

MENTAL DISTURBANCES OF CHILDHOOD*

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In an attempt to discuss briefly some of the chief abnormalities in the mental life of children, there are one or two preliminary observations that seem to be in order. First of all the very inclusion of the topic in a section devoted to child welfare seems to the writer to indicate a recent and happy development in the point of view both of those interested in child welfare and in that of the Specialist in mental disease. It is no longer felt by the former that good physique alone is a sufficient goal in a child's development. It is recognized that it is no less important that parallel with the physical there shall be a symmetrical unfolding of the intellectual and emotional powers. In short, it is not merely a healthy animal but an efficient and self-supporting personality which should be the crown of healthy childhood. And on the other side the psychiatrist has come to see that the key to many of the problems of abnormal psychology and abnormal conduct presented by his adult patient, lies in the understanding of the variations of the process of mental development in children. Genetic Psychology has thus contributed not a little to the fuller understanding, both of childhood and of mental disease—an understanding which supplements and fits into the data furnished us by normal physiology.

It is important to remember secondly, that not only do the physical and mental powers of a child develop more or less together, but that each side constantly interacts upon the other, and in consequence any marked disturbance in either sphere is bound to show results in the other. One need only mention the effects of various organic nervous diseases such as hereditary, neuro-syphilis or the after effects of a meningitis to make this obvious. But the result of disturbances which are less apparent, such as endocrine, insufficiency or hyper-activity, or of the lesser degrees of toxemia, are frequently not recognized. But that the condition of the physical functions of a child is a fundamental point in estimating its mental reactions is a truism which cannot be too often reiterated or too constantly kept in mind.

Again it has been well stated that the one word which sums up the whole physical and mental life of childhood is "organization." His physical activities are gradually organized into abilities which will finally make him a producing and self-supporting individual. His mental activities in a parallel way become organized along certain more or less

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