CONSTITUTIONAL FACTORS IN INSTITUTION CHILDREN.*

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I AM deeply conscious of the honour you have done me in asking me to serve as your Chairman for the coming year. I feel this promotion is somewhat premature and that there are others better qualified for this responsible task. But I bow to your wishes and will do my best to serve you.

I feel rather ambivalent about the tradition which rules that there is no discussion of the Chairman's address, as I would prefer to stimulate a debate, and I have chosen for my subject this evening a field of study where there is plenty of room for argument. I hope therefore that even if you cannot voice your disagreements with me now, on some other occasion we may be able to resume the debate.

Having completed early this year an investigation which has occupied most of my spare time for some three or four years, I have had a few months to reflect on the results, and am venturing to put before you the results of my meditations. You may possibly dismiss them as a " blinding glimpse of the obvious," but they are based on this survey, which has substituted a scientific method for an intuitional one.

Briefly, the object of this investigation was to ascertain the kind of social adaptation made by children brought up in institutions, when they left school and the institution, and began to earn their living.

At the time of the promotion of the investigation in the spring of 1943, the war had emphasised the necessity for making provision in this country and in Europe for homeless, abandoned and unwanted children. Because of the size of the problem it was believed that many of these children would have to be placed in institutions, and it seemed of the utmost importance to ascertain whether the institution child suffers from disadvantages in his development as a person, in comparison with the child brought up in a normal home. It was a general impression among those who have to deal with children that the child brought up in an institution compares unfavourably with the child who has had the benefit of normal home surroundings, but in this country, this was an impression only, and not based on scientific enquiry. It is true that about this date Dr. Edelston had published in America his studies on the effects of hospitalisation in children (a survey which he had begun in 1938). But hospitalisation, while it involves the factor of separation from the parents, is not the same situation as institutionalisation.

In America, as early as 1940, the concept of the " institution child " as a clinical type had been developed and elaborated. Lowrey, while working as a psychiatric consultant to an orphanage, was impressed by the compara-

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tively uniform pattern of socially disturbing behaviour, in a series of children referred for advice from the orphanage ; he attributed this maladjustment to a common factor—that of being reared for approximately three years in a home for infants. This prompted a study of all cases referred from infants' homes for two years, and a series of 28 children were accordingly investigated. Lowrey claimed that only those children admitted before the age of two developed the syndrome of personality distortion, characterised by unsocial behaviour, hostile aggression, inability to give or receive affection, inability to understand or accept limitations, and marked insecurity in adapting to environmental changes.

This pioneer investigation of Lowrey's was followed up in America by a series of more detailed investigations by Goldfarb. This worker made a comparison between children who had spent the first two or three years of their lives in institutions, and then had been boarded out, and compared them with a control group whose total experience had been in foster homes. In this first study 40 institution children, average age six years plus, were compared with 40 foster home children of the same age.

It was clearly demonstrated that the institution children showed greater frequency of problem behaviour, more expression of anxiety—restlessness, hyperactivity, inability to concentrate—more open expression of aggressiveness, such as temper tantrums, impatience, obstructiveness, cruelty without cause, disregard of other people's rights. It was inferred that the institution children were less secure, more isolated from other people, and less capable of entering into meaningful human relationships.

In another study, it was shown that institution children were more predisposed to poor adjustment in a foster home, and to transfers to further foster homes because of unusual behaviour. The problems that made replacing necessary were aggressive, hyperactive behaviour, bizarre, unreflective actions, and emotional unresponsiveness.

Goldfarb considered these investigations left him with the definite inference that the emotionally deprived infancy of the institution child resulted in a dramatic arrest in all aspects of his (personality) development, and in the formation of a characteristically typical personality.

Was this childhood pattern permanent ? Goldfarb (1943) then investigated 15 children (average age 12 plus) who had entered institutions in very early infancy and remained there three years before transfer to foster homes, and compared them with a control group of the same age who had always been fostered out.

His findings were that " the institution child continues to be different from a group of family children, even as late as adolescence, and even after a long period of foster-family and community contact. The institution child has a personality which has not expanded to the same degree. In the realm of the intellect, his behaviour is more aimless, thoughtless, unplanned, wasteful. In the realm of feeling his responses are poor and meagre. His range of language is narrower, his pronunciation imperfect."

" The absence of human ties, particularly the absence of relationship with protecting, loving adults, leads to personal insecurity. The institution group

is consequently characterised by the need for attention and affection. Yet the never sated craving for affection is accompanied by the inability to set up a mature give-and-take relationship.

" The fact that the personality-distortions caused by deprivation are not overcome by later family and community experience must be stressed," he writes, " if anything, there is a growing inaccessibility to change."

After further controlled studies of institution children at three years and eight years, Goldfarb (1945) undertook intensive investigations of the life histories of 15 institution adolescents—a longitudinal section after his series of cross-sections.

In his view these studies confirmed the inferior intellectual performance of the institution child. In his view they cannot grasp ideas about space and time, and so disregard temporal and spatial limitations. " They don't keep on the pavement, wander on the way home from school, don't come in at bedtime. They cannot recall the past clearly or anticipate the future sensibly." Emotionally he finds the institution children very primitive. They indiscriminately demanded affection and attention, and yet could form no permanent ties ; not being able to feel for other humans, they were not upset by hostility or cruelty to others.

Goldfarb considered that the deprivation in infancy associated with institutionalisation results in a basic defect of the total personality. It is as if the institution child personality " is congealed at a level of extreme immaturity." He cannot be taught as readily as other children because of deficiency in attention and lack of capacity to grasp ideas. " He has little self-insight, and direct treatment is commonly ineffective, particularly at the adolescent level."

Goldfarb claims that " one would hardly describe the institution regimen as brutal or aggressive. Its major defect lies in the bare and narrow horizons of experience it offers. This last applies both to the world of things and to the world of people. The institution child thus establishes no specific identifications, and engages in no meaningful relationships with other people. The basic motivations to normal maturation and differentiation of personality are absent." All this seems to be a terrible indictment of the effects of institutionalisation. You will notice the stress laid on the catastrophic effect of a rigid environment. But very little reference is made to the kind of child who has been exposed to these special environmental conditions.

Apart from these American studies, what confirmation can be found for this concept of the " institution child ? "

In this country we have had the advantage of the masterly studies of Miss Anna Freud and Miss Burlingham at the Hampstead Nursery. They published clinical reports but no statistics. They pointed out that residential nurseries provide excellent conditions for the development of motor skill and early social responses, but have limitations which hamper emotional development and the formation of character. This character formation, this establishment of personal values, depends largely on the strength and depth of the personal attachments which give rise to them. If the child has no loving adult to identify with, it will fail to develop values and standards of its own.

In the residential nursery, if the grown-ups remain remote and impersonal, or change often, so that no permanent attachment is possible, then Miss Freud suggests that institutional education will fail to develop moral standards.

Nevertheless, in their report, there are numerous examples of personal relationships developing between child and nurse, and between child and child —relationships which were obviously of considerable depth, judging by the reactions which occurred when separation was inevitable. The institution child is not necessarily affectionless. I mention this matter of affectionless character, as Dr. Bowlby lays great stress on it, and claims that children showing it have a remarkably distinctive history of prolonged separation from their mothers or foster mothers; he considers them unusually clear examples of the distorting influence of a bad early environment. But he lays stress on the separation from the parent. I would ask why was it necessary to separate the child from his home. One of Dr. Bowlby's cases had a schizophrenic heredity, and he had *not* been separated from his mother. But on examination of his detailed studies it appears that of the 11 affectionless children about whom something was known of the parents, nine had an unstable, violent, alcoholic, or antisocial parent.

So much for the background to our own investigation. In this the field work was carried out by Miss Sykes, psychiatric social worker and Miss MacKinlay, educational psychologist, to whom I am deeply grateful for their thorough and painstaking studies, often carried out under great difficulty.

The questions we set ourselves to answer were: are there any differences in educational attainment between a child brought up in an institution, and a child brought up in his own home?

Does the child brought up in an institution show any difference in social maturity from the child reared in his own family?

Does the institution child shew any special difficulty in adapting himself to society when he leaves the shelter of the institution? Can the institution child make friends? Does he find it easy to adapt himself to conditions of work?

The survey began with an investigation of the institution child in the institution during the year of school-leaving age. The social worker visited the institution and contacted the staff; the educational psychologist interviewed the child and administered a battery of tests.

Six months to a year later, when the child had left the institution, the social worker visited the foster home or lodging and interviewed the child and tested social maturity, using the Vineland Social Maturity Test. She also interviewed, where available, foster parents and employers to get a comprehensive picture of the child's adaptation.

The controls were a group of senior school children brought up in their own homes, who underwent exactly similar investigations.

I do not propose to consider in detail all the results of this investigation. It is hoped that the National Association of Mental Health who sponsored the investigation, with the welcome help of the Nuffield Hospitals Trust, will publish our results in detail.

But I wish to confine myself to one general aspect of our findings.

On comparing the 50 institution children with the school control group of 52, we found that the average social quotient of the institution child was 92·9 per cent. compared with the control groups' average of 106·5 per cent.—a difference of 13·6 per cent.

It might be thought that here is confirmation of the handicap to which children brought up in institutions are subjected.

But when we studied the reasons for which the children had been placed in the institutions visited, we were struck by the fact that only just over a quarter of our sample were orphans. Another quarter had been institutionalised because one or both parents had been admitted to mental hospitals or colonies for mental defectives.

The high proportion of mentally unstable parents invited comparison with the control group. We considered factors which might have a constitutional or hereditary basis, such as insanity, mental deficiency and epilepsy, and also took into account authentic reports of bigamy, incest, family desertion necessitating action on the part of the authorities, terms of service in prison or approved schools or habitual promiscuity. Relatives for this purpose were restricted to parents and sibs, as in the case of institution children, records in the files of public assistance offices rarely had information about other members of the family.

When, therefore, these institution children with insane, defective, epileptic and antisocial relatives were grouped together, we found that they constituted 74·3 per cent. of the total; in comparison with 11·5 per cent. of the school control group.

This high proportion of institutional children (nearly $\frac{3}{4}$) with possible hereditary handicaps, suggested a further comparison.

The whole material of institution children and controls was regrouped, into those children with epileptic, insane, defective and antisocial relatives, and those children whose family record was clear of these taints, and their social quotients compared.

The average social quotient of the children with unsatisfactory family records was 91·6 per cent. compared with the presumed normal children whose social quotients averaged 105 per cent.

The difference of 13·4 per cent. is exactly the same as when institution children were compared with normal controls.

That is to say, the same degree of social retardation is to be observed whether the children are grouped according to environmental circumstances (home or institution) or classified according to hereditary factors (unsatisfactory or satisfactory parents).

Such a finding certainly weakens the case of those protagonists who argue that any social or personal retardation is attributable exclusively or mainly to environmental influences.

This finding sent me back to a study of the original American papers on the institution child. A study of Lowrey's 1940 paper shewed that of his 28 cases only 16 had intelligence tests reported. But one was feebleminded, 10 had I.Q.'s under 90. Further, of possible hereditary factors, case 1 had a neurotic "lowgrade" mother, case 2 a dull unstable mother and a father

with a criminal record ; case 5 had a delinquent moron for a father, and a dull and unstable mother ; case 6 had a schizophrenic mother ; case 8 had a paranoid mother ; case 9 had a schizophrenic mother. Briefly, two-thirds of the cases reported at length by Lowrey had parents of inadequate, unstable or psychotic mentality.

A study of Goldfarb's series also revealed a discrepancy of a very considerable nature in intelligence.

In his comparable study of adolescents the average I.Q. of his institution group was only 72 per cent., compared with his control group of 95 per cent. And one cannot avoid the conclusion that many of the unfavourable features of his so-called institution type are really attributable to borderline defect rather than to institutionalisation as such.

It would only be natural that the authorities would board-out their brighter children, as more acceptable to potential foster parents, and be forced to retain the dull and near-defectives.

Goldfarb claimed that the institution children in his group were singularly unable to form abstract concepts, and failed conspicuously in tests involving conceptual performance. But this is only to be expected in a group of borderline defectives.

In our present series an attempt was deliberately made to find controls of a corresponding intellectual level. Miss Mackinlay found the average I.Q. of our institution children 90 per cent. compared with the average of the control group 99·5 per cent. Both figures therefore fall within the average range of intelligence. Our findings therefore suggest that constitutional factors are at least as important as environmental factors in subsequent social maturation.

I think our studies therefore confirm the claims of Doll, who maintains that there are probably limits to the unfolding of the social personality, just as there are limits to the development of intelligence.

The influence of training and environment is principally effective during the period of development. It is ineffective after social maturation is complete. This, if true, has important bearings in the institutionalisation of children, particularly defectives, as Doll has found that the rate of social maturation slows down after 15 in the feebleminded compared with normal development until the 25th year.

Doll has investigated a series of families using his social maturity test, and has demonstrated that social maturity appears to be distributed in similar fashion to intelligence. He prints genealogical trees of four generations, shewing that in some families the social maturity never reaches a normal level, while in other families the social maturity is always above average.

Doll was inclined to believe that social capacity was very largely an innate factor, and only slightly modified by environment, though he admitted that foster-home placement capitalises social competence to better advantage than does institutional care.

Now the Slaters in discussing the various theories which may be advanced to account for the phenomena of the neuroses and maladjustment, favour that group of theories which considers that the constitutional basis is in part

hereditary, but may be due to several factors, with dissimilar effects which may overlap.

They propose the theory that a very large number of characteristics can be differentiated amongst men, each of which plays a part in determining the success with which the individual adapts to circumstances.

"The normal man possesses certain characteristics that promote success, and lacks others in roughly equal proportions.

"But the man with a tendency to maladjustment lacks many characteristics that promote success and possesses few.

"In other words, every individual possesses characteristics, variable in strength, which render him more or less liable to maladjustment. Whether he succumbs or not depends on the extent to which he is endowed with qualities which help to make him less vulnerable to breakdown, and on the nature and degree of the stresses to which he is exposed."

If I may add an analogy. In the parable of the Sower, both seed and soil were taken into account. Not only may the seed fall by the wayside, on stony places, amongst thorns, or on to good ground; but even the seed with good environment had different productive capacity, the best a hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some only thirtyfold.

And was it not the same Thinker who asked, "Do men gather grapes of thistles, or figs from thorns?" Of course the question is not a simple one to answer.

Indeed Kanner warns us:

"We must especially guard ourselves against any sort of formulations calling for an exact statement expressed in percentages, as to how much a child's behaviour disorder is constitutional and how much environmentally determined. It is not our desire to separate things which are so thoroughly fused and integrated that they cannot be separated, or to draw lines which cannot be drawn even approximately or artificially."

One of the main difficulties, of course, is that normally the unstable, psychotic, defective or social parents not only may be the source of the child's constitutional make-up, but also constitute the main personal influence in the child's environment, particularly if it is the mother. And as these handicapped parents are themselves maladjusted, the environment of their children teems with stresses and tensions to which the normal child is not exposed. One only has to consider the effects on an adolescent boy of an alcoholic father who comes home violent and quarrelsome and turns his wife and family into the street in the middle of the night. A severe stress for a normal boy; but for one who may already inherit psychopathic tendencies—a catastrophic stress.

Or, again, consider the example of the unfortunate boy of 12 whose mother was sent to prison for manslaughter after performing an illegal operation—again a situation involving domestic tensions and conflicts almost beyond the capacity of an inherently stable boy to endure.

Michael Fordham has discussed the *participation mystique* of the young child with his parents, and stressed the burdens that are laid on the young child by neurotic parents; and Wellisch has stressed how completely identified with his parents' psyche is the child during the first years of his life. It is interesting to note that in Wellisch's case of *folie á deux* in mother and son, the son's depression improved when he was separated from his mother.

Lowrey claimed that early separation from the mother was the factor in determining the institutional type of character, and suggested that the critical age was two years.

But my own experience of some of these psychopathic, deranged and defective mothers would suggest that early separation of mother and child would be an advantage to the child. There was the adolescent girl with a psychopathic mother, who miserably exclaimed—" If I didn't have parents, I'd be an orphan, but I'd know who *I* was anyway. If you live in a choked up adult world, how can you know anything? You're lost. They—the adults—can be sure of me—I can't be sure of them! "

Actually, we investigated this question of age of institutionalisation in our own series, and we were unable to confirm Lowrey's claim. Of 16 children admitted to institutions before the age of two, the social quotient on leaving school age was 93·1 per cent. compared with an average social quotient of 92·8 per cent. of 34 children admitted to institutions after the age of two. The difference of 0·3 per cent., of course, is not significant. Our studies therefore suggest that in this country the institution child is not a clinical entity. In many cases the reasons for his institutionalisation are the rejecting attitudes of his unstable, psychopathic, defective or psychotic parents. Inheriting in part some of their handicaps he is the more *vulnerable* to the stresses of separation anxiety and the deprivation of personal relationships. But when, as often occurs, he is also dull and backward in intelligence, these experiences are not indelible, their effects are fleeting and soon forgotten, and the father or mother becomes a mythical figure bearing no more significance than the King or the Prime Minister, as far as his personal life is concerned. The important persons in his life are the matron and her assistants and the group of children with whom he lives.

If these findings are generally true, it means that the average institution child because of his inherited defects, in social capacity and also perhaps in intelligence requires more individual care and understanding than the average child secured in his own family.

And this finding gives force to the recommendation of the Curtis Committee, that the small group home should contain not more than 12 children.

I know I shall be accused of a Calvinistic bias in proposing this psychology of predestination. But have we not already accepted the implications of such a psychology for our mental defectives, and are we not pressing for measures to provide a suitable environment for their limited intelligences?

It is not illogical to believe that we will be forced to take the same steps for our social defectives. The tragedy of these children is that in the past and even in the present we have placed, and are placing, these already handicapped children in an environment which has tended to accentuate their shortcomings—to highlight their limitations.

Afraid of society, do they not visualise it as that hard man reaping where he has not sown, gathering where he has not strawed, and wrapping his single talent in the napkin of respectability, and burying it in the ground? Surely that impoverishment of society is a greater risk even than the delinquency which tends to attract all our attention?

But the finding that constitutional factors are relatively so important need not depress us unduly. As Dr. Carroll has said, " If we cannot effect real changes in character, it should be possible to alter the pattern of behaviour in which that character is expressed."

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