

## **CONTRIBUTIONS TO A DISCUSSION ON SUICIDE**

### ***I. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS***

Gentlemen, - You have all listened with much satisfaction to the plea put forward by an educationalist who will not allow an unjustified charge to be levelled against the institution that is so dear to him. But I know that in any case you were not inclined to give easy credence to the accusation that schools drive their pupils to suicide. Do not let us be carried too far, however, by our sympathy with the party which has been unjustly treated in this instance. Not all the arguments put forward by the opener of the discussion seem to me to hold water. If it is the case that youthful suicide occurs not only among pupils in secondary schools but also among apprentices and others, this fact does not acquit the secondary schools; it must perhaps be interpreted as meaning that as regards its pupils the secondary school takes the place of the traumas with which other adolescents meet in other walks of life. But a secondary school should achieve more than not driving its pupils to suicide. It should give them a desire to live and should offer them support and backing at a time of life at which the conditions of their development compel them to relax their ties with their parental home and their family. It seems to me indisputable that schools fail in this, and in many respects fall short of their duty of providing a substitute for the family and of arousing interest in life in the world outside. This is not a suitable occasion for a criticism of secondary schools in their present shape; but perhaps I may emphasize a single point. The school must never forget that it has to deal with immature individuals who cannot be denied a right to linger at certain stages of development and even at certain disagreeable ones. The school must not take on itself the inexorable character of life: it must not seek to be more than a game of life.

### ***II. CONCLUDING REMARKS***

Gentlemen, - I have an impression that, in spite of all the valuable material that has been brought before us in this discussion, we have not reached a decision on the problem that interests us. We were anxious above all to know how it becomes possible for the extraordinarily powerful life instinct to be overcome: whether this can only come about with the help of a disappointed libido or whether the ego can renounce its self-preservation for its own egoistic motives. It may be that we have failed to answer this psychological question because we have no adequate means of approaching it. We can, I think, only take as our starting-point the condition of melancholia, which is so familiar to us clinically, and a comparison between it and the affect of mourning. The affective processes in melancholia, however, and the vicissitudes undergone by the libido in that condition, are totally unknown to us. Nor have we arrived at a psycho-analytic understanding of the chronic affect of mourning. Let us suspend our judgement till experience has solved this problem.