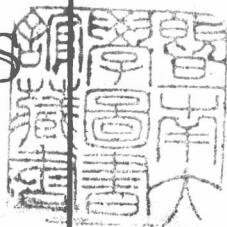


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BABIES ARE HUMAN BEINGS

An Interpretation of Growth



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"hands that itch to hold the spoon . . ."

BABIES ARE HUMAN BEINGS



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Objectives

SEVERAL YEARS AGO I was asked to give a course on the growth and development of children to the medical students at Northwestern University. Since no single textbook could possibly cover so varied a subject, the material for discussion had to be gathered, bit by bit, from the great number of books and articles on growth which have been published during the last twenty-five years. My search led me wandering agreeably through the wide and diverse fields of medicine, physiology, psychology, philosophy, anthropology and education.

This composite preparation showed me that the facts of growth need not be, as is usually supposed, a dull bundle of statistics, but might be instead the very essence of a practical understanding of children. For as this study brought into relief some of the more striking characteristics of young human beings, the babies under my care became in my mind something very different from our traditional idea of them. I began to feel that we do not half appreciate the peculiar value of our own human quality of being.

To think of these babies in terms of their progressive growth changes, enlivened and deepened my picture of them in much the same way that a movie gives a perspective not caught by a flat photograph. Even newly born babies became active, hard-working members of society instead of static bundles wrapped in flannel. Seen against a

developmental background they became human beings in a three-fold sense; as products of their evolutionary past, as dynamic living creatures and as potential adults.

In discussing this drama of growth with the parents of young children, it was evident that they, too, got pleasure and profit from looking ahead for the changes so rapidly taking place, and their foreknowledge of these changes helped to give meaning and point to the care of their children. The fun they got out of establishing this rapport with their babies convinced me that such information should be just as familiar and as available to parents as information about baths and formulas. For without an appreciation of what babies are really like and what they are trying to do, it is impossible to give them the considerate treatment during the early months of life which will modify the rigors of their new world and make them ready for a successful childhood.

Those who are interested in mental hygiene are continually laying stress on the necessity for early consideration of the mental health of children. But psychologists and psychiatrists rarely have the opportunity to see large numbers of babies professionally, except occasionally under the controlled circumstances of research. As a result, it is the parents, nurses and physicians who, by their close and constant contact with young children, are influencing mental health whether they realize it or not.

In the early years of childhood, physical and mental functions are so merged in the plan of growth that they cannot be considered separately. In fact, at this age mental growth is measured by physical accomplishment. Since this is so, there can be no mental hygiene as sharply distinguished from physical hygiene. Considerate physical care is good mental hygiene in infancy. To give a baby all the warmth,

comfort and cuddling that he seems to need; to meet his wishes in the matter of satisfying and appropriate food; to adjust our habit-training to his individual rhythm; and to see that he has an opportunity to exercise each new accomplishment as it emerges; these are the beginnings of a forward-looking program in mental hygiene.

Every human being, as he grows into childhood, must inevitably be hampered and opposed by the restrictions of his environment, and the best we can hope for is to modify somewhat the urgency of this conflict. The degree to which we are considerate of our baby's early needs, however, may be the measure of his later ability to feel secure in a world of change and to adapt himself to the necessities of circumstance.



For practical purposes this book is written from a pediatric standpoint, but the development of its ideas has been, from our first planning of it, a joint project with my wife, Mary M. Aldrich. Not only has she participated in the selection of materials and in editing, but also she has shaped the course of its thinking to a large extent, and contributed much of the actual writing. It is appropriate, therefore, that she share the title-page, since she is in every sense its co-author.

It would be impossible to give due credit to the original sources of the material on growth presented here. But to those who have led in the research which has been most instructive, we would like to express our appreciation, not only for the tangible results of their labors but also for the vision which made them foresee the practical value of their work in the lives of children. The contributions of Arnold

Gesell, Richard E. Scammon, T. W. Todd, Alfred H. Washburn, Charlotte Bühler, W. Preyer and many others, are in constant use by every student of growth.

The following chapters are merely an attempt to select from the complicated processes which these observers have so painstakingly revealed, a few of the simpler and more relevant facts of growth, and to present them as a means of understanding babies. They contain no specific instructions or formulas except where development furnishes its own formula; and since their contents are for the interest of parents and those who care for young children, technical language has been avoided wherever possible. The authors also hope that throughout these pages, any soarings of pure theory have been well tempered by the salutary experience of having themselves raised a family.

BABIES ARE HUMAN BEINGS

Mr. Frank F. Selfridge of Highland Park, Illinois, has contributed the photographs used to illustrate this book. We gratefully acknowledge his skill in catching these fleeting, unstudied expressions of childhood.

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Beginnings

IF WE ARE TO MAKE a candid study of the early growth of babies, we must break through the traditional aura of pink ribbons by which they are ordinarily camouflaged and observe them critically when they are newly born. The simplest way to do this is to visit them where they are found in abundance, in the nursery of any hospital. Here we may get a good view of human beings as they start their independent existence. What can we make out of these young animals soon after they are born? How do they look and act, what can they do, and how do they differ?

If we arrive at the nursery at a quiet time soon after feeding, every baby in the long row appears to be sound asleep. The facial expression of each child has the mask-like repose of a young Buddha. To look only at their faces might lead one to believe in the possibility of absolute rest in human existence. If, however, we draw back the covers on each crib we will see that not one of these babies is lying in a relaxed position in bed. All of them have their arms and legs acutely drawn up as if ready for instant action. Even in deepest sleep their attitude does not relax. In fact, it would take a serious illness to loosen these extremities. The persistence of this position shows us that there is something more than habit in such a dynamic posture and gives us our first hint that even a newly born baby is by no means a passive individual.

Their sleep, instead of being continuous, appears to be a series of cat-naps. Every few minutes a sleeper wakes, moves his arms and legs, shifts his position and drops off again into oblivion.

If, however, instead of taking our walk through the ward when the babies are sleeping we choose a moment just preceding their usual feeding time, there is an unbelievable change in the picture. Where a short time ago we saw a row of placid, expressionless infants, we now find the room a hubbub of shrieks and wails, while the cribs are full of wildly waving hands and feet, and agonized faces. All semblance of placidity is gone in a demonstration of dynamic passion. The starry-eyed, innocent babe, so tenderly described by the poets, must have been winged from Heaven by the Victorian stork just after he had finished dinner. Certainly, he doesn't fit in with these blustering, red-faced brawlers, demanding satisfaction. A visit at meal-time clearly brings to the fore one of the most dominant characteristics of newly born babies, or of human beings at any other age for that matter, the need for gratification. They want their stomachs filled because they hurt! This is human nature in the raw.

Now that these young creatures are awake and active, we can get a closer view of their appearance. Judged by adult standards they are definitely not objects of beauty except to their parents. Their heads are unduly large, taking up one-fourth of the body length, and their legs are much shorter than their arms. Their chests are small and narrow, deeper than wide, and their abdomens are large and prominent. Their skin is red and their eyes remain closed most of the time, occasionally blinking in an expressionless manner. And they all, if the truth were told, look like Andy Gump.

Most new mothers have to be assured that the baby will eventually have a chin, as soon as the jaw bone, which is one of the fastest-growing bones in the body, gets started in its development.

As we look at these crude infants in the hospital it is difficult to believe that they can do anything purposeful. Their behavior, however, is by no means the random activity one would expect of a beginning individual but is, on the contrary, full of meaning. For newly born babies have been at their job a long time and have already gone part way toward their ultimate achievement.

One cannot be specific about the duration of their preparation for living, because as a matter of biologic fact there is no definite point at which life begins. It is true that each human being starts with the union of the sperm and the egg. But before this time growth changes necessary for producing a new life have already occurred in both the egg and the sperm, when the process of maturation which precedes fertilization reduces the number of chromosomes to one-half the original quota in each of these cells. It is evident, therefore, that the process of beginning a new individual antedates fertilization which becomes a mere punctuation point in the stream of life. At birth, then, we are seeing in these babies the result of all the progressive changes which have been taking place during the entire evolutionary period of the race. They have been growing and will continue to grow, according to the specifications of their own hereditary plan of development.

Not only is their growth a going concern before birth but their surroundings also are influencing them during this time. Students of human nature are becoming more and more aware of the importance of pre-natal environment to