

ANTHROPOLOGY

Anthropologists Called On To Observe Baby's Eye Color

WHAT color are a baby's eyes? This simple-sounding question has attracted the attention of Dr. Knight Dunlap and Dr. W. C. Beasley, psychologists at the Johns Hopkins University. In trying to answer it, they have discovered that science knows almost nothing about the color of eyes at birth, and still less about the changing color of the iris as it takes its final form.

The psychologists are sure of one thing, emphatically. There is no truth in the old saying, "all white infants have blue eyes."

Trying to answer that simple question about eye color, the two psychologists have found themselves embarked on a major series of investigations, which will require cooperation of experts in other fields of science. Chemists, physicists, oculists, and embryologists are to be enlisted in solving the problems of eye color.

Dr. Dunlap and Dr. Beasley expect to have a preliminary report ready by the end of summer.

"We now would like very much to issue an appeal to anthropologists," said Dr. Dunlap, explaining the program to Science Service. "There is no systematic, reliable information as to the color of the eyes at birth in the various races of the earth. We are anxious to get the cooperation of field workers in anthropology who are stationed in, or plan expeditions to, various parts of the world, in obtaining data on the iris coloration at birth and on changes during the first year. Of special importance will be data on racial stocks which have been hybridized very little during recent times."

Dr. Dunlap stated that he will be glad to send a list of color terms and other details to any anthropologist, willing to assist in the enterprise.

"The classical generalization that 'all white infants have blue eyes' is still widely quoted," Dr. Dunlap said, "although any obstetrician, midwife, or nurse who has noticed the irises of many newborn infants can recall that some are totally brown, some are blue-green, and some are mixed brown-and-blue or brown-blue-green."

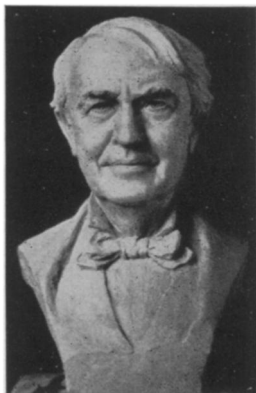
"It is well known also that in early

babyhood, significant changes in iris coloration occur, especially in those which are initially some type of blue. No positive information seems to be available as to whether the initially brown irises desaturate, and whether in the extremes of such cases they become finally some type of blue with or without partial brown patterns of streaks, flecks, or rings.

"Just how rapidly the major changes in coloration occur is unknown. General opinion is to the effect that the 'final' color is attained some time between the first month and the first year of life. However, general observation again reveals that throughout life marked changes occur."

The two psychologists are now observing new babies in the Obstetrics Department of the Johns Hopkins University Medical School.

Science News Letter, June 4, 1932



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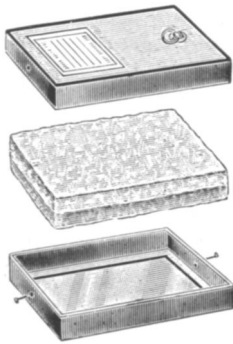
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