

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CHILDHOOD

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The psychology of childhood by Frederick Tracy & Joseph Stimpfl

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FREDERICK TRACY & JOSEPH STIMPFL

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CHILDHOOD

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PREFACE

THE undersigned have united to issue the second German and seventh English edition of *THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CHILDHOOD*. The earlier text has been submitted to a thorough revision, while the German author has added to the work a series of new paragraphs and a seventh chapter. These enlargements deal principally with abnormal mental conditions in child life. The fundamental importance of child-psychology for the teacher is now no longer a matter of dispute among those best qualified to judge. The psychopathology of childhood is almost equally important. In this book the simple or elementary disorders of the child's psychic life are described in close connection with the corresponding normal conditions; while the complicated disorders, or "psychopathies," are treated by themselves in the newly added seventh chapter. It was the intention of the authors to issue the German and English editions simultaneously; but on account of the illness of the English author the publication of the English edition has been delayed until now. The German edition was published early in 1908.

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INTRODUCTION

THE comparative method of study has commended itself to all the sciences in modern times by its fertility in results, and is now being employed extensively in two principal directions: viz., the analogical and the genetical. The philologist, for example, compares his own language, on the one hand with other languages (in the search for analogies), and on the other avails himself of all manuscripts, inscriptions, etc., which show him his language in its earliest stages, and help him to determine by the operation of what causes, and according to what laws, it has developed from its original crude and inefficient state to its present polished and complicated condition. And similarly with other sciences. In the case of psychology the application of the comparative method has led the investigator to the observation of mental manifestations in the lower animals; in human beings of morbid or defective mental life, such as the insane, the idiotic, the blind, deaf and dumb; in peoples of different types of culture, ancient and modern, savage and civilized; and finally to the study of the mental life in the early stages of its development in the child. Such study has already yielded valuable results, not only for psychology itself (which now finds itself in possession of that genetic point of view which has proved so valuable in other sciences), but most of all for pedagogy, whose very business it is to facilitate the healthy unfolding of that life whose early stages we here seek to understand.

When we compare the young child with the young animal, we cannot fail to be struck by the apparent superiority of the latter over the former, at the beginning of life. The human infant, for example, requires weeks to attain the power of holding his head in equilibrium, while the young chicken runs about and picks up grains of wheat before the first day of his life is over. This, however, carefully considered, is a token rather of the superiority than of the inferiority of the human being, and has most important bearings upon the entire life of the individual, as well as upon the character of human society. The higher you ascend in the scale of being, the more varied and complex is the environment in which the individual moves, and to which he must adapt himself. This adaptation requires, on the physiological side, a cerebral and nervous development, and on the psychic side a mental growth, for which *time* is an absolute necessity. Animals go on all their lives, doing the same simple things, which require a minimum of mental activity, and which, by dint of constant repetition, produce physiological adjustments that become at length hereditary; so that phenomena which seem to the casual observer the index of an astonishing degree of mental advancement—such as the “scampering” of young chicks on a certain peculiar call of the mother—are really at bottom little more than the response of an organism, adjusted by heredity, to the action of an external stimulus.

The longer and more arduous the journey, the more time is required for preparation; the more complicated the art to be acquired, the more extended is the period of apprenticeship. So the child, having an infinitely grander life before him, and infinitely more exalted, complicated and difficult operations to perform—mental, moral and physical—requires a longer period of tutelage than the chicken, which on the first day of his life scratches and pecks, and to the