

THE MENTAL UNFOLDMENT OF THE CHILD.

ROSE MC COY.

The child when born into this world is perfectly helpless. He is the most helpless of all animals, and if not cared for with the tenderest care would certainly perish. It is believed by some that he can neither see nor hear until several days after birth. He is but a mass of living flesh, created to the image and likeness of God. His powers are limited and at this stage lie dormant. His development is measured by that which makes him more like the Infinite.

Though a child is the most helpless of all animals at birth he becomes the most powerful as his capabilities develop. Dr. A.R. Taylor uses the following illustration. "Here lies in my hand a young bird; all it can be, all it can do, may now be written at once by any one. Who dare say, what that babe lying in yonder cradle shall be and do? Who is able to place a limit upon the result of its efforts at reaching up toward the Infinite?"

Our first knowledge of ourselves and of the outside world is gained through the senses. If it were not for the senses we possess we would never awaken to realization of this life, could never appreciate the powers of man and never know the possibility of ourselves possessing such capabilities.

At first the senses are all dormant but after a short time there is a differentiation among them and this begins with the sense of taste. The sense of taste has been educated to the extent that "Expert tea tasters in the employ of the great tea houses can easily recognize as high as fifty different kinds of teas that have been mixed and steeped together." As the musician depends on the sense of hearing so the cook depends upon the sense of taste. The blending of flavors is something that all cooks must learn. Many a meal of good rich food has been wasted by the cook who has not learned to use flavors in the right proportion. The education of this sense should be watched and cared for, as so much of our future life depends upon it. Stimulating drinks

are to be avoided. A child who has inherited the tendency to drink strong and intoxicating liquors can be so educated that he will overcome this tendency.

The other senses develop in order of intellectual importance; the sense of smell being the next to become differentiated, and without it our food would not have the proper taste. The physician uses the sense of smell to guide him in his diagnosis and treatment of many diseases; the cook, the botanist, the chemist all use this sense as a special guardian in their profession.

The sense of touch protects us against many physical injuries. Through the sense of touch we are immediately told whether an object is hot or cold, smooth or rough, etc. We cannot see nor describe any object as it really is unless we understand the condition of the external appearance. By simply looking at any object and describing it from the standpoint of the sense of sight we would not be able to discriminate between it and some similar appearing object. When the child touches an object, he gets a sensation; he touches himself and he recognizes two sensations, and until he is able to do this, he cannot distinguish between himself and anything else.

He who cannot hear, lives as it were in an atmosphere of stillness. The sense of hearing gives us pitch, intensity and quality of sound, which are the fundamental principles. In order to sing or play well our sense of hearing must be cultivated to the highest extent and if at all defective we could never become a musician. The ability of anyone to receive or transmit the exact sound is wholly dependent upon the ear. What is not heard perfectly cannot be transmitted perfectly. Music lifts and inspires man more than anything else can do and to appreciate music to the highest extent we must be able to hear every tone perfectly. Many other benefits are derived from a perfect ear, as the estimation of distances and direction by the volume of the sound heard.

If we could not see, think of the world of darkness that would surround

us and of how we would have to cultivate our imagination to all appreciate our surroundings. The aesthetic senses could be only partially developed without sight.

We have seen that the senses communicate with the outside world and the working of the brain is guided by them. Unless the mind responds to the working of the brain, nothing but sensations result. An adult can think and reason from what he already knows, but a child has no such store of knowledge and must depend upon sensations from the various objects studied. He must be guided and made to study these sensations. Each sense performs its functions by gathering material and bears its relation to the mind by converting this material into knowledge. But the knowledge of pain, joy, etc. is conveyed through our consciousness. The consciousness of the child is very simple. It is not observation as is that of a man, but simple sensations. He is not self-conscious, he is not aware of his abilities or importance as is an adult and we can study him in his true nature. He cannot at first clearly distinguish between others and himself, but he begins to imitate those about him and finally realizes that he is somewhat different, so becomes self-conscious. The child gradually acquires self-consciousness though his opinion of self is ever changing. One day he thinks of himself as possessing some great gift and the next day he finds some one who is more gifted along that line than himself. This would of course change his opinion of himself.

While the child is thus gaining consciousness he is comparing and finding out where one thing is like or different from another. He is interpreting the new by means of the old. This is the process of apperception. A child will select from a number of objects the thing that gives him most pleasure, or that which has the power of arousing pleasure. Anything that causes pleasure arouses interest. But he cannot recognize the use of an object unless he knows that the object possesses such properties. Therefore any new object brought before the child must be explained or he must learn by experience. Apperception is not

complete until he can identify the new with the familiar. An infant has no power of speech, it knows no language, but if left alone it would soon form one.

A child from three to twelve years, as a rule, has words to express its thoughts. It is seldom that he will hesitate as will the youth of sixteen or eighteen years. He can tell what he thinks or knows with greater ease than the youth who thinks of the word he wants to use and the form in which he will express his thoughts. As the child advances toward youth, we find he uses words for other purposes than for the explanation of visible objects. He will explain his experiences of the past, explain imaginary pictures, and he begins to judge and reason.

The development of the child in any direction depends upon the nervous system which controls the movements of every organ of the body. The movements of a very young child are due to reflex action. A reflex movement will throw the body in a position. But the placing of the hand or foot in a certain position is something that needs the direction of the will. When the child becomes conscious of any movement, he has begun to realize the ideals he has built and this is what we find in our adults. Through these movements the child gradually sees the difference between himself and the outside world and he sees that he exists independently. Sound utterance depends upon the muscular or motor control of the muscles of the vocal cords, the motion of the lips, shape of the mouth and those that control respiration. By practising the movements of any of the muscles we get a mental picture of that movement.

When the nerves are excited we get a sensation; sound, light, etc. are sensations and are called feelings. Feelings are signs of mental consciousness; they force themselves upon the child; some drawing particular attention; others excluded entirely. Emotions are feelings that are entirely of mental origin. Some are pleasurable; some are painful. They get the pleasurable or unpleasurable characters from the harmonious or lack of harmonious workings with self.

Thought is always preceded by an emotion. Show a child a stick of candy, he gets a sensation of sight, he at once recognizes the object and an emotion of pleasure is aroused.

The emotions of a child are revealed by nervous activity. The expression on the face or movement of some kind will enable any one to read the feelings of a child. This is not so easily done in an adult. The child has by this time learned to use his reasoning powers. There are two methods of reasoning; the inductive and the deductive. The inductive method reasons from individual facts to general principles. The deductive method reasons from general principles to individual facts. A child's reasoning is mostly about concrete objects. The transition to the abstract reasoning is made slowly. The cells of the brain must be trained and developed by some intelligent exercise and this must be given when the child is very young.

In infancy, sense-perception is the chief characteristic. In this stage there is a differentiation among the senses and the child learns to distinguish between himself and others. He is now in the stage of dependence.

As the child advances toward childhood, memory and imagination are the chief characteristics. Childhood is a critical period, the character can be easily defined, and the disposition is shown. Their ideals are constantly changing as they advance in years and new ones are being formed.

In youth thinking and reasoning are the chief characteristics. This is the stage in which the child becomes independent. He is discontent and longs for a change.

Thus the child is unfolded from a state of perfect helplessness to the most wonderful and most powerful of all living beings. During this process all his knowledge is gained and he passes from the innocent and simplicity to the strong minded and complex man.