

Have You Been



No. 1. The Impulsive Age—Digging up the garden roses seems a good idea to the three-year-old and she persistently digs away with no special aim in view. Yet, when tired, all of us are apt to slip into such impulsive childishness.



No. 2. The Common-Sense Age—She remembers that the drawing board and not the living room is the proper place for art.
(Photo, Washington Child Research Center)

The Four Ages

By Emily C. Davis

IF six-year-old George Washington really marched up to his father's best cherry tree and sunk his shiny new hatchet blade into the trunk, he was merely slipping back for a minute into the impulsive age of his earlier childhood. For that excited minute, young George was just about three years old, so far as his behavior was concerned.

By the time his father came on the scene to inquire about the situation, George had recovered from his impulsive brain-storm and had risen to a calm and philosophic level of behavior, probably a trifle higher than you would expect from a boy of his years.

This explanation is given, not with any idea of psycho-analyzing an American hero, but because the cherry-tree drama, authentic or not, is true to life and illustrates some of the latest psychological investigations.

Young Washington's behavior is repeated every day, and not only by children but by adults. If you doubt it, consider the man who impulsively hails an invitation to play golf when

his desk is piled high with papers marked "rush." Or, consider the woman who talks faster than she thinks, and whose tactless, four-year-old remarks betray her into serious consequences.

A Swedish professor of psychology has been looking into this question of the ups-and-downs of human behavior. He finds that in addition to your mental age and your age recorded by the calendar, you have a third—your developmental or behavior age.

Unlike your mental and calendar ages, your behavior age slides up and down the scale with great agility. If your behavior could be charted for a day, it would show a long jagged line ranging probably between the highest level of which you are capable, and the lowest. In most people that lowest is all the way down to impulsive babyhood. In general, however, you have one habitual behavior level, characteristic of yourself most of the time.

Psychologist Has "It"

The psychologist who has been

studying our American behavior is Dr. Gustav Jaederholm, of the University of Gothenburg, and author of a number of highly technical volumes. He has been watching the development of young America chiefly at a nursery school of Hull House, in Chicago.

The Swedish psychologist is an unusual personality, himself. His figure is stocky and plump. His face beams, with genial happiness. You realize at a glance that children would adore him. From their point of view, this jolly person has "it."

To test on young Americans the theories that he had evolved by studying Swedish children, Dr. Jaederholm wanted to observe assorted children from two to seven years. They offered him at Hull House a collection of fifty, ranging over an array of nationalities, including little Mexicans, Jews, Slavs, Negroes, Greeks, and Russians.

A middle-aged scientist could not go running about a playroom after his lively little specimens. So he hit upon the plan of inviting himself regularly to lunch with three

Graduated From



No. 3. The Work Age—This is the time when boys and girls can hold their minds to study and work. Many adults never get past this stage and into the final stage.

(Photo, U. S. Children's Bureau)



No. 4. The Creative Age—Most of us rise to it once in while, but few live on the heights regularly. This is Nathalia Crane, who writes poetry and gets it published.

of Behavior?

Psychology

of them at a time. It worked. While they remained more or less quiet and together and consumed rations to carry them through a busy afternoon, he was able to steer the conversation and bring out each child's personality.

"I try to disappear and just be part of the group," he explained. "At first they ask why I am writing down shorthand. I say, 'Oh, I just forgot something.' Next day, one child asks again. 'Oh,' says the other, 'he's always forgetting something.' So, I am taken on that basis."

Out of these luncheon parties for four, supplemented by the histories of the children, Dr. Jaederholm has gained a new conception of how human beings grow up in their behavior—and sometimes how they fail to grow.

Examining the Children

He has found that there are four general levels or ages of development. You climbed up through these levels of behavior in childhood. Your behavior today may still be

assigned to one of these four "ages of man."

The first age, typical of the earliest years of existence, is the age of impulsiveness.

"I take the three-year-old up to a picture of a Dutch boy and ask if there is a cat in the picture," said the psychologist, explaining how the baby-mind works. "The three-year-old thinks I want him to say yes, so he says it. There is no end to this."

At this impulsive level of behavior, the child—or the adult who has temporarily slid backward into impulsiveness—cannot look ahead. Only the immediate present seems important.

"I tell the youngsters to come to me tomorrow and I will give them something nice," he continued. "They pester me all day, so that I can do nothing. But next morning nobody comes. At the age of three, they have forgotten all about it."

So long as the little human being lives continually in this careless, unthinking state, he is not ready to take on school work or responsibilities. In the daily routine of the

nursery school, Dr. Jaederholm found some children who would get everything mixed up. They could not brush their teeth. They never played group games sensibly with other children. These, he concluded, are the children who linger in the impulsive age. They have not come up to the next level, which is the age of common sense, or as the Swedish psychologist generally labels it, the deliberative age.

Boys and girls become sensible about the fourth year of their existence, he observed, but the shift depends a good deal on how much their parents and other older people talk to them, and treat them like sensible beings.

At this second age of his development, the child doesn't use any old silly ideas or impulses. He takes stock of a situation.

The little girl who has reached the common sense age can be expected to go to the corner store and bring back the loaf of bread, as directed. At least, the law of probability makes it reasonably safe to try the experiment.

Four Ages of Behavior—*Continued*

Brains and Thinking

The amount of thinking that you do as you go about your business depends somewhat on your brains. That is an accepted notion. But Dr. Jaederholm has come to the conclusion that the amount of thinking you do depends still more on your training in childhood in this trait of common sense deliberation. Sometimes a child is forced too early and too completely into this deliberative age, and becomes a little social prodigy.

Describing one of these social prodigies, he said:

"I have seen a boy of four years who was brought up by a divorced mother. Her one principle was that the child should not be like his father in any way. She developed the deliberativeness of this boy to such a degree that I found he would do carefully and critically some of the things that grown people do not do. I said, 'Aren't you afraid you are overdoing it?' And so she stops a little, and the boy becomes more childish."

As an individual develops he never casts off the earlier types of his behavior, like a snake shedding last year's skin, but simply lives more and more in the higher level. These higher levels of behaving responsibly and usefully put the individual on a greater tension, like the stretching of an elastic band. And so, throughout life, he snaps back into the earlier, easier levels when he plays games or when he becomes very tired. Games and exercise give the burdened worker or head of a family the chance to be childish without endangering his career. They keep the tension from becoming too much of a strain.

Fatigue slackens the tension, too, but in an undesirable fashion. In fatigue, the tension is apt to be uncontrollably relaxed, perhaps without warning, at a time when the individual cannot afford to be childish.

Weariness leads to thoughtless remarks at afternoon teas, and to failures in pushing office deals. It explains a good many mistakes in bridge games, which caustic players rather truthfully pronounce "the sort of game you'd expect a child of four to play." It is not chance that the peak hour of traffic accidents is around five o'clock when tired workers are driving and walking home.

Looking at mental and nervous breakdowns from the behavior angle, Dr. Jaederholm explained that the person who becomes mentally ill may slip back almost entirely into his childish way of treating life. Once he succumbs, he may not have the elasticity to pull himself back to stand the stress of the sort of behavior that is expected of responsible citizens.

The third age of human behavior is experienced between the fourth and sixth year, Dr. Jaederholm observed. This is the time when the child leaves his carefree babyhood behind him, and discovers that he is expected to settle down to work. He has entered the effort or work age.

Slipping Back to Childishness

Not until he comes to this degree of maturity can a growing human being start on a school career. But now he can keep his attention on a book after the first few minutes of pleasing novelty have worn off. He can hold himself to the book task, even with more attractive ideas of things to do flitting through his mind, for he has grasped the conception of working with a distant goal in view. He can delay talking until the teacher calls on him, and still remember what he has so eagerly wanted to tell the class for perhaps a long five minutes. He is able to overcome the impulse to jump up and investigate the noise outside the schoolroom window. In short, by this time, the individual has entered the routine, work level on which most people remain, more or less, for the rest of their lives.

Some gifted ones grow out of this work-effort age, Dr. Jaederholm found. These are the geniuses, and all the lesser creators and experimenters, who voluntarily seek new experiences, and who try to convert themselves into something finer. But, except in the gifted person, the streak of originality is apt to run thin.

Most children start bravely to climb into this more interesting level of life, for youngsters are usually fearless enough to try new adventures, and have enough curiosity and enough energy for experiments. But the child's willingness to spend hours over a tangle of wires and coils that he calls a radio set, or his desire to spend time drawing pictures or writing verses is apt to run counter to adult plans for the daily routine.

People Easily Discouraged

With a little discouragement, the desire for voluntary experience is stamped out in most people, and they are content for the rest of their lives to stay on the less exciting work-a-day level. They climb once in a while to try something new, but when they get tired, or give way to fear or anger, or fall a victim of nerves, then they drop back one level—or two—or three.

The Swedish psychologist believes that the people who start a small child off in life cannot do so much to develop this creative trait as they can to teach the child to use his mind. If the creative or adventure spark is lacking, no urging will arouse it.

"But," he added, "it was the brilliant idea of the kindergarten to give the children the materials and let them do what they can."

The natural order of a human being's development can occasionally be reversed, he has observed. This is especially true of creative behavior. A tot who cries angrily and then stops and listens to himself and changes the tone of his cry, is voluntarily experimenting, though he may be far too young to reach the working age of his career.

Whether it is in some such ways that geniuses get an early start toward practising originality, Dr. Jaederholm has not yet investigated.

Behavior Growth Stunted

A human being's development may be stunted or twisted, back in the years when he should be progressing normally up the four levels of behavior. Among the fifty children studied at Hull House, the psychologist encountered some who were getting off to a bad start.

One little girl had had her normal development arrested in the common-sense age, because she was made to feel that she was a failure when she ambitiously tried to do the things that bigger children so easily achieved. She finally gave up trying to master new skills of using her hands, and contented herself with being the petted baby of the family.

Grown people need to watch their own behavior in dealing with children, and to make sure that they are not the cause of undesirable quirks in the child's unfolding personality, the investigation made clear.