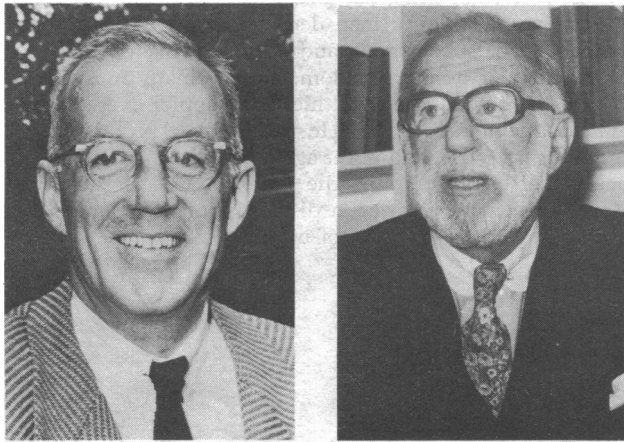


Parents' favourite paediatrician

Accusations by Spiro Agnew and Richard Nixon during the Vietnam war that he had corrupted the youth of America by his permissive attitude towards bringing up children had little effect on Dr Benjamin Spock—he doesn't much like Republicans anyway, and says that such charges from that source are ridiculous. ("At least no one can accuse me of raising Spiro Agnew," he says.) Hostile feminists, however, were a different matter. When they claimed that he was a major oppressor of women as they demonstrated vociferously against him, he was perplexed, because he had always



Dr Spock in 1946 (first edition) and in 1979 (fourth edition). The photograph on the left is reproduced by kind permission of Bodley Head Ltd.

number of mistakes), so his relaxed approach to child-like women and had intended to help rather than hinder them. Nevertheless, he listened to their objections and after mulling them over for three years decided that he should revise *Baby and Child Care* by taking the sexism out of it. Hence babies are no longer necessarily boys, cookies are not necessarily baked only by girls, and he addresses both parents instead of the mother alone. Even so, he always did mention the father's part in looking after a baby, but this was ignored by the opposition.

What is the key to Spock's astounding success with parents, young and old, all over the world? Several British paediatricians have written good baby books, only to find that many parents preferred the American guide. Could it be because he speaks with the kindly voice of a friend or relation rather than a professional? (Spock says his book was meant to emancipate parents from guilt about calling on grandparents for advice.) Certainly, he sounds like one parent helping another.

Baby and Child Care was first published in April 1946 (but not available in Britain until 1955) at the request of his publishers, who told him that it didn't have to be a particularly good book because at 25c it would sell anyway. At that time Dr Spock was one of the few paediatricians in America who also had training in psychiatry or psychology. Until then baby books had tended to advocate stern handling of children: Spock was afraid of his own parents (dominating mother, quiet but awesome father), and was strict with his sons (he admits that he made the average

rearing was a refreshing change. He was not accused of being permissive until his campaign against the Vietnam war more than 20 years later made him an easy scapegoat for the behaviour of the youth of the '60s. He did not grow up properly himself, he says, until he was indicted by the Federal Government for his anti-war activities (and beat them on appeal), and when he realised that the thousands of young people he met at the time were delightful despite their dirty hair and "dust between their toes."

Dr Spock understands the practical difficulties of taking sexism out of parenthood, but he thinks that if both parents want to work they should have a chance to do so. He emphasises, however, that the under-3s need continuous care and should not be neglected. He suggests that the working day should be reduced from eight to six hours—to allow for fuller employment, more flexibility, and more time at home; and that a parent who chooses to care for a baby at home should be paid by government (shades of Finer). He pointed out recently, however, that parents teach by example and no sexism means the woman in the garage as much as the man in the kitchen.

Dr Spock was in England last month to launch the new British edition of *Baby and Child Care*. He is now a lively grandfather of nearly 76, apparently untouched by time, fame, or fortune. Friendly and relaxed, he hardly looks a day older than he did when the first edition was launched (see photographs). He lives in Arkansas with his attractive second wife, Mary Morgan, and spends much of his time sailing. The "corrupted" youth of America (and elsewhere) are now producing their own children and will doubtless have a copy of this excellent book by their side in case of need.

You say creeping, I say crawling; you say diapers, I say nappies; you say schedule, I say timetable. British mothers never minded what anyone said so long as Dr Benjamin Spock's *Baby and Child Care* was to hand. Nevertheless, the newly adapted and revised British edition (Bodley Head, £6.50) has much useful information about problems peculiar to Britain—the National Health Service, for example. Dr Spock hopes to remove early discriminatory sex stereotyping and he recognises that nowadays the father's responsibility is as great as the mother's. Even in his first edition in 1946 he apologised to parents of girls for calling babies "he," but thought they would prefer this to "it"; he has now overcome this dilemma by describing babies variously as he, she, and they.

Dorothea Fox's delightful drawings are still there, as is the "don't worry, you know best" approach. Modern mothers may not wish to stop using the vacuum cleaner "for a few months" when their 1-year-old is around if it alarms him, but they will welcome the short emergency index (before the main one) listing such things as swallowed objects, concussion, and choking.

Over 28 million people have bought Spock's book, and many of these will wish that they had a sturdy hardback edition such as this one to pass on to their daughters (or sons) when their time comes.