

# Individual, National, and Racial Adaptability

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**T**HE problems of adaptability and non-adaptability between individuals, nations and races rest upon a common basis, as subdivisions of the great question of the nature and value of human contacts. Individuals, nations and races whose habits, traits and customs are the same, drift naturally together; those which have differences in these respects drift apart.

Because of the strongly developed social tendency in man, we find, preserved by natural selection, a regular and almost universal routine of behavior aimed to produce the detection of the elements which two individuals, nations or races have in common. Thus, when two people come into social contact with one another there is, after the preliminary sensation of sight, usually an effort on the part of one or both to establish contact points, and to discover common interests or mutual acquaintances.

Since, however, life demands many diverse types, we find that individuals differ widely in the ease with which they make or receive such inquiries. They differ also in their accuracy of judgment and in their ability to classify the information thus obtained. The variations in these respects are just what make the individual what he or she is, and they thus form one of the most fascinating studies or fields of speculation that exists.

## SOCIAL ADAPTABILITY FUNDAMENTAL

**S**UMMED up, they may be defined as the social adaptability of an individual. This social adaptability, complex in origin, yet present to some degree in all of us; difficult to measure, yet continually used by each of us throughout life; held together in each of us as an individual, yet varying widely in each of us under different environments, forms the strands of which any social fabric, great or small, is woven.

The very same things that have been said concerning an individual also, as we know, can be extended to the family, nation, or race. In such extension, however, we must realize that we are dealing with an ever increasing complexity and an average or grouping together of a large number of individuals—a condition bound to lead to the increase of problems and possibilities.

Thus, as we have seen, the miscibility or degree of co-operation without friction between individuals depends on the elements of their personality which are common to both. By "common," I mean mutually understood by both, accepted, correlated, filed away psychologically as a thing agreed upon and settled to the satisfaction of both individuals.

The degree to which such a tacit interrelationship exists and to which two personalities interlock, determines the degree of what we have come to call friendship existing between the individuals concerned. Some of the elements involved are definite, measurable,

easy of description; others are subtle and indefinite, and almost, if not entirely, impossible of measurement or description—yet clearly experienced and recognized by both the individuals concerned.

Now these same conditions and factors determine the miscibility of nations and races. But, as we have already intimated, the nation or race is so complex, so large and unwieldy, and its points of contact so difficult to control, that causes for disturbance in its relationships with others are more frequent, more serious, more difficult to forestall or predict, and more unreasonable than is the case with individuals.

In other words, a disagreement or non-adaptability between individuals is less likely to arise because their control of their speech and behavior is better and more efficient than is that of a nation or a race. Once it occurs, the disturbance is more apt to be amicably adjusted by individuals because of these same factors of control and ease of manipulation. Finally, the origin of a possible cause for disagreement is more easy to predict or forestall in an individual because of the relatively small confined and well-defined basis from which it can arise.

## INDIVIDUAL NON-ADAPTABILITY ASCRIBED TO RACE

**W**E see, then, that the nation or race is a thin layer of personalities widely spread, sensitive in its contacts with other nations or races, and varying in its own degree of solidarity and peace of mind. Unpleasant traits possessed by a small proportion of its units (individuals) are

if they happen to form non-adaptable elements when in contact with another nation, apt to be attributed to all its units.

This is a natural, but unfortunate, protective reaction on the part of the nation. The burden of proof that the distribution of non-adaptability is not general is placed on the nation producing the non-adaptable elements. If it were not so placed, nations would not have survived, for by taking this attitude a nation places itself on the defensive against the possible further contact with non-adaptable elements in sufficient numbers and degree of intensity to disrupt its life functions. This, of course, is a reaction preserved and perpetuated by natural selection.

But another factor has made this situation most deplorable. This is the fact that the "sense organs" of nations are poorly developed and easily confused. The visual image of another nation is apt to be distorted and poorly recorded. The national "eye" depending so largely upon the "lens" provided by the daily press is apt to be influenced by defects and flaws in that very structure. The opinions and viewpoints of a few individuals become magnified and spread to thousands, just as the rays passing through the narrow lens of the individual eye spread to affect thousands of individual elements in the retina. The auditory impression is also ill-defined and frequently troublesome. Differences in language mean real and serious obstacles to mutual understanding and sympathy.

Then, too, the body of a single nation is seldom all well, and its mind is seldom at peace and ready for the whole-hearted approach to the problems of others.

## THE CRITICAL POINT

**I**F is at this point that we reach a most significant and critical point of query. Have we evolved and produced a form of national life so complex and unwieldy that it is to absorb all our time, effort and life to keep it well and healthy? Are the nations of today in a position where the constant appearance of such ailments as headaches, rheumatism, and local inflammation, due to lack of education, class feeling and strikes are inevitable? If so, we may expect that the greater part of the resources of a nation, both physical and mental, will be employed in trying to correct and combat pathological conditions in its own physiology.

There will be, in this event, little time to give to the pains and aches, or even to the constructive thoughts and inspirations provided by other nations.

To admit this decrepitude of our present national existences would be to acknowledge that the nations of today were in the decay of senility, and this is obviously absurd as a working philosophy of life. For this reason, therefore, we

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must, as I see it, stop our somewhat morbid attitude concerning our own problems and must make the deliberate effort to focus our attention on the study and solution of international and inter-racial problems.

Either the present quota of nations or races will be decreased by the natural demise of some—which seems unlikely—or it will continue to exist. If it continues to exist, its various members must look forward to living together as friends. This will require the effort on the part of all to seek out the elements which they possess in common with others. Such elements, having been found, will have to serve as the basis on which a true and lasting friendship and co-operative scheme of life can be erected.

But, as we have seen, relationships between nations are more complicated than those between individuals; and while the latter could pick out and utilize these common interests *subconsciously* and without effort, this will not, in all probability, be the case for nations or races.

Rather, it will be necessary to institute a deliberate inquiry as to the nature of the physical and mental characteristics of the races or nations involved and by a study and analysis of the factors involved consciously try to influence and direct the course of friendly relations. It is this great need for mutual study and interchange of ideas and inspirations which the world has only recently become aware of and which it still fails to appreciate in an almost unbelievable degree.

This great subject is a vast field for research of a most fascinating sort. The world as a whole will see the application of the principles and laws discovered, but the research as such will have to be done in a much smaller unit of space.

In this connection, our own country has, by the enormous influx, through immigration of diverse nations and races, become the laboratory where the opportunity for studying the problems of national and racial contacts and mixtures is best given. Modern biology has provided and can continue to produce methods and workers. Educators and educational institutions can be trained to afford materials and records for study.

Can we not pause a moment in the all-absorbing rush of life and desire for immediate returns, and take a new and different viewpoint? Can we not agree that a study of the physical, mental, and sociological results of national and racial inter-mixtures going on under our very eyes in the United States—a study broadly and properly conceived and made possible by the establishment of organizations to insure its pursuance over long-time periods—would be the greatest contribution to the solution of these very problems that we can make?

Past history and present speculation as to the merits and demerits of racial or national contacts or inter-mixtures will avail us little or nothing. What we need and must have—and above all what we can, at this very moment, begin to get—is information of an accurate and scientific nature as to what the effects, good and bad, really are.

When this is being done, and only then, shall we be able to *understand the problems* that confront us, and until we *do* understand and recognize these problems, of what value is speculation concerning the best methods of their solution?