



THE part which play should have in the growth and development of a child is the subject of this article, one of a series by Dorothy Johnson, Rural Sociologist, Department of Agriculture, Christchurch, on child care and development. It discusses principally the surroundings and environment in which children play; next month's article will deal more specifically with toys and equipment.

WATCHING children's growth and development, having the privilege of seeing how human personalities begin and grow, is a wonderful and fascinating spectacle. Even within one family children show definite individuality—in fact, amazing variety—in their ways of dealing with the manifold problems the world about them presents. The amount of development occurring in a child from birth to 5 years is stupendous, unequalled by the accomplishments of any other 5 years in life. That is partly because a year is much longer physiologically and psychologically for a child than for a man; the years 3 to 7 probably correspond to 10 or 15 years in an adult's life.

One year at 10 corresponds to 2 at 20, but the learning accomplished in the first 5 years is very great (1). It is literally a transformation. A newly-born baby is utterly helpless, but at 5 years "he is a self-contained and conforming little citizen. He likes to please and is capable of sympathy, takes pride in clothes and in the work of his hands. He likes to be shown how and he responds to praise." Dr. Arnold Gesell, whose description that is, reminds all who watch its accomplishment that they can have deep faith in the constructive essence of growth and with that faith they can enjoy their children. This should be remembered when dealing with problems and difficulties as they occur, and action based on it will solve the

problems more quickly and on a better level because the parents see them in a better perspective.

Heredity and Environment

Each child has his own way of growing up, for he inherits certain factors which determine how and when the different aspects of his growth will take place. The parents' task is really first to observe that individual inherited pattern, and then to provide the environment in which the child does his own growing toward the highest of his potentialities.

That is demanding a great deal in a few words. Observing one's offspring objectively is fairly difficult, because the child is so intimately part of the parent's life that human pride and egoism tend to distort the view. On the whole, fathers are better than mothers at this. One of the best ways is to take time to observe the children at play and to play with them from their babyhood.

Development by Play

Directly and indirectly, a good deal has been said already in these articles about children's play and the importance of its place in their development. There is no need to justify

the place given to it, though it is tempting to discuss the distinction between work and play. Readers who are interested will find the subject ably outlined by Miss Lois Benjamin in her book "The Young Child and his Parents," obtainable on loan from the Country Library Service.

Play is the exercise of growing powers. Even the baby tries out all his abilities. He kicks his legs and brandishes his arms. He watches things; he handles, sucks, and bangs them; he pokes an inquiring finger in and around them. His first random movements develop into exploratory and investigating movements of hands, legs, and body. He babbles and imitates what he hears. By these activities he builds up a knowledge of the world in which he lives.



1. Lecomte du Nouy in "Human Destiny" and "Biological Time."