

The Practical Relationship of Psychology to Pastoral Life and Work.¹

BY THE REV. F. S. P. L. GIRDLESTONE, M.A.

EVERY effect has a cause. To know the cause of an effect has a twofold value. On the one hand, knowledge of the cause deepens appreciation of the result, if good ; while, on the other hand, a bad effect may be more readily avoided through familiarity with those circumstances which tend to its creation.

Psychology is neither cause nor effect, but a science which demonstrates how certain causes or sets of circumstances lead, in the natural order of things, to certain definite effects. In the physical world we recognize the facts that a scalded hand is the result of contact with hot liquid, or that exposure to intense cold will freeze the blood, and we take appropriate precautions. Correspondingly, if we perceive the tendencies of certain mental exercises, we can safeguard ourselves in approaching the attitude of mind which results. In other words, a situation will be dealt with correctly if the factors which usually create such a case are rightly understood.

Psychology is, then, the science of the mind, and furnishes the key to problems otherwise baffling. The science is in the practical service of men in other professions, and should be seriously studied by members of our own. We are all familiar with certain common phenomena : the falling off of the newly confirmed in their attendance at the Holy Communion ; the Sunday-school whose attention is occupied by anything save the lesson in hand ; the somnolent attitude of certain members of the congregation ; perhaps the picture of the youth who hides behind the hedge because the parson makes tracks for him across the intervening field has also not escaped us. In the

¹ Paper read before the Ruridecanal Chapter of the Deaneries of Hodnet and Whitchurch, Salop.

one case, perhaps, we judge the communicants as careless, indifferent, or even altogether bad; the Sunday-school class as inattentive and idle; the congregation as sluggish, and wanting in common sense and qualities of appreciation; the youth is a lout, lacking in ordinary respect due to the "cloth." Now, to call these commonplace events by a new name will not assist us in solving the problem involved, or in eradicating the difficulties. True; yet a science that can point us to the causes, in others and ourselves, which produce (in the nature of things) the effects we have mentioned, must surely prove of incalculable value.

The study of the mind is an essential factor in the methods of the doctor and the lawyer in their respective dealings with patient and client. Is it because, in our frantic, zealous, and amateurish grabs after the souls of our parishioners, we are blind to the natural workings of the mind, and therefore fail? Is it because we are conscious of the superiority of our prolonged education over the tuition of many with whom we have to deal, that we pit our knowledge and methods against those of our flock, and wonder that so superior an array of forces should be so easily defeated? Can it be that frequent disappointments, which a wider knowledge of the mind's inner working might have minimized, have been able to quench enthusiasm, lessen power, and even threaten loss of spirituality? Are we not thus, too often, thrust within ourselves, into a groove, with a limited outlook on life, until the seed has been sown whose ultimate harvest can only be the proverbial "country cabbage," just because our wayward passion for souls has never been combined with the science of those souls' minds?

It is common knowledge that a man of the world is often able to deal with problems which would baffle the understanding of one less experienced. Is it not because constant contact with men, and practical experience of the human mind, have given the man of affairs such an insight into the devious routes along which the mind travels, that he is able for the most part to forecast how the mind will act under given conditions, or

philosophically to accept, as the natural effect of a cause, an event that would perhaps bewilder the mind of a man of smaller experience? *Experientia docet*; and one who has been for long an apt pupil is indeed a man of experience. Yet while we can, as we say, learn by experience, there are many branches of study where this is supplemented by the aid of textbooks. Is it not desirable that this should be so? Is it not possible that the acquirement of practical experience may be facilitated by the study of what may be called the science of that experience? It is easier to play the game when one knows the rules. We are told that "a science can only lay down lines within which the rules of the art must fall—laws which the follower of the art must not transgress. But what particular thing he will do within the given lines must be left to his own genius. Two methods of work will differ: both will succeed, because neither will transgress the lines." To study psychology, then, will be no guarantee that we shall be more capable priests. Psychology lays down laws, but to psychology must be added natural ingenuity in meeting another mind, and a consecrated tact for the concrete situation. The clerical student of psychology will at least hold this overwhelming advantage—he will know in advance that certain methods of approaching an attitude, a mind, or circumstance, are wrong. He will be saved, by his knowledge of the science of the mind, from the mistakes which his inexperience might otherwise lead him to make.

It will be necessary to review briefly the general machinery by means of which mental processes evolve thoughts and corresponding actions.

The human mind seems to be built up of fields of consciousness, reception of impressions, states of feeling, and conditions of sensation. Roughly speaking, the varied emotions of the mind may be classed under the names "centre" and "margin." For our present purpose the term "centre" signifies the main trend of the mind, while "margin" stands for the less obvious, or subconscious, thoughts or feelings. For example, even as I speak, your minds may be wandering to the

thought of luncheon which is to follow. Luncheon, then, has become the "centre" or main thought; this paper has a mere marginal place in the subconscious mind. On the other hand, the actual impressions of my voice and face may be occupying your fullest attention or your "centre" thought; epicurean pleasures to follow may be banished to a faint and marginal place. The change and interchange of these "central" and "marginal" thoughts, impressions, and sensations, are constantly creating streams and fields of consciousness. Now the functions of this field of consciousness are two—(1) knowledge, (2) action. Impressions are received, knowledge is set up; sensations are created, action results. All consciousness should be capable of development into action. A man's mental processes are worthless unless leading to practical results. The methods of educating the very young afford illustration. If impressions fail to arouse activity, the child is judged deficient in mental capacity. Every *impression* must have its correlative *expression*. It is a good thing that our children are taught the Church Catechism, but the answers received in the Confirmation class plainly show the ultra-uselessness of verbal recitation without a corresponding conception of the value of the words when translated into practical action. Man is an organism for reacting on impressions. It rests with us to make these reactions as numerous and as perfect as possible. During life we are massing in the mind's consciousness these impressions—from the stores of knowledge which may be turned to practical account as occasion demands, to the mere vocabulary which, gradually built into the subconscious memory, involuntarily responds to the call of the conscious mind. Psychology will tell the preacher to memorize ideas, not words; to marshal in the memory a regularly built scheme or skeleton of facts, trusting absolutely to the memory to supply the words with which the skeleton shall be clothed. The paper-bound preacher will admit that he is more fluent in the drawing-room, the club, or at table, than in the pulpit. Why? Because the pulpit is the only place in which men do not trust that God-given gift of memory for the words with

which to clothe their thoughts. In club and room we describe the accident or relate the anecdote, trusting the memory implicitly, and it respects our confidence by supplying words to every need. In the pulpit we seem to endow the memory with the personality of an enemy, to be treated with suspicion and trusted not at all; and the dog, conscious of its bad name, plays its master merciless tricks, and is fit only for the hanging which, so far as the extempore utterance goes, it gets. As well might we ask a broker, who juggles easily with complex figures, to go behind the counter and use a ready reckoner!

The man who habitually distrusts his "word-memory" by the constant use of manuscript may in time create partial atrophy of that part of the brain which contains his vocabulary until it will not be possible for him to announce the briefest notice without aid of the manuscript. Words are impressions made in the mind; but all impressions must result in constant action if they are to remain in a healthy condition. A remarkable passage in Darwin's short autobiography seems to prove this. He says: "Up to the age of thirty, or beyond it, poetry of many kinds gave me great pleasure, and even as a schoolboy I took immense delight in Shakespeare. . . . I have also said that pictures formerly gave me considerable, and music very great, delight. But now, for many years, I cannot endure to read a line of poetry. I have tried lately to read Shakespeare, but found it so intolerably dull that it nauseated me. I have also lost my taste for pictures or music. . . . My mind seems to have become a kind of machine for grinding laws out of large collections of facts; but why this should have caused atrophy of that part of the brain alone on which the higher tastes depend, I cannot conceive. . . . If I had to live my life over again, I would have made a rule to read some poetry and listen to some music at least once every week. . . . The loss of these tastes is a loss of happiness, and may possibly be injurious to the intellect, and more probably to the moral character, by enfeebling the emotional part of our nature." Here is, indeed, proof that even natural inclinations become atrophied unless opportunities

for regular practice and habit-formation are supplied, and that actual resolution *must* be accompanied by action, or the impression which gave rise to the resolve will go, and no action will follow. So that psychology tells me, that when, through God's grace, I have been the means of creating a good impression in the mind of a hearer, at all costs I must see to it that in some way or other practical action ensues, in order that the interest created may be appropriately fed, till such a habit is formed that it becomes second nature.

Psychology suggests not only the need of some method of assuring ourselves when impressions have been created in church, but that some means should be adopted for following them up. The practical utility of regular house-to-house visiting is an instance of the latter. Impressions made in the church will be consolidated in the home. In this connection, the value of the C.E.M.S. will be obvious, as an organization providing men with the means of acquiring active habits for good as the result of corresponding impressions and sensations. Psychologists would tell us that all our pother about the work and place of the layman in the Church of England is wasted words, until we recognize the one and only method by which the layman may form the habit of action—namely, *WORK*.

The question of Work is closely wrapt up with the subject of Resolution, for it will be by *resolving* to work for God that any tasks will be undertaken. The new year, some anniversary, or crisis in life, will lead many to make new resolutions. It is strange as one looks back, how the road seems strewn with tottering and broken resolves. "It is not the moment of forming resolutions, but the moment of their producing motor effects, that resolves and aspirations communicate the new set to the brain." Psychology tells us that every opportunity of putting our resolve into practical effect must be eagerly seized. It is the old "stream of consciousness" coming to light again. The resolve has created a native impression in the mind; action must follow, and follow repeatedly, else those habits which alone can make the resolution of value cannot come into being.

One psychologist speaks of the necessity of keeping alive the faculty of effort by gratuitous exercise, such as every day doing something hard simply for the sake of doing a hard thing. Those who have ever consistently tried to take the line of greatest resistance, and have proved successful, will testify to the extraordinary strength which is gained in the daily performance of little irksome duties, and the increase of reserve power laid up. Professor King says: "Character and power are developed not by general strivings, or by the inculcation of general principles, but by definite, concrete application in definite relations, which become definite associations in the mind. General self-denials and general self-surrender to God that involve no particulars will be useless." This is a strong affirmation of the science of psychology, and will come home with special force to the parochial missionary; for it is a striking fact that the majority of resolutions formed by those who make any profession during a mission consist of general desires "to lead a good life," etc., which, unless reduced by the missionary to one or more definite propositions, usually fail completely. Does not this also impel us to give no heed to the plausible platitudes of the teachers of a vague and general "Bible curriculum," and by plain, definite doctrines to form in our children habits of Christian principle and living?

Now we speak of "bad habits" often, and of "good habits" seldom; yet all our life is but a mass of habits, good or bad as the case may be, sweeping us on to our destiny. "Sow an impression, reap an action; sow an action, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap destiny." The student of psychology will realize that impressions, actions, habits, are but links in the chain which begins in the association of ideas, and ends in destiny. It belongs to the science of psychology to explain how the nervous system is being moulded by daily habits, how the thoughts, impressions, and sensations enter into our field of consciousness, creating definite actions which in turn become habits and so form character. An American psychologist says: "The plasticity of the living

matter of our nervous system, in short, is the reason why we do a thing with difficulty the first time, but soon do it, more easily, and finally, with sufficient practice, do it semi-mechanically, or with hardly any consciousness at all. Our nervous systems have *grown* to the way in which they have been exercised, just as a sheet of paper or a coat, once creased or folded, tends to fall for ever afterward in the same identical folds." The truth of this can, of course, be proved by numberless instances within our personal experience. It will be recognized that the majority of our daily activities are mainly automatic and habitual—that is to say, they are habitual actions resulting from native impressions which have been received by, and built up into, the nervous system. Realizing this, the parish priest will be able to approach the difficulties, bad habits, and indifference of his flock with more of patient philosophy than if he were to regard these faults as obstinate, wilful, and conscious sin. The native impression must be dealt with before the resultant indifference can disappear. It was said by the Duke of Wellington, "Habit is ten times nature." If, then, nature is strong (and we know it), with what a spirit of love and sanctified tact must the ten-times-strong nature be approached by the fisher of men!

In passing, let us remember, in dealing with the habitual sinner, that moral victory depends on the power to attend to something other than the temptation which threatens to engross the sinner. In the country, I suppose, it is particularly true that our parishioners are people of but one interest. "A man's world," says a modern writer, "is no greater than the number of objects to which he can attend with interest." Christianity, whose influence is world-wide, involves a reasonable breadth of interests, and it behoves every parish priest to try to furnish the minds of those he seeks to save with varying and ennobling interests. Club, gymnasium, and reading-room should be helpful in stimulating wider ideas, counteracting the narrow indifference and sin, for which the habitual single interest has left such ample room.

In no sphere of Christian work will a study of psychology

prove of greater value than in work with the young. Much of the lack of discipline to be found in meetings for children—such as the Band of Hope, Scripture Union, and the “troublesome” Sunday class—might be changed, were those in charge familiar with the elements of the study of psychology. Watch a skilful teacher. A wrong or irrelevant answer is given by a scholar. The teacher recognizes that this is produced by some native impression latent in the child’s mind, and he proceeds, by working from the wrong answer through the association of ideas which prompted it, to reach that impression and then substitute the correct answer. Every time that the correct answer is given, the right association of ideas will be strengthened, and the habit of giving the correct reply will be formed. The present writer recollects seeing a class of children who had been told to draw something that, in their opinion, made the greatest noise, and being astonished to find that nearly every child was drawing a pair of boots! The facts that it was a country school, and the boots were hobnailed, partly explained this; but the reason was made still more obvious by the master, who informed me that many times during the day the order was given: “Don’t make so much noise with your feet.” A very crude but logical association of ideas existed in the scholars’ minds, and the master was wise enough to welcome this natural mental process, even though it resulted in boot-drawing! It will thus be seen that in the mind of every child there are native ideas, or instincts, and that nearly every answer given by a child springs directly or indirectly from one of these. The successful teacher will probe the mind by well-directed questions, in order to discover the existing ideas. In some cases the recital of an incident will suffice, when the child’s involuntary comments will often furnish the clue to what already dwells in the mind. Once the teacher is conscious of any one instinct or native idea, it becomes a foundation on which more may be built. Psychology tells us not to waste our materials where no foundation has been laid; if the native idea is not there, the teacher must plant it before the tree of knowledge can grow. With this the question of

interesting children is closely connected. To some it is given to attract the attention and hold the interest of the young without apparent effort. I doubt whether what is called a "children's man" could define wherein lay his power of interesting children. Psychology, while unable to supply a natural gift, will at least show us how *not* to deal with children, and thus prevent many mistakes and much worry.

We have spoken of "native" ideas, or instincts—every child possesses them. Now, some situations appeal at once to these native ideas. Others fail to make any impression, or, at any rate, to arouse interest, until the proper links have been made between the new idea and the native idea; in other words, an association of ideas must be formed. In one case, the natural foundation already exists, and the lesson at once becomes interesting because there is a connecting link between the new idea—*i.e.*, the lesson—and what the child already knows; then the building grows apace. In another case, the object is natively or naturally uninteresting, and interest has to be roused by putting within the child's mind some thought which may serve as a foundation on which to build the association of ideas. The art of the teacher lies in discovering the native ideas in the scholar's mind, for any object, not interesting in itself, may become so through association with an object in which an interest already exists. I borrow a familiar story: A Sunday-school teacher flattered himself that at last he had gained the undivided attention of his class. One boy, in particular, gazed intently through the whole lesson at the teacher's face. Afterwards the teacher asked the boy what he had learned, and was amazed at the reply, which was, "Nothing!" "Why," said the teacher, "you were looking at me all the time." "Yes," replied the boy, "and I saw that you did not move your upper lip once!" The moral is obvious. The lesson was prepared; it was certainly taught—or should I say, delivered? (judging from the fact that the lower jaw did not cease to wag)—but the result was nil. The teacher had taught from *his* point of view, and had never once appealed to a single native idea in the

child's mind. Instead of working from the centre to circumference, he had pottered about the circumference in a futile search for the centre. There is obviously only one way in which to insure the interest of children, and that is, to make certain that there is something in their minds to attend with ; and to work and dovetail the novel objects into the native instincts by means of a logical and systematic association of ideas.

Psychology has much to say in explanation of the mind's association of ideas. One psychologist has described human beings as pieces of "associating machinery." Just as habits of external conduct are formed by the frequency with which impressions react, so our thinking and feeling processes are largely subject to the law of habit, and the processes are generally known as the association of ideas. The "nature" and "character" of an individual means really nothing but the habitual form of his associations. Bearing this in mind, it will be possible to forecast with a measure of certainty how such and such a man will act in given circumstances. His habits will have been built up by his peculiar environment, home, and upbringing, and can only (unless he breaks from natural association) result in compatible actions. The action of the youth in hiding behind the hedge to escape the parson is, after all, perfectly natural. Does he not associate (in his narrow mental outlook) the parson with an invitation to attend church, or a scolding for stopping away? He does not always associate with the parish priest the human qualities of friendliness, sympathy, and good-fellowship. Knowledge of this psychological law of association will help us to see the necessity for building up, by our personal life and doctrines, those associations in the minds of our flock which will lead them to habits of trust in ourselves, and to the formation of correct associations regarding the truths we teach.

One aspect of the subject cannot be left untouched, owing to its immense value to the parish priest, and that is the influence of Memory. We are asked to remember a certain fact or inci-

dent. At once the mind is, as we say, set working ; in other words, trains of thought, association of ideas, are awakened, and the incident is recalled. Memory, or the power of recollection, is brought into action through associative processes. A scented handkerchief, the notes of an old song, or the fragrance of flowers, will recall some far-distant scene, "for the laws of association govern all the trains of our thinking which are not actually interrupted by sensations breaking on us from without."

Here, then, is an immense field for reflection and profit in connection with pastoral work ; and those whose work lies in country places, where each member of the flock is personally known, possess an especial advantage. It will help us in dealing with the habitual sinner to learn some facts of his earlier life, home, and surroundings, and to strive to arouse such a train of associations that his mind may be steered back along the devious routes of the associated ideas to the memory of his childhood, home, and love. Many have succeeded in awaking an old memory, but the awakening has been caused by some chance word in home or pulpit, and not by any definite aim on the part of the preacher. Will not the ministry be made more effective if we recognize that in the mind and memory of everyone some tender spot exists, long buried by an accumulation of deadening influences and ideas, which may be restored from spiritual death and freed from its grave-clothes by the recalling, along the train of associations, some memory of a sweeter life? The whole Christian year will provide us with countless opportunities for recalling forgotten hopes ; and the time of preparation for Confirmation is an unrivalled occasion for a course of addresses on Confirmation, in the church, which, while instructing the faithful, will arouse in the callous those associations of brighter and holier days, when, in the freshness of unspoilt and undisappointed youth, they were the recipients of the Pentecostal flame.

While realizing the necessity for heart-conviction, let it not be forgotten that, if the *mind* is left unconvinced, the heart-seed will wither, because it will lack depth. There is a very real

sense in which the mind is the key to the heart. The lock must be turned before the door may be opened; the door must be thrown back before one may enter.

Psychologists tell us that the memory contains all sorts of items which we cannot now recall, but which may be recalled providing a sufficient cue is given and the right associations are set in motion. This law, while furnishing the preacher and teacher with a key to the vulnerable points in the adult mind, also forms a magnificent equipment for dealing with the young, especially in that all-important though difficult question of purity. With the recollection of this law in my mind, shall I not demonstrate to the child that the eye and the ear are like photographic lens, through which impressions pass, to be indelibly registered on the material behind? Shall I not point out that every suggestive picture, every obscene tale, passes through eye and ear, to be registered for ever on the plastic substance of the brain? And that though these impressions in the vigour and freshness of youth may be forgotten for years, yet a picture postcard, a suggestive story, twenty or thirty years after, has power to bring back the original impression by means of this law of the subtle association of ideas, and to set working trains of thought which, in the strength of maturity, must (unless checked) develop into action. This should greatly strengthen our hands in dealing with this difficult subject, and should prove a strong deterrent to the young. The reality of the law, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap," will become a living and practical influence, and the prayer in the Communion Service, "Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Thy Holy Spirit," will receive a new and living significance.

