

THE LITTLE MISSES MISERABLE

By "MEDICUS."



MEET some of them wherever I go. There is one of them in every third or fourth family, just as there is always one tiny piggie in every litter. Pray pardon me the strange comparison, reader, for no offence is

meant, I do assure you. And besides, are you aware that the one tiny piggie in the litter, although it is puny enough in body, is invariably the cleverest piggie of the lot? Having been raised in the country, I have often had a chance of verifying this statement. I have also had many queer pets in my time, and occasionally I have had a piggie as a pet. My father has said to me, "You can have the little piggie, boy; see if you can make something of it." And I have ever found my wee piggie highly intelligent, very affectionate, a trifle nervous at times, but willing to learn and to make itself generally useful, as one might say. If I only told you one-half that all my little piggies did, and were taught, you would be very much astonished. But as this is not a paper on little piggies, I must not waste my valuable space in any such way. Only, if ever you are inclined to make a pet of a piggie, just you choose the smallest in the litter, feed it well, wash it very frequently, give it the driest of straw, and let it follow you about, as her little lamb followed Mary, and you shall see what you shall see.

"Do you think," I heard a father say one day to a mother, "we shall ever be able to make anything of her?"

"I fear," was the mother's reply, "she will never make old bones."

The particular SHE referred to was a little girl, who at that moment was squatting on the nursery floor, quite oblivious of the remarks that were being made about her, her whole soul being for the time wrapped up in the dressing of a very dowdy rag doll. The rag doll was going to a rag-doll ball that evening, and of course it was of the highest importance that she should wear a becoming costume. Little Buttons—for that was the child's nursery name—did not seem to care a pin whether anything could ever be made of her or not, or whether or not she should ever make old bones. Presently she held aloft the dowdy doll, and eyed it very critically indeed.

"I like to see my chillun 'spectably dressed," she said, talking more to herself than to anybody near her. Buttons was a woebegone-looking wee mouse, with pale, rather thin face, and eyes about three sizes too big for her. Her hands and legs were thin as well as her face, and she was altogether ethereal. But a look of extreme intelligence beamed in her countenance and marked her every movement.

"I think," said the father presently, "that poor little Buttons is far too clever to live long."

The child looked up from her work now as if she had quite understood the remark, which perhaps she had.

"Oh, bless oo, daddy," she said with extreme *sang froid*, "Buttons is going to live till oo is tired of her!"

"May heaven grant it," said the father with something like moisture in his eyes.

Buttons proceeded leisurely with the dressing of her doll, and nothing more was said on the subject for the time. It is funny, perhaps, that a little Miss Miserable like Buttons generally manages to make herself a favourite, and be very much beloved in a family, partly, no doubt, because pity is akin to love, and because such children are usually original and amusing in their remarks.

I never found out what became of Buttons, else I should tell you a little more of her story; but there are so many of these Buttons about, that I may be doing good to some, and pleasing some of our grown-up readers, if I give a few hints about the proper way of rearing delicate children of this sort.

First, then, it should be remembered that they are really fragile and tender from their birth; that their little hearts are weak, flabby, and small; and that their digestions are very far indeed from being strong. Overfeeding would assuredly kill such bairns, just as you might kill a fragile pot-plant by deluging it with too much water. I am not sure even if the favourite motto of "Little and often" holds true in such cases. But I am sure enough, on the other hand, that the constant giving of too strong food of any sort is very deleterious, and causes indigestion. But a weakly child should always be allowed to eat whenever she is hungry, even if it does spoil her appetite for the next meal. I am convinced that one-half of the children of the Miss Miserable class are killed by kindness and ignorance combined. They are too often fed upon the forcing system, which, instead of causing them to grow up stronger, makes them every day more weakly, and which either impoverishes the blood, or renders it grossly impure. Now, feeding, in the case of delicate children, is of the very first importance. I will presume that the reader's little one has cut her temporary teeth, and that she has been fed hitherto principally on milk. This is of course the correct diet for young infants. But having got those tiny teeth, it is time she had something to practise them on. Therefore, though the milk diet is not to be wholly discontinued, she must have an allowance of animal food. We generally advise an interval of four hours between meals, although in the case of the weakly something may be given between meals if the child craves for it—but *not otherwise*.

Now, supposing that Miss Miserable has been put early to bed, and has had a good night's rest, she ought to be all alive and literally kicking by seven or half-past in the morning. Do not feed her in bed, however. Breakfast in bed is good for no one who is able to get up. Let her be bathed and dressed, therefore. She will thus have a far better appetite for her first meal. What should this consist of? Well, there is nothing for English children to beat bread and milk, so long as it agrees. But of course there is porridge to fall back upon, and this is even more nourishing—if it can be borne—than

sops of bread and milk. I am correct, I believe, in stating that all our royal children are fed on well-made porridge, and they are all healthy and bonnie. Besides, porridge is slightly laxative. But too much care cannot be bestowed in the making of it. The meal must be fresh and new. Taste it to make sure it has no warm flavour, or "nip," which would indicate the presence of a mite. Place the saucepan over a very clear fire and add a little salt to the water; as soon as the water comes to the boil begin to "meal in," stirring as you do so till the porridge is of fairly thick consistency; then let it boil for five minutes—not one moment longer unless the meal be the round sort; but that should never be used—it should always be the medium. This is the only proper good way to make porridge, and it cannot be too well known that long boiling, in the case of the medium oatmeal, renders the mess slimy and unpalatable, as well as indigestible. Having made the porridge, be sure to let it cool; if eaten hot it often produces dire sickness. Let it be cooled, therefore, and then eaten with nice creamy milk. Pray do not pour the milk over the porridge. Such a mess is hardly fit for a sick puppy. Let the child sip the porridge with a spoon, and take a mouthful of milk between each spoonful; so shall she have the full benefit of this royal breakfast. Sugar should never be eaten with porridge unless you wish to induce indigestion. Yet you constantly see English people, at hotels and elsewhere, taking sugar with porridge, to the intense horror of those who know better.

Well, now, this first meal should be partaken of not later than eight o'clock, and the dinner should follow at about half-past twelve—certainly not later; and the nurse or mother should bear in mind that if she keeps the child waiting, she is injuring her both bodily and mentally. Variety should be studied each day; thus, the weakly bairn should have nice broth, with an allowance of bread in it, every day; and, to follow this, one day tender beef, the next day mutton, and the third day white fish—not salmon or any of the oily fishes. Well-mashed potatoes are very nourishing. I need hardly say that a portion of pudding will always be relished, or that the dinner may often be almost wholly pudding. But in rearing little Miss Miserable, let me give you a warning or two. She must be taught to eat very slowly, and to masticate well, and she must not eat too much of the first or second course if there is pudding to follow. At five o'clock, or a quarter before five, tea will be looked for; and I need hardly say, as far as tea is concerned, that luxury should be conspicuous only by its absence. Bread and butter with plenty of good milk must form the staple of this meal. These are three meals, then; and with these, and plenty of sleep, most children should thrive. But if the little one gets hungry later on, there cannot be the slightest objection to some lunch biscuits and another glass of milk. I want to call your attention particularly to one thing; although a weakly child may have a bite of something to eat between meals if she craves for it, the healthy should be taught to wait for their regularly-prepared diet, else they will have but little appetite for either tea or dinner. We must never forget that a healthy appetite depends as much on nervous force as upon anything else, and if the organs of digestion never have any rest, nervous force will be absent. Do not forget that many children are

reared, and reared well too, who never see or touch animal food from one year's end to another, and that it is better to give but a small quantity of animal food, especially if the child be very young.

This paper is devoted to the little Misses Miserable, but there can be no harm in reminding mothers, that in allowing their children to become fat from overfeeding, especially with animal food, they are sowing the seeds of disease that can never be eradicated unless the cure is attempted at once, and the extra supply cut off. Besides, a fat child can never be a clever one, although he may be, and generally is, a precious disagreeable one to all but his parents. Fat in either child or adult is a disease of itself, and you should not forget it.

The best of animal foods are mutton, tender beef, chicken, lamb, white fish, eggs, and milk. The worst sorts are pork, veal, game, rabbit, salmon, herring, mackerel, eels, and plaice. Eggs should be lightly boiled.

As to puddings, we have a large choice, but they should not be too rich as far as the Misses Miserable are concerned. Plum pudding is bad for such as these; but rice, sago, tapioca, corn-flour, rizine, and plain bread-and-butter pudding, are all good, though they must not be rendered too rich with eggs. One egg in a tolerably large pudding is quite enough for a young child.

Beware of giving too much sugar or sweets to even Miss Miserable; and if your child is getting fat, these should be stopped altogether. But a delicate girl may have a fair proportion of sugar. There is a medium in all things, however.

We must not give fruits indiscriminately to Miss Miserable; a little does good, nevertheless, but they must be well chosen. They should be in season, and neither too ripe nor too green. Strawberries, gooseberries, raspberries, oranges, greengages, and peaches, are all good in their way; but apples, unless baked, and nearly all wild fruits, are best avoided. We must not give dried fruits; and even preserves should be dealt with sparingly.

But what should little Miss Miserable drink? Now this is a question of some considerable importance. Probably the child is frequently thirsty. To begin with, there is pure water, and this must always be boiled. If a little good lime-juice be added to it, it will be all the more palatable, and will tend not only to quench the thirst, but to cool and purify the blood and system generally. The Montserrat lime-fruit cordials are very wholesome, and in my own family I constantly use them. Then there is milk; but this is not always relished as a drink, and in reality it is as much, if not more, of a food than a drink. A cup of nice cocoa, if made with plenty of good milk, will often be greatly relished, and is very satisfying as well as very nutritious. Get only the best cocoa that is to be had in the market. Bad cocoa or chocolate is positive poison. While mentioning chocolate, I should not forget to add that the pure chocolate sweets, made only by one or two of the best firms, are about the best and most nutritious form of sweet that a delicate child can have. A little tea or coffee may be given to a child over six, but either should be very weak. Vinous stimulants in no form should be given unless ordered by the family physician—they are most injurious; and the same may be said about strong tea or coffee. Good whey, or buttermilk that is not sour, makes a very nice drink, especially in summer weather.

Aërated drinks are not generally good for children, and you are particularly to avoid that form of them which contains phosphorus or any other drug. It is only too much the fashion nowadays, I am sorry to say, to use phosphorus in some form. Quacks tell us

that it feeds the brain, and cures debility in every shape or form. But phosphorus is known to produce the most terrible and loathsome diseases; so be warned, and avoid it both for yourself and child.

How shall Miss Miserable be clothed? This is another very important consideration, if we would have the girl make old bones; and yet it is one about which the most grave mistakes are made every day. If a child is strong and healthy, we should abjure coddling in every shape or form. By coddling a child too much we are in reality making a hothouse plant of it; and this climate of ours is by no means of the hothouse order, but quite the reverse. On the other hand, if the child is one of our little Misses Miserable, we are bound to take extra care that she is properly and warmly clad, so that the seeds of disease may not be sown in her. If fashion in dress is to be studied, therefore—and I for one confess that I like to see a child well dressed—be careful to select that for her which shall be easy and as loose as possible, giving unrestrained liberty to her every movement. It should be wool—all wool—winter and summer, and instead of being heavy or clumsy, it should be as light as down itself.

As for night-dresses, the rule should be, never to permit the girl to sleep in under-clothing that she has worn all day. And whether she be weakly or the reverse, a bath should be taken every second night. Indeed, this practice of evening bathing has often given a puny child the start that has led in course of time to good health and bounding strength. On evenings when the bath is not taken, face, hands, and neck should always be washed, and she will sleep all the better for it.

I am fully aware that it is unnecessary to tell these things to a great many nurses and mothers, but at the same time there are an equal number of people who either do not know them, or, knowing them, take good care not to bother themselves about carrying out these rules of health.

For the strong, the morning tub is much to be recommended; but your weakly child has a tiny heart of her own, and it would never do to put too much strain or stress on that. Morning ablutions, in cases where the cold bath is inadmissible, should be as complete as possible, and most careful drying and rubbing must not be neglected.

A mild soap is requisite. There are a great many excellent soaps now in the market, but, anyhow, never use the ordinary alkaline soap, nor a cheap soap of any kind; it is not merely a matter of cheap and nasty, but cheap and detrimental to the skin and the health as well.

Now for a word or two about little Miss Miserable's bedroom. I have oftentimes in these columns advocated fresh air and well-ventilated rooms even for the strong; but when it comes to advising for a tender child I do not feel that I can put the matter too strongly; bad air in a nursery or sleeping apartment is injurious in the extreme to the inmate.

Mothers would keep the child's room much sweeter if it were not for the bugbear, cold; but ventilation can now be carried out so scientifically, that catching cold in bed is a matter of impossibility. Any builder will arrange this, or show how best it can be done, though without diagrams it is difficult to describe on paper.

I take a new line in what I am now about to say, so important do I consider it: (1) Fresh air by night and by day is quite as valuable to a child as food itself; (2) A child, and particularly a weakly one, that has been put to sleep in a close, ill-ventilated room, is almost sure to awake badly rested, hot, and uncomfortable, and unless she is a little angel in

short frocks, very peevish; (3) Children may not show the effects of sleeping in a badly-ventilated room all at once; but be assured that in course of time it will tell upon them, and it gives the tender child not the ghost of a chance of becoming hardy and strong; (4) Says Sir Thomas Watson, "If there be any disease that is, strictly speaking, the product of impure air, that disease is undoubtedly scrofula," so let *mothers take warning*; (5) Tuberculosis is another terrible and incurable disease that is fostered by impure air; (6) But even should your delicate child escape the more dreaded ailments that this uncertain climate of ours renders even the strong liable to, she will have impure blood if the bedroom be not well ventilated, and she cannot therefore be expected to thrive.

Sunshine is of very great benefit to the delicate among our children. This ought to go hand in hand with fresh air. We do not get too large a supply of sunshine in this country; but this is all the more reason that we should take advantage of the little we are allowed. Believe me, then, when I say that a sunshine bath, or rather a succession of such baths, is about the best medicine you can let a tender child take.

Just a word or two about SLEEP. Good refreshing sleep depends upon a variety of circumstances, that all combine to lead up to it, but the absence of any one of which may cause poor little Miss Miserable a restless night and a nervous day to follow. The circumstances are these: judicious feeding, exercise during the day in the fresh air, proper clothing by day, a comfortable, not over-warm, bed, quiet, and last, but not least, a well-ventilated bedroom. Sleeping draughts are not only useless, but in almost every case they are positively poisonous. But if a mother leaves the care of a tender child entirely to the tender (?) mercies of the nurse, she need not be surprised to find out that some of the so-called soothing medicines are used to procure rest for the little one. A nurse may give these without the slightest intention of doing any harm; but harm is thus done without doubt, and if a child that has been much dosed with syrup of poppies, or opium in any form, grows up at all, it is invariably delicate in *body and feeble* in mind.

Do the little Misses Miserable require anything in the shape of medicine or drugs? This is a question that should generally be left to the medical adviser. But there are times when medical assistance is not easily procured, or one may be very far away indeed from a doctor of any kind, so that a mother should always know the value of certain drugs, and keep a small supply in the house. I hope, however, to be able to devote a whole paper some day to a consideration of the medicines best suited for children, and shall not, therefore, touch on the subject to-day. But there is one little tonic that does great good at times to delicate children: I allude to the syrup of the superphosphate of iron, which is the principal ingredient in Parrish's Chemical Food. It is an excellent tonic, and tends to the growth of bone. The dose for a child of one year is twenty drops in a little water, or simply by itself, and so on up to one dram thrice daily, according to age.

I have purposely couched this article in the simplest language I can command, so that she who runs may read. Simple though it be, however, it contains many a wholesome truth, and if my advice were followed to the letter, there would be far fewer of the little Misses Miserable in the world. I trust that this will be an autumn paper, so that in my next I may have a chance of redeeming the promise made in my last, and giving some further advice to the delicate, that, if taken, shall help to harden them to the rigours of the winter still before us.