

Task for Two



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Editorial Note

This is essentially an Easter School issue. Dr Lowenfeld, who proved a most inspiring lecturer, has written us an article embodying most of the material of her first lecture. Her second will appear in our next issue. Dr Rushforth's lecture on Fulfilment in Marriage is reprinted almost in full, and the remainder of the space has been given to the second part of Dr Darroch's lecture on "Psychology and War."

Task for Two

In studying the adult the facts that come to light are the results of events and processes started in early life. In work with children we are in direct contact with those events and see those processes at work. In the adult the effects of mistakes and failures remain, but many of the potentialities that were present in the child have disappeared by the time adult life is reached. Potentialities, which have not been realised are difficult to trace in adults in whom their presence is unsuspected, but if appropriate means be used in the study and treatment of children they can be brought to light and nourished, and used to help the child to overcome his difficulties by the development within him of the power to find direct expression in life of the forces which are inherent in him.

This approach to the problems of children has been developed through the study and treatment of children suffering from different types of disturbance, which show themselves in physical illnesses, personality disturbances, educational failures and disorders of behaviour. In careful follow-up of these children in later life it is found that they show certain common characteristics. As adolescents and young adults their central feature is their vitality. They are vigorous, independent young people with confidence in themselves and a sense of humour, with keen interests and delight in life and the capacity to enjoy people and things. For example, a boy first seen at the age of seven suffering from very severe asthma, an over-protected delicate child, the despair of his family and the focus of attention of his devoted mother, became in later school years a husky footballer and normal member of a boarding school community, and when he presented himself for medical examination for his call-up, was passed A.i into the R.A.F.

In these lectures, therefore, four nodal points in development are to be discussed: 1. Infancy. 2. The years between the dependence of babyhood and the independence of school life. 3. The years of school, and, 4. The years of later adolescence.

I. INFANCY

In a small baby three processes are simultaneously taking place: —

- (1) The things, which happen to him from the outside: bathing, being dressed, fed, cared for and carried about.
- (2) The physical events happening within him; his breathing and the movements of his bowels, urination, sucking, swallowing and digesting and all the sensations brought him through his special senses
- (3) The inner development of his own personality, his impulses, feelings and thoughts.

Every baby is unique—some are fat and slow in reaction and response; some thin, eager and quick in movement and reaction; some sensitive and vulnerable; some relatively insensitive and cheerful. It is possible, to some extent, to regulate the outside handling of infants, but exactly similar handling may appear to have a very different impact upon different individual babies. To consider for a moment each of these three points in turn: —

- (1) Too often to parents and nurses a baby is either a bundle of automatic responses, something to be cared for, or is handled like a doll. The basic experiences then that the infant has are of impersonal contacts, of being treated as if he, himself, his inmost personality did not exist.
- (2) Every baby is different—different in his rate of physiological response, the inter-relation of the events going on within him, the detail of his needs and bodily hungers.
- (3) Although to some extent a general pattern is discernable in his interior personal experiences, yet in each baby the relation of these to each other within the baby are different and will develop on lines unique to that particular baby.

The very impossibility of knowing beforehand what kind of a baby a new infant is going to be arouses great anxiety in young mothers. As knowledge of the needs of baby's increases so, in these days, does the tendency of mothers to rely on books, advice from neighbours and articles in the papers, and as these are so often directed to babies of other temperaments than their own, anxiety increases. The essential need for every mother is to *get to know her own baby*, to become intimate with him and to allow herself to respond to his demands.

The coming of babies, and particularly the first baby, into a marriage makes a special demand upon fathers, which some fathers find delightful and some difficult to respond to. The father of a new baby needs to be willing to

allow his wife a new intimacy, to wish profoundly that his wife should make a new relationship from which he, for the time, is excluded, and to support her in it. Fathers are very important for babies, as only with their support and encouragement can a mother lay the right foundation for her baby.

In handling a small baby the factor of greatest importance to the baby is that the mother shall enjoy her contact with him. The central fact about the mother-baby relationship is that it is a simple physical contact between two human bodies; and every aspect of it should be enjoyable to both.

If a mother succeeds in establishing this pleasure in contact the baby will start life with a sure foundation.

Naturalness and reality are of fundamental importance to the mother-baby relationship. A mother needs to realise that her baby is a real person like herself, having moods as she has moods, and to be natural with him, accepting her own changes of feeling towards the baby and the baby's changes of feelings towards herself.

Although she can control the outer timetable the baby has very important experiences in his own body, which she cannot control. These experiences and her responses to them form the key to his later life and it is the reactions to them that will determine the general trend of his development in after life. Babies should, and can, enjoy every process in their bodies, feeding, sleeping, and feeling warm and comfortable, excreting, and moving, and if they are allowed to do so this pleasure in themselves will lay a foundation for spontaneous enjoyment of themselves in adult life which nothing can upset.

But a baby's desires are, to begin with, insatiable, and life cannot give him all he wants and so rage sets in, healthy rage. This is a new experience and in itself both satisfying and terrifying. It arouses an intimate loss of security. For the moment it seems to the baby that his world is shattered, his mother and himself are in pieces. If his mother knows about all this and understands its essential nature and is herself serene, she will not be troubled by it, she will hold her baby quietly and confidently and give it time, that most important element, time to find itself, for its rage to die down, for the child to learn the lesson that rage ends and everything is restored again. This experience, constantly repeated, is the kernel of inner security, the first element in the belief of a child that life is trustworthy. In analysis of both adults and children there is a theme, which constantly recurs—that of the finding of the treasure which has been buried. This is the repetition of inner experiences “which are central in value”—the finding of that confidence in life, that treasure of one's own inner experiences, that gives value to oneself and security in one's contact with the outside world.

At first this treasure is within, it “happens” it cannot be controlled, it turns up here and there, it is sought and lost. But with the coming of the second year the baby begins to be able to do things for himself, to explore himself and the outside world, to use his sensations to test and examine the

outside world. He can now do things to people where formerly they could only do things to him.

In this stage a child needs

- (1) To find out *what* he can do.
- (2) To learn the smells, sights and sounds of ordinary things and to distinguish between them.
- (3) To learn what the adults around him think and feel about what he does and about the things with which he is surrounded; what they approve of and what they do not.

Here it is that the inherent difference between babies begin to manifest itself. Some babies are by nature confident and exploring, they take rebuffs easily and easily forgive the outside world and themselves. Other babies retreat from experience, suffer acutely from rebuffs, find it difficult to re-establish their confidence. Such babies suffer acutely from anxiety about what is happening inside their bodies, they watch the faces of the adults who tend them and react to expressions of annoyance or anger with intense fear of themselves and of their feelings so that a split begins to appear within them. They try to separate themselves from their experience, to retreat to a place within themselves where this experience will not find them and to stifle their normal reactions to themselves.

In every sense of the body there is hidden delight—life is vivid, real and exciting. Infancy is the age of keen joy and profound living and at the same time of profound “thought.” All this can be lost from the personality if the child turns away from it and cannot identify himself with his own experience; it becomes then the buried treasure which in later life the child may cease even to believe in or seek for himself, the treasure which he may never find again. The handling of infancy therefore holds the key to successful development for every individual. Recent work on infant study in all countries is bringing home to us the immense importance for the whole of life and for the whole of society of the proper handling of this stage of life: the immense importance of loving care, of responsiveness and naturalness, and the central value of an infant’s delight in himself and his mother.

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