

## Old Children.

ONE can no more help loving children than he can help liking rose-buds. But I meet with some children whom I cannot love without considerable effort. These are the old children. Their wise looks and sedate and dignified ways are appalling. They seldom laugh, and their smile is a sickly, sneering, sardonic smile. They never romp, but step staidly, and with a gravity of deportment which would become an octogenarian.

These poor, little, old children, withered and hard and dry before their time, are the legitimate fruits of certain forms of the child-culture of to-day. We were not used to have them. In days not remote, children were children in tastes, feelings, manners, and occupations; the spring of life lasted twenty-one years and longer. Our boys were buoyant and sportive, and the rippling laughter of our girls was as sweet music. But now, too many of our girls are fine ladies, and our boys sedate gentlemen. The jacket of jean, frock of flannel, and bowl of porridge, have passed away and with them have passed healthy, hearty, happy child-life. With our artificial modes of life and premature development of mind, we are in danger of abolishing that out of which come all valor, heroism, and worth whatsoever—a *healthy childhood*. Our children are in school, when they ought to be at play; at the ball, when they ought to be in bed; promenading in stiff, fine clothes, when they ought to be frisking with the lambs in the meadows, as blithe and gay as lambs, and knowing as little of fashionable life. Books, fashion, and, I may add, business, are what make old children.

Our girls are clamoring for "higher education," and we think we give it to them when we extend the range of their school studies. I met a child the other day who knew "enough for a professor," I was told, but she was wearing six strengthening plasters, and could not look you in the face. Men have, in every age, played the fool for knowledge; have got it at the cost of wisdom, health, happiness, and virtue; but no previous age has equaled ours in madness of this sort. I would not give a girl that knowledge which might put a single wrinkle in her face. A formal walk or game of croquet sandwiched between six hours of study and six of fashionable life, will not go far toward developing the physical well-being of our girls.

The premature placing of our children in mercantile relations, or the inculcation of what has been termed "shop-keeper's philosophy," is another of our expedients for abolishing youth. We begin by giving the child one of those fool-invented toys, called "banks,"—an invention which has done harm enough to counterbalance the good of all other toys,—and persuade him to shut up in it all his penny-gleanings, as if they were angels' gifts, instead of spending them as soon as acquired, as a healthy child is sure to do. Such a toy is a practical object-lesson in avarice. Visiting once at the house of a Christian minister, I found that each of his children had his little bank in which he deposited every penny that came into his hands. A beggar stopped to ask an alms. I said: "Why do you not give some of your money to the poor old blind man?" The answer was: "We don't give our money to tramps; we're going to keep it and make more money with it." When I see the best years of childhood monopolized by the acquisition of a

trade or profession, I feel like telling parents that such treatment is wicked, and uncalled for even by avaricious calculation. The shallow utilitarianism so prevalent among men of business is attributable, in a great measure, to the premature entrance of boys into commercial relations. Ignorant of poetry, nature, and history, they base their theories of human nature upon what they see of Dick, Tom, and Harry. There is no ideal in their lives, nor ought of nature, and they transmit the plague. If we would prevent our children from becoming dry, withered, and callous in mind and in heart, we must prevent them from coming too early in contact with the tricks of trade, and the heart-hardening principles which rule over the commercial world.

Another aging influence is to be found, as I have already intimated, in the high and fast living in which we indulge our little ones. We exhaust them by a system of profusion, luxury, and dissipation. The breakfast of life should be frugal, for dinner must be an improvement on it. To what serious consequences are we bringing our children when we give them a high-seasoned morning feast and a table of dainties? It is sad to see how many of these old boys and girls there are, who, at the age of fifteen years, or thereabout, have gone into chronic *ennui*, and are surrounded with appliances for their instruction and diversion which would have bewildered their grandparents at their age. He is the promising lad who cares not to consult a thermometer before going out; who would as lief be kissed by the north wind as by any lass in Christendom; who would willingly exchange all the overcoats in the world for a pair of skates or a sled; who takes to the water like a duck, to the mud like an eel, and to the sun like an "American citizen of African descent."

O. O'B. Strayer.

## A Bar to Social Evenings.

HAS there ever been a time when—at least outside of our cities—it was not considered an essential of hospitality to offer food to a guest? It is the savage instinct of hospitality, and civilized nations have pampered it into an imperious custom. Among savages it is well enough. These livers "from hand to mouth" are often half famished; and, naturally, "after the famine, the feast." There is no expense, and the trouble is not to be considered. Hunting game is only sport to the men, and the simple manner of living gives the women of a tribe very little else to do or think of besides manual labor and preparing food; the children take care of themselves. In warm countries they do not even have to be provided with clothing, and in colder latitudes their garments are of the simplest kind. But where women have to make a great variety of under and over garments, with seams and gussets and bands, ruffles and pockets, button-holes innumerable, thin summer wear, and thick winter wear for two, three, or four children, who are all the time growing out of said clothing, with no seamstress, probably, and only one servant to do the housework, it will be readily understood that the company entertainment is the straw that often breaks the housekeeper's back.

The expense of a simple refreshment is the smallest part to consider when persons wish to have their



friends come in often to spend a social evening. It is the care and extra work which make it impossible for the average family to entertain guests as its members would like. How often it prevents the informal sending to the neighbors to "Come this evening and have a dance," or to "Come and help us act charades." It has broken up many a "sociable" and given the death-blow to the good-fellowship of a whole neighborhood, filled with pleasant people who would have enjoyed one another very much and would have done one another a world of good.

It is a trouble to both mistress and maid to supplement all their various labors with the frequent preparation of even such a simple entertainment as sandwiches, coffee, and cakes. An extra amount of bread must be mixed, twice molded, and properly baked. A ham must be prepared, and boiled, and nicely cut into thin slices—a process that requires some skill and a good deal of time. The coffee must be roasted, ground, and then prepared with a nervous nicety that is somewhat wearing. The materials for the cakes must be collected from store-rooms and closets; and what a time of anxiety it is until the cakes come out of the oven! and then, though they look all right, there is the possibility that in cutting our loaves, with the eyes of our guests upon us, we may find them streaked with dark lines! But even this is not all. Perhaps the most arduous part, and decidedly the most disagreeable, is the cleaning up after the cooking and after the guests.

When we give large parties, much more than this is cheerfully borne; for the thought and the labor begin a long time before the event, and, usually, extra help is hired. But we are not now considering large parties. We want to meet our friends frequently. Cannot we do so without this interminable eating? We would not eat after our supper (or dinner) if we

had remained at home. Why should we find it necessary when we go out? If we "drop in" at a friend's house for an evening we do not expect it or think of it. But if this same friend asks us to come to hear some music, or to look at some new engravings, or to do anything whatever, we look for something to eat in the progress of the evening. "She invited us," we say, "and, of course, there will be refreshments of some kind." Why "of course"? We don't need them,—often we would prefer to do without them,—and certainly we should be clearer in our minds in the morning if we were to do without them. Still the senseless custom goes on.

The surprise parties of a few years ago, which were so mercilessly condemned, arose out of a genuine feeling of friendliness, due to the naturally gregarious habits of mankind. After a day of housework, sewing, and "bother," after office hours are over, when the little folks are in the land of dreams, while Bridget or Dinah is quiet in the kitchen, with sewing, or a visitor, a yearning arises in our souls for some sort of recreation. And there is a need for it, too. But the surprise parties were a mistake for the same reason that we hesitate to accept the general invitation, "Come and spend an evening with us some time!" We do not go because the very evening we fix upon may be the most inconvenient one of the whole season to our hosts. But, were it not for those bugbears, "sandwiches and coffee;" or, "oysters and ice cream," instead of this vague, unmeaning phrase, one might give the specific invitation: "Come this evening, or next Wednesday evening!" for they would have nothing to think of in the meantime, in relation to the visit, but the pleasure of their friend's society.

*Louise Stockton.*

## THE WORLD'S WORK.

### Test for Fire-damp in Mines.

THE inflammable gas known as fire-damp has been made the subject of long study, and many plans have been tried to obviate, as far as possible, its destructive explosions when set on fire. It appears it can be removed by proper ventilation whenever it collects in dangerous quantities. Whenever it is known to be present in the mine, any method of indicating its presence in advance, or before it can become dangerous, would therefore be of value. Among the plans that have been proposed to accomplish this is a comparatively new one, that has the merit of indicating above ground or at the mouth of the pit the presence of the gas in the mine. On the roof of the galleries, where the gas may be known to collect, is placed a hollow ball of wire gauze. This is placed, by means of wires, in electrical communication with a bell at the mouth of the mine. The ball is supported by a suitable bearing, in such a way that, when free, it will revolve by its own weight, but is ordinarily kept in position by a plug of fusible metal, so that it cannot move. Upon the

ball are arranged pins, or teeth, in such a position that when the ball is released by the melting of the fusible plug the teeth alternately make and break the electric circuit, and the signal sent to the station above indicates the number or position of the ball in the mine. Within the ball is a piece of spongy platinum, connected by a second wire with the station at the mouth of the pit. When it is desired to ascertain if gas has collected in the mine, say just before the men go to work, a current is sent through the second circuit, and the platinum sponge is raised to a white heat. If the air is pure, nothing happens. If gas has gathered in explosive quantities, the heat of the platinum sets it on fire, and there will be a small explosion inside the wire gauze ball. This will give heat enough to melt the fusible plug, and the ball will be released. It will by its own weight, or by means of a spring, make a revolution, and the teeth will cause the signal to sound at the station above. At the same time, the burning of the gas is limited to the ball, as the flame will not pass the wire gauze, and all danger of extensive explosions of the gas are avoided. While this system has not, as far as can be learned, been tried