

PSYCHOLOGICAL CARE OF INFANT AND CHILD

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INTRODUCTION

EVER since my first glimpse of Dr. Holt's *The Care and Feeding of Children*, I hoped some day to be able to write a book on the psychological care of the infant. I believed then that psychological care was just as necessary as physiological care. To-day I believe it is in some ways more important. Healthy babies do grow up under the most varied form of feeding and bodily care. They can be stunted by poor food and ill health and then in a few days of proper regime be made to pick up their weight and bodily strength.

But once a child's character has been spoiled by bad handling, which can be done in a few days, who can say that the damage is ever repaired?

I know this book is not as complete on the psychological side as Dr. Holt's is on the care of the body, but the behaviourist does not know enough to-day to do a thoroughly satisfactory job. We have only just begun to believe that there is such a thing as the psychological care of infants and children.

A great many mothers still resent being told how to feed their children. Didn't their grandmothers have fourteen children and raise ten

of them? Didn't their own mothers have six and eight children and raise them all—and they never needed a doctor to tell them how to feed them? That many of grandmother's children grew up with rickets, with poor teeth, with under-nourished bodies, generally prone to every kind of disease, means little to the mother who doesn't want to be told how to feed her child scientifically. But thousands of mothers have found in Dr. Holt something as valuable as the Bible. The twenty-eight editions of his work abundantly prove this.

Parents—mothers especially—resent still more strenuously any advice or instructions on how to care psychologically for their children. What parents want advice on how much affection they should bestow upon their children or any word about how their children should be handled and treated hourly in the home? "I can't take my child up in my lap! I can't let my children sleep together! I can't let my child play around me all I want to! I can't slap him or scold him if I care to! I have to begin talking sex to him the moment he is born! Who ever heard of such a thing?" And do not think this is a backwoods attitude. In every city, village, and town you find just such parents. You find the same resistance in the homes of university professors and in the homes even of pediatricians. Even in the homes

of "advanced" mothers—mothers who are listening eagerly for words of wisdom about the care of their children—you find the complaint: "The behaviourists are on the right track, but they go too far."

It is a serious question in my mind whether there should be individual homes for children—or even whether children should know their own parents. There are undoubtedly much more scientific ways of bringing up children, which will probably mean finer and happier children. I suppose parents want their children to be happy, efficient, well adjusted to life. But if I were to offer to take any mother's child and guarantee it such an upbringing, and were even to convince the mother at the same time that she was unquestionably unfitted to bring up her child—that she would inevitably bring up a weakling, a petted, spoiled, sullen, shy youngster who would grow up a liar and a thief—would she give up the child to me? No, the social pressure to have a child, to own a child, to be known in the community as a woman with a legitimate child, is strong—it is a part of our *mores*.

The home we have with us—inevitably and inexorably with us. Even though it is proven unsuccessful, we shall always have it. The behaviourist has to accept the home and make the best of it. His task is to try to get the

mother to take a new view of what constitutes the care of an infant—of her responsibility for her experiment in child-bearing.

Since the behaviourists find little that corresponds to instincts in children, since children are made not born, failure to bring up a happy child, a well-adjusted child—assuming bodily health—falls upon the parents' shoulders. The acceptance of this view makes child-rearing the most important of all social obligations.

Since the most serious faults in the rearing of children are to be found on the emotional side, I have put especial emphasis upon the growth of emotional habits. The other two phases taken up are day- and night-time care and the kind and amount of sex instruction that should be given.

One of the many criticisms which may be argued against the book is the fact that I have written principally to mothers who have leisure to devote to the study of their children. The reason I have chosen these more fortunate mothers as my audience, grows out of the hope I have that some day the importance of the first two years of infancy will be fully realized. When it is faced, every woman will seriously question whether she is in a proper situation to have a child. To-day we debate whether we can buy a motor-car; whether the house or flat is big enough to keep a dog; whether we

can afford to belong to a club. But the young mother rarely questions whether her home can house a child or whether her husband's salary or weekly wage will stretch far enough to feed another incessantly hungry body. No, she has the child and we all rush to congratulate the pair and smile and smirk over an occurrence which takes place each year. The having of a child should be a carefully thought out operation. No mother has a right to have a child who cannot give it a room to itself for the first two years of infancy. I would make this a *conditio sine qua non*.

When our homes come to realize that the child has a right to a separate room and adequate psychological care, there will not be nearly so many children born. *Not more babies, but better brought up babies* will be our slogan. The idea that our population must sustain itself and show an increase is an old fetish growing out of tribal warfare. Why should we care if the birth-rate begins to decline—even more rapidly than that of France? There are too many people in the world now—too many people with crippled personalities—tied up with such a load of infantile carry-overs (due to faulty bringing up) that they have no chance for happy lives.

The purpose of this small volume will be accomplished abundantly if it contributes in

any way to help the serious mother to solve the problem of bringing up a happy child: a child who never cries unless actually stuck by a pin, illustratively speaking; who loses himself in work and play; who quickly learns to overcome the small difficulties in his environment without running to mother, father, nurse, or other adult; who soon builds up a wealth of habits that tides him over dark and rainy days; who puts on such habits of politeness and neatness and cleanliness that adults are willing to be around him, at least part of the day: a child who is willing to be around adults without fighting incessantly for notice; who eats what is set before him and "asks no questions for conscience' sake"; who sleeps and rests when put to bed for sleep and rest; who puts away two-year-old habits when the third year has to be faced; who passes into adolescence so well equipped that adolescence is just a stretch of fertile years; and who finally enters manhood so bulwarked with stable work and emotional habits that no adversity can quite overwhelm him.

JOHN B. WATSON.

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