxed. Get anything out of this long-winded malarkey, Joe?"

"Well, it's a little steep, Bill, but maybe it can be climbed if approached from the right quarter; though it's still hard to fathom what the doorknobs were doing in the coffee. But I think you mean, with Cherterton, that one shouldn't be too literal, and I will concede that his ideas about art do suggest a way of thinking about the modern variety without getting mad or frustrated."

"That's THE point, Joe. You ought to feel better now. But as to coffee, by the way, how is your genius department making out with that Paxwell coffee account you people just snagged? You DID brag about that lately, didn't you?"

The man addressed as Joe grinned, with no attempt to conceal pride, but it was not the kind that riled you. "You know Al Wilson?", he asked, "the fellow I work with on Paxwell? Grade A 'ad' man, and prolific as - as mink. Anyway, we are refining a lot of his ideas right now, but look what the research people dug up for him." He reached for his wallet, and began to read from a paper he extracted.

"This squib appeared in the 'London Publik Advertizer' of May 19, 1657. Listen: 'In Bartholomew Lane, on the backside of the Olde Exchange, the Drinke called Coffee, which is a very wholesome and Physikal Drinke, having many excellent Vertues, closes the Orifice of the Stomache, fortifies the heat within, helpeth Digestion, quickeneth the Spirits, maketh the Hearte lightsome, is good against Eye-Sores, Coughs or Colds, Rheums, Consumptions, Headache, Dropsie, Gout, Scurvey, King's Evil, and many others, - is to be sold both in the Mornings and at three of the Clocke in the Afternoone.' Apparently no Federal Trade Commission in those days."

His friend Bill looked both serious and amused. "Also apparent", he said, "is that you 'ad' people haven't changed much, but it's only - let's see - 295 years and 8:30 'of the Clocke' to this point. Have a cigarette account? No? Well, they swiped your thunder. So did Alka-Seltzer and Carter's



Little Liver Pills. Wait until hard liquor appears on radio and TV, as it's now trying to. It will surely play up Dr. Sam Johnson's recommendation - you know the one? - 'There is nothing which has yet been contrived by man, by which so much happiness is produced, as by a good tavern.' This will be followed with some engaging chatter about warming the millions of cockles of millions of hearts - what's a cockle, by the way? And on Sunday night you get the song and dance show and the animated bottle act, which should punchline out with the gag about the glassblower, who kissed his wife when he came home from work, and forgot to let go. The poor woman puffed out like a Navy blimp. Now there's a TV stunt to rig up, Joe. Does your outfit pay any bonuses for suggestions?"

Joe smiled tolerantly. "Say," he asked, "do you pop off to your classes too about all your pet peeves? Get you into trouble."

"Not exactly, but you have to take sides some of the time, and when you call your shots as you see them you take some risks, which include becoming a target for name callers. There is a story about some cannibals who inhabited one of the Fiji islands, and who had a meeting once because they were worried about the rapid decline in their population. Not much headway was made, so they finally voted to put their problem to a missionary, who lived, at some risk of course, in a little hut at the other end of the island. The missionary came over, listened attentively, and then told <sup>them</sup> the problem was really quite simple. "All you have to do", he urged, "is to stop eating one another. And another thing", he added, "why not a trial period of being good to your neighbors. Just as an experiment." At this the island chief jumped up, waving his arms with rage. "Get out of here", he bellowed. "This man", he charged, "is just a dirty communist!"

His friend Joe smiled with wry amusement. "Well", he said, "I do remember some of your lessons in applied civics when you showed up at the district meetings in Oak River. Didn't Old-what's-his-name, that crackpot engineer, call you a scissor-bill at the pre-primary meeting?"

"You mean Justinus Flack. No, that was aimed at Red Whitman, who had given me a little support in the argument. What he called me - 'people like me' - he really said - was 'renegade'. And that was because he had learned, and I ~~had~~ admitted, that I advocated ticket-splitting. The truth is, Joe, that I baited him a good bit, but the effect of facts he couldn't refute or explain was only to raise his voice and his blood pressure."

"A MacArthur-McCarthy discussion, wasn't it?"

"Not at first. I had asked for his opinion of a top level official who had insisted, early in 1945, that the Russians must be induced to enter the war against Japan. His answer was, 'Sounds like Acheson, or Marshall, or one of those other Yalta traitors.' "

"Well", I said, "that isn't all. This same person was so carried away on Red Army Day, back in '43, as to send a glowing message to Moscow, a message of praise, in which he said that 'the achievements of the Soviet Army represent in many respects the most magnificent war effort the world has yet seen.'



"He was by this time too indignant to be suspicious of me." 'Could be Harry Hopkins', he rasped, 'or one of those other treacherous New Deal pin-kos. Do you KNOW who it was?'

"Yes, Mr. Flack", I told him, "it was your favorite general, Douglas MacArthur."

"Ha . . . did he take it hard, Bill?"

"Plenty. He looked at me murderously, and it made me feel rather mean and cruel, so I kept talking to placate him a bit. 'Mistakes at the top level', I went on, 'are dangerous and regrettable, but no one has yet invented a procedure for avoiding them. But what is also regrettable, AND dangerous, is for people in high places to get up and denounce the decisions sweated out in the light of circumstances of another day. The indignation of these people with perfect 20/20 hindsight vision seems to block out all memory of what they themselves thought and said at the time, and is turned on those with whom they had then agreed. Isn't that pretty dishonest, even for politics?' I asked him. Well - he just stalked off, red as a lobster, and no doubt my enemy for life."

"It's fatal for an 'ad' man to get heavy, Bill, but since you tend to be so serious, weren't you on the verge of lumping Hate, with a capital H, Ignorance with a capital I, and Prejudice with a capital P, into a kind of synonymous moral package labeled Evil, with a capital E? Incidentally, pal, you've been splitting a lot of infinitives lately. You're supposed to be a TEACHER!"

"One charge at a time, please. Didn't you know that breaching its own rules is the occupational disease of every profession? But I will let Bernard Shaw stand up in my defense. He once sent a letter to the London Times which went something like this: 'There is a busybody on your staff who devotes a lot of his time to chasing split infinitives. Every good literary craftsman splits his infinitives when the sense demands it. I call for the immediate dismissal of this pedant. It is of no consequence whether he decides to go quickly, or quickly to go, or to quickly go. The important thing is that he should go at once.' Does that vindicate me too, Joe?"

"You're not Shaw, but go ahead with the other one."

"Aren't we getting close to Randolph? But I do think a case can be made for viewing hate, ignorance, prejudice, greed, deception, and so on, as facets of a single, hard, glittering, black, poison-stone, whether you call it evil, or invent a word. I like the way Gilbert Murray put it, that 'the Enemy, with a capital E, has no definite name, though in a certain degree we all know him.' "

"Randolph is next, Bill. Yes, I like that too. Say, with Valentine's coming up, do you have any ideas for me, for Alice?"

"Well, there's always nylons, candy, ....."

"No, no, - I mean the ditty to go with it."



Both men were now riding to leave, and Randolph was my destination, too.

"Valentine ditty. Let's see. Well, you can start off

'To the Ideal Woman .....'

"I'm listening."

'Who is as intelligent as she is beautiful.....'

"Proceed, flatterer."

'Who shares my tastes .....'

"Add 'mostly'."

'Likes the magazines I like ....'

"Add another 'mostly'."

'And maintains a flawless silence while I am reading them ....'

"Hm-m-m-m-m !"

'Who is the perfect wife, mistress, mother and companion ....'

"You're rolling now, Bill."

'And who, among other things, doesn't exist ....'

"That's enough, wise guy. I'll have to do this job myself."

Both men were now walking off the train and immediately disappeared in the crowd. I tried to recover my lost thoughts as I walked down the platform, but couldn't manage it.

HSG



## *You Couldn't Think More of a Horse*

Sometime ago in a magazine article someone mentioned the fact that everybody ought to have a hobby. The hobby didn't have to be expensive, the article explained, but it was very good for people to have some consuming interest outside the daily routine. Well, I thought so, too, and began to worry because Roy didn't have a hobby. He didn't care for golf or bowling, woodcarving or jewelry making, knitting or fly fishing - not even pottery making, as Hazel Meyer does. No, unfortunately, Roy was in a bad rut. We did take up stamp collecting for awhile, but he did it only to please me, and I didn't care that much for it either. Besides, we thought it was a little expensive. So help me.

To go back - I should have been warned before we were married, because even that long ago I remember Roy saying that some day he wanted to own a farm not, as you might surmise, because he longed to commune with Nature. Oh, no. On Roy's farm he was going to have a home for old, unwanted, lonely but proud automobiles. Of course I laughed at what I considered his whimsy. But George understood, and said he'd go halves with him. I should tell you about George, because he figures all through this story. George is now a doctor, and he lives just a few blocks from us. But he is Roy's oldest friend and they were boys together back in the old neighborhood, than which there is nothing whither if you happened to go to Austin High School. As long as I've known them, Roy and George have talked almost incessantly about the old Lozier or Simplex or Jordan Playboy, or what have you, that had the chain drive or the overhead cam shafts or something, and it's too bad they don't make cars like them any more, cars with personality and not looking so much like peas out of the same pod. Well, about three years ago it happened - they found out that some people were buying old cars and fixing them up like new, and getting together with other similar fiends with the purpose of showing them to each other. I think that up to this time George had been a little jealous of Roy because we had a Pierce Arrow, and all he had were two current model Cadillacs. When World War II came along with its rationing program, we had this old Pierce and a current model De Soto which was supposedly mine. Well, we thought we should get rid of one car, and which one do you think we sold? So we drove this old Pierce Arrow which gave 8 miles to a gallon and just managed to get us to the gas station and back on the amount of gas we were allowed on an A card.

Well, anyway, Roy and George decided that if other people could find old cars and fix them up, they could too, and would do it together. So one day George called Roy on the 'phone to tell him he had an option on a Model A Duesenberg, and would Roy like to go in with him. Would he ever! It didn't look like very much at first, but how they worked on it that first summer, they and our son Al and some of Al's friends. When daylight faded they would bring parts of it into the house, got themselves covered with grease and loved it. Frankly, I didn't know Roy had it in him to work that hard - I'd never seen evidence of it before. Surprisingly enough, the fame of this little car began to spread, and people came from around and about to see it and ask wistfully if they could maybe buy it - which of course was the silliest thing to ask. Letters came from California and Massachusetts, from other Model A owners, and it was established that in our garage reposed the oldest known Duesenberg in existence - built in about 1921. We do know that it was the 85th ever built. That first summer, as I have said, they all worked like beavers, but there were some things they could not do themselves - so they found themselves a mechanic who liked to work on old cars and understood them, and that's when the bills began to roll in. I'll tell you frankly, it isn't the original cost of these things that really counts. The motivating force which prompted them to work so hard that summer was the state Fair in Springfield which was to feature an antique automobile show and was being sponsored by Secretary of State Barrett, himself the owner of a 1908 Brush. We went to the Fair in the Duesy - that is, Roy, George, Al and a friend



of Al's rode in the Duesy, and George's wife and I followed them. The top was down on the Duesenberg, and it rained cats and dogs all the way down, but those silly males refused to ride with us in a more comfortable state, and when we arrived in Springfield they were all soaked to the skin. We did have fun, though and saw some wonderful old cars, met a lot of other collectors, stood around beaming while people admired our Duesy, and came home with a ribbon. I should hasten to explain that there were many much older cars there, many more valuable and some that had come in all their venerable glory from much greater distances. But there was none that had prouder or more excited owners.

Since then, the Duesenberg has won other ribbons, and even came home with a cup which it won in a race at Milwaukee. But the thrill of that first meet was wonderful. You see, Roy and George had had a sneaking suspicion that their friends at home thought they were a little peculiar and here - why, there were dozens of people just like them. Cameron Peck up in Evanston had a collection of well over a hundred old cars which were priceless, and look at James Melton with his fine collection. So they felt vindicated, and joined the Horseless Carriage Club, The Veterans Automobile Club, the Antique Automobile Club of America and the Sportcar Club. Yes, there are several national organizations of these old car enthusiasts with hundreds of members and publications to go with them. The members help each other in finding missing parts, and carry on voluminous correspondence regarding all phases of their hobby. They swap pictures and stories as well as cars and have a generally good time. Since then, Roy has acquired an old Stutz, and George has bought several old Cadillacs and another Duesenberg. They have never particularly wanted any cars so old that they were not driveable, and have always considered it a distinct advantage if they had self-starters.

Of course, at our house conversation almost inevitably turns to garage and car talk. When our daughter Barbara would come home from school she would stand just so much of the conversations between her father and her brother, then she would burst out with "Don't you boys ever talk about anything but cam shafts and break linings?" Of course, that wouldn't stop them, and I finally convinced her that her best protection was to adopt my method of looking interested but letting my mind wander. I remember one morning when Roy told us that he hadn't been able to sleep the night before, and had whiled away the time by mentally restoring a Marmon roadster he thought he might be able to get his hands on. Barbara looked at him impatiently. "Dad", she said, "why can't you count sheep like other men?" A good question - but maybe his method is more interesting and just as effective.

The all-consuming problem is what to do with the cars after you get them, and we've begged, borrowed and tried to steal every available garage in the neighborhood. After restoration, the cars are kept in a condition of shiny newness, and my car which we depend upon to take us where we want to go has often had to stand out over night to make a place for some car many years its elder. Stamps would be much easier to store - of that there isn't any doubt.

If you ever see Roy in a group groping for some pictures, they will not be pictures of his wife and children. They will be pictures of his beloved automobiles. And if you are close enough so that you can't escape, will you please remember that you will make him very happy if you will show admiration and enthusiasm. If I have given you the impression that Roy's hobby bores me, let me hasten to correct you. I have enjoyed it very much too. And I find myself inadvertently looking intently into every junk yard and automobile graveyard that we pass, when we are out driving. I'd be so proud if all alone I would be able to find a Marmon or a Stutz Bearcat or a Mercer - but of course some of you people are too young to know even what I'm talking about. However, if you ever do come across one of the good old cars that nobody seems to love any more, please call Roy and earn his eternal gratitude.



## THE THEORY OF CONTRARY OPINION

by Anthony J. Frystak

Just as a diversion from the serious business of thinking about world affairs, our search for information and knowledge about what goes on in the world about us, and the various interpretations as to the meaning of these actions, their cause, their effect, and how they may affect our daily lives, I want to call your attention to a theory that many of you probably know about, but which I have found to be of more than passing interest.

It has a rather formidable title - "The theory of contrary opinion." I don't mean one should be contrary just to be mean or nasty, but as an attempt to look at the other side of the question, or to see a matter from a different, even if only a minority point of view.

Boethe, the poet-philosopher, once wrote: "I find more and more that it is well to be on the side of the minority, since it is always the more intelligent." Just to be contrary, I won't go along with that all the way.

You may have noticed that time and again, historical or political or economic events have been interpreted by so-called "experts" in such a manner that they read as if all opinions were written by the same author. Psychologists tell us that we all (rich or poor, bright or dumb) are 100% Grade A conformists. We tend to do what others do, say what others say, and think what others think. How many times have you heard conversations punctuated with "I hear this" or "they say that". Unfortunately, the crowd is usually wrong when it most pays to be right. The theory of contrary opinion is a method of thinking which can be applied to all phases of life, and I believe you will find it indispensable to a proper perspective. Now, what is it?

The Theory of Contrary Opinion is based upon laws of sociology and psychology that are as old as history; namely, that natural human traits frequently tend to make people act "as a crowd" rather than as individuals, when voicing opinions, when making decisions, and when arriving at conclusions.



Some of these important traits that tend to throw us off the track are: Habit, custom, imitation, contagion, emotion, greed, credulity, irritability, susceptibility, pride-of-opinion, wishful thinking, and impulsiveness. Public opinion, for example, about the midnight firing of General Douglas MacArthur was heightened by several of these traits: impulsiveness, imitation, emotion, contagion, and irritation.

Radio and television are amplifying the crowd characteristics of people generally. As people are drawn together by simultaneous reports of news-events, and through television, by dramatizing and emotionalizing events and "leaders", the tendency toward crowd behaviorism increases, take the Kefauver hearings, for example.

It appears safe to predict that an understanding of mass psychology becomes of greater, rather than of lesser, significance under today's conditions of fast and illustrated news-reporting, particularly when we couple with these conditions the fact that events which influence people have become worldwide, and are thus less understandable, making people more susceptible to mass opinions. It seems safe further to predict that the use of the theory of contrary opinion, that is, to consider acts in opposition to the mass sentiment of the moment, will have greater value as people draw together.

Le Bon in his book "The Crowd - A study of the Popular Mind" gives us the three causes that determine the characteristics of crowds: (1) Members of a crowd yield to instincts which individuals would repress; (2) contagion; (3) and that a crowd is subject to "suggestibility" that would not influence the members as individuals. It should be understood that people make up a crowd, however isolated, when (even if separately) they come under the influence of a common occurrence.

The theory of contrary opinion is based also on a principle well known in law, in sociology, and in the history of government: the principle that custom, habit, and the psychology of imitation of the minority determine the long-run trends and socio-economic evolutions. (Tarde's "Laws of Imitation.")



And conversely, that the short-run psychology of the majority is frequently wrong because people tend to imitate what they erroneously believe to be the correct procedure.

Justice Oliver Wendell Homes (in "The Common Law") wrote of the "fallacy" that "the only force at work in the development of law is logic. The life of the law has not been logic, it has been experience." In economics, as in law, the notion that logic is the only force at work is also a fallacy. The irrational impulses, contagions, and epidemics of the public mind in economic matters are fully evident to anyone who cares to study them. Economics, like law, is a mixture of sociology and history and subject to the same errors of human progress. Experience has indicated that in economic and political matters particularly are "contrary opinions" of value.

As said previously, the theory of contrary opinion is based upon crowd behavior. In the employment of the theory we constantly have to throw our minds in two directions:

1. To sense which way the crowd is traveling, and then to consider if a tangent direction isn't the safer road to travel (like taking a back road to avoid the congestion.)
2. To attempt to gauge, or guess, which way the crowd is likely to go in the future.

At the present time we have two catastrophic developments to weigh for their influence upon human behavior. Catastrophic is used here to indicate the dictionary sense of "events which overturn the usual order of things." I refer to (1) the militant form of society that is being created because of our long-range policy of "containing communism"; and (2) state interventionism as practiced by the President a week ago when he seized the steel mills. Both these policies, militancy and interventionism, if pursued, lead to autocracy.

The President's usurpation of the private rights of the steel companies is an outcome, it <sup>maybe said</sup> seems, of the militant influence. Doubts are expressed if Mr. Truman would have impetuously breached so widely the gap between free enterprise and state socialism if it were not that we have reached a high state of militancy in this country. In his seizure speech, you felt an exaggerated reliance upon



*He was, you know, a Captain of artillery  
in World War I.*

military necessity. Truman's admiration for military men is well-known. His leaning toward a militant society in preference to an industrial society appears very evident.

Herbert Spencer wrote of the dangers of military despotism, and we in our lifetime have seen the results of such policies. Militancy engenders obligatory co-operation and the oppression of the individual under <sup>necessary</sup> administrative centralization. We are living under such conditions now. This should be contrasted with our experiences under industrialism, which <sup>fosters</sup> breeds voluntary co-operation, individualistic effort and decentralization.

The problem, that confronts us is to appraise human behaviour and thought in the light of both militancy and interventionism. Will the great majority follow the lead down the road to autocratic control (and eventual dictatorship) or has interventionism over-reached itself and gone far ahead of the crowd?

History reveals that interventionism is doomed to failure over the long run. We hope that the President's extraordinary act will prove to be a boomerang - a last-gasp attack on private interests. <sup>I believe</sup> It is justifiable to contrarily guess that the crowd is not ready for the rocky road of state socialism and that interventionism will be repudiated by the majority.

From that standpoint, it is a salutary event. It may be the means of furnishing political ammunition to the opposition <sup>party</sup> and be helpful in the process of "turning the rascals out."

*The best contrary prediction of the moment is that a slump and economic upsets lie ahead. The whole government "controlled economy" may be on the skids.*



PHI SIGMA - "THE VOICE"

Date - Friday, April 11, 1952.

Write - an original essay.

Reading Time - 10 to 15 minutes.

Subject - shall be of your own choosing. It may be witty, humorous, or serious. Examples of what we have in mind are -

A hobby, an outside interest in which you are active, a subject on which you desire to express yourself, your most interesting vacation, your business, an important pet peeve, or anything else.

BUT - it should be an original essay.

Please send a typed copy (for insertion in "The Voice" to me not later than March 11, 1952.

EARL MEYER