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THE SOCIOLOGY OF RECREATION

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Play was once looked upon as an evil necessary but incident to childhood and youth. It was a matter which parents, guardians, and teachers had to put up with as best they might and with the consolation that, like children's diseases, it would tend to disappear with the advent of manhood and womanhood. Therefore, it was a tendency which must be treated in as tolerant a fashion as was consistent with the temper of the adult who had to contend with it. The great goal in life was work. Therefore, the proper thing was for wise parents to teach children to work. This was done with a rigor corresponding with the seriousness and inflexibility of the person in charge of the child. In adults, play—childish, useless play—was not only foolish; it was sinful.

It must be admitted that there is something to be said for that philosophy which has given to the world so many useful men and women. It may be said even now that a judicious mingling of work with play is not at all undesirable.

Mingled with the conviction that play was only to be tolerated, however, there was a quite clear conception, in spite of the emphasis upon work, that "all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." That empirical judgment has been justified by modern psychology and sociology. Moreover, for adults, the practice was not consistent with the theory. They did not call it play, but what were those pageants, May Day festivities, and religious activities, such as Passion plays and feast-day frolics, which accompanied, if they were not a part of, the religious ceremonies of all peoples down to a very short time ago? They may not have called them plays, except in the case of the Passion plays, but all that great body of pageantry, holiday customs, the frolics attendant upon fairs and markets, upon marriages and even funerals, upon trials of strength, and skill of arms, and in most countries upon even skill of hand and

voice and brain, giving expression to the unusual in legerdemain, oratory, song, and the music of handmade instruments of greater or less perfection—all these were forms of play. The dances in a thousand mediaeval courts, the religious dances around a million smoking altars of primitive people, the ceremonies of court and temple, both pagan and Christian, the activities connected with all the great events of life are rooted in the same impulse as gives life to the play of men. Joyous occasions they were all. Pleasure-giving was an outstanding characteristic of everyone. At birth of a child, at the time which marked the coming of that child to man's or woman's estate, the occasion which marked the consecration of the pubescent youth to the god of the tribe, and thus his consecration to the purposes of the tribe, at the marriage of that child, and on the occasion of his being prepared after death for reception into the company of the immortals gone before by funeral rite and ceremony, in short, at every time of crisis in the life of man from birth to death, we find play.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PLAY

The history of the theory of play is marked by three distinct stages. They may be called the physical, the psychological, and the sociological explanations of play. Herbert Spencer gave us one of the first of these theories in his thought-provoking *Principles of Psychology*. Like so many of the theories of that revolutionary thinker, it was not adequate, but it stirred men to think out the problem which he had forced upon their attention. Spencer said that the young of man and animals played because they had a surplus of energy, which in some way moved them to exert themselves in the seemingly useless activities of play. That theory survives today in the expression sometimes used as an apology for the playful spirit of childhood and youth that "he must work off some of his surplus energy." It is the "common-sense" explanation of play. Really it can hardly be called a psychology of play, because it deals with an explanation which can be called psychical only by accommodation. It might better be called a *physical* explanation of play. While there doubtless is some such physical fact as Spencer's theory assumes, it does not explain psychically why the expenditure leads to play. Labor certainly works off surplus energy.

A much more important theory is that of Karl Gross, who in his two books, *The Play of Animals* and *The Play of Man*, now translated into English, argues that play is a preparation for life and therefore it has been established in the life of animals and man, and also for that reason survives. This theory has the advantage in that it explains play on the basis of natural selection, by showing that, since it is advantageous to survival, natural forces account for it. This theory, while more strictly scientific than Spencer's, is not strictly psychological. It marks a great advance over Spencer's theory but needs to be supplemented. It explains why the desire for play is almost an instinct, and why no one for so long could justify rationally this impulse. The child, the youth, and even the man demanded play, in spite of the opposition of philosophy, religion, and the economic motives, which reluctantly indulged it in the child, frowned upon it in the youth, and permitted it in the adult only when it was called something else.

Recently two other writers have added to and developed the psychology of play. Professor G. T. W. Patrick of Iowa State University, in a magazine article, suggested that play was not merely a preparation for life. He cited the fact that some games were not adapted to the better preparation of the individual for the work of life, indeed were actually opposed to efficiency. These plays, not to be accounted for entirely on the theory of Gross, were explained as survivals from old race habits, surviving from a time when they were useful, and persisting because they answered to the psychological demand for rest on the part of the nervous organism. This rest is due, according to Professor Patrick, to the fact that, being established by race habits, they are more or less automatic, and thus demand a minimum of attention to establish the co-ordinations necessary to perform the acts they demand. The nervous energy required for their performance flows along brain-tracks well worn by the habits of ages. That fact makes such actions pleasurable in their effects on the nervous centers, whether they are advantageous to that person or not.

This theory has the advantage that it accounts for many games which are survivals from an earlier period of culture and are not "either mimic work or mimic war." But it does not explain why

the games which are new and are not survivals from old race habits are as desirable as those which are.

Professor Addington Bruce in an article on the "Psychology of Football," while adhering to Spencer's "surplus energy" theory, has added another suggestion of value. He criticizes Professor Patrick's theory by observing that if the rest theory were all there is to the explanation of play, then how account for the fact that people like to sit still and see games? He suggests that the *pleasurable emotion* resulting from the dissipation of energy either in play or in seeing play is an explanation necessary to account at least for the fact that people enjoy seeing games and probably also for the joy of playing.

This is a suggestion which is very significant, but Professor Bruce has failed to make the use of it which its importance demands. He has incidentally referred to the pleasurable emotions stirred in the player and the beholder by the dissipation of energy in the activities of play, yet he does not make any use of that fact to explain the activities of play. Why should he not answer the question why animals and men play, by saying that playing stirs the emotions? Then all he would have to do is to describe the psychology of the emotion of pleasure.

Play is rooted in the emotions. Children and adults play because play stirs the emotions. It is a form of stimulation which gives pleasure and therefore is desired. It is a kind of pleasure which contributes, moreover, to activities which are biologically and socially useful, though not always as preparation directly for the activities of after life. It prepares in many cases indirectly, however, for later life by promoting a sound physical development and that mental quickening which counts so much in the struggle for existence, and for that social co-operation which has played so great a part in survival of all the social animals in their struggle against inanimate nature, hostile animals, and other groups of men. As Lester F. Ward has shown, the activities of men are rooted in the emotions. That is the motivating part of man's psychical make-up. From the psychological side the suggestions of these various writers make up the development of the theory of play up to date.

THE SOCIOLOGY OF PLAY

That does not, however, exhaust the matter. In fact the psychological explanation of play does not go far enough. Before a complete explanation can be made sociology must be invoked. Only when the psychology of the crowd is taken into account can we understand fully the reason for play in spite of its apparent foolishness. Starting with the pleasure arising from the activities of play either actually participated in or shared in imagination, one can understand some of the play activities of children and of men. It is possible that such solitary games as those played sometimes by children and the few in which adults occasionally indulge could be explained by psychology alone. Nevertheless, is it not a fact that even these are played with reference to an imaginary partner or spectator? When such are left out of account there remain a great many games whose attractiveness is unaccounted for. The suggestibility of people in crowds, the greater depth of emotion and therefore the greater pleasure experienced by plays which are engaged in by a number of people must be taken into account. There is no doubt that our great national games owe their attraction to these facts of social intercourse and interstimulation.

It is a well-known fact that this stimulation is felt to be necessary by the players and coaches in order to get the best work out of the players themselves. A team which is poorly supported by "rooters" has not the same chance as one which is properly supported. The emotions of a large crowd in the bleachers are much deeper than those of a small one. Moreover, all sorts of artificial stimulation are devised by those who have the game in charge both to stimulate the players to do their best and also to help the on-lookers to get the worth of their money. Bands play, colors are waved, songs are sung, yells and calls are voiced. What for? Simply in order to stir the emotions, that the players may play their best and that the crowd may enjoy to the full the possibilities of the game. By such means the emotional stimulation is increased, which is the same as saying that the pleasure experienced is likewise augmented. Like any sort of stimulation, emotional stimulation demands even more and sharper stimulants. The crowd gives this result. It gives the thrill even to the jaded nerves of the

hard-worked "fan." This, together with the pleasurable sensations which arise from relapsing into the activities established in the habits of the race, makes the combat-games, in more or less primitive forms, the source of the great emotional outbursts which characterize the great games and sports. As this emotional excitement due to the crowd is the explanation of the horrible activities connected with emotional outbursts of lynchings, of the grotesque jumpings and "fallings" formerly so often connected with religious revivals, so the emotional "sprees" of the games of great popular interest afford the explanation of their hold upon the people. Moreover, these outbursts now common in connection with our sports are the emotional equivalents of these outbursts which in the absence of such sports characterized people in other days. Consider the dulness of men's lives once the necessity of defending their lives and property from the onslaughts of wild beasts and hostile men had passed away. Is it any wonder that under those circumstances the dull monotony of life was relieved by emotional outbursts in religious revivals, in political debates, in such rude games as barbecues, annual orgies, and alcoholic debauches? Is it any wonder nowadays that one constantly hears the complaint that there is but little interest in the old-fashioned political debates, that revivalists have great difficulty in securing a hearing, that the ecstatic phenomena of religious conversion is no longer to be found, when people find their emotional satisfactions in art, music, society, business and political intrigue, and in games which give occasion for outbursts of emotional frenzy by the individual corresponding in intensity and satisfaction with those other frenzies? Games produce the emotional equivalents of ancient gladiatorial combats, mediaeval pageants, and tournaments; of modern political barbecues, religious revivals, primitive social orgies, alcoholic "sprees," and religious persecutions.

This theory of play throws a great light upon the social purposes which play serves. It also explains why play has been a continuous accompaniment of civilization, constantly more refined in its expressions. There is no doubt that play contributes something to the social efficiency of the race, else it would tend to disappear, except as a fossilized vestige. This it is by no means today. It does

meet the needs of men. One of these most fundamental needs is the need for emotional expression and satisfaction. It breaks the prosy humdrum of human existence, now incidental to the making of a living for many people. It adds to the task of making a living the joy of making a life. It rests the wearied attention to a certain task by shaking it free in the old race habits, and allowing the consciousness to glide along grooves worn deep by the activities of unnumbered progenitors. It supplies the joyous abandon once to be found in the hunt, the primitive way of making a living. It provides the creative gladness now so often denied the worker in the shop where division of labor is so completely realized that it is only by a stretch of the imagination too difficult for the ordinary worker to make that he can see the thing of which he is the maker of only an infinitesimal part. It provides the means of an emotional "spree" which otherwise he can secure only by means of drugs or alcohol, or by activities in which too often he takes no part, like those of art, or religion.

More important, however, is the fact that play strengthens the intellectual processes. Language originated, we are told, in the cries accompanying the emotional outbursts incident to the chase or the games of animals. There is no doubt that quick thinking is necessary to successful play. Adjustment of means to ends is demanded, quick thinking and the making of a decision on the spur of the moment are *sine qua non* of the successful player. In addition to that there is the stimulus to quick thinking, right decisions, and proper adjustment of means to ends which the social approval or disapproval brings.

The practical bearing of this fact is seen when it is remembered that in some cities 50 per cent of the children have never learned to play. An investigation in Milwaukee made in 1911 showed that of the children seen on the streets, playgrounds, and in parks only half were playing at anything. Is it any wonder if such children are dull in school, if they lag behind in the work required of them there, and if they fail in the struggle of life? While we must not forget that some laggards in our schools and in after life are such from congenital causes, and while some children do not play or learn readily because of undernourishment or from physical defects such as bad

eyesight, defective breathing, adenoid growths, and such things, it must not be forgotten that some perfectly normal children are sub-normal in their development because they have never been stirred out of the lethargy of their uneventful lives by the splendid enthusiasm of play. Their minds, like their bodies, are asleep, so to speak, and await the touch of emotional pleasure which will cut the leashes that hold them bound.

Furthermore, play produces the excitement which casts off the reserve that separates men from each other. This reserve protects a child from his fellows before he knows them well enough to be perfectly at home with them. It is one of the devices of nature to perfect selection. Nevertheless it often stands in the way of socialization. Watch children on a playground when there are some present who have never been there before. There is a reserve which constantly interferes with free intercourse and happy play. Watch that reserve melt away in the rhythm of play. Before the heat of the emotions aroused in play it disappears as frost before the rising sun. The painfulness of cautious reserve gives place to the freedom of intercourse and pleasure of social co-operation produced by play. The same is true with respect to men and women. No matter whether it is a case of hostile tribes of savages who have come together for the purpose of perfecting a treaty of peace, or of a gathering of new students from all parts of a state or nation for purposes of getting acquainted, or of a body of business men who have come together to form either a combine or a commercial club, some form of ceremony which has in it many of the same elements of play is always present. In one case it may be a corborree, in another a pipe of peace, in another "a smoker" or a banquet, in another a dance, in another a procession, yet in every case there is a form which has for its purpose the dissipation of that reserve which divides men from each other as by a Chinese wall and prevents co-operation. In play the soul reveals itself. This makes for social co-operation and unity of thought, feeling, and purpose.

Now, in our great centers of population, whither have come people from all the countries of the earth, there is vast need of socialization. The middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile still needs to be broken down. Religion now, as in the first

century, may break it down, but there are other things which will do it more quickly and much more extensively. One of these is play. Religion now often separates and divides. Play has no creed centuries old and entrenched in prejudice to keep high the wall of division. Race characteristics may keep men apart, but play arouses feelings which rush over these barriers of race, for it arouses feelings common to all races. How important, then, that our cities at least should provide means of play for all the people. The folk dances will bring to the attention of all of us appreciation of the riches of culture and pleasure-producing means which all these nationalities possess. Under the excitement of common play we shall forget that they are "foreigners," and see in them fellow-men. Under the impulsion of the same common activities and pleasures they will cease to feel that we are snobs. Here we have one of the most powerful agencies of socialization. Let us use it more effectively in securing that unity of thought, feeling, and purpose which will make us a strongly united people.

Moreover, play is needed very much in the church. Historically, the play element in religion has been a very important part. The pomp and ceremony of the historic churches are to many people the attractive parts thereof, and the best sermon is the one which, other things being equal, has the most of that emotional stimulus which excites the individual in play.

Altogether aside from this aspect of the matter, however, there is the social need for play in the church. Healthful recreation is absolutely essential to the proper development of our young people. Commercialized agencies will provide it with none too much respect to the quality of it, if other agencies do not. Other agencies, like the parks and the schools, will provide it in many parts of the country. If the church wishes to hold its young people and to develop their social life under the best influences, it cannot ignore the recreation of its young people. The church of the future must give much more attention to the recreation of its children and youth than it has in the past, for numerous other agencies are its competitors for their social development. If the other agencies provide the means of recreation in connection with such non-religious institutions as the school, the parks, and commercial

amusements, ought not the church see to it that religion as well as education use this instinct to further its purpose to teach religion and morals? Certainly a wise Tom Sawyer could make religious services as interesting as white-washing a disagreeable old aunt's white palings. Has not the church too often in our day ignored the splendid dramatic possibilities for her young people in those graphic stories of the Old Testament? Is she insensible to the possibilities wrapped up even in the Book of Job, devoid even though it be of movement? Has she failed to profit by the recorded activities of those great teachers of men, the Old Testament prophets, who constantly were resorting to symbolic actions? At once there occurs to the mind Jeremiah going about the streets of Jerusalem, like Diogenes with his lantern in the daylight streets of Athens, looking for a man, or hiding his girdle by the Euphrates, or wearing a wooden yoke about his neck. Others who made use of "the acted parable" occur to the mind like Ezekiel, and the Master himself. The latter congealed some of the things he wanted remembered into actions, such as baptism, the Last Supper, and the foot-washing, which have become established as sacred rites in the church. Why has the church not learned from some of its most moving activities further lessons in making use of the play impulse? Youth forever dreams its dreams, fashions its ideals of future manhood and womanhood, and re-creates the world in the rhythm and excitement of play of some sort. As the youth playeth so he fashioneth his future and that golden age of humanity of which youth is forever dreaming.