Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War

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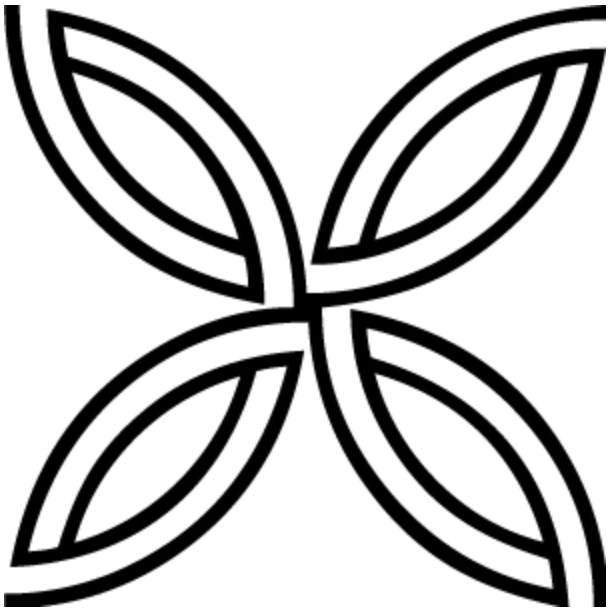

PREFACE

The first two essays in this book were written some ten years ago and published in the *Sociological Review* in 1908 and 1909. They had formed a single paper, but it was found necessary to publish in two instalments at an interval of six months, and to cut down to a considerable extent the total bulk.

It was lately suggested to me that as the numbers of the review in which the two essays appeared were out of print, the fact that the subject concerned was not without some current interest might justify a republication. It was not possible to do this without trying to embody such fruits as there might be of ten years' further speculation and some attempt to apply to present affairs the principles which had been sketched out.

The new comment very soon surpassed by far in bulk the original text, and constitutes, in fact, all but a comparatively few pages of this book. This rather minute record is made here not because it has any interest of its own, but especially to point out that I have been engaged in trying to apply to the affairs of to-day principles which had taken shape ten years ago. I point this out not in order to claim any gift of foresight in having suggested so long ago reasons for regarding the stability of civilization as unsuspectedly slight, but because it is notorious that the atmosphere of a great war is unfavourable to free speculation. If the principles upon which my argument is based had been evolved during the present times, the reader would have had special reason to suspect their validity, however plausible they might seem in the refracting air of national emergency.

The general purpose of this book is to suggest that the science of psychology is not the mass of dreary and

indefinite generalities of which it sometimes perhaps seems to be made up; to suggest that, especially when studied in relation to other branches of biology, it is capable of becoming a guide in the actual affairs of life and of giving an understanding of the human mind such as may enable us in a practical and useful way to foretell some of the course of human behaviour. The present state of public affairs gives an excellent chance for testing the truth of this suggestion, and adds to the interest of the experiment the strong incentive of an urgent national peril.

If this war is becoming, as it obviously is, daily more and more completely a contest of moral forces, some really deep understanding of the nature and sources of national morale must be at least as important a source of strength as the technical knowledge of the military engineer and the maker of cannon. One is apt to suppose that the chief function of a sound morale is the maintenance ofa high courage and resolution through the ups and downs of warfare. In a nation whose actual independence and existence are threatened from without such qualities may be taken for granted and may be present when the general moral forces are seriously disordered. A satisfactory morale gives something much more difficult to attain. It gives smoothness of working, energy and enterprise to the whole national machine, while from the individual it ensures the maximal outflow of effort with a minimal interference from such egoistic passions as anxiety, impatience, and discontent. A practical psychology would define these functions and indicate means by which they are to be called into activity.

The more we consider the conduct of government in warfare the clearer does it become that every act of authority produces effects in two distinct fields—that of its primary function as directed more or less immediately against the enemy, and that of its secondary action upon the morale of the nation. The first of these two constituents

possesses the uncertainty of all military enterprises, and its success or failure cannot be foretold; the influence of the second constituent is susceptible of definition and foresight and need never be wholly ambiguous to any but the ignorant or the indifferent.

The relative importance of the military and the moral factors in any act or enterprise varies much, but it may be asserted that while the moral factor may sometimes be enormously the more important, it is never wholly absent. This constant and admittedly significant factor in all acts of government is usually awarded an attention so thoroughly inexpert and perfunctory, as to justify the feeling that the customary belief in its importance is no more than a conventional expression.

The method I have used is frankly speculative, and I make no apology for it because the facts are open to the observation of all and available for confirmation or disproof. I have tried to point out a way; I have tried not to exhort or persuade to the use of it—these are matters outside my province.

HERD INSTINCT AND ITS BEARING ON THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CIVILIZED MAN

I. INTRODUCTION

Few subjects have led to discussion so animated and prolonged as has the definition of the science of sociology. It is therefore necessary, as it is hoped that this essay may be capable of sociological applications, that the writer should define the sense in which he uses the term. By calling it a science is, of course, denoted the view that sociology is a body of knowledge derived from experience of its material and co-ordinated so that it shall be useful in forecasting and, if possible, directing the future behaviour of that material. This material is man in society of associated man.

Sociology, therefore, is obviously but another name for psychology, in the widest sense, for, that is to say, a psychology which can include all the phenomena of the mind without the exception even of the most complex, and is essentially practical in a fuller sense than any orthodox psychology which has yet appeared.

Sociology has, of course, often been described as social psychology and has been regarded as differing from ordinary psychology in being {12} concerned with those forms of mental activity which man displays in his social relations, the assumption being made that society brings to light a special series of mental aptitudes with which ordinary psychology, dealing as it does essentially with the individual, is not mainly concerned. It may be stated at once that it is a principal thesis of this essay that this attitude is a fallacious one, and has been responsible for the comparative sterility of the psychological method in sociology. The two fields—the social and the individual—are regarded here as absolutely continuous; all human psychology, it is contended, must be the psychology of associated man, since man as a solitary animal is unknown

to us, and every individual must present the characteristic reactions of the social animal if such exist. The only difference between the two branches of the science lies in the fact that ordinary psychology makes no claim to be practical in the sense of conferring useful foresight; whereas sociology does profess to deal with the complex, unsimplified problems of ordinary life, ordinary life being, by a biological necessity, social life. If, therefore, sociology is to be defined as psychology, it would be better to call it practical or applied psychology than social psychology.

The first effect of the complete acceptance of this point of view is to render very obvious the difficulty and immensity of the task of sociology; indeed, the possibility of such a science is sometimes denied. For example, at an early meeting of the Sociological Society, Professor Karl Pearson expressed the opinion that the birth of the science of sociology must await the obstetrical genius of some one man of the calibre of Darwin or Pasteur. At a later meeting Mr. H. G. Wells went farther, and maintained that as a science sociology not only does not but cannot exist. {13}

Such scepticism appears in general to be based upon the idea that a practical psychology in the sense already defined is impossible. According to some this is because the human will introduces into conduct an element necessarily incommensurable, which will always render the behaviour of man subject to the occurrence of true variety and therefore beyond the reach of scientific generalization; according to another and a more deterministic school, human conduct, while not theoretically liable to true variety in the philosophic sense or to the intrusion of the will as a first cause, is in fact so complex that no reduction of it to a complete system of generalizations will be possible until science in general has made very great progress beyond its present position. Both views lead in practice to attitudes of equal pessimism towards sociology.

The observable complexity of human conduct is, undoubtedly, very great and discouraging. The problem of generalizing from it presents, however, one important peculiarity, which is not very evident at first sight. It is that as observers we are constantly pursued by man's own account of his behaviour; that of a given act our observation is always more or less mixed with a knowledge, derived from our own feelings, of how it seems to the author of the act, and it is much more difficult than is often supposed to disentangle and allow for the influence of this factor. Each of us has the strongest conviction that his conduct and beliefs are fundamentally individual and reasonable and in essence independent of external causation, and each is ready to furnish a series of explanations of his conduct consistent with these principles. These explanations, moreover, are the ones which will occur spontaneously to the observer watching the conduct of his fellows.

It is suggested here that the sense of the {14} unimaginable complexity and variability of human affairs is derived less than is generally supposed from direct observation and more from this second factor of introspectual interpretation which may be called a kind of anthropomorphism. A reaction against this in human psychology is no less necessary therefore than was in comparative psychology the similar movements the extremer developments of which are associated with the names of Bethe, Beer, Uexküll and Nuel. It is contended that it is this anthropomorphism in the general attitude of psychologists which, by disguising the observable uniformities of human conduct, has rendered so slow the establishment of a really practical psychology. Little as the subject has been studied from the point of view of a thorough-going objectivism, yet even now certain generalizations summarising some of the ranges of human belief and conduct might already be formulated. Such an inquiry,

however, is not the purpose of this essay, and these considerations have been advanced, in the first place, to suggest that theory indicates that the problem of sociology is not so hopelessly difficult as it at first appears, and secondly, as a justification for an examination of certain aspects of human conduct by the deductive method. The writer would contend that while that method is admittedly dangerous when used as a substitute for a kind of investigation in which deductive processes are reduced to a minimum, yet it has its special field of usefulness in cases where the significance of previously accumulated facts has been misinterpreted, or where the exacter methods have proved unavailing through the investigator having been without indications of precisely what facts were likely to be the most fruitful subject for measurement. This essay, then, will be an attempt to obtain by a deductive consideration of conduct some guidance for the application of those methods of {15} measurement and co-ordination of facts upon which all true science is based.

A very little consideration of the problem of conduct makes it plain that it is in the region of feeling, using the term in its broadest sense, that the key is to be sought. Feeling has relations to instinct as obvious and fundamental as are the analogies between intellectual processes and reflex action; it is with the consideration of instinct, therefore, that this paper must now be occupied.

II. PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF INSTINCT.

Many years ago, in a famous chapter of his Text Book of Psychology, William James analysed and established with a quite final delicacy and precision the way in which instinct appears to introspection. He showed that the impulse of an instinct reveals itself as an axiomatically obvious proposition, as something which is so clearly “sense” that any idea of discussing its basis is foolish or wicked. 1

1 Not one man in a billion, when taking his dinner, ever thinks of utility. He eats because the food tastes good and makes him want more. If you ask him why he should want to eat more of what tastes like that, instead of revering you as a philosopher he will probably laugh at you for a fool. The connexion between the savoury sensation and the act it awakens is for him absolute and *selbstverständlich* , an “ *a priori* synthesis” of the most perfect sort needing no proof but its own evidence. . . . To the metaphysician alone can such questions occur as: Why do we smile, when pleased, and not scowl? Why are we unable to talk to a crowd as to a single friend? Why does a particular maiden turn our wits so upside down? The common man can only say, “ *Of course* we smile, *of course* our heart palpitates at the sight of the crowd, *of course* we love the maiden, that beautiful soul clad in that perfect form, so palpably and flagrantly made from all eternity to be loved” (W. James, “Principles of Psychology” vol. ii. p. 386).

When we recognize that decisions due to instinct come into the mind in a form so characteristic and easily identifiable we are encouraged at once to ask {16} whether all decisions having this form must be looked upon as essentially of instinctive origin. Inquiry, however, reveals

the fact that the bulk of opinion based upon assumptions having these introspectual characters is so vast that any answer but a negative one would seem totally incompatible with current conceptions of the nature of human thought.
2
2 This introspectual quality of the " *a priori* synthesis of the most perfect sort" is found, for example, in the assumptions upon which is based the bulk of opinion in matters of Church and State, the family, justice, probity, honour, purity, crime, and so forth. Yet clearly we cannot say that there is a specific instinct concerned with each of these subjects, for that, to say the least, would be to postulate an unimaginable multiplicity of instincts, for the most part wholly without any conceivable biological usefulness. For example, there are considerable difficulties in imagining an instinct for making people Wesleyans or Roman Catholics, or an instinct for making people regard British family life as the highest product of civilization, yet there can be no question that these positions are based upon assumptions having all the characters described by James as belonging to the impulses of instinct.

Many attempts have been made to explain the behaviour of man as dictated by instinct. He is, in fact, moved by the promptings of such obvious instincts as self-preservation, nutrition, and sex enough to render the enterprise hopeful and its early spoils enticing. So much can so easily be generalized under these three impulses that the temptation to declare that all human behaviour could be resumed under them was irresistible. These early triumphs of materialism soon, however, began to be troubled by doubt. Man, in spite of his obvious duty to the contrary, would continue so often not to preserve himself, not to nourish himself and to prove resistant to the blandishments of sex, that the attempt to squeeze his behaviour into these three categories began to involve an increasingly obvious and finally intolerable amount of pushing and pulling, as well as

so much pretence that he was altogether “in,” {17} when, quite plainly, so large a part of him remained “out,” that the enterprise had to be given up, and it was once more discovered that man escaped and must always escape any complete generalization by science.

A more obvious inference would have been that there was some other instinct which had not been taken into account, some impulse, perhaps, which would have no very evident object as regarded the individual, but would chiefly appear as modifying the other instincts and leading to new combinations in which the primitive instinctive impulse was unrecognizable as such. A mechanism such as this very evidently would produce a series of actions in which uniformity might be very difficult to recognize by direct observation, but in which it would be very obvious if the characters of this unknown “x” were available.

Now, it is a striking fact that amongst animals there are some whose conduct can be generalized very readily in the categories of self-preservation, nutrition, and sex, while there are others whose conduct cannot be thus summarized. The behaviour of the tiger and the cat is simple, and easily comprehensible, presenting no unassimilable anomalies, whereas that of the dog, with his conscience, his humour, his terror of loneliness, his capacity for devotion to a brutal master, or that of the bee, with her selfless devotion to the hive, furnishes phenomena which no sophistry can assimilate without the aid of a fourth instinct. But little examination will show that the animals whose conduct it is difficult to generalize under the three primitive instinctive categories are gregarious. If then it can be shown that gregariousness is of a biological significance approaching in importance that of the other instincts, we may expect to find in it the source of these anomalies of conduct, and if we can also show {18} that man is gregarious, we may look to it for the definition of

the unknown “x” which might account for the complexity of human behaviour.

III. BIOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF GREGARIOUSNESS.

The animal kingdom presents two relatively sudden and very striking advances in complexity and in the size of the unit upon which natural selection acts unmodified. These advances consist in the aggregation of units which were previously independent and exposed to the full normal action of natural selection, and the two instances are, of course, the passage from the unicellular to the multicellular, and from the solitary to the social.

It is obvious that in the multicellular organism individual cells lose some of the capacities of the unicellular—reproductive capacity is regulated and limited, nutrition is no longer possible in the old simple way and response to stimuli comes only in certain channels. In return for these sacrifices we may say, metaphorically, that the action of natural selection is withdrawn from within the commune. Unfitness of a given cell or group of cells can be eliminated only through its effect upon the whole organism. The latter is less sensitive to the vagaries of a single cell than is the organism of which the single cell is the whole. It would seem, therefore, that there is now allowed a greater range of variability for the individual cells, and perhaps, therefore, an increased richness of the material to be selected from. Variations, moreover, which were not immediately favourable would now have a chance of surviving.

Looked at in this way, multicellularity presents itself as an escape from the rigour of natural selection, which for the unicellular organism had narrowed {19} competition to so desperate a struggle that any variation outside the straitest

limits was fatal, for even though it might be favourable in one respect, it would, in so small a kingdom, involve a loss in another. The only way, therefore, for further advantageous elaboration to occur was by the enlargement of the competing unit. Various species of multicellular organisms might in time be supposed in turn to reach the limit of their powers. Competition would be at its maximum, smaller and smaller variations would be capable of producing serious results. In the species where these conditions prevail an enlargement of the unit is imminent if progress is to occur. It is no longer possible by increases of physical complexity and the apparently inevitable sequence is the appearance of gregariousness. The necessity and inevitableness of the change are shown by its scattered development in very widely separated regions (for example, in insects and in mammals) just as, we may suspect, multi-cellularity appeared.

Gregariousness seems frequently to be regarded as a somewhat superficial character, scarcely deserving, as it were, the name of an instinct, advantageous it is true, but not of fundamental importance or likely to be deeply ingrained in the inheritance of the species. This attitude may be due to the fact that among mammals at any rate the appearance of gregariousness has not been accompanied by any very gross physical changes which are obviously associated with it. 3

3 Among gregarious insects there are of course physical changes arising out of and closely dependent on the social organization.

To whatever it may be due, this method of regarding the social habit is, in the opinion of the present writer, not justified by the facts, and prevents the attainment of conclusions of considerable fruitfulness.

A study of bees and ants shows at once how {20} fundamental the importance of gregariousness may become. The individual in such communities is completely

incapable, often physically, of existing apart from the community, and this fact at once gives rise to the suspicion that even in communities less closely knit than those of the ant and the bee, the individual may in fact be more dependent on communal life than appears at first sight.

Another very striking piece of general evidence of the significance of gregariousness as no mere late acquirement is the remarkable coincidence of its occurrence with that of exceptional grades of intelligence or the possibility of very complex reactions to environment. It can scarcely be regarded as an unmeaning accident that the dog, the horse, the ape, the elephant, and man are all social animals. The instances of the bee and the ant are perhaps the most amazing. Here the advantages of gregariousness seem actually to outweigh the most prodigious differences of structure, and we find a condition which is often thought of as a mere habit, capable of enabling the insect nervous system to compete in the complexity of its power of adaptation with that of the higher vertebrates.

If it be granted that gregariousness is a phenomenon of profound biological significance and one likely therefore to be responsible for an important group of instinctive impulses, the next step in our argument is the discussion of the question as to whether man is to be regarded as gregarious in the full sense of the word, whether, that is to say, the social habit may be expected to furnish him with a mass of instinctive impulse as mysteriously potent as the impulses of self-preservation, nutrition, and sex. Can we look to the social instinct for an explanation of some of the " *a priori* syntheses of the most perfect sort needing no proof but their own evidence," which are not explained by the three {21} primitive categories of instinct, and remain stumbling-blocks in the way of generalizing the conduct of man?

The conception of man as a gregarious animal is, of course, extremely familiar; one frequently meets with it in the

writings of psychologists and sociologists, and it has obtained a respectable currency with the lay public. It has, indeed, become so hackneyed that it is the first duty of a writer who maintains the thesis that its significance is not even yet fully understood, to show that the popular conception of it has been far from exhaustive. As used hitherto the idea seems to have had a certain vagueness which greatly impaired its practical value. It furnished an interesting analogy for some of the behaviour of man, or was enunciated as a half serious illustration by a writer who felt himself to be in an exceptionally sardonic vein, but it was not at all widely looked upon as a definite fact of biology which must have consequences as precise and a significance as ascertainable as the secretion of the gastric juice or the refracting apparatus of the eye. One of the most familiar attitudes was that which regarded the social instinct as a late development. The family was looked upon as the primitive unit; from it developed the tribe, and by the spread of family feeling to the tribe the social instinct arose. It is interesting that the psychological attack upon this position has been anticipated by sociologists and anthropologists, and that it is already being recognized that an undifferentiated horde rather than the family must be regarded as the primitive basis of human society.

The most important consequence of this vague way of regarding the social habit of man has been that no exhaustive investigation of its psychological corollaries has been carried out. When we see the enormous effect in determining conduct that the gregarious inheritance has in the bee, the ant, the {22} horse, or the dog, it is quite plain that if the gregariousness of man had been seriously regarded as a definite fact a great amount of work would have been done in determining precisely what reactive tendencies it had marked out in man’s mind. Unfortunately, the amount of precise work of this kind has been very small.

From the biological standpoint the probability of gregariousness being a primitive and fundamental quality in man seems to be considerable. As already pointed out, like the other great enlargement of the biological unit, but in a much more easily recognizable degree, it would appear to have the effect of enlarging the advantages of variation. Varieties not immediately favourable, varieties departing widely from the standard, varieties even unfavourable to the individual may be supposed to be given by it a chance of survival. Now the course of the development of man seems to present many features incompatible with its having proceeded amongst isolated individuals exposed to the unmodified action of natural selection. Changes so serious as the assumption of the upright posture, the reduction in the jaw and its musculature, the reduction in the acuity of smell and hearing, demand, if the species is to survive, either a delicacy of adjustment with the compensatingly developing intelligence so minute as to be almost inconceivable, or the existence of some kind of protective enclosure, however imperfect, in which the varying individuals were sheltered from the direct influence of natural selection. The existence of such a mechanism would compensate losses of physical strength in the individual by the greatly increased strength of the larger unit, of the unit, that is to say, upon which natural selection still acts unmodified.

A realization, therefore, of this function of gregariousness relieves us from the necessity of {23} supposing that the double variations of diminishing physical and increasing mental capacity always occurred *pari passu* . The case for the primitiveness of the social habit would seem to be still further strengthened by a consideration of such widely aberrant developments as speech and the æsthetic activities, but a discussion of them here would involve an unnecessary indulgence of biological speculation.

IV. MENTAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GREGARIOUS ANIMAL.

(*a*) Current Views in Sociology and Psychology.

If we now assume that gregariousness may be regarded as a fundamental quality of man, it remains to discuss the effects we may expect it to have produced upon the structure of his mind. It would be well, however, first, to attempt to form some idea of how far investigation has already gone in this direction. It is of course clear that no complete review of all that has been said concerning a conception so familiar can be attempted here, and, even if it were possible, it would not be a profitable enterprise, as the great bulk of writers have not seen in the idea anything to justify a fundamental examination of it. What will be done here, therefore, will be to mention a few representative writers who have dealt with the subject, and to give in a summary way the characteristic features of their exposition.

As far as I am aware, the first person to point out any of the less obvious biological significance of gregariousness was Professor Karl Pearson. 4 {24}

4 Many references to the subject will be found in his published works, for example in “The Grammar of Science,” in “National Life from the Standpoint of Science,” and in “The Chances of Death.” In the collection of Essays last named the essay entitled “Socialism and Natural Selection” deals most fully with the subject.

He called attention to the enlargement of the selective unit effected by the appearance of gregariousness, and to the fact that therefore within the group the action of natural selection becomes modified. This conception had, as is well known, escaped the insight of Haeckel, of Spencer, and of

Huxley, and Pearson showed into what confusions in their treatment of the problems of society these three had been led by the oversight. 5 For example may be mentioned the famous antithesis of the “cosmical” and the “ethical” processes expounded in Huxley’s Romanes Lecture. It was quite definitely indicated by Pearson that the so-called ethical process, the appearance, that is to say, of altruism, is to be regarded as a directly instinctive product of gregariousness, and as natural, therefore, as any other instinct.

These very clear and valuable conceptions do not seem, however, to have received from biologists the attention they deserved, and as far as I am aware their author has not continued further the examination of the structure of the gregarious mind, which would undoubtedly have yielded in his hands further conclusions of equal value.

We may next examine the attitude of a modern sociologist. I have chosen for this purpose the work of an American sociologist, Lester Ward, and propose briefly to indicate his position as it may be gathered from his book entitled “Pure Sociology.” 6 {25}

5 “Socialism and Natural Selection” in “The Chances of Death.”

6 Lester F. Ward, “Pure Sociology: a Treatise on the Origin and Spontaneous Development of Society.” New York: The Macmillan Co. 1903. I do not venture to decide whether this work may be regarded as representative of orthodox sociology, if there be such a thing; I have made the choice because of the author’s capacity for fresh and ingenious speculation and his obviously wide knowledge of sociological literature.

The task of summarizing the views of any sociologist seems to me to be rendered difficult by a certain vagueness in outline of the positions laid down, a certain tendency for a description of fact to run into an analogy, and an analogy to fade into an illustration. It would be discourteous to doubt that these tendencies are necessary to the fruitful

treatment of the material of sociology, but, as they are very prominent in connection with the subject of gregariousness, it is necessary to say that one is fully conscious of the difficulties they give rise to, and feels that they may have led one into unintentional misrepresentation.

With this proviso it may be stated that the writings of Ward produce the feeling that he regards gregariousness as furnishing but few precise and primitive characteristics of the human mind. The mechanisms through which group "instinct" acts would seem to be to him largely rational processes, and group instinct itself is regarded as a relatively late development more or less closely associated with a rational knowledge that it "pays." For example, he says: "For want of a better name, I have characterized this social instinct, or instinct of race safety, as religion, but not without clearly perceiving that it constitutes the primordial undifferentiated plasm out of which have subsequently developed all the more important human institutions. This . . . if it be not an instinct, is at least the human homologue of animal instinct, and served the same purpose *after the instincts had chiefly disappeared* , and when the egotistic reason would otherwise have rapidly carried the race to destruction in its mad pursuit of pleasure for its own sake." 7

7 "Pure Sociology," p. 134. Italics not in original. Passages of a similar tendency will be found on pp. 200 and 556.

That gregariousness has to be considered amongst {26} the factors shaping the tendencies of the human mind has long been recognized by the more empirical psychologists. In the main, however, it has been regarded as a quality perceptible only in the characteristics of actual crowds—that is to say, assemblies of persons being and acting in association. This conception has served to evoke a certain amount of valuable work in the observation of the behaviour of crowds. 8