THE PROBLEM OF SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT.*

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THE problems of adolescence are largely problems of adjustment to society and the success or failure of such adjustment will make or mar the whole subsequent life of the individual. Psychologically, success depends on the formation of an adequate organization of several instincts to form a sentiment of a social self which shall in large measure dominate the other sentiments in the personality.

McDougall defines a sentiment as the organization of emotional dispositions in relation to an object, and the formation of sentiments represents a relatively high level in the development of the personality. In the study of social adjustment, therefore, we have to consider what is the object of the sentiment, what are the particular emotional dispositions concerned in the evolution of the sentiment, and what are the guiding lines along which this evolution takes place.

First as to the object of the sentiment. This is not so simple as is that of many of the sentiments usually quoted as illustrations, for example, love or hate. In these the object is a distinct individual generally other than the self, though the self may be an object of a sentiment of love or hate, and a variety of emotional dispositions are organized in relation to that individual. Here, however, the object is more of an abstraction. Social adjustment depends on a duality, an adjustment between the self on one side and the world of humanity on the other. It cannot exist except in relation to both sides of this duality and therefore it is difficult to define the term 'social self' which has been used in connexion with this sentiment. We may consider the self from two aspects, the introverted self and the extraverted self. It may be that the expression 'self-regard' which McDougall uses and which seems to include the social self should only be used in respect of the first of these, for the introverted self is literally self-regarding. The concern is with the essential ego, its tastes, its interests and its impulses, but it is very difficult to get far in the definition of such an introverted self without becoming involved with the extraverted self, for the very expressions, tastes, interests and impulses imply something outside for which the individual has a taste or in which he takes an interest, or towards which he experiences an impulse; and when we come to consider such things outside, we are concerning ourselves with the

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extraverted self, nor can we go very far in a study of such objects extraneous to the self without coming up against extraneous individuals—other selves with which our own self interacts. It is then the self in relation to other selves which is the object of that sentiment which allows the individual to be an integral part of a community.

While at any moment any emotion primary or derived, simple or compound, may be in evidence in the relationship of ourself to others, the organization of the sentiment depends more particularly on certain of the recognized emotional dispositions or instincts. Of these the herd instinct is commonly supposed to be of prime importance, but we must realise that in human behaviour its nature has come to be very much modified, and we must beware of using the term 'herd instinct' to explain human behaviour too glibly. In its primitive form the herd instinct involves a sense of unpleasure when the animal is in isolation and pleasure when in contact with his fellows, more especially in physical contact. The conative urge is therefore to seek such bodily association on all occasions. Allied to this instinct but distinct from it, each probably mutually facilitating the other, is that ill-defined and unnamed instinctive reaction which involves suggestibility, passive sympathy, and imitation.

With regard to the close physical contact such as the compact huddling together seen in the herd of bison under the influence of the gregarious instinct, we do not generally find that the human herd behaves in this particular way, unless the football crowd and the sands at Blackpool and other resorts on the first Monday in August are examples of this. Rather do we find the herd instinct expressed in the affective phase of unpleasure in loneliness and pleasure in the not too close presence of others, while for the rest it is represented by a general facilitation of suggestibility, sympathy, and imitation. As to the close physical contact, there is some indication that this has been so conditioned as to be carried over into the domain of sex, for in much of what is called sexual play—apart from the actual act of mating—this close physical contact plays an important part. Similarly, in parental relationships the same applies, so that this pattern of behaviour cannot be regarded as belonging solely to the herd instinct, at any rate as this instinct is manifested in human beings. It is to be noted that the herd instinct, both in respect of its affective phases and its facilitation of suggestibility, sympathy, and imitation is apparently less potent in the introvert than in the extravert, at any rate at conscious levels. This diminished potency, however, may be more apparent than real, for, as Jung has pointed out, what is lacking in consciousness often enjoys complementary importance at unconscious levels; we often find in the behaviour of the introvert ill-controlled and poorly differentiated flashes of what is generally regarded as typically extravert behaviour.

In man it is through his suggestibility, sympathy, and imitation that he manifests his gregariousness. He accepts the opinions of his compeers, he has a fellow-feeling for his kind, and his actions are too often stereotyped

imitations of those of others : but it is through these reactions that he makes his social adjustments. It is a truism to state that education depends on this instinctive group to achieve its objects, and without it, it could achieve nothing at all. Yet, as we shall see, this instinct alone is not enough either for social adaptation or for education, for the mentally defective often exhibits all three phases of it in no small degree and yet is almost totally uneducable.

Before considering this point, however, we must refer to another instinct which has a strong influence in establishing the sentiment of the social self. I refer to the sex instinct. This powerful urge is not in itself concerned with the make-up of the sentiment : to describe social intercourse as a manifestation of sexuality is to my mind a mistake : but what sex does is to give a tremendous impetus to extraversion without which the true social sentiment cannot exist. With the development of sex the whole personality unfolds, the individual becomes intensely interested in a personality other than himself. Sentiments are formed so strongly organized that they are able to outweigh the demands of such a dynamically powerful instinct as self-preservation. Under the influence of these sentiments the individual may conquer fear, subdue anger, and still curiosity, and in this process of extraversion the developing social self is involved and takes advantage of it in the organization of its own sentiment.

We see then that the social sentiment requires these three instincts for its existence—the herd instinct to give it being ; suggestibility, sympathy, and imitation to give it material with which to build ; and sex to give it the drive towards extraversion ; but it also requires the integration of these and the emergence of something higher and unique in itself, before it can be recognized as the describable characteristic of the human race which we are discussing. Needless to say other emotional dispositions become involved in the sentiment and help to modify it or to round it off. Curiosity, fear, disgust, self-assertion and self-abasement are seldom absent from the developed sentiment, but they are not essential to it.

In the development of this sentiment physical agencies are important. Thus certain observations of Dr. Gesell on the effect of precocious puberty on mental development are of interest. Without going into details of the work of this and other observers, it is sufficient to say that intelligence is not affected either in normals or in mental defectives by precocity, but in social adjustments there is evidence of maturity greater than might be expected from the actual age of the subjects. This would indicate that the physical endocrine secretions of the sex glands as well as the sex instinct itself—if we can fully separate these—must be taken into account in the formation of the sentiment in question. This but serves to remind us that in any purely psychological discussion we cannot leave physiology very far behind.

If we wish to illustrate the fact that the emotional dispositions alone are not capable of forming the sentiment concerned with social adjustment, but that integration depending on higher levels of the nervous system is necessary,

we may study the efforts of the young child in this respect—or still better those of the mental defective, who presents a reasonably accurate slow-motion picture of human development, slow enough in many instances to allow us to see a static cross-section of the process. The fact that physical development, more particularly that of the sexual system, distorts this picture to some extent, does not invalidate it for our particular purpose, for in view of what has been said about the influence of the sex instinct in promoting extraversion and stimulating the development of the sentiment it becomes clear that this stimulus alone is not enough, but that the capacity for integration must also be present.

It is a truism that the young child is not a social animal, his behaviour being almost entirely egocentric, and that only gradually does he even recognize an increasing circle of individuals in his environment and still more slowly learns to adapt himself to them and to give and take in a proportionate manner. In the case of the defective, one of the most striking observations of the recent report of the departmental committee appointed to examine the subject of mental deficiency in Great Britain was, that important as was defect in intelligence, almost more important was the obvious failure in social adjustment.

Whether we are dealing with normals or defectives, we find that all individuals exhibit the instinctive bases referred to above in varying proportions, and that defectives show no particular peculiarities in this respect. It has been maintained by some that defectives are more suggestible than normals, by others that they are less so. Observations by several American observers show that so far as innate suggestibility is concerned, there is no special difference discoverable between large numbers of defectives and large numbers of normals; but when it comes to the control and discrimination of this innate disposition in the course of development, matters are very different. Normally, knowledge is integrated; suggestibility is controlled to a greater and greater extent as age advances by increased knowledge, by the organization of beliefs, and by the development of the power of making judgements. At the same time, a certain amount of discrimination becomes possible between good and bad suggestions. In all this the defective has a poor chance, for his knowledge is scanty, his beliefs uncertain, and his judgements at fault. Therefore his control and discrimination of suggestion, sympathy, and imitation are poor. Similarly, in respect of the sex impulse, there is no reason to suppose that defectives in general are necessarily more strongly sexed than normal, but they are unquestionably less well controlled; hence when a defective has a strong sex impulse, he or she is more likely to break out into behaviour which gives copy to the more sensational journalism.

It is then in the three functions of control, integration, and discrimination that the mental defective is conspicuously lacking, and without these, full social adaptation is impossible. These three functions are associated with the proper development of the cerebral cortex. This is amply proved by the advances in neurology which we owe to such men as Hughlings Jackson,

Sherrington and Head. Hughlings Jackson was the first to show that abolition of cortical function by disease or injury leads to what have been called release-phenomena, of which the epileptic convulsion is the typical example. This symptom illustrates the corollary that if the abolition is temporary the re-establishment of trans-cortical control leads to a disappearance of the symptom. Sherrington has demonstrated the integrative action of the nervous system and he and his followers have shown how, for example, in the field of motor phenomena the cortex is concerned with the integration of muscular contractions into purposive movements.

Head, in his study of sensory phenomena, has clearly shown that the cortex is concerned with the function of discrimination. The recognition of two separate points of contact of an æsthesiometer on the skin, the evaluation of shades of differences in heat and cold applications are impossible if the cortex is damaged, while the special senses of sight and hearing whose chief function is the discrimination of slight variations in the wave-lengths of light and sound are entirely dependent on cortical integrity.

These three functions then are all concerned in the major function of adaptation, and are essential to the proper development of social adjustment. They depend essentially on a fully developed cortex which only reaches fruition comparatively late in childhood. It is true that the infant is provided at birth with the full number of potential nerve-cells called neuroblasts, and he will never increase the number of these, but they are only rendered functionally active when they are transformed into neurones. This transformation is largely determined, as Sherrington has shown, by the proper stimuli which come through the distance-receptors—sight, hearing and to a less extent taste and smell—and represent the 'interests' of the child. Failure of development of the full cortical activity and with this amongst other things the power of social adaptation, may thus arise from the following causes :—

An initial paucity of neuroblasts—primary amentia.

Failure of proper stimuli—amentia by deprivation such as occurs in the blind or deaf if compensatory training is not given.

Distortion of interests—as occurs in certain emotional repressions and dissociations, the mechanism of which has been the subject of much recent study and is still imperfectly understood, but which underlie the psychoneuroses and probably some of the cases of the psychoses, and which may be ameliorated by analytic psychotherapy.

Social adjustment, then, must be regarded as of gradual development and only coming to fruition with the full functional activity of the cortex. Two pieces of work in which I have lately been associated with Dr. Thomas seem to illustrate this. It is sometimes supposed that even the higher grade mental defectives stop short in their development, advancing to a mental age of say six or seven, and then ceasing to make any further progress. In the serial examination of the intelligence of a number of feeble-minded children attending the special school at Bath, over a period of nine years, Dr. Thomas

found that far from there being any cessation of development, the mental age of these children, with only two temporary exceptions, continued to rise, slowly it is true, but none the less steadily ; and about the time of leaving the school, at 15 to 16 years of age, there was a decided steepening of the curve of development, showing a late spurt in the establishment of mental capacity. The theoretical normal increase is one year of mental age for every year of actual age, thus maintaining the intelligence quotient at 100 per cent. Since these higher grade defectives only increase their mental age about four to six months in every twelve months, the curve of the intelligence quotient drops, but this must not obscure the fact that these children do progress. This being so we come to the second series of observations. These were carried out on a hundred children referred from elementary schools as difficult in some respect or other. Almost all of these were found to be backward, but not legally defective. A critical study showed that apart from any intellectual defect which would of course make them difficult at school during the educational period, 50 per cent. had shown definite asocial tendencies of one sort or another during school age. Later, however, in the adolescent period, as many as 90 per cent. had made a reasonable adjustment in so far as they were in work and reported well of by their employers. This showed, therefore, that even after school age, which is commonly supposed to mark the term of mental development from the point of view of mental tests, progress in the power of social adjustments is possible. This was presumably attributable to further development of cortical function by the conversion of more neuroblasts into neurones, and by the provision of fresh stimuli and interests.

This brings us back to the subject of amentia. To the majority of people this implies defect in intellectual capacity and to suggest that a person considered by his neighbours to be highly intelligent was nevertheless an ament would probably be greeted with derision. None the less I make bold to assert that this is sometimes the case. Intelligence is not everything in life, for social adjustment is even more important ; and there are numbers of people who may or may not be intelligent who never develop the capacity of social adjustment. I suggest that many of these people fail to do so because they are lacking in the special cortical development necessary for the integration of their instincts and the formation of the sentiment which has been discussed.

People who lack this particular capacity seem to divide themselves into two groups. Firstly, there are those who compensate by an intense integration of an egocentric sentiment, so that there is nothing left over, so to speak, for social adjustment. It seems permissible to speak in this way because there is no reason to suppose that there is any centre for social adjustment in the sense that there is a visual centre or a centre for movements of the head and eyes. This function would seem to depend more on general cortical capacity than on the integrity of any localized anatomical area. In other words, this function, like many studied by Lashley, depends on the total number of neurones rather than on any special neurones. We are quite familiar with

individuals who exhibit certain 'capacities' apparently 'at the expense of' others, for example musical genius in the absence of general intelligence or the power of calculation and manipulation of figures in the absence of the power of making judgements and reasoning; thus there does seem sufficient evidence to warrant the assumption that in the absence of a sufficient total number of neurones all 'the eggs may be put in one basket.' Such people are conspicuously lacking in consideration for others and destitute of the capacity for affection, though they are sometimes apparently highly intelligent and may even be described as geniuses. Curiously enough this type of personality is in many cases associated with the illness of idiopathic epilepsy. Pierce Clarke and J. T. McCurdy in their study of epileptics have clearly recognised this asocial, egocentric personality and have called it the 'epileptic personality.' As has already been mentioned, the characteristic epileptic fit is a release-phenomenon and is a clear indication of failure in trans-cortical control. This conception of the epilepsies as being due to temporary or permanent deficiency in neurones is the only one which will include all varieties. The presumption is that the epileptic convulsion is due to a stimulus finding too ready a path for discharge. Sherrington has shown that the greater number of neurones a given stimulus has to traverse between the sensory end-organ and the final motor path the less violence will be exhibited in the motor response. If therefore a stimulus is short-circuited because there are not sufficient functioning neurones for it to traverse we might expect just the sort of thing that happens in an epileptic seizure. The stimulus may not traverse the higher neurones which normally control the motor field for several reasons:—

- (i) Because the neurones are not and never have been there (amentia—idiopathic epilepsy).
- (ii) Because the neurones have been destroyed (traumatic epilepsy).
- (iii) Because the neurones have been temporarily or permanently put out of action by inflammation (encephalitic epilepsy).
- (iv) Because the neurones have been temporarily or permanently put out of action by circulating toxins (toxæmic epilepsy).
- (v) Because the neurones have been inhibited by emotional conflict (psychogenic epilepsy).

So whether we call epilepsy a deficiency disease with a restricted personality or whether we regard this particular variety of amentia, as I should prefer to do, as one which frequently exhibits, as an additional symptom of cortical deficiency, the epileptic fit, is a matter of little moment since the implication is the same.

The second group is not compensated and simply fails to adjust to life. Such are those whom Janet has called the psychasthenics and many of the chronic hypochondriacs who seem irrationally to prefer illness to health to the great annoyance of their friends and physicians: yet for these people ill-health with its attendant measure of protection and sympathy may be a

lesser evil, because much less difficult, than to have to stand on their own feet and adjust themselves to life. If this is so it is quite as unreasonable to expect such people to shake off their doldrums and undertake an independent existence as it is to expect the intellectually defective to understand the integral calculus, and analytic psychotherapy must not expect to be successful in 100 per cent. of its cases, for even this method cannot make up for a deficiency in neurones. I would like here to make it quite clear that I do not regard every neurotic as an ament. In the first place, adjustment to life is a relative matter, and the War showed that under great strain many people who would otherwise have continued to make a successful adjustment broke down. Further, what is strain for one is not so for another, so before we dub A an ament because he has broken down under strain X, let us be sure that strain Y would not prove us more of an ament than unhappy A. In the second place, we saw that deficiency in neuroblasts is not the only reason for failure in the development of cortical function, but that in many cases this is due to distorted interests. In such cases analytical psychotherapy may deliver the patient from his difficulties and enable him to make a successful adjustment quite up to the standard attained by the so-called normal.

I would conclude from this paper that :

- (1) Social adjustment depends on the formation of a well-defined sentiment.
- (2) The instinctive bases of this sentiment are herd instinct : suggestion, sympathy, and imitation ; and sex, together with other less constant contributory factors.
- (3) These may be present, as in the mental defective, without the subject's having the power to achieve social adjustment owing to his deficiency in cortical tissue.
- (4) The cortical functions of control, integration and discrimination are essential if social adjustment is to be achieved.
- (5) The absence of social adjustment may be a sign of amentia apart from intellectual defect.
- (6) Even in defectives this function of adjustment may go on developing in late adolescence ; hence an individual should not be regarded as hopelessly asocial too early in life.
- (7) This absence of social adjustment may be associated with idiopathic epilepsy.
- (8) Epilepsy is essentially a sign of some sort of cortical defect in function.
- (9) The ' social ament ' may be apparently intelligent because one capacity has been developed at the expense of others.
- (10) ' Social amentia ' may be part of a general psychasthenia which in certain cases is a real amentia, and therefore not amenable to psychotherapy.