

Today's World Largely Impersonal

A WHILE back, somebody updated the adage that fame is fleeting, remarking that in the future everybody may become famous for 15 minutes.

Maybe that could happen, but if we continue in our present direction of making everybody a number, such fame may be as impersonal as a computerized credit card.

In totalitarian countries, individuality is subjugated to the state. In this free nation, the trend is toward becoming a faceless, numbered, friendless society.

People used to visit with fellow workers while riding public conveyances and sit on porches with their neighbors.

Now air conditioning and TV keep us inside so that youngsters may grow up without ever hearing the experience of oldtimers or listening to the birds sing.

Farming once was a personal relationship between people who lived on the soil and what it produced. Farms have become mainly vast mechanized fields and cows, which

onetime may have been given names, are numbered by thousands in huge feedlots by truck-driving cowboys.

Travel is a hectic, impersonal experience, too. We used to imbibe the atmosphere of distinctive communities when we stopped for food and gas. Now we just wake up after an impersonal jet trip above the clouds and we're there, where look-alike stores make our destination resemble the place we left.

The process of education once was a personal matter between teachers and pupils. Today it is a system of negotiation between the teachers union and the school board, subject to federal courts.

Pupils might feel that their principal function is to be counted for ADA (average daily attendance, upon which state aid is allocated), unless they can make touchdowns or perform similar feats.

It was Joseph Stalin who said: "One death is a tragedy and a million deaths is a statistic." Death too often has become an impersonal

occurrence. Society's demands allow little time for mourning.

The personal touch of craftsmen has largely given way to the work of computerized robots on assembly lines. Homes have, in many instances, become impersonal institutions where speaking acquaintances eat and sleep. Some are set up without marriage and without love.

Religion traditionally has been a personal, intimate relationship of an individual with his God. Broadcast media make possible impersonal religion evidenced only by literature and donations mailed.

Big government becomes personal only at taxpaying time, when personal funds flow into a faceless bureaucracy to provide jobs or otherwise benefit unknown persons.

Even this column is impersonal. If spoken to one or two people, it might have a direct meaning. Published in a widely-read newspaper, it may seem to refer to someone else.