WALTER BUCHANAN CLINE
PERSONAL REMINISCENCES

Ralph C. Altman

Walter Cline died. But the dedication of this volume of the Kroober Anthropological Society to his memory is a symbol of his being more than a memory. He will continue to exist as part of everybody who felt the impact of his forceful personality.

The contributors to this volume do not consider their papers as mere gestures of tribute but as statements that Walter Cline remains with us. Many regret their inability to join, particularly Walter's friend Joseph Birdsell who writes from Australia how much he would have liked to contribute.

When I first met Walter I had been warned that he had just lost one arm in the course of the incurable disease, a form of cancer, which he had had since childhood. We met, I noticed his disability—and immediately forgot about it. One felt, here was a man with a mind so full of strength and a heart so overflowing with love of life that he did not have to fight disease, but stood above it simply by negating its existence. One felt close to him immediately; it needed only one glance at his open, tremendously appealing face for this to be apparent. His was a most expressive face, radiating his interest in, and love for, people. This love for people, this boundless vivacity and intensity of interests and this communicative enthusiasm were so strong that they left their imprint on everybody who had contact with Walter.

All these qualities were channelled to serve the study of man, in research as well as in teaching. We often discussed his attitude towards anthropology, particularly during many wonderful weekends at the beach of Newport, California. He loved the ocean and spoke more freely about himself there than elsewhere. In his opinion anthropology represented one of the noblest pursuits. He regarded it as one of the humanities, to be studied for its own sake, for the sake of knowledge without consideration of the possibility of any "practical" ends, although in a way which, inevitably, results in a better understanding among different peoples and races. The degree of understanding which he reached and demanded might have been unobtainable without his sensitivity, his gift for identification and, again, his love of people which shone from his face no matter whether he talked about his visits with the Pala Mission Indians or his life with Arabs in North Africa. Cultures, as shaped by, and shaping, peoples, represented for him phenomena to be appreciated in their richness and beauty and to be enjoyed as works of art. Indeed, he planned a book on the patterns of religion and ritual viewed as art.

"In this country we are rather prone, I fear, to forget that there is a sentimental side to the scientific life" said F. W. Fosdree in 1905 (Boas Anniversary Volume, Introduction). Walter was not among those who
Walter could get He regarded WTalter, meaning. Rico was the took exception to he wherever these were. Walter-he was Christian civilization which remain in utmost...requirements regarding knowledge of foreign languages and a concomitant unfamiliarity with the scientific literature; the narrow, premature overspecialization without an earlier broad foundation of world cultures; the facile hypotheses of interpreting cultures by that kind of psychological or psychoanalytic approach which disregards material culture and ethnology in general. And it was in discussing this point that Walter could get really angry. But such outbursts never lasted long; his wit and never-failing sense of humor soon came to the fore.

Walter attributed the lowered standards of education to what he called a caterine to "the common man, source of all evil." He hated (and he could hate as well as he could love) his concept of the "common man" whom he identified with everything which is intolerant, insensitive, smug, drab, self-satisfied, ignorant without any incentive to look beyond one's fence, without any curiosity or longing; common man who is the dunce cheap fertilizing fascism and communism alike; and pompous, righteous officialdom which Walter loved to attack, whether he found it among French authorities in Morocco or the faculties of our universities. And in that sense—and only in that, without any of its connotations of snobbishness—Walter was an aristocrat par excellence.

He was himself wherever I saw him: at the homes of the painter Rico Lebrun, the actor Vincent Price, society people in Beverly Hills, in the dirty tent of a family which lives on the beach. He was at home wherever he chose to stay and could talk about everything: about art, drama, politics—always stimulatingly because of the originality of his mind and the wide range of his curiosity and interests. A discussion after our visit to a house where a huge, spotlighted, Mexican crucifix was the central decorative piece of the living room was typical of Walter, whose mind seemed to illuminate everything from a slightly different angle than everybody else. He recognized the aesthetic importance of this piece of sculpture but considered it bad taste to hang the image of a body in agony in one's living room. But, most of all, he took exception to the use of the crucifix as a decorative item. He regarded this as indicative of the breakdown of our so-called Christian civilization where its most sacred symbols had lost all meaning.

Walter was deeply religious and, in a way, a mystic and a romantic. But these are cold words and I feel utterly inadequate to convey their meaning in relation to Walter—this man who was unable to take anything lightly and, at the same time, enjoyed life as fully and gaily as imaginable. It seems equally impossible to illustrate the many small incidents which might give an idea of his complex personality, trivial incidents which remain like snapshots in my memory: Walter standing
surrounded by young women who whisper how much he looks like D. H. Lawrence; Walter racing his dog on the beach or happily tying knots, with teeth and his one hand, in preparing his fishing line; Walter wading along the beach collecting mollusces, talking about marine life and whales and stranded seal babies; or, hours after one of many small operations, fresh from the hospital, telling jokes which make everybody laugh; or telling anecdotes of his life with Arabs; and Walter—scarred from pulmonary surgery and one-armed—saying about a deaf person how hard it must be to be crippled. Then there is the picture of Walter pushed to the train in a wheelchair, eight hours after an operation in Los Angeles, full of determination to meet his class in Berkeley the next morning because he does not want to let his students down. Often we sat with a highball near the fireplace listening to his plans for new books, a discussion of the Bible from the ethnologist's point of view, for example. How it amused him to "debunk" the legend of Salome, the siren, who could only have been a little pre-adolescent girl because it is impossible in the Near East to imagine an adult daughter dancing in front of her father's guests! He also collected stories of "supernatural" events recorded as simple facts, more or less shamefacedly, by bona fide anthropologists, and looked forward delightedly to writing a paper on this subject. Another one was to be devoted to the cults and rituals among the present-day colored population of the Bay Area. But in the last months his main interests centered around a plan to write a book on the patterns of religion.

Walter's death represents a great loss to anthropology in many ways, but mainly for two reasons. First, there was probably nobody else who had such a wide knowledge and understanding of the Arab groups and the Near East in general, a knowledge based on combining archaeological background with the study of historical development, familiarity with the Koran, and ethnological fieldwork. It was typical for him to have tackled one of the most neglected and complex sets of problems in anthropology. This loss is particularly painful now at a time when the Arabs gain steadily in importance in world affairs. The second great gap is caused by the fact that he represented one of the very few strong outposts of that tradition which approaches anthropology from the humanistic point of view. His attitude was a needed, healthy counterbalance against the opposite trends which dominate anthropology today.

Knowledge and attributes may be replaceable; the sum total of personality is not, neither for friends, colleagues nor students. Walter loved to teach, to share his interests, and had the gift of communicating his enthusiasm. He was a great stimulator, always eager to develop critical faculties, to show how to reevaluate and resynthesize facts and, particularly, how to make them come to life in broad perspective. He often talked to me about his students, enjoyed the response and stimulation he received from them. It was part of his nature to make the teacher-pupil relation a very personal and intimate bond.
Many people disagreed with his views. But everybody respected him. They looked to him in humility because of his inspiring, unostentatious heroism which enabled him not only to "carry on" against all odds, in spite of his relentlessly devastating disease, but to give so much. And they looked to him with that kind of love which makes their faces light up at the mention of his name: Walter Cline.