

GEORGE VI IN LEFT-HANDED LEGION

Psychologists Hold Children Should Not Be Broken of Trait

Because of a superstition that anything seen or done on the left foreboded ill, was therefore to be shunned as unlucky, the left hand has been in disrepute for centuries.

A deep-rooted prejudice, use of this hand is confined by South African natives, for example, to all degrading acts. The Maori tribe of New Zealand considers it profane, uses it as little as possible. Romans had a word for it in the evil-sounding "sinister."

Conscious of an "ugly duckling" embarrassment in consequence of this perverse heritage, from 4 to 8 per cent. of the world's population have, willy-nilly, served out their appointed days, often with no small shame to their right-handed betters. Far from being maladroit, balmy or queer, some have been great personages.

Many of Egypt's Pharaohs were left-handed. So were most of Rome's Cæsars; the Biblical Benjamin, Alexander the Great, Charlemagne, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci was so completely left-handed he wrote a backward stroke readable only with a mirror.

Royal "Southpaw" — Last week, right-handed columnists got off to a left-handed slant, found that the small and select clan of contemporary "southpaws" had at their head no less a figure than King George VI of England. Moreover, like the *élite* of left-handers, he was considerably ambidextrous.*

Early taking to his right hand, King George uses his left virtually in tennis alone. He is an expert rifle-shot, good at squash, a nimble boxer, and has awed caddies on the links with right-hand drives of 210 yards. While he still stammers, royal circles deny this is due to efforts to correct his left-handedness in infancy.

Why King George, like sinistral kinsmen the world over, is that way has long been a matter of divided opinion among medical scientists. Some hold that handedness, left or right, is an acquired trait, others that it is of congenital origin.**

The first school traces it to the way a child is held in infancy, to its social training, or possibly to its imitative instincts; the second seeks to connect it with the structural features of the human body.

The latter has several explanations: an unequal distribution in the two halves of the body which displaces the center of gravity, an unequal supply of blood to the two sides of the brain, functional predominance of one side of the brain, and the potency

*George VI's distant ancestor, Charles I, became ambidextrous to rid himself of the sinistral stigma. Psychologists point out that one in ten persons is ambidextrous, but most of them do not know it.

**An interesting side-light of this latter theory is that it originated in primitive warfare, where the stick or sword was wielded by the right hand in order that the left might be used for defensive covering of the heart.

George VI

of the right eye. For instance, about 50 per cent. of left-handed people are also "left-eyed"; about 70 per cent. of right-handed are "right-eyed."

Brains—To many a psychologist and behaviorist, the most plausible of these postulates is the one that holds people are left-handed because they are right-brained. This is supported by the theory that the left hemisphere of the brain predominates in right- (or dextral) handers and the right in left- (or sinistral) handers. What happens here is the motor nerves that innervate the two halves of a body as they descend from the cerebral hemisphere cross over from one side to the other.

All skulls are structurally lopsided, contrary to the old-time phrenologists' claim of the perfect head. Persons with the right side of the skull more developed are generally more developed throughout the right side of their bodies,* including ears, limbs and feet. Yet they are left-handed. The opposite is true of persons with the left side developed.

Heredity—This fact alone, congenital theorists point out, suggests evidence of sex influence in handedness determination. From families in which one or both of the parents are left-handed, the percentage of left-handed children is 17.34 per cent.; in families in which neither of the parents is left-handed, only 2.1 per cent. of the children are left-handed. Two left-handed parents nearly always have a left-handed child.

If left-handedness were not inherited, not more than 5 per cent. of left-handed children would be found in any of these families, regardless of the handedness of parents, according to Herbert D. Chamberlain, Ohio State University psychologist.

Most psychologists agree that children should not be broken of left-handedness. They hold that a child forced to disturb the natural use of the hand he wishes to use will be nervous and uncomfortable. The higher percentage of left-handers in asylums for the insane is attributed to just this cause. In at least 11 per cent. of the cases, tests show, the children so tampered with will stammer or stutter. The reason is that the change disturbs the nerve-centers used in reading, writing and speech.

There is a difference of opinion here, too. Dr. Louis E. Bisch, New York psychologist, says no harm will ensue. The only thing that might ensue, he says, is that the child would stammer, temporarily. And stammering can be cured easily.

*Investigators at the Worcester State Hospital, in Massachusetts, announced last week that everybody's left side was warmer than the right side, but left feet or left hands were likely to be colder instead of warmer. While its cause has not been proved, they said it may be related to differences in the distribution of blood to different parts of the body, the parts that have the better blood supply being kept a trifle warmer than others.