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THE BEGINNINGS OF SOCIAL BEHAVIOR IN UNICELLULAR ORGANISMS¹

By Professor H. S. JENNINGS

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT LOS ANGELES

By social behavior we mean the behavior and reactions of individuals with relation to other individuals as such; reactions to individuals as individuals, either singly or in combination, not merely reactions to physical forces or to masses present in the environment.

How far down in the biological scale does such social behavior extend? Are social urges and instincts and reactions part of the life of the very cells of which organisms are made? Or are they manifestations only of relations that have first come into existence in the great complexes of cells that constitute higher organisms?

I have of late been forced in the course of investi-

gations to become intimately familiar with the daily and most private life of certain organisms, each of which is a single microscopic cell. The phenomena that thus come under observation throw light on the most primitive manifestations of social behavior. I shall try to present the main features of these phenomena, with certain of the reflections and conclusions to which they give rise. They raise the question: What is the nature of the earliest manifestations of social behavior; and perhaps they help us to answer it. They bear also upon the problem of the unity of the manifestations of life in higher and lower organisms. And they lead to a reconsideration of certain other questions that are related to the problems of social behavior: particularly to a question that has been discussed as the problem of self-consciousness in animals.

¹ Leidy Lecture, delivered before the section on Natural Sciences of the University of Pennsylvania Bicentennial Conference, Philadelphia, September 18, 1940.