

THE HOME

The Child Problem

Every one is interested in knowing something about the child. There are many reasons, in fact, why he should be a center of univernal attraction. His innocence and simplicity refresh us; his tenderness and pliability leave him the apt subject of our suggestions; his exuberance of feeling often inspires our lagging spirits, and rejuvenates our blood with the fire of his youth; finally, he is our hope, for in the ordinary course of nature, he will one day be a man and enter into the domain of men's affairs.

There are several phases of the child's life to which we might profitably devote our attention. Leaving aside, however, all other considerations, we must restrict ourselves in this series of articles to an examination of his mental growth. On the physical and moral aspects of his development we shall touch only in so far as they have their bearing on the genesis of his mental powers.

At the very outset it may be noted that in the first years, the child's inward life can scarcely be described except in terms of sensation and reaction to external stimuli. All his activities during this early period are preparatory to what will eventually become mental action in the strict sense, such, namely, as proceeds from intellect and will. So in his babyhood, we must study him as the behaviourist analyzes the adult; we must observe his conduct; we must watch closely his muscular movements; we must note carefully the effect of physical environment upon his waxing powers. Such is the only means of knowing what transpires within his limited atmosphere.

It is extremely difficult to enter into the feelings of the child. We are forced to describe his inner life in the same terms that we apply to ourselves, and thus we frequently misinterpret his actions. When the infant is born he is capable of only the most simple and elementary sensations. Later he learns to associate these sensations with the objects that give rise to them. This we call perception; in it is contained the germinal notion of cause and effect. It is necessary to remember that in the early period of the child's life there are only the seeds of rational activity; before they will blossom and mature they need the further cultivation of the material soil, the sensory apparatus, to which they are attached, on whose development they depend for their own expansion.