

The Midwife.

The Neonate.

The neonate, *i.e.*, the newly-born infant, is physically winsome, and mentally blind; his "ego" is colourless, undefined, without individuality; to all appearance each babe is simply a helpless little animal, new to independent life, with little to distinguish him, save features, from the thousands of babes, who have preceded him. All make the same random movements, all are expressionless, all are irresponsible to their environment. This uniformity, however, is brief lived, every keen baby observer knows that character shows itself even in the first days of life.

At birth, the beauty of the neonate lies chiefly in his exquisitely rounded contours, delicate fineness, and downy softness; the hand which grasps our finger vigorously is a marvel of creation by reason of its suppleness, the shell-like nails, the dimpled knuckles, the tapering fingers. It is not necessary to love babies to attest the charm of the tiny ear, the mouth with its graceful arc, the rounded knee and elbow, the pink toes, etc.

Perhaps one of the most striking points in the new born infant is his proportions as compared to the adult; the face is small, the head large, the convolutions of the brain are not very developed, but the size of the organ is remarkable, in fact one writer characterises it as "enormous"; it is six times as great as in the case in an adult. The chest circumference is relatively small, the average dorso-sternal measurement being 13 to 14 inches; this is easily explained by the fact of the non-expansion of the lungs in utero; they do not then fill the whole of the thoracic cavity; before birth they are of a dark-red colour, firm, and solid, divided into lobules; they sink in water. At birth, the upper portion is the first to expand, the central portion is the last to yield; full expansion does not take place for some months. The respirations which are chiefly abdominal, are at first irregular, shallow, and rapid (65 to 50 per minute, gradually diminishing to 45—40 per minute). Naturally chest development in the first year of life is marked. The narrowness of the chest at birth is accentuated by the prominence of the abdomen; this is due to the shallowness of the infantile pelvis, the large size of the liver (1-30th of the body weight), which may be palpated to the right below the ribs, and to the fact that the intestines are loaded with meconium. The trunk is long as compared to the limbs, and the limbs are long as compared to the legs. The child presents a

larger surface for his weight than the adult; this is one reason he loses heat more rapidly by radiation, another being the delicacy and thinness of the epidermis, the bloodvessels are thus nearer the surface. The rectal temperature at birth is between 99 degs. and 100 degs. Fahr. (37.2—37.8 Cent.); it should not be allowed to fall below 98 degs. Fahr. (36.6 Cent.).

With regard to the sense organs at birth, we can only judge of their activity by watching the effect of stimulation. The eyes are expressionless, of a blueish-grey colour; if exposed to bright light, the pupil contracts. This is a reflex action, and does not prove the infant feels the stimulus; he may, however, also show signs of discomfort. As far as can be judged, he seems to stare into space without distinguishing objects. At about three weeks to a month his eyes follow a light moved from side to side. The eyes frequently move independently of one another, so that he appears to squint; it is as well to shield the eyes from too strong light, and to guard against straining the very perfect accommodation.

At birth hearing is defective; the physiological reason for this is that it takes some few days for air to penetrate the drum of the ear. The auditory canal may also be blocked by fluids. This is hardly a drawback, since it allows undisturbed sleep.

The centre of smell is the first to develop and mature. The sense is present at birth. The infant also manifests his ability to taste; he relishes the lactose, which he is regaled upon, if thirsty, and, if the tongue be touched with weak acid or salts, marks his disapproval of the same by making a wry face. The lips are very sensitive to touch; a baby is quick to suck its hands or any object put within reach of its mouth; it is said that the younger the baby is the less sensitive is he to pain. Often minor operations are performed on very young babies without anæsthesia; they appear to suffer but little inconvenience.

The nervous system is very unstable, and readily excited; when one thinks of the floods of impressions which pour in upon the newborn infant, stimulating the development of the brain, the all-important necessity for a placid environment is easily recognisable. The dandling, rocking, and vociferous baby talk are inadvisable, and even harmful; they lead to restlessness and wakefulness, and in a child with a nervous temperament, higher excitation may lead to convulsions, or serious nervous disorders. At the same time a certain amount of movement is useful in promoting warmth

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