

GIFTED CHILDREN

THEIR NATURE AND NURTURE

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TO THE MEMORY
OF
MY GRANDPARENTS
SAMUEL THOMAS DANLEY
MARY BLAIR DANLEY

PREFACE

NEARLY all we know about gifted children has been learned through investigations of the past ten years. A decade ago it would have been impossible to write the book which these pages introduce. The literature of experiment dealing with unfortunate deviates — the stupid, the delinquent, the dependent — has long been voluminous; but the literature dealing with fortunate deviates was until recent years chiefly legendary.

This preoccupation with the incompetent resulted from the natural tendency of human beings to notice whatever is giving them pain or annoyance, taking for granted that which proceeds in an orderly and agreeable manner. It was due also to the wave of uninformed humanitarianism, which rose in the latter half of the eighteenth century, and extended through the nineteenth century. Under this influence, expensive and even palatial institutions were established for the preservation and care of the feeble-minded, the delinquent, the crippled, the insane, and others who varied biologically in the direction of social incompetence. Philanthropy, originally meaning love of man, degenerated to mean love of stupid and vicious man. These efforts were, of course, actuated by the emotionally satisfying doctrine that all human beings are or might be born equal in merit; and that money, education, surgery, medicine, and faith can eventually uplift any and all to the desired level of behavior.

Humanitarianism, which has supported the scientific study

of unfortunate deviates, has now been to some extent informed of the fact that many problems apparently of education or economics are essentially problems of biological heredity and variation. The result of this information has appeared in the past ten years in many ways, one of which is the granting of funds for the study of gifted children. We owe much of the knowledge set forth in this volume to private foundations, established to promote human welfare. In 1918, the General Education Board financed for one year the investigation of Dr. Whipple at Urbana. At about the same time, The Public Education Association of the City of New York assigned the services of a psychologist for the purpose of studying gifted children at Public School 64, Manhattan. Approximately five years later, The Commonwealth Fund gave much larger sums than those appropriated by previous donors, to support the monumental work of Dr. Terman in California; and this subvention was matched by Stanford University for the same purpose. In 1922, The Carnegie Corporation granted money through Teachers College, to make possible an experiment in the education of gifted children in New York City, which was carried on for three years by a joint committee of investigators, at Public School 165, Manhattan, under the principalship of Mr. Jacob Theobald. It is to these appropriations that we owe most of our present knowledge of gifted children as organisms.

Public funds also have been utilized for the study of the gifted, wherever educators have undertaken experimental classes in public schools. Money has thus been spent toward the welfare of the exceptionally competent in all the cities to which reference is made throughout the present volume. To experiments thus supported we owe much of our present knowledge about the school progress of the gifted and about the relative success of various methods of selection.

The appropriations both of private and of public funds thus spent for the gifted are, of course, very small as compared with the millions of dollars being given for the guidance and promotion of the incompetent. Nevertheless, they indicate the onset of change to a healthier social psychology. In fostering this benign change, educators have, perhaps, the greatest opportunity and duty of all professional groups.

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June, 1926

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

THE subject that Dr. Hollingworth treats in this volume is a timely one. It has recently come to engage a large part of the attention, not only of psychologists and educationists but also of laymen. If nature really endows some children intellectually much more generously than she does others — and the data presented in this volume will convince any fair-minded person that this is the case — the fact is of importance to those who are interested in social advancement as well as to those teachers and parents who are striving to do the best they can for each individual committed to their care. The present writer can easily recall the time when everyone thought that “bright” children could look out for themselves — as a result of which opinion they were neglected, in the schools at any rate, in order that teachers might devote all their energies to the less able and the backward pupils. The view generally held in those times was that it would be best for the group as well as for the individual to keep all children in a school class at as near the same level as possible in intellectual development ; or at least, to make a supreme effort to lift up the lowly so that there would not be too great a gap between them and those of their companions who could push ahead more rapidly if encouraged to do so.

A few years ago one rarely heard that social progress depended mainly upon the discovery and development of the gifted child ; or that well-endowed individuals have a right to receive as much attention from teachers and society

in general as less-favored children. But our views on these matters have changed fundamentally. The question of the desirability of discovering and developing to the utmost all our superior children has been pretty generally decided in the affirmative, so that we can now expend our energies in devising instruments for locating highly-endowed children and in determining how best to bring their talents to fruition so that, without any overlooking of their personal interests and well-being, they may become most useful to society.

Dr. Hollingworth's book treats the problems involved in a convincing and illuminating manner. There is presented herein the kind of evidence that a psychologist, a teacher, a parent, or a lay reader would wish to see with respect to the frequency of gifted individuals in the whole group of children; the traits exhibited by those who possess superior ability — whether they are physically below or above par and temperamentally eccentric or stable and normal — how they respond to educative influences; how they are regarded by their associates and their teachers; and, most of all, what kind of educational régime seems best adapted to their powers and their needs.

Dr. Hollingworth has included a large amount of scientific material in her book; but she has presented it in a straightforward, clear, interesting manner; and it may be predicted that this volume will be read easily and with complete comprehension by parents, teachers, and laymen as well as by students of human development and of education. The author combines in an unusual degree scientific acumen, exactitude, and adequacy, with clarity and literary grace.

M. V. O'SHEA

THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

June, 1926

*Nothing is so great a service, nothing so great a gift,
as to give another an opportunity for a task worth
while and the achievement of that success which
comes in the doing.*

— WILLIAM H. BURNHAM

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