

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF WAR

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CHAPTER III

GREGARIOUSNESS

INTERNATIONAL rivalry is, apparently, never friendly; in fact, it seems to be invariably characterised by jealousy, often by bitterness. Community of interest is only a phrase, and never sought in practice. If nation A develops trade in some commercially isolated district, the citizens of nation B do not see in this a gain for their own merchants in the opening up of a new outlet for business, but view the growth with alarm and lend their energies towards blocking the foreigner's efforts as much or more than they extend their own. Similarly a new warship or new military program is regarded with an almost paranoid suspicion by all possible military rivals. All this is

obviously irrational, and is certainly a problem to be studied by psychopathologists. If the average citizen is asked why this situation exists, he gives one of two answers: either, "It is silly, and we shouldn't do it any more;" or, "History teaches us that the nation which is not suspicious is destroyed." The first reply is a form of the pacifist's fiat that human nature be changed. The second makes a pretence of rationality. But does man listen to History? Have the yoking of force and suspicion ever led to anything but disaster, even after a short triumph? Surely here, as elsewhere, man learns what he wishes to learn; some powerful instinct urges him the way he goes.

War is never far from consciousness when such suspicious rivalry is in the air. What is the attitude of any nation towards war in time of peace? War, of course, is damnable, all readily agree. But this is war as an abstraction. What do the citizens of any

given country think of their own wars? All are excusable, some justifiable and some glorious. Every thinking man will admit at least these differences, and here there emerges a not unimportant fact. The wars that fire the national imagination are those in which the nation's existence was threatened. The same is true of national heroes: no heterogeneous English gathering ever waxed enthusiastic over the name of Darwin, nor did a German crowd applaud Goethe to the skies.* It is the military hero

*It is true that a few years ago a large plebiscite, instituted by a Parisian newspaper, placed Pasteur first in answer to the question, "Who was the greatest Frenchman?" But the form of this question naturally calls for an objective, intellectual judgment. The voter probably put himself in the place of a foreigner, trying to decide what Frenchman had done most for the world. Had the question been, "As a Frenchman, whom do you admire most?" the vote would probably have placed Napoleon first, a similar plebiscite had some years before. Emotional feelings are more dynamic than intellectual judgments, as every observer knows. It is safe to guess that many more Frenchmen to-day visit the tomb of Napoleon than the grave of Pasteur.

who is the national hero, and here again a discrimination can be made. It is not the genius who fought in some small campaign that stirs the blood, but the man of force who saved the country or founded the empire. The point of these observations is this: The attitude of a people towards its wars is not a glorification of war, but rather an enthusiasm for itself as a nation. War marks the highest level of national consciousness that is ever reached. In earlier days, when primitive man had not known the advantages of herd life for very long, friction with other tribes over hunting grounds or other coveted possessions must have made strangers appear like those of another species in the struggle for existence. Advance of knowledge has taught that all the members of the species *Homo sapiens* are men, but it is doubtful whether that knowledge is a vital part of our automatic mental life. It is one thing for us to recognise in

an animal identity of anatomical structure, and another to *feel* that he is like ourselves. Without this instinctive bond, every stranger, every member of every other group, must to a greater or less extent arouse in us the biological reaction appropriate towards a different species. We have sympathy for a dog, an animal useful to us, but we kill wolves, snakes and insects without any revulsion of feeling for the act. International relationships are probably largely traceable to this feeling of specific differences and to the deep-lying instinct for preservation of the species, distorted in this case to the preservation of what is at most only a variety.

This phenomenon of group allegiance is, of course, a commonplace to sociologists. One might hazard the generality that without it there would be no large political or social problems. It is this instinct which cements the labour unions, maintains re-

ligious factions. Here we have what is, perhaps, the greatest paradox of human nature. The forgetting of self in devotion to others, altruism or loyalty, is the essence of virtue. At the same time, precisely the same type of loyalty that makes of a man a benefactor to all mankind can become the direst menace to mankind when focused on a small group. The bigot can with all sincerity and consciousness of high motive enslave thought and retard science for centuries. Similarly the labour leader, in his zeal to better the condition of his fellow unionists, will shake the foundations of industry. The reader will call to mind countless examples having this in common, that the small group calls forth a loyalty which is inimical to larger groups. In the case of war we have national loyalty destroying the civilisation of all mankind.

There is but one psychologist who has seen the potentiality of man's gregariousness.

This is Wilfrid Trotter.* The substance of his claims is that one can understand many anomalies of man's conduct by regarding him as a herd animal: that is, not only an animal who lives gregariously, but one whose instinct it is to react with the herd. He is deaf to the voice of one without the herd, but infinitely suggestible to influences coming from within it. In this way herd traditions and herd thoughts are superior in their influence to individual reason, and the struggle between these two he assigns as the cause for most human ills that are not frankly physical in origin.

He says that there are three great types of development in herd life: that of the animals, who unite for aggression as do wolves; that of the species like sheep, whose cohesion gives protection; and finally, the highest degree of gregariousness, which he

**Instincts of the Herd in Peace and in War*. Fisher Unwin & Co., London.

terms the socialised type, exemplified in the society of ants, or better still by bees. Each kind of specialisation is represented in man, and has its peculiar mental make up exhibited both in the reactions of the mass and the individual. Each tends in human development to exclude the others and produce a type that is almost a specific variation biologically. This leads to lack of sympathy and, if the interests of two "herds" come into collision, a deep hostility.

In his original papers,* he showed how gregariousness leads inevitably to unquestioning acceptance of the herd dogma, and that this works strongly against that sensitiveness to experience—open mindedness—which is necessary for progress. In biological terms, the aggregation of units in the herd, which ought to facilitate variation, actually inhibits variation. He concluded, therefore, that the human race was doomed

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to extinction unless some new factor should come into play. Hints as to the nature of this force were extremely vague. He now states that this must be an understanding of man's psychology in the biological sense, and a conscious guidance along the path of evolution on which he has entered only to halt long before the goal is reached. Both of these definite additions to his theory appear prominently in his discussion of war.

In this book there are no statements as to the causation of warfare in general, but only arguments about the present conflict. The author frankly admits that prejudice is unavoidable, and claims no immunity from that vice in his discussion. He places entire responsibility for the war on Germany, giving no suggestion as to how England could have had a hand in producing the situation which made war inevitable. Such criticisms as he directs against England concern only her internal politics and social constitution.

If there be a neutral bloodless enough to qualify as an impartial critic, and if he dispute the validity of such claims, he could still profit from Trotter's work. One does not need to sympathise with his antagonism to Germany to get helpful material from his essay. It is only necessary to agree that forces such as he alleges to be operative there would probably produce war, to gain a hint as to what underlies warlike impulses in general. Similarly whether English society has the inherent virtue he ascribes to it or not, is for our present purposes immaterial. In the type of herd he describes as British would certainly be found a people whose power could only be a blessing to the world.

In 1908 Trotter wrote as follows—

"The solutions [of the problem of reconciling individual desires or experience with herd suggestion] by indifference and by rationalisation, or by a mixture of these two processes, are characteristic of the great

class of normal, sensible, reliable middle age, with its definite views, its resiliency to the depressing influence of facts, and its gift for forming the backbone of the State. In them herd suggestion shows its capacity to triumph over experience, to delay the evolution of altruism, and to obscure the existence and falsify the results of the contest between personal and social desires. That it is able to do so has the advantage of establishing society with great firmness, but it has also the consequence of entrusting the conduct of the State and the attitude of it towards life to a class which their very stability shows to possess a certain relative incapacity to take experience seriously, a certain relative insensibility to the value of feeling and to suffering, and a decided preference for herd tradition over all other sources of conduct.

"Early in history the bulk of mankind must have been of this type, because experience, being still relatively simple, would

have but little suggestive force, and would therefore readily be suppressed by herd suggestion. There would be little or no mental conflict, and such as there was would be readily stilled by comparatively simple rationalisations. The average man would then be happy, active, and possessed of an inexhaustible fund of motive and energy, capable of intense patriotism and even of self-immolation for the herd. The nation consequently, in an appropriate environment, would be an expanding one and rendered ruthless and formidable by an intense, unshakable conviction of its divine mission. Its blindness towards the new in experience would keep its patriots narrow and fierce, its priests bigoted and bloodthirsty, its rulers arrogant, reactionary and overconfident. Should chance ordain that there arose no great environmental change, rendering necessary great modifications, such a nation would have a brilliant career of conquest, as

has been so often demonstrated by history.

"Among the first-class Powers to-day the mentally stable are still the directing class, and their characteristic tone is discernible in national attitudes towards experience, in national ideals and religions, and in national morality. It is this possession of the power of directing national opinion by a class which is in essence relatively insensitive towards new combinations of experience; this persistence of a mental type, which may have been adequate in the simpler past, into a world where environments are daily becoming more complex—it is this survival, so to say, of the wagoner upon the footplate of the express engine, which has made the modern history of nations a series of such breathless adventures and hairbreadth escapes. To those who are able to view national affairs from an objective standpoint, it is obvious that each of these escapes might very easily have been a disaster, and

that sooner or later one of them must be such."

In his later work Trotter ascribes these primitive characteristics more specifically to the aggressive or wolf gregariousness and, needless to say, he finds them highly developed in the Germans. This race, he thinks, demonstrate the validity of his claim that great development can be obtained by conscious direction of what is the evolutionary tendency, although, of course, he looks on lupine gregariousness as inimical to civilization as a whole, and therefore bound to fail in the end. It may seem grotesque to attempt an analogy between the society of the wolf and that of any group of men, and it would probably be impossible to present Trotter's arguments sympathetically without quotation *in extenso*. Assuming this risk, however, what he considers to be the lupine characteristics in man may be enumerated.

Wolves band themselves together purely

for the sake of the advantages the pack enjoys over the individual in hunting. Wolf gregariousness is, therefore, founded on aggression. Trotter notes that the Germans are constantly taking as their ideal the civilisations which in the past were built on aggression. Not unnaturally he points to the fact that peoples of the "socialised" (the bee) type, such as Italians and Americans, have not been impressed by German propaganda, while the bloodthirsty Turks and Bulgarians have espoused the Teutonic cause. He finds as a national characteristic, pervading all classes, a naïve arrogance usually displayed in florid and banal metaphors. The simple, honest conviction of being God's chosen people furnishes a great stimulus in attack. He claims they are incapable of grasping the idea that other people may be differently constituted from themselves; that they are incredulous of altruism ever being a real motive, and rely

on intimidation rather than understanding in their relations with other nations. It is to these tendencies that he ascribes the series of diplomatic blunders which resulted in Germany facing a coalition of tremendous strength. Not unusually he views the apparent determination of the General Staff to keep constantly on the offensive as an evidence of aggression being the keynote of their union. He even risks the prediction that there will be a collapse so soon as offence is no longer possible. There are certain traits shown in their internal relationships which Trotter regards as distinctive of the lupine type. He speaks first of the flagrant cruelty and harshness exhibited by the individual German in times of peace as well as in war. The same habit he observes in the treatment of their colonies. As a corollary to this the individual German shows a subserviency to his superior and a favourable reaction to rigorous, even phys-

ical discipline, that would to other peoples be intolerable. This is likened to the behaviour of the dog, who reacts so much more satisfactorily to a whipping than does a horse, for instance. Finally, Trotter makes much of the German tendency to adopt war cries and shibboleths (e.g. "Gott strafe England"), any attempt to implant which on the English meets with failure. This successful bolstering up of the national morale with catch phrases he considers directly analogous to the howl of wolf pack, which inspirits and unites it in hunting.

From a scientific rather than a national standpoint it is regrettable that Trotter writes with this partisanship, for it tends, *a priori*, to prejudice the validity of his arguments. Before speaking of England and Germany explicitly, he mentions that it is open to man to develop his gregariousness along either the wolf, the sheep, or the bee plan. Man, then, is potentially capable of

all three types and, it is safe to assume, has all three latent in him. We can get much from Trotter if we accept his aggressive type as expressing those elements in the gregariousness of man which tend towards war. Sheep never fight, bees sting merely to repel attacks. It is only in the development of the bee type that mankind can progress. The swarm has the focus of the hive, in which all interest is centred, and the co-ordination of function is such that no individualism is possible. What Trotter terms "intercommunication" among the units is developed to its highest point. This he aptly compares to the cell colony that develops into the metazoic type of animal. No one thinks of the welfare of the individual cell in a multi-cellular animal. The advance of the bee-hive is not determined by subjugation of other hives or species, but by more effective industry. This would make an ideal national type.

It is now a fairly well recognised fact that in the study of psychopathic states the observation of the conduct and utterances of the patient will betray much of his innate mental constitution, and also show what was the underlying personal significance of the events which disturbed his balance. Our material on the psychology of war is, therefore, not complete until we have made more of a survey of the phenomena of war. These are, of course, legion, and only a few can be considered here and, at that, in generalities. The external changes in the life of the mass and of the individual do not demand comment—that is the sphere of the economist. Our problem is to discover the mental changes of the nation and the citizen.

Of the national changes the added cohesiveness and unity is a commouplace. What has been a vague conception of flag or king becomes a living entity. The herd crowds closer together. All the departments of

Government become more co-ordinate: the claims of smaller groups, such as labour, capital, and political parties are allowed to lapse in the presence of the need of the large groups. A much-needed reform, long blocked by the obstinacy of some small class, can be instituted without opposition. In short, internal problems almost cease to exist, not merely in relation to the magnitude of the external problems, but absolutely. The factors of sectional rivalry and jealousy have disappeared, or, at least, tend to do so. National conscience is both quickened and perverted. The action of the enemy or of individual enemy citizens is judged to be wicked regardless of the merits of the case, while individual frivolities and indiscretions of fellow-citizens come to be looked on almost as treason. The people press a debt of the individual whose payment is never expected in times of peace. Trotter observed in England some less obvious signs

of a quickening of the herd instinct. The first reaction was of vague fear. This did not necessarily confine itself to fears for the safety of the country as a whole, but was transferred to ridiculous, petty anxieties. With this was an intolerance of isolation. Men could not bear to be alone, and, following the instinct for members of the herd to be in actual contact, class barriers were broken down. Most interesting was the wild-fire spread and credulity of rumours, that form of mental contagion which owes its existence to herd suggestion. Finally, every foreign-looking person was looked on with suspicion. This last, coupled with the open hatred of individual foes, gives us a beautiful analogy with the psychosis. The unconscious idea that the foreigner belongs to a rival species becomes a conscious belief that he is a pestiferous type of animal.

All the above, with the exception of rumour, fear, and senseless suspicion, are

gains for the nation as such. National consciousness is a large part of that vision without which the people perish, and it is quite possible that the essential victory rests with that people whose national morale emerges intact from the war. I once had occasion to meet one of the most noteworthy of the Boer generals, and took the opportunity to ask him why the Boers had not yielded to the British demands instead of attempting the impossible. He replied that they all knew their relative impotence, but that to have capitulated would have meant the forfeiture of their national self-respect, so they chose to fight against impossible odds. We can now begin to see the result of this decision. Their individual losses were enormous, but nationally they are probably better off. They have as good a Government or better; they are part of a larger civilisation (to which they owe ready allegiance); they are not a subject race in fact or feeling.

One thing is altered: the Vierkleur is replaced by the Union Jack. But that of which the flag was a symbol has not been destroyed. In fact, it has probably grown. Had the two States capitulated a Boer would not now, in the eyes of Europe and America, be a citizen of the world, but only a semi-savage frontiersman. Did the Boers really lose the war?

The effects of war on the nation as a whole have still more interesting results on the mental reactions of the individual. We are accustomed to think of energy being largely a product of personal ambition. The individual in war time couples self-abnegation with unwonted energy. His interests change: his pride tends to be centred less on the eminence of himself and family, but more on what he and they can do for the country. A man no longer strives to outwit his neighbour in business, but rather to outdo him in patriotism. An exhibition of generosity or

altruism that merits a sneer from many quarters in times of peace becomes an incentive, an example to copy. Herd suggestion constantly reinforces the spirit of self-sacrifice in the interests of the herd. These statements must not, of course, be taken as indicating constant results. If all the citizens of any country responded to the full along these lines, the concerted energy of that herd would probably make it infinitely stronger than any other nation. As in all psychological matters, we can only consider tendencies. It is frequently stated that war awakens a feeling for the essential realities of life. In the face of the astounding perversions of truth which characterise every war, this statement must be delimited. More accurately one could say that a vaguely felt standard of conduct—to act in best interests of the herd—becomes a vital, conscious rule of life, and keener criticism is directed by each individual to see if his conduct fol-

lows this rule. As a corollary to this, self-deceptions may tend to disappear. The more or less conscious delusions of grandeur which actuate so many people are apt to fail in the emergency of war. Probably the more fundamental of such ideas—the importance of one's individual life—is the one that is most conspicuously shattered. In the article by Freud, already quoted, there is considerable discussion of our attitude towards death. He shows that normally we are continually handicapped by our insincerities about death and fears of it in ourselves and others. There is no more beautiful proof that a nation at war acts as a species struggling for existence than the fact that individual deaths do not matter either to the mass or to the individual himself. Trotter's comparison to the multicellular animal is peculiarly apt in this connection. If we find ourselves in a situation of danger we are not conscious of any fear for hand or eye or

body, but for ourselves as a whole. Neither the wolf in the pack nor the bee in the swarm has thought for its own safety. As Trotter points out, mass formation gains psychologically perhaps more than it does tactically. It seems to me not impossible that the success of military training consists essentially in the acquisition of the herd spirit, the gain of a feeling that the herd is always present, even if it be only in imagination. When this is accomplished the prodigies of devotion and self-immolation, which are a commonplace of mass formation, can become possible individually. The essential victory in war rests with that nation which has the largest number of citizens unconsciously and constantly aware of the presence of the herd, fighting or travelling alone, perhaps, but hearing always the voice of their choir invisible.