

Testing of Babies for Deafness Shown by Expert English Couple

By EMMA HARRISON

Two eminent scholars from England demonstrated their famous screening test for deafness in infants here yesterday. The distinguished white-haired man scraped an ordinary spoon in an ordinary teacup. The baby on the stage turned her head to the right.

Then the gracious, soft-spoken woman bent down at the baby's other side. "Bababababababa," she murmured. The baby turned to the left.

Through these simple sounds, Dr. Alexander Ewing and Dr. Irene Ewing, educators of the deaf, have produced remarkable scientific results.

Mrs. Ewing stood at the microphone in the auditorium of the Lexington School for the Deaf, 904 Lexington Avenue, while her husband brought rattles and chimes and crumpled tissue paper to test babies lent by the near-by New York Foundling Hospital.

The Ewings, who have conducted hearing clinics at Manchester University for many years and who will tour this country until Nov. 1, explained that their test was not diagnostic, but was used only to determine as early as possible whether a child responded naturally to sounds. They are now working with younger and younger children, some only four months old.

Emphasis on Early Testing

"We want to detect deafness before the child is expected to talk, at a time when he should be responding to sounds," Mrs. Ewing said. "A delay may have serious consequences to intellectual and social development."

The Ewings first test with the quietest sounds and then test to see if a child hears over the range of frequency used in speech. Finally they try to determine whether a child locates the sounds he hears automatically, since no one with impaired hearing can do so.

Just any sound will not do for all babies, Mrs. Ewing explained. They must have sounds that interest them and that they would normally hear.

An eight-month-old baby was brought in and Dr. Ewing's spoon-scraping evoked an expectant reaction.

"The baby located the sound hoping for food," Mrs. Ewing commented, adding that the sound compared with the "e" frequency range.

On the other side of the baby Dr. Ewing crumpled a piece of tissue paper and the baby turned again. That sound had the same frequency range as that of the letter "s."

A Sound Beyond Experience

Then Dr. Ewing reached for chimes and hammer and retreated to the back of the stage, thumping loudly. The baby paid no heed.

Mrs. Ewing explained that the sound was out of the baby's range of experience and would probably have attracted an older child, one who was toddling about. She said that loudness of sound and response often had no relation in proving deafness in the very young.

During an earlier tour of the school with Dr. Clarence O'Connor, superintendent, and Dr. Mildred Groht, academic principal of the school, Mrs. Ewing, who wears a hearing aid herself and says she qualifies as "profoundly deaf," received approbation from youngsters in the lower and middle schools.