

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT

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The psychology of child development by Irving King

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**THE PSYCHOLOGY
OF CHILD
DEVELOPMENT**

The Psychology of Child Development

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
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TO

F. B. K.

TO THE INFLUENCE OF WHOSE TRANSITORY LIFE
THESE PAGES ARE DUE

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NOTE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

In preparing this edition I have availed myself of the criticisms and suggestions of many who have kindly offered them. These have in most cases been regarding verbal alterations and the clearing up of the ambiguity in certain passages. I shall be grateful for suggestions of any kind from those who use or read the book in the future.

PREFACE

These studies are an outgrowth of work begun in a seminar in "Mental Development" conducted by Professor Dewey in 1901-2. Their aim is to present a consistent and intelligible outline of the mental development of the child from the standpoint of mental function. They do not pretend to try to cover, even in a general way, all the aspects of child-psychology, but rather to outline a point of view from which it is believed a good deal of the chaotic material of child-study will assume a new significance.

Child-study has fallen into disrepute, not because it is of slight importance to the educator, but because it has been pursued partly in an unscientific fashion and partly with the presuppositions of an out-of-date psychology, which dealt with "powers" rather than the life as a whole. These pages emphasize the point that the attempt to study isolated elements of the child's life is radically unscientific; that we must have as nearly as possible the *complete setting* of an act before we are entitled to say what it is or what it means.

The first chapters on the early development of

the child are of fundamental importance. It is usually presumed that, if the teacher needs any child-psychology at all, it is only that of the years covered by the school period. But if experience is a continuous affair, she surely cannot hope to gain an adequate comprehension of it by studying isolated portions of it only. It is particularly important that the teacher should see clearly that the mental functions can be rightly understood only in the broader setting of activity which gives rise to them. These points cannot be clearly comprehended except through a study of the earliest mental development. Hence the teacher cannot afford to neglect the study of the earliest phases of mental growth.

We take it for granted that the prime prerequisite for successful teaching is the interpretation of the child, the discovery of what the things the child feels and does can mean to him with his relatively undifferentiated experience, not what they would mean to an adult with a broader and more highly specialized form of life. We grant that such a knowledge does not furnish a rule-of-thumb guide for the teacher who faces concrete situations and problems, but why should it be expected to do so? It furnishes a knowledge of *what* she is dealing with, and that should certainly be fundamental in all methods of instruction.

We believe there are two causes for teachers as a whole failing to profit by the study of psychology: first, they go to it expecting to get something that it cannot give, and hence they fail to get what it really can give them; in the second place, they go to the wrong sort of a psychology, or rather they have been furnished by educators with the wrong sort. They have been compelled to study the mechanism of mental contents in adult life, rather than the mechanism of mental functions developing within complex social situations. In other words, the psychology of the most value to the teacher is the psychology of the unfolding of experience that comes from the interaction of mind with mind.

As we have said, many aspects of child-psychology are left untouched in such a preliminary statement as this book attempts—aspects that are none the less important because they are here neglected. Among these are the problems of physical growth and the great subject of rhythm, so closely allied with the physical organism and its method of development; the questions regarding disease, mental and physical abnormalities, and the whole psychology of defectives. All these problems, and many others, must be taken into account in the complete working out of the child's experience. Even the mental functions