

Social Sciences Notes

GENETICS

Hereditary Learning Disabilities

Children unable to learn specific subjects but otherwise intelligent have lately been lumped into a general category called "minimal brain dysfunction." Three Illinois investigators now suggest that the learning disability may be hereditary rather than the result of brain damage or environment.

Drs. David Rutherford and Meyer A. Perlstein of Northwestern University, with Dr. Sue Pace from Southern Illinois University, studied the families of 14 children having difficulty in school.

In such cases, trouble may focus on reading, spelling or arithmetic and is usually due to a specific deficit in perception or memory.

None of the 14 children appeared to be abnormal in mental, emotional or sensory capacity, but inability to locate the source of difficulty is characteristic of minimal brain dysfunction.

The Illinois team found, however, that in every case both mother and father had a learning disability, though not necessarily the same as their child. In one case the parent might not be able to recall telephone numbers, even his own, in another, he might remember only one route home or be unable to spell simple words.

Besides the parents, half the brothers and sisters of these 14 children had a learning deficit.

This suggests a dominant hereditary trait, wrote the researchers in the April 17 issue of the *JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION*.

How disabling the trait is depends on an individual's walk in life. Also it may be so well-compensated for, he is unaware of it.

ARCHEOLOGY

Oldest New World Paintings

In a remote cave north of Acapulco, Mexico, two amateur anthropologists have located the oldest paintings in the New World to date.

The paintings date from between 400 and 800 B.C. and were probably done by the Olmec people, the first advanced culture in the Western Hemisphere, antedating the Mayan civilization by some 700 years.

Carlo T. E. Gay, retired executive of Kew Gardens, N.Y., and Gillet G. Griffin of the Princeton University Library, discovered the archaeological treasure which consists of three paintings and three line drawings depicting humans and serpents. One of the human figures stands five feet, five inches high.

They are red, yellow, green, black and white on flat rock walls 4,000 feet inside the cave, located in a valley of the Sierra Madre Del Sur.

The Olmec work is about 300 years older than previously discovered New World paintings. It is reported in the April issue of *NATURAL HISTORY*.

POPULATION

Birth Control in Catholic Lands

Recent interest of Catholic Latin America in birth control was reflected last week when the International Planned Parenthood Association met in Santiago, Chile, for its annual convention.

Latin America has the fastest growing population in the world, but until this year, no international meeting on the subject had been held there. Besides Chile, 16 other Latin American countries attended the 80-nation conference.

Participants were warned to study carefully the customs and living standards of people before instituting national birth control programs.

Mothers in developing nations, for instance, commonly breast-feed their babies for 18 months to two years. The milk is essential to infants who have almost no other source of protein. But birth control pills often stop lactation. In a study of 150 women placed on various oral contraceptives 12 weeks after childbirth, 56 percent reported they had stopped producing milk.

This side effect of birth control pills, noted by Dr. Siva Chinnatamby of Ceylon, could be a problem to many Latin American countries.

ANIMAL EXPERIMENTATION

Science Wins in Chicken Trial

The New Jersey Supreme Court has given its approval to animal experiments in high schools. In ruling that such experiments do not constitute cruelty to animals, the Court ended what came to be known as the "chicken trial."

Suit was brought last year by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals against a New Jersey school board for allowing a biology student to inject cancer virus into live chickens. Though the trial began on a small scale, it soon grew into a major confrontation between the Humane Society and national medical research groups.

Since the decision is the first dealing with high school experimentation, the New Jersey ruling is expected to have wide impact on other states with similar anti-cruelty statutes. It should also have an effect on science fairs where students in the biological sciences may use live animals in their projects.

The New Jersey student, in fact, originally displayed his chicken experiment at the Newark Science Fair where it came to the attention of the SPCA.

This latest decision upholds an earlier one given by County Court Judge Charles S. Barrett.

PSYCHOSOMATICS

Heart Patients Boil, Strive

Coronary patients are driven people who cannot relax and who let anger burn inside them, according to a Connecticut heart study on 114 men.

The men represented all those hospitalized for heart attacks in the Norwich-New London area over 27 months. Their personal characteristics compared to people without heart trouble were reported to the annual meeting of the American Psychosomatic Society by a University of Connecticut team.

The anger data was unequivocal, they said. Coronaries suppressed hostility and boiled inside. Also, they could not relax passively, but had to strive even in leisure hours. In short the heart patients held in anger and denied the existence of their dependent needs—a state of excessive self-imposed control, reported Drs. Clau Bahne Bahnson, Walter I. Wardwell and Marjorie Brooks Bahnson.