
Bigger And Better Suicides.

"Theologians tell us that God's infinite superiority to man consists chiefly in his complete self-sufficiency. Might we not take a shrewd hint from the theologians and profitably imitate, in our poor mortal way, this chief excellence of God?" This blasphemous smirk is Henry Morton Robinson's rhetorical clincher for an argument that to correct the plague of suicide-from-individualism we must have more individualism. ("The Case of Suicide", in the North American Review.) He pleads for us to drop our props of religion, of maternal love, of romance, and the rest of the "infantile fictions"; "the childish fancy of a watchful Father that heeds even the sparrow's fall must be reinterpreted for adulthood in terms of an impersonal, indifferent natural force that can not be swerved by intercession nor influenced by tears, sacrifice, or prayers."

Take a few bizarre assumptions, sprinkle them with a few marks of erudition, and serve raw. That seems to be the formula for getting a publisher and a fat check in this great Goofy Period of American Letters. (A channel swimmer or an aviatrix can omit the marks of erudition.) Our thinking (God save the mark!) is done for us in the stately magazines by apodictical egoists who turn a pretty phrase in defense of their morals against the painful barkings of their own consciences. Logic is outmoded, principles are scrapped, the experience of the individual and his whims outweigh the experience and the common sense of mankind.

Robinson's article is a splendid example of tripe. The doubling of our suicide rate since 1918 he attributes to the rise of individualism (we would call it selfishness, an uglier word). He traces individualism from Petrarch through such capital letters as the Renaissance, the Reformation, the French and Industrial Revolution (he omits the World War) and thence to the Suicide Wave. He wastes no sympathy on flop-house wreckage and incurables who kill themselves (the world is better off without them, presumably); he saves his words for the "persons of wealth, talent and some portion of bodily vigor favored by society and frequently a very source of power and influence in that society." He sees in their self-destruction a menace to society - and proceeds to diagnosis and prescription.

Individualism is the diagnosis, more individualism the prescription. Suicides are cold-blooded, but not cold-blooded enough. They still cling to some "infantile fictions;" they still want some one or some thing to lean upon. They are not sufficiently self-sufficient. They have weak moments in which they doubt their power; they want to fall back upon religion, or the love of a wife or mother - but those things have gone out of their lives. Not finding the prop they 'slit life's tedious thread.'

Of the author we know nothing except what the editor tells us - that he was once editor of Contemporary Verse and professor at Columbia. Probably we'll never hear of him again unless he commits suicide (when editors stop buying tripe and his Jehovah complex explodes). Perhaps he had a mother he couldn't love - at least he is a spoiled boy sticking out his tongue at One Father. But for the benefit of the indiscriminating we want to point out the meaning of his thesis: Be self-sufficient. Abolish parenthood - bring yourself into being. Annul infancy, childhood, adolescence and senility. Buy what you can't take, but have no unsatisfied cravings. - And against his thesis we propose the following: 1. It was the Lord Who raised Himself from the dead Who told us about the Father that heeds the sparrow's fall; 2. All the individualists since Cain have been unable to wipe out that Father; and 3. Prof. Robinson will also have his weak moments. If he says he is happy he is a liar: he may be drunk or unconscious, but he isn't happy. He is whistling to keep up his courage.

PRAYERS: A friend ill; a friend undergoing an operation. Two special intentions.