

THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY

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POOLED SELF-ESTEEM

BY A. CLUTTON-BROCK

I

I AM, I confess, astonished at the lack of curiosity which even psychologists, and they more than most men, discover about the most familiar, yet most surprising, facts of the human mind. They have their formulæ, as that the human mind is unconsciously always subject to the sexual instinct; and these formulæ, while they make psychology easier for those who accept them, utterly fail to explain the most familiar, yet most surprising facts.

There is, for instance, self-esteem, — egotism, — we have no precise scientific name for it; if we go by our own experience, it seems to be far more powerful and constant than the sexual instinct, far more difficult to control, and far more troublesome. The sexual instinct gets much of its power from this egotism, or self-esteem, and would be manageable without it; but self-esteem is, for many of us, unmanageable. Often we suppress it, but still it is our chief obstacle to happiness or any kind of excellence; and, however strong or persistent it may be in us, we never value it. In others we dislike it intensely, and no less intensely in ourselves when we become aware of it; and, if a man can lose it in a passion for something else, then we admire that self-

surrender above all things. In spite of the psychologists, we know that the sexual instinct is not the tyrant or the chief source of those delusions to which we are all subject. It is because we are in love with ourselves, not because we are in love with other people, that we make such a mess of our lives.

Now, what we ask of psychology, if it is to be a true science, is that it shall help us to manage ourselves so that we may achieve our deepest, most permanent desires. Between us and those desires there is always this obstacle of self-esteem, and if psychology will help us to get rid of that, then, indeed, we will take it seriously, more seriously than politics, or machinery, or drains, or any other science. For all of these, however necessary, are subsidiary to the management of the self; and all would be a thousand times better managed by a race of beings who knew how to manage themselves. There is not a science, or an art, that is not hampered by the self-esteem of those who practise it; for it blinds us both to truth and to beauty, and most of us are far more unconscious of its workings than we are of the workings of our sexual instinct. The Greeks were right when they said, 'Know thyself'; but we have not tried

THE CONTRIBUTORS' COLUMN

A. Clutton-Brock, critic of art and lover of gardens, has at the *Atlantic's* request contributed a number of papers on modern dangers and difficulties, varied in their subject, but alike in ascribing to religion the real hope of the future. The secret which brought her consolation at a time of anguish many years ago, and which has ever since been the constant companion of her thoughts, **Mrs. Albion Fellows Bacon** now feels it right to share with others. The record is, of course, faithful to the last detail. The writer of 'Shell-Shocked — and After,' for manifest reasons, prefers to remain unknown. After many actual pilgrimages to the Orient, **L. Adams Beck** now makes an imaginary one into the heart of the Chinese Empire of other days.

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Margaret Widdemer is a well-known poet of the younger generation. **Anne C. E. Allinson**, author of 'Roads from Rome' and (with her husband) 'Greek Lands and Letters,' was formerly dean of the Women's College in Brown University. From her girlhood experiences upon her father's Southern plantation, **Eleanor C. Gibbs** recalls these memories of old-time slaves. Her forebears were kinsmen of another Virginia planter, **George Washington. Bertrand Russell**, long famous as a mathematician and philosopher, is a grandson of Lord John Russell, the eminent British statesman. Mr. Russell has just returned to London from a winter's stay in China, where he has been teaching at the Government University in Peking.

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This interpretative reading of Shakespeare's letters brings **Miss Ellen Terry** back for one more curtain call. It is characteristic of her discrimination to find in the Shakespearean field a topic quite unworn. During the war **Arthur Pound** edited a confidential weekly bulletin of trade and commodity information, issued by the Chief Cable Censor, U.S.N., for the guidance of American naval censors in handling business cable and radio messages. Traces of this training in international trade-practices are evident now and

then in the 'Iron Man' papers. **Margaret Willson Lees** is a Canadian essayist.

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We wonder how many readers will remember **Agnes Repplier's** first two contributions to the *Atlantic*, on 'Children, Past and Present,' and 'On the Benefits of Superstition.' They marked the beginning of the long and delightful series, different in quality and kind from anything else America has to show. **Christopher Morley**, whose 'Bowling Green' is the sportive element of the New York *Evening Post*, advocates newspaper work because it 'keeps one in such a ferment of annoyance, haste, interruption, and misery, that, occasionally, one gets jolted far enough from the normal to commit something worth while.' **William Beebe's** new book, 'Edge of the Jungle,' is reviewed in this month's *Atlantic*. **Harrison Collins**, at present a member of the faculty in one of the Imperial Normal Colleges in Japan, bases his story on an actual experience with Japanese goldfish and fishermen.

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Sir Arthur H. Pollen is, perhaps, the best-known naval critic in the United Kingdom. Our attention was originally called to **Sisley Huddleston** through the warm recommendation of Mr. Arnold Bennett. Throughout the Paris Conference, his journalistic work seemed to us of the highest importance. Since then *Atlantic* readers have had opportunities to judge it through a number of articles which, once read, are not easily forgotten. **Jean Sokoloff**, the Scotch widow of a Russian officer, after her recent escape from Petrograd, made a flying visit to American cousins, and has returned to her home in Glasgow. **Walter L. Ballou** is the associate editor of *The Black Diamond*, the official organ of the Coal Industry.

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At Mr. Pound's request, we are glad to publish the following acknowledgment:

DEAR ATLANTIC, —

The receipt of the October number, containing the first of my articles on 'The Iron Man,' brought forcibly to my mind the absorption with which I must have been vacationing when you wrote me

and indifferent. Rarely is pressure brought to bear upon a man in order to make him docile to the wishes or caprice of the philanthropist. Health decisions are practically the only ones ever forced, and these, for the most part, only when the welfare of a child is at stake. As to the philanthropist's influence upon the people with whom he deals, that is impossible to measure. Perhaps, as Mrs. Cannon says, the majority of our clients 'act upon our advice if they must, they disregard it if they can, but they preserve untouched the inner citadel of their personality.' This, however, is no indictment against the philanthropist, but against human nature. God forbid that any of us should fling wide to all comers the inner gates of our personality!

Yours sincerely,

FLORENCE SYTZ.

DEAR ATLANTIC, —

Perhaps I may be permitted to speak a word for the Settlements, which are included in the alleged 'perfect orgy of charitable activity' in which philanthropists are said to have indulged for the past thirty years. The Settlements have consistently endeavored to avoid the dangers of philanthropic work against which the author rightly inveighs. From the very first they have tried to become an integral part of their neighborhood. An attitude of condescension is as abhorrent to them as to Mrs. Cannon. A cardinal principle of settlement work has been to seek the coöperation of their neighbors in improving local conditions. Their aim, as it was put long ago, I believe by Jane Addams, has been to work *with* and not *for* people. I think it can safely be said that they are not hampered by the 'philanthropists' first handicap' — that of making their 'human contacts on the basis of infirmities, poverty, ignorance, sin, never on the basis of any mutual interest or responsibility.' It is precisely on the basis of mutual interest and responsibility that they seek to make their contacts with their neighbors. Again, the Settlements have all along been trying to pass over to the tax-payers such of their experiments in the promotion of social welfare as have proved of permanent value. Mrs. Cannon concedes that certain 'social pioneers' have done essential work, and that, 'in so far as charitable societies catch the spirit of these adventures and hold the ideal of their own labor as pioneering, they do a vital work, and in the future as in the past, will be essential to social progress.' Without, I trust, assuming too much, Settlement residents may take heart from this admission, for they have thought (modestly, I hope) that such pioneering was an important part of their work, and they believe that the time is not yet come for them to shut up shop. As a matter of fact, modern social workers, like the members of the medical profession, are really intent upon putting themselves out of business, but, like the doctors again, they have not yet achieved this desirable end. Let us not neglect the extension and improvement of public-welfare agencies, while, for the present at least, we maintain such private philanthropies as are serving the community. Very truly yours,

GAYLORD S. WHITE.

Oh, the crimes of the Intellect!

DEAR ATLANTIC, —

The popularity of the *Atlantic* with wide-ranging peoples was demonstrated recently, when our house was entered in the night-time, and, along with food-stuffs, safety-razor, flash-light, and sundry kitchen vessels, the August and September *Atlantics* were taken, with a reading-glass.

Respectfully yours, HENRY A. BLAKE.

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Our readers seem to think, since there is a woman in the case, that twelve hundred, and not twelve, is the requisite number for a jury. From the full panel we have selected one for the body of the magazine, and here is another for the Column.

DEAR ATLANTIC, —

Your story 'The Jury' intrigues me. It recalls by its unannounced verdict *The Lady or the Tiger*?

It is not easy to determine the exact nature of the plea. There is no prosecution and there is not a suggestion of a defense. It is not quite a petition for pardon with restoration of civil rights. The guilty person — I beg her pardon, the heroine — is not a petitioner of any sort; only, as always, a recipient of unrequited favors. The question seems to be: shall other benefactors rush in to fill a temporary vacancy, her late 'protector' having been removed by death?

The principal speaker's status is not quite clear. Is it that of the *amicus curiæ* of the civil, or of the *advocatus diaboli* of the ecclesiastical court, or just 'your orator' of the old court of equity? She herself is, however, sufficiently convincing. And how admirable are her accessories! The first cigarette that she lights seems to dispel all illusions as to old-fashioned social conventions. The second seems to symbolize the weakened will-power that over-indulgence produces. And then the bridge table! It seems symbolic of the ennui of the unoccupied time of the 'idle rich.'

Surely there can be no question as to the verdict. One seems to hear the unanimous cry: 'Tell Violet Osborne to return. The seventh commandment is out of date. No one can expect a rich woman to care for her children. We take no stock in this talk about "much being required from those to whom much has been given."'

But might not the whole company be persuaded to join Violet Osborne 'abroad,' and make room here for a few more who want to vindicate for America a moral supremacy in meeting the needs of a world wrecked by selfishness and self-indulgence? Very truly yours,

ETHELBERT D. WARFIELD.

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The clergy of the old school kept their sermons in barrels. But now — ?

DEAR ATLANTIC, —

You are always glad, I know, to hear how useful you are. Even your wrappers are of use — for sermon-covers. I'm sure the sermons acquire a literary quality they might not otherwise possess.