

## CHAPTER III

### THE STAGE OF CHILDHOOD

THE stage of infancy passes into that of childhood when mastery over the activities of senses, body, and limbs, is so far developed that they begin to express mental activities. Hitherto the various aspects of mental life have been merged in an undifferentiated whole of being. With the acquirement of language begins the differentiation and organization of this vague sentience. The child learns to use the concrete facts about him as means to the attainment of the ends given by his own inner life.

It is, then, with childhood that real education begins. At this time the mind demands more care and attention than does the body, and education belongs wholly to the mother, the father, and the family, with whom the child still forms a natural and unbroken unity.

So this first stage of childhood is of the greatest importance, because in it the child first begins to comprehend the nature of his surroundings. It matters much whether this outer world appear to him as noble or as ignoble; whether as a mere instrument of selfish gratification or as having a high and spiritual function; whether as pure or as impure; whether as ennobling or as debasing—in a word whether he grasp its true nature or see all in false and distorted relations.

The child should first perceive and then name everything clearly and correctly, and should learn to specify

accurately the relations of space and time in which things stand to each other. And in all this, every word should be clearly and distinctly spoken. That he may so perceive and name, everything should be presented to him rightly and clearly.

When he is at play a child talks continuously, thus indicating that with him talking is not yet distinguished from himself as talker, nor names from the things named. Play and speech are the elements in which the child now lives. So he attributes the same life to all about him. The pebble, the chip of wood, the plant, the flower, the animal—each and all can hear and feel and speak.

Thus in childhood there is a four-fold development of life—the child's own inner life; his life in relation with parents and family; his life in relation, common to him and them, with a higher invisible Being; and, especially, his life in relation with nature, regarded as endowed with life like his own.

Consequently, parents and family should regard contact with nature as one of the chief moving forces of the life of the child, and should make it as full and rich as possible. And the best means is play, for at first play is the child's natural life.

Play, then, is the highest expression of human development in childhood, for it alone is the free expression of what is in the child's soul. It is the purest and most spiritual product of the child, and at the same time it is a type and copy of human life at all stages and in all relations. So it induces joy, freedom, contentment, inner and outer repose, peace with all the world. From it flows all good. A child who plays vigorously, freely, and quietly, and who persists till he is thoroughly tired, will of a certainty grow into a capable and quietly persistent man, ready to sacrifice his own present ease when

a higher good for himself or for others demands it. Can childhood ever show more beautiful than in a child so absorbed in play that sleep has overcome him unawares?

§ 9 Childhood's play is not mere sport; it is full of meaning and of serious import. Cherish and encourage it, then, O parents! For to one who has insight into human nature, the trend of the whole future life of the child is revealed in his freely chosen play.

§ 10 In these early years the child's food is of special moment. Through its diet a child may be made indolent or active, dull or bright, inert or full of initiative. And these qualities thus cultivated may persist throughout life, for such proclivities are not easily changed, even when the age of deliberate choice is reached. By then they have so grown into the physical life that they are inextricably woven into the life of sensation and feeling, and are thus closely connected with the higher spiritual life.

Let the child's food, then, be strictly the means of nourishment, with the one object of securing activity of body and mind. Never allow food, or the quality, flavour, or delicacy of food, to become ends to be sought for their own sakes. See, then, that every child's food be as simple and plain as his circumstances permit, and that the amount given him be proportioned to his bodily and mental activity.

§ 11 That the young child may freely move about and play, and so develop without hindrance both physically and mentally, his clothes must not be tight and cramping, for such garments fetter mind as well as body. Neither clothes nor their colour or cut should ever in themselves be made the object of desire; to do that is to fix the child's thoughts on his appearance rather than on his real life, and so to make him vain and frivolous—a doll instead of a child, a puppet instead of a human being. Dress, then,