

ALFRED L. KROEBER

Alfred L. Kroeber, the most distinguished of American anthropologists, died in Paris on October 5, 1960, in his eighty-fifth year. His intellectual vigor was undiminished to the end; he was still writing, and had just attended a conference of anthropologists in Austria. He had made great pioneering contributions in the fields of archaeology, linguistics, folklore and ethnology, but latterly had written more on culture history. As he told me, his earliest training had come through wide historical reading; it was this that led him into anthropology. We of the editorial staff of *CSSH* are happy to have enjoyed his friendly counsel as a member of our board and we would like to recall some of it here in his own words.

The article that he contributed to our pages (March 1959) dealt with ideas already developed in his *Configurations of Culture Growth* (1944) and in his *Style and Civilizations* (1957). It included a sharp warning against "the forcing or selection of phenomena to fit a scheme". As he had written in his Huxley Memorial Lecture, "The one proper foundation of all broader studies in ethnology as in history is the precise, intimate, long-continued examination of the culture of an area or period. It is only upon such detailed examinations that sound comparisons and wide inferences may legitimately be based."<sup>1</sup> He therefore favored an editorial policy of seeking careful parallel studies of similar problems in different areas or periods, "writ-acual correspondence to each other", and warned against articles written only to "make a theoretical point, illustrating it with a few sketchy examples from different periods or countries". He was hopeful that more writers would in time attempt to synthesize and compare patterns of growth, for example, in art, literature, and language: "I see humanistic scholarship in the U.S.A. on the verge of a great rising tide that will carry such a journal with it."

A last letter dated only a few weeks before his death reiterated his pleasure in the journal's progress and possibilities, and his hope that we

<sup>1</sup> *The Ancient Oikoumené as an Historic Culture Aggregate* (The Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, London, 1945), p. 1.

might deal constructively with the criteria of periodization: “. . . professional historians . . . seem mostly to look upon periodization as a perhaps necessary evil. Personally, I feel placid acceptance of unorganized continuity as a failed opportunity. Continuity is indisputable, of course; comparative data assume or manifest it as strongly as historical data. But granted this underlying continuity, we don't want to stop there: a new set of problems begins with it.”

SYLVIA L. THRUPP  
*Editor*