

SOCIAL SERVICES FOR EUROPEAN JEWISH CHILDREN*

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EVERY war has its child welfare and educational problems; every nation in war must face the bewilderment of its youth and must undertake the difficult task of leading back to normalcy both adults and children after the wartime disruption of normal life.

Are Jewish children and Jewish youth in Europe in a situation peculiar to themselves? Is there a need for special social services for them?

Hitler has undoubtedly created the psychological species "Jewish youth." This species consists of the children of a group of human beings who have been subjected to a special type of cruelty or who feel themselves threatened by such cruelty.

National Socialism has subjected to this kind of persecution a motley variety of other groups as well. We shall certainly find among children of other groups many psychological phenomena common among Jewish children. But there are psychic trends more or less characteristic of Jewish youth today, and an understanding of these and a knowledge of their proper treatment will be of great importance for the future of the whole group and its individual members.

Under Nazi persecution the Jewish

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children of Europe have been cruelly made aware of their common fate. Non-European Jewish youth has not experienced just this kind of persecution. They have felt compassion for Jewish children on the other side; they have sometimes been afraid—it could happen to them. But they have never actually experienced personal humiliation and danger, forced separation from home and accustomed environment, separation or fear of separation from parents, relatives and friends, hunger, cold, persecution or death.

The environmental factors which have provoked the psychic trauma of European Jewish youth today have not always been of the same kind or the same power, though they have always had the same origin—Hitler's war of extermination on the Jews. There have been different developmental tendencies and phases. These alone could explain the often contradictory psychic reactions of young Jewish groups and individuals. But even psychic trauma of the same nature manifest themselves differently according to whether the trauma became effective in early childhood, after an emotionally calm and secure childhood, or after a childhood full of emotional privations, rejections and inhibitions.

The First Phase of Persecution—Hope to Escape, Hope to Survive

When the persecution of the Jews in Germany began, it was still a matter of

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temperament whether the individual chose to base his hopes on a speedy end to the terror or even the early overthrow of Hitler himself, or an emigration from his sphere. The majority, and especially the youth, did not yet react to persecution with despair. There was still this or the other way out. Psychic readiness to find a way out, the expectation of socially impossible developments, and similarly unrealistic conceptions were not limited to the children.

In her study entitled "Ruth," Irma Kessel (*Zeitschrift für Politische Psychologie und Sexualökonomie*, Copenhagen, 1936) reports on her experiences with a six-year-old girl in Germany about six months after Hitler's seizure of power. ". . . She changed completely in a short time," she writes, "she became ambitious, peevish, pale, and was seized with an intense interest in arithmetic and writing.

". . . 'Will the teacher be very happy,' Ruth asked, 'if I know so much? If I can write up to a hundred, will the teacher tell the principal and then will the principal be glad? And if I can write up to a thousand and write all the letters and read all the names, do you think Adolf Hitler will like me a little bit too and forget that I'm a Jewish child?'"

"All the Jews have to get out of Germany soon. Adolf Hitler has a long list of all the Jews and he goes down the list and chases them all out. I'm so scared when they're coming to me. And what if there's no room in any country? Once I said "Heil Hitler" in the street and an S.A. man slapped me in the face; and he said I should go to Palestine because I'm a dirty Jew. . . ."

"Maybe if I'm very good and study very hard, Adolf Hitler will let me be a German child and like me too."

Similar experiences like the one de-

scribed by Irma Kessler were made by the author of this paper when he was general director of the homes and schools for refugee children of the OSE Union in France:

Speaking of the year 1938, after the occupation of Austria, but before the bloody November days, one twelve-year-old boy, a Viennese, described the spirit prevailing in the "Jewish School" which he attended after Hitler's invasion: "They talked mostly about emigrating. Even the teachers, who had all, with one exception, been transferred to a Jewish school on account of their political opinions, advised us to emigrate, and one remarked, 'Ah, yes, before, when things were better.' . . ."

"Since we had nothing to be happy about, we were tremendously happy when Schmeling was defeated by Joe Louis. We repeated to each other all the slogans about his 'certain victory' that had appeared in the newspapers before, and we rejoiced that things had come out differently. When we found out that in the fall there would be only one high school left in Vienna for Jews, we got all excited about who would get into this school, and everyone was happy who knew that he would no longer be in Germany in the fall. When we received our report cards at the end of the term, we took our leave and hoped to see one another abroad."

The Second Phase—Hopelessness and Despair

Children who experienced only the early days of Jewish persecution, when the aim was still simply to force the Jews to emigrate, reacted—and react today—psychically otherwise than those who went through the second phase of closed borders. Utter despair led many who were in a relatively favorable posi-

tion to give up all hope of a normal or even a better future. At the beginning of 1939, when the children of the "St. Louis"—the ship whose passengers were not permitted to land in Cuba despite their visas—were picked up in Boulogne-sur-Mer to be brought to the OSE children's home in Montmorency, one fifteen-year-old said to me: "What's the sense of our going to these homes? What can we expect there? First they drove us out of Germany, just because we were Jews, then they didn't give us any visas to the United States. So we wanted to go to Cuba and wait for our American visas. They didn't let us into Cuba, even though we had visas. Then we went to San Domingo and Haiti. We couldn't land anywhere. Our voyage took us along the coast of Florida. It was so beautiful and peaceful, that country, but there was no harbor for us to land. Now they've let us land in France. How long will they let us stay here? Where do we go next? What a life!"

The Third Phase—Crushing Fear and Horror

The third group consists of those children who were not so fortunate as to suffer "only" pre-war terror, "only" humiliation, "only" despair of a better future, "only" separation from their parents, friends and home, and to find deliverance from persecution, hunger, cold and want in emigration. This third group was exposed also to the horrors of the gas chamber, saw their relatives murdered, performed slave labor in the military service of their enemies, and suffered constant hunger and cold.

Aside from the thousands who have been destroyed physically, there are thousands who can be saved from moral and psychic destruction only by a supreme effort. Of these, some are per-

haps so far gone that we must regard ourselves as successful if we can prevent them from doing society serious injury. Among those not physically ruined we shall find some who never went through anything like a normal childhood development. We shall find those who grew up without parental love and without any substitute for it. Youngsters without home or school, without friends, without belief in fellowship, will know of only one way to win toleration, to gain small advantages—and that is to humble yourself, to grovel, to sneak, treacherously to betray your neighbor, to denounce and deliver him up to the powers that be. Morals, propriety, the relation between the sexes, the position of the individual in the social group, all these will have to be learned from the beginning by the children and youngsters who have grown accustomed to an utterly abnormal life under terror and fear. Drives that human society has sublimated in the course of thousands of years take a bestial form in these young people. Instincts have been developed in them that must set the individual in a civilized society in constant conflict with the community and must inevitably endanger the community. True, all this applies to a certain extent to all of warring humanity and it certainly applies to large numbers of the peoples who have been oppressed by the Nazis; nevertheless, many of these problems are the problems of Jewish youth first and foremost—the young Jews who lived through the terror of Hitler's war of extermination against the Jews.

Resistance Against Psychic and Emotional Destruction

We have several reasons for offering examples of children and young people who did not succumb to the psychic and

moral temptation to degrade themselves, individuals who fought with heroism and ingenuity against such degradation—and with success. Most important, however, these examples demonstrate even more clearly than the successes achieved in the conscious treatment and education of the children victims of Hitler's terror that we need not give up hope of restoring to health these injured children's souls. Perhaps it will take decades of the most intensive efforts of the best psychologists, sociologists, parents, guardians, educators and teachers to achieve restoration—the field cannot assign a more important, a more painful or a more wonderful task to its workers. But the task can and will be accomplished. We may draw confidence from the examples before us of children who rebelled against their own social and physical decline and of those who responded readily to treatment and education given with scientific knowledge, with understanding and with love.

Dr. Joseph Friedjung, psychological consultant for refugee children in Haifa, wrote the author a letter upon the arrival of the Polish children in Palestine after their flight from Poland through Russia: "It is really astonishing how few visible signs of neglect these children show after three and a half years of wandering about."

Our optimism is in most cases not a simple, definite diagnosis but rather a hopeful point of departure for a systematic purposeful therapy. Such therapy can achieve its greatest success only by seeking to restore to these children their sense of shelter and security.

It is the loss and the regaining of the feeling of security that influences most the psychology of the homeless refugee child; in determining the basic causation of the anxieties, inferiority feelings, and

other behavior problems of such a child, and the proper treatment for them, emphasis must be laid on the role of this security feeling.

We must show them that their past, their beloved parents, all their *loyalties*, great and small, of whatever period in their lives, are respected by us and accepted by us without any effort to destroy or minimize them.

Attention should here be called to the frequently occurring incubation period of neuroses which, in cases of prolonged danger, naturally develop only after the cessation of the danger, often a long while after the danger has disappeared. Such delayed neuroses often manifest themselves suddenly in puberty.

Freud has indicated how the Super Ego, the conscience of man, is formed through the relationship of the child to its parents. Must those children whose parents have been murdered inevitably lack this conscience that should serve as their guide and standard of action? Or can a Super Ego be formed by the relationship of the child to his community when the natural parental stimulus is absent? There is little probability that we shall be able to find substitute parents for all the children whose parents have perished in the mass murder and destruction of the Jews. How will our perception of the needs of these children for a guiding social sense and the importance of developing in them such a sense without the normal parental influence affect our thinking in regards to the inner structure and educational methods of the institutions we have to provide for their care?

Mass Trauma—Mass Neurosis—Group Treatment

It would lead us too far afield to undertake here a discussion of all the most

important individual and social psychological problems of the Jewish youth of today, to say nothing of a closer examination of their traumata and the proper treatment of individual cases. The abundance, the gigantic proportions and the pressing nature of these problems are sufficient warrant for their extensive and intensive study by as many students as can devote themselves to this task. True, most of these cases are just the old regulation neuroses and psychoses as we see from the observations of Dr. Robert Gillespie ("Psychological Effects of War on Citizen and Soldier") made in connection with the psychiatric patients at Guy Hospital in London during the period of the Nazi air attacks on England:

"... The patients that came to us presented chiefly, with a few exceptions, the same problems as in peace time." But the number of cases and the type of traumata creating the neuroses make a mass problem of what were formerly the problems of some relatively few individuals. And the sheer number involved must necessarily alter the kind of treatment applied.

Fear neurosis caused by group persecution which the individual experiences in common with many others is not the same fear neurosis as that caused by an individual trauma. Thus it is not simply the impossibility of giving individual treatment to such vast numbers that must lead us to resort to group treatment; we must recognize that such group treatment is indicated where mass neurosis has been created by a trauma suffered by many in common with many. This is not to say that individual psychiatric treatment is not to be rendered here also, but it must be clear that in addition and in the interest of such individual treatment, education, activity and

community life are essential, in many cases even more essential than individual treatment. Such community life must be the cornerstone of the psychic reconstruction of the individual.

We shall not be surprised to find that these youngsters, having suffered persecution, having been trampled underfoot, seize upon any and all kinds of ideals with wild passion and devotion. All the oppression, despair and doubt, all the fear, cowardice, insecurity and longing for shelter, all the sense of guilt, humiliation, and rejection, all the hatred and desire for revenge that these children have suffered and nourished are sublimated in new worships—the worship of democracy, of socialism, of communism, of zionism, of nationalism for the country in which they find themselves, of pacifism, of self-sacrificing heroism. The educator must undertake the tremendous task of guiding and forwarding this process of sublimation and adjustment to reality.

Only the dreamer far removed from reality can ignore the terrible psychic danger facing a whole generation of victims of total oppression; but only the hopeless pessimist can believe that it is possible to root out utterly the higher human instincts in our children. We must see the danger in order to meet it successfully; but at the same time we must hold fast to our principles of human psychology and take courage from the examples before us of individual endurance and individual rebellion, examples of heroic resistance to spiritual brutalization and defeatism. Our recognition of the strength of this resistance will permit us to hope and to dare fight the danger, to strive purposefully for the rebuilding and remoulding of psychically imperilled individuals and culturally imperilled society. Thus the

heroic battle of the Jews of the Warsaw ghetto will attain a significance beyond the merely historical; it can become the cornerstone for the rebuilding of the moral and social psyche of the humiliated Jewish child.

Past Experiences Consciously Used as Cornerstone of Hopeful Adjustment

The adjustment and adaptation of the mangled psyche of the Jewish youth of Europe, to human society, to the culture, customs and conceptions of democratic and civilized mankind after war, can be achieved, despite the horrible trauma suffered by that psyche, by means of progressive individual and community education. Much will depend on what society, what customs and what conceptions we can offer these young people as ideals to replace the horror of Hitlerism.

These ideals can also help us in the sexual education of young people who, in most cases, will lack the attitude and understanding that make possible a normal healthy sexual relationship. Although we cannot consider the subject here, we wish to call attention to its importance.

One of the most important points

upon which we find agreement between our own observations and those of nearly all the authors who have given us reports on their experiences with children after war and during former periods of persecution—i.e., that in very few cases are children, no matter what their previous experiences, unable to start a new life unburdened by the "tyranny of the past," provided they are given halfway sensible treatment and education. And the most important element of such "halfway sensible treatment and education" is the careful effort of the educator not to repress or destroy the past, not to root out old loyalties in an attempt to leave room for new. "I am a part of all that I have met"—(Tennyson). The severe psychic traumata suffered by these children can be disposed of in only two ways: They can either be forcibly repressed and suppressed into psychic burdens or neuroses that must weigh down the future of the individual, or they can be built into the keystone of a character elevated through "noble suffering," of an intensified love of life, of a stronger will to happiness—a happiness not regarded as a prize gained at the expense of others but as a good created and enjoyed with others in and of the social group.