

## **INTRODUCTION TO PFISTER'S THE PSYCHO-ANALYTIC METHOD - (1913)**

Psycho-analysis had its origin on medical soil, as a therapeutic procedure for the treatment of certain nervous illnesses which were termed 'functional' and which were considered with increasing certainty to be consequences of disturbances in emotional life. It attains its end - of removing the manifestations of these disturbances, the symptoms - by assuming that they are not the only possible and final outcome of particular psychical processes. It therefore uncovers the history of the development of these symptoms in the patient's memory, it revivifies the processes underlying them, and then conducts them, under the doctor's guidance, to a more favourable outlet. Psycho-analysis has set itself the same therapeutic aims as treatment by hypnotism, which was introduced by Liébeault and Bernheim and after lengthy and severe struggles achieved a place in the technique of nerve specialists. But it goes far deeper into the structure of the mechanism of the mind, and seeks to bring about permanent results and viable changes in its subjects.

In its time, hypnotic treatment by suggestion very soon passed beyond the sphere of medical application and entered the service of the education<sup>1</sup> of young people. If we are to believe the reports, it proved to be an effective means forgetting rid of childish faults, of inconvenient physical habits and of character traits that were otherwise irreducible. No one at that time objected to, or was surprised at, this extension of its uses, which, incidentally, has only been made fully understandable by the researches of psycho-analysis. For we know to-day that pathological symptoms are often nothing but substitutes for bad (that is, unserviceable) inclinations, and that the determinants of these symptoms are laid down in the years of childhood and youth - during the same period in which human beings are the subject of education - whether the illnesses themselves already emerge in youth or only at a later time of life.

<sup>1</sup> [The German words 'Erziehung' and 'Erzieher', which are here translated throughout by 'education' and 'educator', have in fact a wider application and include the general notion of the 'up-bringing' of children.]<sup>5</sup>

Education and therapeutics stand in an assignable relation to each other. Education seeks to ensure that certain of a child's dispositions and inclinations shall not cause any damage either to the individual or to society. Therapeutics come into action if these same dispositions have already led to the unwished-for result of pathological symptoms. The alternative outcome - of the child's unserviceable dispositions leading, not to substitutes in the form of symptoms, but to direct perversions of character - is almost inaccessible to therapeutics and as a rule beyond the influence of an educator. Education is a prophylaxis, which is intended to obviate both outcomes - neurosis and perversion alike; psychotherapy seeks, to undo the less stable of the two outcomes and to institute a kind of after-education.

In view of this position of affairs, the question automatically arises whether psycho-analysis should not be used for educative purposes just as hypnotic

suggestion was in the past. The advantages would be obvious. The educator would, on the one hand, be prepared by his knowledge of the general human dispositions of childhood to judge which of those dispositions are threatening to lead to an undesirable outcome; and, if psycho-analysis can influence the course taken by such developments, he could bring it into use before the signs of an unfavourable development set in. Thus, with the help of analysis, he could have a prophylactic influence on the child while it was still healthy. On the other hand, he could detect the first indications of a development in the direction of neurosis and could guard the child against its further development at a time at which, for various reasons, a child is never taken to see a doctor. One cannot but think that a psycho-analytic activity such as this on the part of the educator - and of the similarly placed pastoral worker in protestant countries - would inevitably be of inestimable value and might often make the intervention of a doctor unnecessary.

The only question is whether the practice of psycho-analysis may not have as its prerequisite a medical training, from which the educator and the pastoral worker must remain debarred, or whether there may be other considerations which are opposed to the suggestion that the technique of psycho-analysis should be confided to any but a doctor's hands. I confess that I can see no ground for any such reservations. The practice of psycho-analysis calls much less for medical training than for psychological instruction and a free human outlook. The majority of doctors are not equipped to practise psycho-analysis and have completely failed to grasp the value of that therapeutic procedure. The educator and the pastoral worker are bound by the standards of their profession to exercise the same consideration, care and restraint as are usually practised by the doctor, and apart from this their association with young people perhaps makes them better fitted to understand these young people's mental life. But in both cases the only guarantee of the harmless application of the analytic procedure must depend on the personality of the analyst.

Where a case borders upon mental abnormality, the analytic educator will be bound to make himself familiar with the most necessary psychiatric knowledge, and furthermore to call a doctor into consultation when the diagnosis and prognosis of the disturbance appear doubtful. In a number of cases it will only be possible to achieve success if there is collaboration between the educator and the doctor.

In one single respect an educator's responsibility may perhaps exceed that of a doctor. The doctor has as a rule to deal with psychical structures which have already become rigid and he will find in the patient's established individuality a limit to his own achievement but at the same time a guarantee of the patient's capacity to stand alone. The educator, however, works upon material which is plastic and open to every impression, and he must keep before himself an obligation not to mould the young mind in accordance with his own personal ideals but rather according to his subject's dispositions and possibilities.

Let us hope that the application of psycho-analysis to the service of education will quickly fulfil the hopes which educators and doctors may rightly attach to it. A book

such as this of Pfister's, which seeks to acquaint educators with analysis, will then be able to count on the gratitude of later generations.

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