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The Great Undertow Mystery

The undertow's existence, laughed out of court by Professor Davis of Harvard, as recently quoted in these columns, is vigorously upheld by various correspondents in Science (New York). For example, Wallace Craig writes thus from the Biological Laboratory of the Harvard Medical School:

"People who have had long experience in bathing in Lake Michigan state—and they state correctly—that there are, at certain times and places, currents which may carry a swimmer away from shore, and therefore put him in danger of drowning. The bathers speak of such currents as 'undertow.' Prof. Walter C. Jones writes that the undertow is a myth, and he gives the impression that there are no currents dangerous to bathers in Lake Michigan. It is possible that some reader who trusts this impression and acts upon it may be drowned in consequence. Therefore I write to state that there are dangerous currents in Lake Michigan and that they are the currents which the bathers (correctly or incorrectly) name 'undertow.'"

"The fact that Professor Jones encountered such a current is not at all surprising. It simply means that he never swam in the lake under the special conditions of time and place under which the current comes into existence. Shore currents in general are local and variable phenomena; that very fact makes them dangerous."

Another writer, M. I. Brant, agrees in general with Professor Davis, although challenging his statement that there can be no "undertow" in a pocket beach without an offshore wind. Of an experience of his own, he writes:

"In the main the 'undertow' was not an undertow. The troughs all ran outward, and it was a conflict of currents in the breakers, it was not noticeable."

The fact is, though, that 'under-

tows' are believed in a thousand miles from the ocean. Whenever somebody struggles in a trash-water mill-pond, there is some newspaper reporter to characterize it as the work of a mysterious undertow.

"The combination of powerful breakers and a bottomless trough can be quite uncomfortable without any actual undertow, but in the case I have described I found that the bad feature was the light specific gravity of the breaker after it had begun to froth. A swimmer breathes out through his nose, or holds his breath, by exerting pressure from his lungs slightly greater than, or equal to, the pressure of the water in his nostrils. Meeting the accustomed pressure becomes as natural, and as automatic, as breathing in the air. I found that in the frothy breakers I breathed out too fast, with the result that I kept gulping salt water. Let me emphasize that ability to control the breath is far and away the most important factor in dealing with tumultuous water. Without it, swimming ability is next to worthless."

There is really an undertow, although that is a bad name for it, thinks M. P. Hite of Elizabeth City, North Carolina. Mr. Hite believes that the flat sandy beaches of our Atlantic Coast have a menace for bathers known by "a grossly misleading term." He says:

"This menace is elusive, for it varies widely in violence and at times is entirely absent so that even some scientists suspect it to be a myth. Generally speaking, it is real when a wind is blowing onshore and within an hour or so, either way, of high tide."

"Waves are of two kinds—'oscillation' and 'translation.' Deep-water waves are of the oscillation type, in which the water undulates but does not move forward. When this type reaches shoal water it changes and becomes the translation type in which the water itself is carried forward with the wave. Under favorable conditions these waters 'heap up' and fill this basin to overflowing. Obviously there must be an escape for these heaped-up waters and the misnamed 'undertow' is their method and means of escape. Low points form in the outer bar and widen and deepen until a sort of river appears every few hundred feet along the beach. This is misnamed 'undertow,' the heaped-up waters, carried shoreward by wind and wave, escape back to the sea."

Prof. Davis contributes the following comments, among others:

"Mr. Brant misunderstands me if he thinks I am not 'willing to concede' the existence of any current, surface or elsewhere; such currents are well attested by observation; for example, the general seaward surface drift that he describes as occurring for a time in a bay on the California coast; but such a current appears to be quite different from a possible 'undertow,' either there or elsewhere."

The difficulty in the undertow problem, he says in conclusion, lies in the fragmentary nature of the facts.

NOTICE—Dr. G. N. Murphy's Office will be closed from Aug. 9th, to Aug. 23rd.—July 30, 1925

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Seven hundred and fifty Chrysler cars, 500 of them the new Chrysler Four, are now being turned out every day by the Chrysler Corporation in its effort to catch up with the country-wide demand for its cars. The plans are working on a schedule of 16,000 cars in July. Unfilled orders at the factory are the greatest in the history of the organization, according to J. E. Fields, vice-president, in charge of sales.

"The first showing of the Chrysler Four has attracted thousands to our showrooms," said Mr. Fields, in a statement issued yesterday. "Scores have placed orders, without demonstration, after a first view of the car. So instantaneous has been its appeal that, already, public demand exceeds our scheduled production."

"Every facility of the great Chrysler plants is concentrated to-day on meeting the demand in delivering the Chrysler Four. Production is now running 500 cars a day—the greatest output of four-cylinder cars ever attained in a Chrysler plant."

"Chrysler dealers to-day are making delivery with a rapidity not anticipated by the thousands who placed their orders, content to wait until delivery could be made."

LARGEST PRODUCTION IN HISTORY. This huge production by the two Chrysler plants in Detroit is made possible by the installation of several hundred thousand dollars' worth of new and improved machinery. The Chrysler Highland Park plant, where the newly announced four-cylinder car is being built, is operating on a schedule larger than it has ever before reached in order to fill the flood of orders which began when the car was first shown three weeks ago. The Chrysler Jefferson Avenue plant is turning out 250 Sixes a day. Increased efficiency in the Jefferson plant has recently permitted the production of an additional 100 to 125 cars a week.

The rapidity with which production of the new Chrysler Four has jumped, approximately 100 cars a day to 500, is a feat which has astounded automobile manufacturing executives of long experience, says W. Ledyard Mitchell, vice-president in charge of manufacturing. This phenomenal increase was made possible through new machinery designed and installed under the personal direction of Walter P. Chrysler, and adds another manufacturing achievement to his long career as the leading figure in that field in the motor car industry. It is even more of a feat, adds Mr. Mitchell, because of the greater number of and more rigid inspections to which each Chrysler Four is subject before being permitted to receive final approval. Cars are being turned out at the Four plant as rapidly as is consistent with quality production, says Mr. Mitchell. Every facility of the entire organization is concentrated on meeting the demand in delivering the Four. Production from the Jefferson plant is likewise the greatest ever attained.

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1000 ORDERS A DAY COMING IN.

Mr. Fields announces that orders for both Four and Six cylinder cars taken by Chrysler distributors and dealers since the advent of the Chrysler Four, June 25, have consistently been the largest reached at any time in its history. He estimates from reports filed by factory district supervisors throughout the country that an average of more than 1000 retail orders for Chrysler Fours and Sixes have been placed since that time.

Average Man's Chance of Life

NO BETTER THAN IN OTHER TIMES.

Do people live longer to-day than formerly? The fact that the insurance companies have not found it advisable to adjust their rates on a greater expectation of life seems to deny the statement. Children have a better chance to live, but older people have not improved their chances.

The Mutual Life Assurance Company of Canada discusses the question of its current agency bulletin and says: "The tables of the 'expectation of life' have been the cause of much confusion. Many believe the tables give the number of years one may reasonably expect to live. But the tables give no such information. They give the average number of years lived by the members of a large group. The general mortality table shows that there are so many years to be lived

by the group and the total years are divided evenly among them. The expectation of life then is for the guidance of companies dealing with large numbers, not for the encouragement of individuals. Disease or accident may remove any one in spite of the tables of the 'expectation of life.'"

"Regarding the 'expectation of life' in this way it is true that the 'span' of human life has materially lengthened as has been stated of late so frequently in the press."

"It has been said that the age of miracles is past but this would appear to be an error were we to credit many of the statements appearing in the magazines and newspapers in regard to the expectation of life. Owing to the improvement in sanitary conditions and the multiplication of preventive measures it has been claimed that the length of human life has been increased twelve years. Another authority claims as many as eighteen years. The man in the street reading the statement imagines that he can reasonably expect to live that many years longer, owing to improved conditions. It would be a delightful thing if that were true. There has indeed been a marked improvement in health conditions, especially in the conservation of child life. That adds to the expectation of life at the early ages. This is a very different thing, however, from supposing that a man at an average age, say 35, has a greater expectation. In fact there are conditions in the life of to-day that make it high y probable that the improvement becomes a 'minus quantity,' after middle life and that the expectation of life is actually less than in former years owing to the degenerative troubles due to the fast pace at which the modern man travels."

Greater Average Life. "One of the most critical years in the life of an individual is the year following birth, and according to some standard tables the probability of a child just born living one year is no greater than the probability of a man aged 65 years living one year more, showing how precarious is the life of a child. Owing to improved methods of caring for infant life, multitudes of children are saved who in former years would have died. But a child who survives contributes a great deal more to the sum total of the life of the population than a middle aged man whose life is prolonged. The result is that the conservation of child life has added greatly to the average life time of the population. On the other hand while the conditions surrounding child life have been improved, adult life has not been substantially improved and modern life cuts down a vast number of men in the prime of life. So that for the man in the street to hope that his expectation of life has been lengthened by twelve or eighteen years is a fallacy. If it were actually true that expectation of life had been increased in this remarkable way at all ages the value of annuities and life assurances would be revolutionized. The annuities would increase greatly in value and the assurance would diminish in proportion. The fact that none of the companies has taken action to adjust its rates to an increased expectation of life shows that all are skeptical as to the truth of the claims being made; and well they might be."



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