LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

* Correspondents are requested to be as brief as possible. The writer's name is in all cases required on proof of good faith. The editor will be glad to publish any queries consonant with the character of the journal.

On request, twenty copies of the number containing his communication will be furnished free to any correspondent.

Recognition by Young Children.

One of the most obscure topics, as well as one of the most neglected, of modern psychology is that of recognition. The question, "Why is it that I recognize an image when it returns to my consciousness?" is usually passed over unnoticed or intentionally omitted in our general treatises. Experiments, however, upon the question are forcing it upon our notice, thus doing a service which we are coming to expect from the new method wherever it is applied.

I have recently advanced a theory of recognition, based both upon mental analysis and objective experiment, according to which the feeling of familiarity called recognition arises from the re-instatement of the apperceptive or relational process of the earlier presentation. According to this theory, simple unrelated homogeneous images (bell-stroke, pure color) would not be recognized, single complex images (human face) would be recognized only in the degree in which the complexity had impressed itself in the first perception, and clear recognition would arise only when the relations attentively discerned were clearly brought out in the reproduced state. A further result would be that images, when reproduced, would largely depend upon and re-enforce each other in producing the feeling of familiarity.

I have recently had an opportunity to test a little child six months and a half old, with these points in view, and the result was quite instructive. Her nurse, who had been with her continuously for five months, was absent for a period of three weeks, and on her return was instructed first to appear to the child simply in her usual dress, but to remain silent; then to withdraw from sight, but to speak as she had been accustomed to; and finally to appear and sing a nursery rhyme, which by special care the little girl had not been allowed to hear during the nurse's absence. The first result was that the child gazed in a questioning way upon the face, but showed no positive sign of recognition; yet the absence of positive fear and antipathy shown at first toward the substitute nurse indicated that the visual image was not entirely strange. Second, the tones of the nurse's voice were not at all recognized, as far as passive indications even of familiarity were concerned,—a result we would expect from the greater purity and simplicity of the auditory images. The third experiment was attended by complete and demonstrative recognition.

The visual (face) and auditory (rhyme) images must have re-enforced one another, giving again the old established complex apprehension of the nurse.

As to the ultimate meaning of recognition, we are quite in the dark: it is only its mental conditions that fall to the psychologist. On the view given above, it would seem to rest in the active side of our mental life, and to consist in the diminished expenditure (whatever that is) involved in the repetition of an act of attention.

This case also shows, as far as any individual case can, that images from different senses vary greatly in intensity in early child-life, that they are not well differentiated from one another, and that even at the very early age of six months special memories are becoming more or less permanent.

J. Mark Baldwin.

University of Toronto, April 23.


2 Work of Lehmann, Philos. Studien, VI.