

PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS OF THE MATURE PERSONALITY.

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THE age of maturity may be regarded as having begun when the individual has finally chosen his mate, and is satisfactorily and happily married. The problems of the unmarried and the homosexual are somewhat different, but have analogous solutions.

Marriage itself involves some deep psychological problems. The necessity for the individual to shoulder his responsibilities, to think for another as well as for himself, to develop the "binocular" view of life, both masculine and feminine, may give rise to disturbances, if not affecting conduct, at least affecting feeling and outlook. The great danger at every stage of mature life is regression, a retreat to a previously occupied position. It is because of this that deep mental analysis is so helpful, enabling the individual to gain an insight into the persisting effects of his earlier experiences. With the birth of children come new problems of adaptation. The parent must be encouraged to live for his children in an objective way, not in a narcissistic way as though the children were his possession.

Another problem of maturity is settlement in a profession. Here, in the most favourable circumstances, it is not the man who chooses the profession, but the profession which chooses the man. In this respect also there is always the possibility of regression. The occupation not chosen may have had a glamour of its own. It may have attracted him at one time, and have been dismissed for one reason or another, but not completely excluded, and when difficulties are encountered, or other special circumstances arise, the earlier ambitions may reassert themselves, sometimes with very disturbing, even disastrous, effects for the individual.

The fundamental problem before the mature personality is sublimation, the opposite of regression, a movement forward to a fuller development of the personality instead of a stepping back. Sublimation means the direction of primitive instinctive energy towards ever higher social and spiritual ends. As a rule it is in the late forties or early fifties that the greatest ethical demands are made upon the individual. He must consent finally to the surrender of some personal ambitions for himself, he must abandon the last vestiges of narcissism, he must find a philosophy to meet the needs of his advancing

years. He is at the parting of the ways, one way being a process of continued sublimation, the other of regression, lost courage, and futile depression. Here again much help can be given by some form of analysis, taking him back into his past, enabling him to talk out his life, and to know himself ; and then, through the emotional rapport which springs up between himself and the psycho-therapist, he is enabled to get a clearer view of his difficulties and courage and incentive to overcome them.

Difficulty of adaptation to the approach of declining bodily vigour, with failure of satisfactory sublimation, may result in injudicious enthusiasm for some special theory or cult in place of a real philosophy of life.

A sound philosophy of life, practical as well as theoretical, harmonizing biological and psychological needs and leading up to a supra-temporal and duly co-ordinated system of values and a serene and courageous spiritual outlook, gives the highest degree of unity, vigour and permanence of the personality, and leads to true happiness.