

# Your Guess is as Good as Mine

**T**HE scientific study of man is in its infancy. Although some progress is being made, we know less about man and his habits than we know about the physical properties of matter, and not much more than we know about the weather. This ignorance, and our inability to predict and control what groups of men will do under a given set of circumstances, permit wars, revolutions, depressions, and other regrettable but so far unavoidable consequences.

Social studies were for many years the Cinderella of the sciences. There were reasons for this which, at the time, must have seemed good. For instance, there was the code which for many years forbade the dissection of the human body, forbade also experimentation on the human mind. The holder of the Chair of Psychology at one of the leading English universities has still, as a condition of his appointment, to swear that he will not indulge in psychological experimentation.

Toward the end of the last century, the social sciences started on an experimental basis, and like most infants made considerable noise in the process. In order to finance themselves—for even psy-



chologists must eat—they advertised on a large scale the results of their experiments. Psychology swept America like a tidal wave, not unaided in its course by the entertaining works of Sigmund Freud and Havelock Ellis. This was a bad thing in every way, for it led to the publication of half-baked experimental results, and to sweeping statements, the truth

Questionnaires ask many apparently trifling and stupid questions. An official document of this character circulated among Allied servicemen is no exception. On reading it New Zealanders have wondered what value could ever be placed on the answers given to such inquiries. This article explains how questionnaires, probing the soldier's mind now, may aid smooth re-establishment in civil life after the war.

of which was doubtful, to say the least.

The flood is now subsiding, but even today in the digests, we continue to get a collection of psychological articles. Quacks are often encountered, offering to «jack up your personality in three easy lessons for 10 dollars.» Yet some honest work has been done by the back-room boys in the last 30 years, and we are a little further forward in our research.

The human being is not an easy subject to study. For this reason: while we can observe his behaviour easily enough, we have no means of observing directly what he is thinking. We have to ask him, and this asking involves a good deal of what may easily appear to be indecent curiosity. Furthermore, man being what he is, the answers he gives are not always true.

Collecting experimental data is a slow and exacting task in the social sciences. Working the results out statistically and trying to assess their value is also a slow business, for in studying groups of individuals we have to make use of statistical technique to get the answer. A few odds and ends will give you an idea of how much has been done in the industrial field alone.

Some people are personally more liable to accident than others