

PSYCHOLOGY

Rituals Help Hold Family

The ceremonies which become a part of family life increase its happiness. They are most common among better-to-do families.

►FAMILY rituals—those little acts that the whole family get together and take part in every day, every week or once a year—are important in holding the family together and increasing its happiness. This is the conclusion of Drs. James H. S. Bossard and Eleanor S. Boll, of the William T. Carter Foundation, University of Pennsylvania, from a study of some 400 cases.

Not every family has its own private ceremonies, they found, but those that do sometimes observe them very faithfully and they are of a great variety.

In one family there is a reading of the poem, "The Night Before Christmas," every year on Christmas Eve. The ceremony has become more and more elaborate with the passing years. Lights are extinguished and candles lighted. Refreshments are served. No one of the family would ever miss the occasion.

In another family, a ritual is made of the washing of hair on Thursday evening.

One father makes a ceremony of taking

home a package of gifts of candy, fruit, and so on to the family each Saturday.

Some make a ritual of listening to certain programs on the radio each week.

One interesting ritual is reported thus:

"I was in my last year in High School when the depression came. Our family was hit by it. I succeeded in getting a summer job to help out. The first Saturday I worked, Daddy and I came home at about the same time (10 o'clock) in the evening. I remember that I fried some eggs and made some coffee for us that night. While we ate, we talked about our experiences at work, then we put our weekly wages on the table and, with mother coming in, we planned our expenditures for the week ahead. Thus began a practice which has continued at our house ever since. Every Saturday night, we meet in the kitchen of our home at 10 o'clock. Eggs are fried, and coffee or cocoa is served. Then we talk—about our work, experiences of the past week, the family income, our plan

for family expenditures, and other matters of family importance. Often these family sessions last until after one o'clock. Six years ago, I was married, but my husband and I have kept our weekly date with mother and dad. None of us ever let anything interfere with these Saturday night get-togethers. They surely have become a ritual in the life of our families."

The study included 156 families from lower, middle, and upper class, selected from among patrons of a social settlement, a public school in a middle-class suburban district and the Junior League and Social Register.

Family rituals increase in number, variety, richness and willing cooperation by individual family members as one moves upward in the social scale, it was found.

"The lower class is one in which there is little connection with the past," the investigators observed. "The present is composed of individuals crowded into a space too small for comfort. The religion is predominantly Catholic. The economic situation is not one of affluence. Children see little of anything in their families to stimulate a desire to perpetuate what they see. Opportunities for emotional satisfactions in the home are few, even for the adults. The rituals arising from these situations are, for the most part, rituals of expediency, to keep the home going, and to facilitate escape from home into a more exciting or promising outside world."

The middle class is more comfortably situated. There is enough physical space to permit of frequent family get-togethers.

The upper class is guarding a way of life which is considered by them, and many others, to be the desirable way of life. They have the time, for the most part the wealth, and the physical surroundings in which they can perpetuate it. Rituals in this upper class group are more formalized and are more easily handed on from one generation to the next than in the other classes.

A complicating factor is the fact that large families, it was observed, tend to encourage rituals more than small families. And large families are found near the bottom of the economic scale, where the scale of living tends to hamper the tendency.

The study is reported in the AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW.

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FISHERIES EXPERTS IN INFORMAL DISCUSSION—This group of experts on fisheries got together between meetings of UNSCCUR. They are, left to right: Lionel A. Walford, U. S., chief, Branch of Fishery Biology, Fish & Wildlife Service; Andrew Lyle Pritchard, Canada, director of Fish Culture Development, Department of Fisheries; Michael Graham, United Kingdom, director of Fishery Research, Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries; M. Goldschmidt, U. N. Secretariat; Sunder Lal Hora, India, director of Zoological Survey; Ahmad Nazir, of Pakistan, and C. J. Botteman of The Netherlands.

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Those Who Learn Fast Can Remember More

►THOSE who learn faster also remember more, Dr. George H. Zimny, of Loyola University, reported to the American Psychological Association in Denver, Colo., as a result of tests of speed of learning and amount retained conducted on 56 students.

The material learned was 15 meaningful but logically unconnected four-letter nouns.

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