CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND THE INTERPRETATION OF BEHAVIOR

By Professor JOHN E. ANDERSON
DIRECTOR OF THE INSTITUTE OF CHILD WELFARE, UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

A year ago upon this occasion, Professor Walter R. Miles delivered an address in which he presented the results of a series of studies upon longevity and senescence. To-day, I propose to start with the opposite end of the life process and consider some of the theoretical implications of modern studies of infant and child development. Since titles for vice-presidential addresses are sent in much in advance of their delivery, this paper has greater scope in its title than in its content. For it started to discuss the implications of several principles and ended with one; thus illustrating its final topic, the movement from generalized to specific behavior.

Despite some differences in detail and in the interpretation of results, it may quite fairly be said that in the early stages of all responses studied genetically, behavior is more generalized, partakes more of the nature of mass activity, involves more of the whole organism, than is true of that behavior observed later in time. Coghill\(^2\) has elaborated upon his phenomenon and discussed some of its implications. It appears alike in studies of prenatal and infant behavior and in the studies of older children. Sometimes this early behavior is described as mass activity or diffuse movements of the whole organism; in other instances as a likelihood that almost any response may be obtained on the first application of a stimulus, known

\(^{1}\) Address of the vice-president and chairman of the Section on Psychology I, American Association for the Advancement of Science, St. Louis, Missouri, December 31, 1935.
