HEADLINES

The roots as well as the effects of war are more closely tied up with the process of child development than many of us had imagined. Some aspects of this relationship are discussed in the present issue.

Among the contributors to this issue are: Anna W. M. Wolf, senior staff member of the Family Guidance and Consultation Service of the Child Study Association, and author of the new book, “Your Children Face War”; Rose H. Alschuler, Chairman of the National Commission for Young Children, and author of “Children’s Centers: A Guide for Those Who Care For and About Young Children”; Dr. Ruth Gillette Hardy, principal of Public School 33 in New York City, who is in charge of the demonstration center of the Public Education Association and the New York City Board of Education known as the All-Day Neighborhood School; Dr. Caroline B. Zachry, Director of the Bureau of Child Guidance of the Board of Education, New York City. The “Science Contributes” article, written by Frances P. Simsarian, a former psychiatric social worker in the Habit Clinic at Children’s Hospital, Washington, D. C., is a follow-up to the article on “Feeding an Infant on a Self-Demand Schedule,” which appeared in the Fall issue.

The Spring issue of Child Study will contain the highlights of the forthcoming Annual Institute of the Child Study Association of America on “The American Family, 1943: Facing the Second Year of War.”
Emotional Problems of the Adolescent and Juvenile Delinquency

By CAROLINE B. ZACHRY

EARLY last fall New York was shocked by the disclosure of the Juvenile Court that delinquency had risen 14 per cent in the first six months of 1942 as compared with a similar period in 1941. Alarming as this situation is, it does not in the least surprise anyone at all familiar with the ways of children and with what war does to them. Children are as susceptible to the general atmosphere of anxiety and tension as to disease; they are disturbed by the interference with their routines, the curtailment of recreation services, the overcrowding in classrooms. The sudden forcing of adult responsibilities upon unready adolescents, the winning of financial independence by relatively young boys and girls, the entry of eighteen-year-old boys into the armed forces, the unsettling effects of early marriages on the next younger group—all these things are telling seriously on children's personality.

But war bears perhaps hardest on children through what happens in their families. An increase in juvenile delinquency is a symptom of other problems among our adolescents, a sign that something is wrong with them emotionally. It is also a sign that something is wrong—radically wrong—with their homes, the daily environment where they have come into being, and which, like the earth and sunlight of the plant, has fostered their growth. War is seriously increasing the disrupting influences in homes. Fathers are departing for war service and mothers for work, leaving many children—temporarily or partially orphaned—to roam the streets unsupervised. In many boom towns housing is badly crowded and unsanitary, and health and social agencies overtaxed. Families migrating across the country in search of work face many difficulties of adjustment. And to all these stresses are added those which come with the notices now being received: "Killed in Action."

We know that adolescence, the period of transition from childhood to adulthood, tends to be the time when emotional stresses reach their peak. To the child's conflict between the urge toward independence and his fear of being unable to achieve it is added the parents' conflict about letting go his hold to make the final break. Even in normal and well-adjusted homes, these are likely to be trying times. But they can be weathered. The emotionally mature parent has recognized, from the time of the child's struggle to separate himself from the mother's body, that the process of growth was a steady pulling away from parental protection. But just as the mother, in the moments after the child's birth, comes far closer to him than when his physical entity was one with hers, so both father and mother may experience, with every evidence of independence, a sense of more complete union. Adolescence thus marks the approach of the fulfillment of parenthood.

But all parents are not emotionally mature. Then the child's growth will have been fraught with a continual struggle—a struggle far more painful and prolonged than the struggle of birth, and which, with adolescence, may well become overwhelming. The parent may seek to hold the child to him by the silver cord, or force him to fulfill some broken dream; he may see in the child the image of an estranged partner's imperfections, or unconsciously reject him as interfering with cherished plans. Frustrated in his own work, he may now become jealous of every sign of budding promise, and secretly and unknowingly be undermining the youngster's self-confidence, while outwardly encouraging it.

It is from such homes that most of our emotionally disturbed adolescents come—the ones who won't work in school, the ones who overwork, the rebellious ones, those with deep-seated fears, the persistent day-dreamers, the habitual truants, the petty thieves. When their disturbances pass a certain borderline, when instability increases and habits take a firmer hold, the emotionally ill adolescent becomes the juvenile delinquent.

These young people present a challenge which must be met if widespread emotional breakdown is to be prevented. We must radically revise the programs of our schools, must extend and strengthen our guidance, health, recreational, and social services, must adapt Army requirements to the needs of these newest recruits. The importance of family counselling and of social agencies at this time cannot be exaggerated. Theirs is the rôle of setting right these emotionally
disturbed homes, of helping parents modify their attitudes, to achieve maturity, and to gain greater insight into their own problems and those of their children.

The parent who enters the office of a family counselling bureau or social agency usually does so in a state of considerable anxiety. While he seeks this agency as he would seek a physician—because there is an illness he is unable to cure by himself—he does not feel the same way as when he visits a physician. Because mental illness is not yet accepted as physical illness is accepted, he feels stigmatized, feels a lurking sense of personal failure or of guilt. Medical science is older than mental hygiene and psychiatry, there are fewer divergencies in schools of thought, and people have more confidence in it as a profession. And—more important still—the body seems divorced from the inner self, while the emotions are the inner self. Thus, while the parent may become grief-stricken, or even broken-hearted, at receiving a physician’s diagnosis of physical ills, he will seldom become conflicted when he hears it; almost never will he become bitterly hostile toward the doctor. But the family counsellor and social worker, like the psychiatrist, must be prepared for such reactions. They must be prepared for vacillation, inconsistency, almost every variety of defensive response.

To this natural anxiety of parents, I am afraid we who would help them have unconsciously added. In our zeal to impress upon mothers the fact that the act of bearing a child does not, ipso facto, bring wisdom to the training of that child, we have allowed the pendulum to swing too far. And, from thinking themselves infallible, mothers and fathers have begun to wonder if they are ever right. They are losing their basic self-confidence, their sense of direction.

The successful counsellor and social worker are fitted, by native endowment and by training, to help the parent. They combine a natural understanding of people, a sympathy with and liking for parents and children, with trained professional skill.

The parent intuitively senses this understanding, sympathy, and knowledge, and becomes correspondingly ready to express himself freely, as to a friend. The very act of unburdening his troubles tends to relieve pressures and tensions. But the wise counsellor recognizes when release of emotion begins to pass over into excitement, and is able skillfully to divert the conversation at this point. Gradually what was pent up within the parent gets outside himself. Of course, the counsellor knows where weaknesses lie, but her emphasis is not upon weaknesses but upon strengths. The interaction between the parent and the counsellor or social worker produces gradually a clearing of the situation. This process does not mean a “laying down of the law,” a “pointing out of mistakes,” to the parent. He gets to see for himself that John is not “a bad boy,” or “just like his father,” or “hopelessly stubborn,” but that John is acting this way because of pressures upon him, pressures he cannot bear. The parent is reassured by realizing that certain manifestations—of rebellion, of sudden overattention to dress, of anxiety about his appearance, or of concern over awakening erotic feelings—are not strange or abnormal but are a natural accompaniment of adolescence. The parent comes to see how he may have been insisting upon nonessentials, while the important things have escaped notice. And, above all, he realizes why he has acted as he has toward the child; that he has acted so because, in his own childhood, pressures were brought to bear upon him.

This parent has not been deprived of his confidence in relation to the child; rather, it has been increased. He realizes that, though his love may not always have been objective, it has been the greatest constructive power in the child’s life, and that, though he has often viewed the child through the rosy glasses of passionate hope, nevertheless he knows the child as no one else knows him, and that his hope for him constitutes the greatest possible stimulus to realization.

With greater insight and understanding comes a gradual change in the attitude toward the child, and a consequent improvement in his behavior. When the counsellor or social worker sometimes recommends psychiatric care for a child, the parent accepts the necessity for such care exactly as he accepts the necessity for medical care. He knows also that he cannot turn the child over to the psychiatrist, shedding his responsibility, but that improvement can only come when he, the psychiatrist, and the child all work together on the problem.

OF COURSE, parents are now coming with many problems which are directly related to the war. With so little time allowed adolescents for apprenticeship in independence, it is vitally important to encourage them to exercise responsibility, as far as possible, in the home, to feel that they count as individuals, to give them a share in making decisions that affect the family. They must be helped to wider social participation in community activities, and to take their part in useful war work. Parents need to be most thoughtful about sex education of their young people,

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DO THEY STILL TEACH SCHOOL?
(Continued from page 44)

purchases at the post office, and to take with her a
different committee of children each day to par-
cipate. While she is out, the special teacher as-
signed to take her class has conducted the social
studies program and included it in a remarkable
forum for discussion of war problems as they appear
to the children. The children have clarified much of
their mental confusion and the teacher has learned
fascinating things about the content of their minds.
Here we have again the increased realism of school
programs under the impact of the war.

Ours is also a neighborhood school which works for
the closest possible cooperation with neighborhood
agencies, and takes what we see and know around us
as the starting point of as many activities as possible.
But many schools all over the country are doing this
under the impact of the newer tendencies in educa-
tion, and we can claim nothing unique in our efforts.
This awareness of the neighborhood on the part of
the school is a peacetime as well as a wartime feature.

Are we still "teaching school"? Let us only modestly
claim that we are teaching children in a busy
and reasonably happy school. And somehow I am
convinced that children who are busy and happy
can't go wrong.

JUVENILE DELINQUENCY
(Continued from page 46)

and to give them the chance for wholesome social
life. Children should feel they can talk freely with
their parents—about the war, and about all the big
and little things which trouble them.

The situation of the mother who is away, either all
day in a factory, or part of the day doing volunteer
war service, is that of any very busy person. She has
more to do in less time. Yet she cannot afford to be
hasty or slap-dash with her children, but she has to
observe quickly, make rapid and correct judgments,
give sure responses. She must be careful, when she is
with her children, to devote herself wholly to them.
The choice of people and outside services to help out
in her absence has always been important; it is far
more important now. The prime requirements of
those who take care of children are now, as formerly,
that they be relaxed and adjusted persons themselves,
and that they understand and like children.

The demands of this war are without parallel in
history. We need not only more and better material

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