Aspects of Child Life and Education

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By

G. STANLEY HALL AND SOME OF HIS PUPILS

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PREFACE

"The highest study of mankind is man," but we can never
know man without knowing the stages of his "father," the
child. The wave of interest in child study which swept over
this country some three decades ago, and even inundated
Europe, was a culture movement of great significance, no mat-
ter what value we attribute to its scientific results. It taught us
that the child and its characteristic traits are ages older than
adulthood, which is a comparatively recent superstructure, and
that success in life is far more dependent than we had realized
on a happy childhood. Another effect of the movement was to
give psychology, which has been slower and more reluctant than
even religion to recognize evolution, something of a genetic
trend, which has been greatly reinforced of late, at least for a
large and important group of scientific minds, by the new con-
ceptions of childhood contributed by the psychoanalysts. The
latter, holding that unconscious trends in the soul are really
more important than those that are conscious, believe that dur-
ing the first three or four years of life the foundations of
character, not only emotional but volitional and intellectual, are
laid, and they practically identify childhood with this larger,
stronger, subliminal soul (Das Unbewusste ist das Kindliche).

The school and most teachers under our "mass and class
system" are eternally prone to look primarily at the subject
matter they have to teach and to follow logical methods.
Paidology brings a Copernican revolution here, and regarding
primarily the nature and needs of the child, considers chiefly
the genetic order and gives interest and zest almost the pre-
eminence that the early Christian Church gave to the Holy
Ghost. “The child is what it becomes” (Est ist was es wird), as Schleicher defined language, and the first care of teachers and parents should be to get out of Nature’s way and allow her free scope, and avoid excessive checks and inhibitions. This is quite in the line of the homely old conception of Socrates that the teacher was the midwife of the soul whose life function it was to help Nature along her own lines and to erect every safeguard against disaster. From this standpoint the real value of every subject in the curriculum and every method is whether and how much it helps orthogenic development, and the value of not only the school but every institution is how much it contributes to bring individuality to the fullest and most mature development of which it is capable.

It was in accordance with this conception that we began at Clark University, more than three decades ago, to apply the questionnaire method, already in various forms so serviceable to anthropology, to the study of special aspects of child life, utilizing childish memories of adults and direct observations of children, whether made at first hand or from literature. I find, in looking over the more than six-score themes that have been thus studied, that most of them fall into certain general groups, each having been a theme of special study:

(1) Relations to Nature, including the child’s experience with light and darkness, day and night; his feelings toward the infinite vault of blue sky above us; the stars; the sun in all the stages of its progress through the sky; the moon, our nearest celestial neighbor, so often worshiped and so indispensable in the romance of poetry and love; clouds and their forms as schools of the imagination; the phenomena of storm, including rain, thunder, and lightning; heat and cold, along with fire and frost; rocks and earth; trees and forests; flowers and the sentiments they inspire; animals, with special studies on the cat and dog, revealing the infantile bases of totemism. Thus we sought roughly to delineate the spontaneous feeling of children towards Nature, animate and inanimate, a theme, the
influences of which in the history of literature have been so carefully traced by Riese, and to show how fundamental these responses of the soul of the child in its earliest years toward country scenes and life are as affording the bases for the art and literature that deals with these objects, sentiments toward which are the foreshools of religion and the foundation of natural science.

(2) Another group of these themes dealt with the development of the sense of self. Closely connected with this also is the compilation of children’s early concepts as to the nature of the soul, which are found to be in such close rapport with those of primitive people. With this, too, are connected other special studies of children’s foods and appetites, including their infantile experiments; the topic of shame, modesty, and self-consciousness generally; the psychology of dress, clothes, and ornaments; early experiences with illness; children’s ambitions or the motives of emulation and self-affirmation and aggressiveness; jealousy, rivalry, and envy; egoism and altruism.

(3) Closely connected with this was the group of studies made on the fundamental affectivities of the child. Here belong the papers on pleasure and pain, including crying and laughing, the development of the algedonic scale, leading up to the sense in which education is teaching us to take pleasure in things we ought and to feel pain and displeasure as we ought to do. Then came the study of shock and children’s fears, which are in a sense the beginning of wisdom, because fear has always been the schoolmaster of the world and, as Aristotle said, education might be defined as teaching us to fear aright. We are also now coming to realize the great importance of morbid fears or phobias, of which medical literature records many score, and these studies enable us to realize how many forms of arrest and even mental perversion are due to unwise fears. Next came the studies of anger, which at its best typifies the aggressive nature of man which has made him ruler of the world and enabled him to attack and
overcome so many of the difficulties that have beset his path, and the sthenic energy of which has prompted the expression that the sum of wisdom is teaching us to be angry aright, viz., at the things that really deserve condemnation and removal, making it thus in a sense the opposite of fears, which make for docility. Then came the studies of sympathy and pity so basal for the herd instinct in gregarious man, the classic expression or masterpiece of which in Christendom is the story of the Cross.

(4) This led to the studies of the social impulses, and these are illustrated in monographs on the gang and rudimentary society among boys; the dangers of being the only child; reactions of children, youth, and even adults to solitude versus the opposite tendency to think, feel, and act group-wise until individuality is lost; studies of suggestion and imitation, including some score of fads; the instinct of leadership; the impulse of teasing, fooling, and cruelty versus hypersensitivity to the pain and suffering in the world. Here, too, belong the study of most plays and games; and perhaps we might place in this group also the emulation, competition, and rivalry; the first burgeoning of the sense of justice; studies of the early manifestations of sex; calf love; prepubescent and adolescent phenomena, and the effects of coeducation.

(5) Besides these rougher groupings, various studies were made of juvenile manifestations of fun, wit, and humor; the development of the instinct of rhythm and dancing; children’s dreams, along with reverie and daydream, which mark the dawn of imagination; response to folklore; studies of their curiosity and interest, of their spontaneous drawings; attempts at artistic creations; their fetishes; collections; the beginnings of property ownership; punishments, both in school and home; conceptions of and attitude toward childhood in different nations, races, and stages of development; the childish attitude toward authority; the earliest expressions of the religious instinct; a few studies on the development of the idea of number,
and more than a score of special ones on the growth of language in young children, including their vocabularies, etc. It is out of this large field that I have selected these nine papers as samples of the rest and illustrations of the questionnaire method, which has both its strong and weak points as applied to children. From its very nature it can never be accurate, but its highest merit lies in its suggestiveness.

From this general movement toward an embryology of the soul has sprung up a new interest in the original or primal nature of man, the chief traits of which are developed in the earliest stages of life. While the method of these later studies has been far more accurate, and hence these studies have made remarkable approximations toward finality in some directions, they have chiefly been directed to intellectual qualities and very few can be called in any sense dispositional, so that along with great advance in thoroughness the field has been very greatly narrowed to a study of more measurable qualities, such as accuracy in spelling, writing, number work, the accuracy and span of memory, with many a test of general ability. These newer studies were mostly based on the Binet-Simon tests until the war, and the application of these methods to soldiers and in personnel work and in college entrance examinations has, although we are thus taken into the teens and twenties, resulted as yet in less consensus regarding methods and results than the Binet data had given us before puberty. We have still no methods of gauging the great fundamental impulses such as the capacities for pleasure and pain, fear, anger, sympathy, or even interest; nor have we made any progress in studying the very significant and characteristic phenomena of second breath in its various aspects, which gives us power to call upon our reserve racial energies, so important in the battle of life.

The following papers have been selected from the above long list, not with a view to unity but rather to suggest as wide and diversified a range of topics as possible.

(1) The first paper, "The Contents of Children’s Minds on
Entering School," appeared more than thirty years ago and marked the beginning of this type of child study in America. Something like it had already been tried in Berlin, and this inventory was made possible by Mrs. Pauline Agassiz Shaw, who placed four of her expert kindergartners, headed by Miss S. E. Wiltse and Miss L. H. Symonds, at my disposal for this work. As the child's mental content differs so much in different localities, it has often been suggested that something of this kind should be undertaken in every community so that a teacher may have some idea as to what she can assume, and especially what she cannot assume, as already present in the child's mind. An official report published some years ago of the children who entered the schools of London indicated that those who entered later did better than those who entered earlier because the educational influences of the street and of the country had enabled the late-comers to acquire a number of facts and concepts which gave them better apperceptive organs and more ability to assimilate the matter of instruction than those whose school life began earlier.

(2) The article on "The Psychology of Daydreams" touches a subject to which psychoanalysis has since given the very greatest prominence and the importance of which is now more adequately appreciated. It is in these moments of revery that the mind often grows most rapidly, and not only are experiences and tales rehearsed and amplified and sometimes idealized, but impressions and images are grouped in new orders. Vaschide well says in substance that creative imagination is by no means chiefly founded on memory or even sense. Indeed, its richness seems often inversely as these. The ordinary laws of association do not dominate here. Instead of explaining the unknown by the known, the child often reverses this process. In daydreams he is often only semiconscious and may be sometimes faintly rehearsing the experiences of his remote forbears. Archaic laws often rule even where the material digested is made up of the facts of individual life.