PSYCHOPATHOLOGY.


Observing that, as a large proportion of children and young adults now come under continuous medical supervision, it is now feasible to investigate the problem of mental deficiency as it is manifested in childhood and early adult life, the author gives his opinion that only by such investigation can any real progress be made.

He reviews briefly, in their chronological sequence, the various standpoints from which the matter has been treated, namely, the primitive theurgic, the compassionate, the educational, the sociological, and the eugenic; and he selects the educational and the sociological modes of approach as the two which fall within the range of present practical politics, the former exemplified by the Elementary Education (Defective and Epileptic Children) Act of 1899, the latter by the Mental Deficiency Act of 1913.

Taking the educational standpoint, the author indicates the two-factor theory of intellectual capacity, where one factor is the general intelligence due to the functioning of the brain as a whole, and which is purely innate; while the other consists of the specific capacity for acquiring and using the complex language symbolization, which is related to the functioning of certain focal areas of the brain, and upon which the educational capacity so largely depends. Although the two capacities do not necessarily go hand in hand, yet the author has observed that a more or less marked condition of dyslexia is to be found in association with a general intelligence defect. He illustrates the point by examples, and draws attention to the analogy which the specific defect presents to the disorders of speech, and of other aspects of symbolic thinking and expression, shown by adults suffering from brain injuries, etc.

From the sociological standpoint there are many problems awaiting investigation. Here Dr. Auden lays stress on the effect of unpleasant experiences followed by repression, such experiences not being necessarily sexual, upon the subsequent conduct of the child; and he also indicates how juvenile delinquency may arise from the love of adventure, from phantasy building, or from the limited scope in town life for the self-expression of the normal interests of youth. These problems of maladjustment and maladaptation amongst children are to be regarded as of the greatest sociological importance, for it is “the experience of childhood that gives colour to the whole emotional content of the outlook on life and the resulting behaviour of the adult.”

The author outlines other important fields for inquiry which have not been touched so far, such as the study of the emotional reactions and anomalies of the affective processes which are exhibited by the feebleminded as a class; and, in this connection, he remarks that it has never been pointed out how closely these resemble the description given by McDougall of the emotional characteristics of the unorganized crowd. Reference is also made to the extraordinary moral change which may be
observed in the child who has passed through an attack of encephalitis lethargica.

In considering how these demands for research and investigation can be met, Dr. Auden feels that there is an urgent need for the establishment in this country of psycho-educational clinics, the scope of which should be sufficiently wide to include the examination of all children presenting abnormalities of education or of conduct. He states here what has been done in this direction in the United States of America. As regards the staffing of such a clinic, he feels that neither the asylum or prison services nor hospital practice affords the opportunity for the acquisition of a sufficiently broad basis of knowledge of the normal as well as of the abnormal psychological states. In his opinion the provenance of the school is the best training-ground for the medical officer who is to staff the psycho-educational clinic, and he thinks that the school medical officers should be encouraged to take the Diploma in Psychological Medicine, which should be extended to suit their needs, and should include more of sociological science than has been the case hitherto.

The author urges that the special training of the school medical officer in this branch of medicine is of much importance at the moment, as otherwise the psychological investigation of the problems of the child will pass into the hands of the pedagogue, and away from the medical, side of educational administration. Especially is this to be emphasized in view of the fact that the popularity of psycho-analysis and the ‘new psychology’ is tempting many persons, both medical and lay, whose knowledge of psychology is of the slightest, to attempt psycho-analytic methods in handling children. He concludes that ‘the results may not be so serious if the agent be a medical practitioner, for he will soon realize his limitations; but if psycho-analysis is undertaken by persons unqualified to distinguish between the organic and the functional, between the true and the false inferences of inductive logic, disaster is certain’.

T. B.


I.—The Ego Instinct (Bernard Glueck).—Glueck deprecates the tendency to regard physiological processes or biological phenomena, which may very well explain things in the behaviour of the dog and cat, as absolute criteria for guidance to the psychological understanding of the behaviour and endeavours of man. For psychiatry and psychotherapy, behaviour reactions, ambitions, strivings, successes, and failures must be recognized as ‘human values’. They are unique as values because they are human values. As such they have no community of purpose with the dog or cat. Nevertheless he does not wish to give the impression that he is not in full sympathy with research in comparative anatomy and physiology, and with the efforts of the behaviourists.

Instead of dealing with the crude and unmodified ego-instincts, Glueck finds it more useful to take as starting-point what Tansley terms the ego-complex, since it is essentially with instinct as modified by experience and
organized into patterns of behaviour that we have to deal in the human being, and not with simple conations. This leads straight into the realm of human values, and permits us to grapple with the ego’s strivings, desires, achievements, etc., rather than with crude ego-trends. The simple delineation of fundamental human desires in terms of humanly appreciable values which he advocates, is one proposed by Professor Thomas: (1) Desire for security; (2) Desire for recognition; (3) Desire for more intimate response (love, adoration, etc.); (4) Desire for new experience.

‘Character’ is determined by the nature of the organization of these desires. The dominance of any one of the four types of desire is the basis of our ordinary judgement of character. Personality, on the other hand, is the individual’s conception of himself. We cannot conceive of the ego apart from sex and herd attributes. What renders the ego-complex pathological? In most cases it is pure speculation to try to determine what the situation may be congenitally. Even in such definite mal-developments of personality as epilepsy, we are perhaps still too apt to emphasize the possible congenital modifications of the ego. It is becoming more and more recognized with regard to those states which we are in the habit of stigmatizing in rather a facile fashion as defects, that life experiences, in the broadest sense of the term, are the real determinants of character and personality.

Glueck stresses the importance of recognizing the frequency of pathological exaggeration of the ego as a compensatory manifestation rather than an inherited fixed and unchangeable anomaly of make-up. This occurs often through educational standards being pitched at a higher level than individual ability, and perhaps still more through the growing desire of the modern parent to wish to re-live his own life only in a ‘maximated’ degree through the lives of his children. In both cases maladjustments result from the discrepancy between aspiration and endowment. These maladjustments range from crushing of the self, with persistent timidity and lack of morale, to a frantic kind of compensatory exaggerated egoism.

The roots of these pathological exaggerations or elaborations of the ego-ideal, even the main objective of the frantic drive for self ‘maximation’, are unconscious.

II.—The Herd Instinct (Sanger Brown).—The author says nothing new about herd instinct, but passes in review, in a suggestive way, manifold aspects of the conflict between individualistic and herd tendencies. He shows that in modern life, in place of a very large body of public opinion there are many more small groups than in the past, to which the individual may attach himself and so avoid intellectual isolation. Herd instinct is a great leveller. It brings the mass of people to certain supposedly desired standards of conduct. At the same time it prevents or retards the development of the enlightened few.

He goes on to criticize the narrower Freudian psychology of the past, in which he says treatment has dealt almost exclusively with the individual regardless of his social environment. It is probable that in the future greater emphasis will be placed upon what has recently been termed ‘the situation types’ of neuroses and psychoneuroses.
Passing to the more academic side of the subject, he sees an analogy between certain types of thinking seen during early racial development, when herd instinct appears to have been much in evidence, and the modes of thinking seen in psychopathology. He suggests that much of the material both of the day-dreams and night-dreams of neurotics is indicative of an atavistic or regressive reanimation of primitive 'group thinking' in which any definite sense of personality seems to have been undeveloped. He quotes Miss Jane Harrison's Themis to show that primitive man, in his collectivism, hardly regarded himself as entirely separate and distinct from other people, and still less from inanimate nature. Many psychiatrists feel that this deficient sense of personality is the significant thing in certain types of dementia praecox. In these cases modern adapted personality becomes swamped in a welter of primitive herd imagery, or, as Jung would say, in the 'collective unconscious'. He suggests that certain people, of our own generation, because of their interest in occultism, mysticism, and so-called new cults, which are really old cults, belong to the same category, although in less pathological forms. Integration of personality therefore is a process which takes place in spite of the inertia of primitive and unconscious herd imagery, which makes for dissolution and disintegration of personality, as in delirium, altered personality occurring in hysteria, dream states, deep abstractions, stuporose conditions, and other disturbances of consciousness.

III.—*The Sexual Instinct* (C. Macfie Campbell).—The writer chiefly devotes himself to the much-discussed question as to what may be called sexual. He considers it an unwarranted generalization to assume that in normal development the pleasure associated with a great variety of organic sources, from cutaneous sensations, from rhythmic movements, from distention of bladder and rectum, has a sexual quality. To claim that all such pleasures are of a sexual nature is to assume that all organic pleasure is sexual. It is to beg the question. Such abuse of language makes mutual understanding difficult. To a large extent this *petitio principis* is involved in the use of such terms as muscle-eroticism, anal-eroticism, etc.

Further, where a specific sexual activity is repressed, to assume that alternative activities must necessarily be sexual is not sound. The hungry man, recognizing that no personal efforts yield any chance of a meal, may, to distract himself, plunge into some interesting study, and while he is engrossed in this the tendency to hunt for food is temporarily in abeyance. The study, however, is not a nutritive activity nor a sublimated expression of the hunger instinct. It is simply different. Similarly, activity of obviously sexual nature may be superseded by other activity without the latter showing any special sexual quality; the energy of the individual, potentially available for sexual activity, may be actually used for other purposes. If all those purposes are invariably regarded as sublimations of sexuality, then either all life is sexualized, or the term sexuality ceases to have any specific meaning.

Thus the writer makes a plea for a less schematic and dogmatic formulation of the facts of human behaviour which are related to our sexual life.
He does not wish to minimize the extremely valuable contributions to human psychology made by those who have pushed their formulations to an extreme; but the time has come for a sober evaluation of these contributions, with full recognition of the complexity of the facts. It is easy to juggle with clean-cut instincts and with a docile libido, but satisfaction with such juggling is apt to warp our observation, and lead to rigid formulae.

IV.—Synthetic View of Ego, Herd, and Sex Instincts (John T. MacCurdy)—MacCurdy begins by reviewing briefly the phylogeny of man. In normal man, instincts exist which interact and produce what we call normality. It is unthinkable that one group of instincts could be responsible for all psychopathological reactions, unless it could be shown that the human mind is resistive to all strains, except those of one class, or that only one strong primitive instinct survived since barbarous times, to spring into prominence when the instincts peculiar to civilization were dissipated. We should not, therefore, expect to find one formula covering all abnormal reactions, any more than one instinct would be expected to guide the life of man. Few, moreover, are capable of searching for many unknowns at once; singleness of purpose seems essential as a stimulus to research. Freud’s theories, which centre round the sex group of instincts, have provided the necessary impetus for initial investigations in dynamic psychopathology; but the time has come to consider more catholic views. Other theories, such as those of Shand, MacDougall, and Prince, have been less productive of enthusiastic research, because the long catalogues of instincts postulated or inferred by these authors are too diffuse. From a dynamic standpoint their analyses become rather facile, new instincts being easily hypothecated to account for new reactions. Dogmatism is so far avoided as to make an invertebrate system; but, on the other hand, disputes as to existence or non-existence of separate minor instincts degenerate into sterile academic discussions and wordy squabbles. Such detailed and unfocused formulations have, pragmatically, a tendency far opposite to Freud’s.

The middle ground between the two is reached by separating instinctive reactions into groups, inherently antagonistic a priori. These groups are ego, herd, and sex. If clinical experience demonstrates certain abnormal reactions to be definitely related to preponderance of one group over the others, then this grouping has pragmatic value. It is difficult, but not impossible, to study the interaction of these three groups. MacCurdy goes on to show the specific ways in which the interaction of these three factors may determine morbid psychological conditions. The end-result in all such conditions seems to be unreal thinking of the type which Sanger Brown calls primitive herd thinking. He corroborates the latter’s suggestion that it is always this type of thinking which occurs in the psychoses.

The article is too long, and the thinking involved in the working out of the inter-relation of the three instincts too complex, to allow of abstraction. The concluding paragraph may, however, be quoted: “An answer must be given to the question in all your minds, ‘What of predominant herd instincts?’ This condition does occur, but, sad to say, the product is not considered pathological. Herd conduct is the standard of
normality. Hence one who conforms more than his neighbours is held to be the worthiest and most normal of citizens. Yet rampant herd instinct is the greatest enemy to human evolution. Ego and sex instincts, when in the ascendant, lead to the destruction or ineffectiveness of the individual. Herd solidarity, however, which should merely act as a balance-wheel, in practice is a locked brake. The genius who is ahead of his time is subject to the same distrust or persecution as is the lunatic or criminal who lags in evolution. It is herd instinct which stones the prophets, burns Galileo, puts convention above abstract justice, cements the uncritical electorate, rushes wildly into war. The world of men suffers, and has suffered, more from such tendencies than from all crime, insanity, or nervousness."

James Young.