

A HEALTHY NURSERY.

BY A FAMILY DOCTOR.



T is love alone, love pure and simple, that prompts a mother to do everything in her power for the well-being and comfort of her offspring. A sense of duty seldom has, nor should it have, anything to do with the matter; for duty in some measure

implies self-sacrifice, performed at the bidding of conscience. It is Nature that is the maternal guide.

But, nevertheless, even a mother may err in treatment of, and in her choice of what is best for, the child. As often as not, she does so when trying to do too much. Reason may be at fault, instinct never. Mankind has both in a great degree of perfection; in the lower scale of creation we have to believe that instinct predominates. Yet how seldom it is that the creatures of the fields make mistakes in their little nurseries! While studying and admiring the homes made without hands, which we see around us in walking through the woods in spring, we cannot help saying with the poet—

“Reason raise o'er instinct as you can,
In this 'tis God directs, in that 'tis man.”

Now, as regards the room called the nursery, we should bear in mind, I think, that it is here the future man or woman is really moulded and made, and the state of his or her future health determined. Well, I mean to devote the biggest half, and maybe more, of this paper to a description of what I think a healthy nursery ought to be; and, if I have any space to spare, I may say a word or two about nursery accidents.

Where shall we have the nursery? Says a writer in a London magazine, “There is no place good enough for a nursery while a better is to be found. Pass the ground floor, and then select the largest, the loftiest, the best-ventilated, and the best-lighted room in the house—the room with the largest windows, and commanding the cheeriest prospect—and make that the nursery.”

These words were surely not meant in serious earnest, yet there is some degree of solid sense in it. But to take the advice literally would be to turn our houses into nurseries from top to bottom. We should not give our children to understand—and remember, they are not slow at grasping the facts of a situation—that they are supreme rulers *in domo*, and their parents but slaves. Such a state of matters would be intolerable, and subversive of all the rules that ought to guide us in properly rearing our little folks. Were the principal rooms

in the house to be set apart as nurseries, then farewell all peace to *pater* and his friends. Fancy a poor author condemned to concentrate, or a clergyman obliged to compose, in a study under a nursery with, say, even three children and a maid in it! Earthquakes, Comanche Indians, barrel-organs, and bagpipes, would be nothing compared to such an annoyance. Male parents would seek refuge in their clubs, and mothers be driven distracted.

No, let baby be king by all means—bless his innocent soul—but let him be king in his own corner.

In the choice of a room for the nursery, there are many things to be considered. But it is of paramount importance that it should be so situated as not to interfere with the general internal economy of the house itself, and not to be itself interfered with. Rooms for the children are the children's rooms, and sacred to the children. Let me describe a nursery more in detail.

I. *Situation*.—It is good for parents and all concerned when this can be chosen on a scientific basis. The room or rooms should be on the ground floor, if this be in accordance with health; and it is so in most country places. If it be so situated, the little ones can run in and out at pleasure, and spend much of their time in the open air. A play-ground should be close by the door, or, better still, close outside the casement window. This window, for sake of light, should open right down to the floor, and be protected at the lower half by wire mesh-work, to save the glass. In big towns, the nursery cannot always be so placed; the dwelling-house may be hemmed in with other houses, in which case it is best to have the children's rooms on the first floor, or even right away up in the attics, where the air, of course, is purest.

There is this danger to be run where the rooms are well aloft, namely, falling down-stairs. The top part should always be protected by a gate, and the rails ought to be strong and secure.

II. *The Aspect*.—Bearing in mind that no creature can thrive without sunlight, the windows of the children's rooms should look south or south-east or south-west. The mind has a wonderful effect over the body, more especially in a growing child, and a gloomy outlook from a nursery window is most depressing. If a choice had to be made between a room that looked on to a busy street, and one that commanded a beautiful view of the country, the former ought to be selected, as being more in accordance with the mind and mood of childhood.

The nursery indeed should be altogether “short-some” and cheerful.

The windows should be guarded in some way or other to prevent a child tumbling over when they are open. I must confess I do not like bars, however.

The glass of the windows at the lower part should also be protected, not that a child if at all properly schooled will mischievously smash a pane, but that

panes may get broken by accident, and worse accidents occur from contact with broken glass.

III. *Furniture and Fittings*.—The paper on the walls is a fixture, if not a fitting, and something must be said about that. We have heard a great deal of late years about poisonous wall-papers. I merely mention them to remind parents that such do exist, and should never be hung in rooms where children sleep or live. It ought to be remembered, also, that *green* is not the only colour that may be called suspicious.

It would be best, indeed, if the walls of a nursery were either painted or simply washed with some delicate tint, not easily rubbed off.

The walls may be hung—here and there—with nice engravings or good photographs, but let no oil or water-colour painting otherwise than the best be seen thereon. The walls of a nursery may be nicely and tastefully adorned without expense. Brackets may hang here and there, and flowers should not be forgotten. These latter should be placed in cheap vases, and if one of these be occasionally *inadvertently* broken, so much the better, as it will form the text on which to hang a little sermon to the culprit child on in-door propriety.

Of course, the nursery is to be as large a room as possible, for the sake of purity and health. It should have no carpet, and really a bare, dry, well-scrubbed wooden floor is better and more wholesome than either oil-canvas or linoleum, as these latter are apt to give colds, and children must and will squat on the floor. But skins here and there, or rugs, are very handy.

Curtains are not needed on the windows, and they are dangerous around the fire. But one big curtain may be hung in front of the door.

There should be no beds, not even a baby's cot, in the day nursery, and the sofa or dais should be a cane or hair-bottomed one.

The rest of the furniture should be meagre enough. A large screen is handy, and the older children may amuse themselves by decorating it with scraps. There should be a cupboard or doll and toy house for each child, and he or she ought to be, at a very early age, initiated in the mysteries of *meum* and *tuum*. No infant should be allowed for one moment to appropriate the toys of an elder sister or brother, on the plea that "he is only a baby."

There should be plenty of means of amusement for children in the nursery, adapted and suited to their various ages, from the straw-rattle to the game of draughts, but no rude or noisy sports, no parlour cricket or nursery tennis. Again, it should be remembered that in rainy weather the little folks will be a good deal confined to the nursery, therefore "crawling ferlies," or infants proper, should not have it in their power to make matters uncomfortable for their bigger brethren. This they may do by the objectionableness of their toys. Drums, trumpets, and whistles should be relegated to the out-door playground; picture-books and mechanical toys which teach the child to think, should take their place in-doors.

IV. The *Ventilation* of nurseries is an all-important subject, for without pure air health is an impossibility.

V. *Temperature* of the nursery. This should be as equable as possible: never hot. As you value the health of your children, do not let the mercury in the thermometer rise in winter above 60°, and in summer keep it as cool as possible. In July, August, and even September, "open doors and wide ports" should be the motto. The heat during cold weather had better be kept up by means of a slow-combustion stove. The air, if necessary, may be moistened by putting a saucer of water over the stove.

A screen should always be placed over an open fire-range, and outside this, or around the stove, a brass railing.

VI. The one objection to a railing round the stove is this—and it is a very solid one—servants or nurses are apt to hang thereon articles of wearing apparel to air or dry. I cannot too strongly condemn such an act. Washing soiled linen or doing any cooking in the nursery are other acts that I merely mention in order to deprecate; for the air in the children's rooms cannot be too sweet and pure.

VII. Two *thermometers* are necessary adjuncts to every healthy nursery. One is the little clinical instrument before mentioned in this Magazine, the other the bath thermometer.

VIII. The *bath* itself must be a regular institution. Let it be given as often as possible, but the weekly warm bath *must on no account* be neglected. I have spoken about it before, and have here only to add that a cold sponge-down may be used to the older and stronger children with advantage.

IX. The *general comfort* of the nursery should be a mother's constant study; the rock she is most likely to split upon being that of over-coddling and making hot-house plants of her little folks. She has to remember that the world is all before them, and they must be rendered fit to enter it and do battle with it.

X. *Sleeping Apartments*.—These should be sleeping apartments in reality, sacred only to prayers and repose. They should be well ventilated, large, with but little furniture and no curtains, and the children's candle should be taken away as soon as they are tucked up.

Cots for infants have nowadays taken the place of cradles. I think the change is a wholesome one, and that the sleep of a child that is neither rocked nor swung into insensibility must be sweet and refreshing.

XI. *Perambulators* should only be used for children who cannot easily walk or toddle. They no doubt save the dress in muddy pathways, and prevent infants from catching cold through the feet. But the face and neck should be seen to on breezy days, else the chest and even the *eyesight* may suffer. I more than half believe that a great deal of eye-weakness is attributable to the use of the modern perambulator, which so often exposes the child's face to wind and sun.

XII. The *Playground* is the real out-door nursery, and here the children are to be permitted to run wild and do everything they please within the bounds of propriety.