THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECT OF AN ARMY AND AN UNORGANIZED CROWD.

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This article lays no claim to anything original. It is merely a résumé of other works on the subject to which I refer the reader in the books mentioned at the end of the text. All that has been attempted has been to review the psychology of the subject of organized and unorganized crowds and place it before those who, at the present juncture, may be interested enough to peruse it.

We may define mind as an organized system of mental forces and every highly organized collection of men may be said to possess what is called a "collective mind." In this way psychology extends from the individual to the group and this is the branch of psychology about to be discussed. In every society of men each new member becomes moulded into the ways of thinking, feeling, and acting of the group, but a vast amount of training and discipline is necessary in many cases to render him able to take his proper part in the group. Human minds resemble one another just as their bodies do; and there is a certain standard or type to which individuals amongst a group more or less closely conform, and mental differences, just as physical differences, arrange themselves about this standard or type. We must recognize that each individual behaves in this or that way because the impulses with which he is endowed are set towards this or that end, and that each individual's conduct is affected through the "mass" by three very important influences, i.e., "suggestion," "sympathy," and "imitation." We will consider these seriatim.

(1) Suggestion.—We all tend to accept without question the beliefs we find established in the minds of our fellows by "suggestion." If a proposition is made to us by a number of different persons it is difficult for us to retain a critical attitude, and we accept it unreservedly. Still more is this the case when a proposition comes as a "mass suggestion" from the whole group at the same time. Even when we reason with strict logic we commonly do so from premises which are beliefs acquired in this unreasoning fashion. We see, therefore, that "mass suggestion" plays a very important rôle in any large body of persons.

(2) Sympathy.—The tendency to experience in the face of the same object the same emotion and impulses that are revealed by the behaviour of our fellows is due to the effects of sympathy. It is sometimes spoken of as "sympathetic contagion." As an example I will quote the story of an officer's experiences in the trenches as he told it to me when passing
through a dressing station at which I was on duty. An exploding shell
buried this officer and a colleague standing close to him. Out of the debris
thrown around them they were just able to look towards each other and
this officer saw his colleague apparently laughing at him. On reflecting,
he considered the circumstances far from ludicrous, but out of "sympathy"
for his companion brought himself to laugh back at him. In return his
colleague made some wild grimaces and began shrieking and went raving
mad. The officer whose personal statements I have quoted was passed
down to the base suffering from mental symptoms following "shock."

All our emotions are capable of spread by sympathy. As a typical illus-
tration of this I remind you of "Mafeking Night," during the South
African War, when all England expressed itself in an outbreak of "national
hysteria." Each member of the crowd on that occasion by sympathy not
only responded to the first news of the "relief" of the besieged town by a
shout of joy but saw joy expressed in every face and every gesture, and gave
themselves over to an outburst of enthusiasm the like of which has never
been known of before. "It was not courage that made me fearless of
death" said the officer after his first bayonet charge; "it was just the
thought of all the heroes who have been soldiers of my regiment." This
officer was surely under the influence of "sympathetic contagion."

(3) Imitation.—The tendency to direct in detail our impulses according
to the pattern of our fellows is the effect of "imitation." If we depart
from the custom of our particular set in matters of dress or amusement
an uncomfortable feeling comes over us. This develops into a feeling of
isolation, which may be illustrated in the man who sees large numbers of
his friends joining the ranks of Kitchener’s Army, and stands aloof himself.
These feelings are due to inherent impulses in us to behave in the same
way as our fellows and not to be isolated from them, and are akin to the
"herd instinct" of animals. They teach us to restrain our own personal
instincts of self-preservation in order to protect others and benefit the
"mass" and they play a most important part in the building up of our
morals. Like all other psychological processes, however, they are subject
to perversion, and examples of this are not far to find. We have had
occasion to observe on many occasions during the present War instances of
officers, and among them, I regret to say, medical men belonging to the best
families in Germany, who have taken active parts in pillage. They have
not refrained from plundering works of art, money, or even women’s
clothing and numbers of things, for the taking of which there could be no
excuse. Whether any uncomfortable feelings arose in these officers’ minds
is not known, but there is no doubt about the fact that many of their
subordinates followed their actions by "imitation" just as in our own
country has been the case with the "conscientious objectors."

This leads us to the consideration of the psychology of the unorganized
crowd. There are two forms of crowds, one the organized, and the other a
collection of separate individuals ready to perform dissociated, uncertain
and disconnected actions.
Psychological Aspect of an Army and an Unorganized Crowd

So long as a crowd possesses no organization there will be a spirit of indifference amongst its members. The individuals will degenerate; and panics, fads, and false beliefs will result which may be looked upon as derangements of the "collective mind" of which panic is probably the crudest example. An example of this is the panic which so often follows the shout of "fire" in a crowded theatre. The suggestibility and emotional excitability of an unorganized crowd is very great, its sense of responsibility is diminished and there is a feeling of loss of identity amongst its individual members. Each individual of an unorganized crowd feels himself to be an indistinguishable unit of mass and that judgment will be placed on the mass rather than on himself. The agitation for the release of driver Caudle of the Aisgill railway disaster in 1913 showed that the sense of unity amongst railway servants has produced among the individuals a lessened sense of responsibility towards the community at large. Syndicalism leads to a state of loss of moral balance in the industrial group and influences for evil the individual members by producing recklessness, inefficiency and indifference to the common welfare.

It is only by sharing in the "collective life" of highly organized masses of people that the individuals are raised above the level of selfish behaviour, and this brings us to the subject of—

Army Organization.—We must not conclude that by sharing in "collective life" by being a member of "a group" necessarily means to suffer degradation. In the case of a regiment the individuals live in a society where their conduct affects and is affected by the conduct of others by "suggestion," "sympathy," and "imitation," but there is in this case an organization at work by which loss of personal identity and responsibility is prevented, and as a result we find that in an organization such as the British Army the attainments of the mass are on a higher level than could possibly be reached by its average members.

A well organized and patriotic army is the product of deliberate design. The intelligence of a highly selected staff, deliberating and deciding, with the aid of a vast amount of information supplied by subordinates, who in their turn have been specially selected, directs its movements. Influence and responsibility rest on those members best qualified for such posts, the men with the firmest courage and finest enthusiasm occupy the positions of greatest prestige, and by their conduct inspire those who stand next to them, and by "imitation" this is transmitted downwards throughout the entire system. The whole object "collectively" is directed to a single end, the defeat of the enemy, which is perfectly clearly defined and willed by each individual in the army.

In such a high standard of organization there exists also what is known as a "group spirit." This implies the existence in each soldier's mind of a sentiment of devotion to the Army to which he belongs. In a well organized army the "group spirit" is not single but multiple. Each man not only possesses the sentiment of devotion to the Army as a whole, but also
has a similar feeling for the corps, regiment or company to which he belongs.

It was the boast of Napoleon about his army that it was more noted than any other army in the world for the extraordinary feats of heroism displayed by its individual members.

The moral side of each individual of such a collective group is raised to a high level by virtue of its organization. Each man is sustained through months of fatigue, suffering and discomfort by the presence of this "sentiment of devotion," and a part of decisive importance is played by its presence at each critical period of battle.

We see, therefore, that mass suggestion, sympathetic contagion and imitation are not suspended in organized crowds, but that their operation is modified and turned wholly to good.

As I stated at the beginning of this paper, every highly organized body of men may be said to possess a "collective mind." This "collective mind" though undoubtedly a source of strength is not without its dangers, for if it puts at the disposal of the "directors" a body organized and united as one man, it at the same time renders the body highly susceptible to waves of emotion, which, if not properly checked, may overwhelm reason and lead to the disgrace of that body of men. We have an example of this in the extraordinary rapid spread of the German nation's hatred against England, and the fearful barbarities that have been introduced into this War by them in consequence.

Under the shock of war we, in England, united as we have never done before. People were taken out of themselves and thought of others, sympathized with others, and for the first time in their lives worked for others. All classes were brought closer together and a "collective mind" was borne upon us which has probably done our country an immense amount of good.

There need be no apprehension of any serious disturbance by emotional epidemics when a "collective mind" has been formed amongst a free people who have been accustomed to the unfettered exercise of their own judgment. We can, therefore, rest assured that our emotions will not play us false as has been the case with our enemies, who instil into their battalions the dominant thought of cohesion by orders from without and not from among the troops themselves. Whereas it has been our boast, and that of the French, that when our men are face to face with a great difficulty their resourceful intelligence sees what should be done, and there is thus created at the time amongst themselves the essential "collective mind."

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