

mother, either instinctively or by an unconscious series of trials and errors, would soon arrive at the discovery that her baby is more at peace if held on the left, against her heart, than on the right.

This may sound far-fetched, but tests have now been carried out which reveal that it is nevertheless the true explanation. Groups of new-born babies in a hospital nursery were exposed for a considerable time to the recorded sound of a heart-beat at a standard rate of 72 beats per minute. There were nine babies in each group and it was found that one or more of them was crying for 60 per cent of the time when the sound was not switched on, but that this figure fell to only 88 per cent when the heart-beat recording was thumping away. The heart-beat groups also showed a greater weight gain than the others, although the amount of food taken was the same in both cases. Clearly the beatless groups were burning up a lot more energy as a result of the vigorous actions of their crying.

Another test was done with slightly older infants at bedtime. In some groups the room was silent, in others recorded lullabies were played. In others a ticking metronome was operating at the heart-beat speed of 72 beats per minute. In still others the heart-beat recording itself was played. It was then checked to see which groups fell asleep more quickly. The heart-beat group dropped off in half the time it took for any of the other groups. This not only clinches the idea that the sound of the heart beating is a powerfully calming stimulus, but it also shows that the response is a highly specific one. The metronome imitation will not do-at least, not for young infants.

So it seems fairly certain that this is the explanation of the mother's left-side approach to baby-holding. It is interesting that when 466 Madonna-and-child paintings (dating back over several hundred years) were analysed for this feature, 373 of them showed the baby on the left breast. Here again the figure was at the 80 per cent level. This contrasts with observations of females carrying parcels, where it was found that 50 per cent carried them on the left and 50 per cent on the right.

What other possible results could this heart-beat im-

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