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THE NERVOUS SYSTEM¹

By Dr. EDGAR DOUGLAS ADRIAN

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THE lower creatures do not meet to discuss the factors which determine their behavior. "Know thyself" is a precept reserved for *homo sapiens*; indeed the more academic our discussion the better we shall demonstrate our true position in the animal kingdom.

We are animals with powers of reflection and foresight, who can use tools and form propositions. Our knowledge and attainments can increase from one generation to another because our children can learn from our successes and failures. In the last hundred years we have found out so much about the material world that we have acquired immense new powers of action on it. What have we found out meanwhile about ourselves?

There have been no practical achievements comparable to the radio set or the flying machine, but no

¹ Given at the Harvard Tercentenary Conference of Arts and Sciences, Cambridge, September 7, 1936.

one can doubt that ideas about human behavior are vastly different from what they were over fifty years ago. Our conduct is no longer as right or wrong as it was. We think of it still as the outcome of a conflict between opposing forces, but we do not postulate forces wholly good and wholly evil. In some lands they are now thought of as racial or class instincts: here we have more choice and are free, if we wish to see ourselves driven by the more primitive forces which Freud has made respectable. But everywhere human behavior has become something to be studied by the methods of natural science, as objectively as possible.

As a foundation to this study there is a mass of information about the mechanism of the body. The behavior of any animal must depend in part on general structure—its shape, size, number of limbs, arrangement of sense organs, etc., and with man there

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