

## HOW TO KEEP CHILDREN WELL AND HAPPY.

BY A FAMILY DOCTOR.



A MEDICAL man hears a great deal every day of his life about "healthy constitutions," about "long-lived families," about "people who are as sound as a bell," and about that much-to-be-envied individual who "never knew what a day's sickness was, and who never had a head-

ache in his life." But granting that purity of blood, stamina, and toughness, and consequently long life, do run in some families, mothers and those who have the care of children must not be surprised to be told that the future well-being of any one depends upon his treatment when very young, and that constitutions are either made or marred in the nursery.

No builder would expect to raise a lasting structure upon a foundation or basis that was otherwise than firm, nor can we expect that our children shall enjoy good health and long life if we cannot keep them well and happy while they are young. Indeed, the terms are synonymous, for a peevish child never is well, and *vice versa*. I am saying that which is trite, I know, but let me add a statement that is not so trite: viz., that the children of even weakly parents—not actually diseased—who are brought up with a due regard to the principles that govern health and growth, have a better future before them than those of robust parentage who are not so reared. It is with the view of reminding parents what those principles are that this paper is written.

But does every one know how a healthy boy or girl should look or appear? Alas! no. It is the custom in England to fatten children. I cannot use any milder term. Some mothers rejoice to see their offspring as rotund as junior Falstaffs. Now, in some islands in the Pacific Ocean adipose boys might be considered very desirable, but in this country they are neither a comfort to themselves nor to any one who has to live with them. Plump children we all like to see; it is well they should be fairly plump, but it ought to be the plumpness of the partridge, and not of that innocent creature in whose honour Lamb penned so pretty a diatribe. All kinds of dangers dog the footsteps of the ultra-gross boy or girl. He or she is soft and "flozen"; no organ internally, no muscle of body or limb, has the least fair play when the skin is stuffed with unwholesome fat. A child of this kind will be liable to colds, and coughs, and croups, and inflammations that others easily steer clear of, and when anything ails him he is down at once all of a heap, and difficult it is to raise him again. The mind, too, of such a child is quite on a par with the body. There is not the ghost of a chance of his ever

setting the temse\* on fire with hard work, or becoming either a poet or the president of a republic. It is all against his growing up strong and happy.

If we inquire into the up-bringing of a child who has become gross and unwholesome, we shall, in nine cases out of ten, find that feeding is at fault, to begin with. Instead of being fed, he has probably been crammed, and his food has not been judiciously chosen.

But there; I shall not make the fat child a subject of study. It is not an agreeable one. Let us see rather what principles tend to the development of healthy tissue, and the *mens sana in corpore sano*.

If I had a speaking trumpet as large as the Lick telescope, I should have it dragged to the top of the highest hill in England, and shout these words through it: "Milk is *the* food for children under six or seven months."

But feed judiciously from earliest infancy, and what a splendid basis is thus laid for the future well-being of your child!

Feed at regular times, too: this is most essential. To stuff a baby every time it cries is a cruelty which cannot be too harshly condemned.

There is something radically wrong with a puling infant, and the sooner the doctor sees it the better, and his advice is to be followed out to the very letter. One thing he will tell you is that the child's food must be fresh, and without the slightest tendency to acidity, and also that it must be exceedingly clean and carefully prepared. He will examine the child, and prescribe if medicine be necessary, but he will condemn too much doctoring. The mother who has to resort frequently to dill-water, bicarbonate of magnesia, syrup of rhubarb or senna, or castor-oil, is a bad manager. She who gives sleeping-syrups is ruining her baby's health.

Ill-arranged feeding, an insufficient or badly chosen dietary, and the indiscriminate use of medicines lie at the root of nearly all the ailments from which childhood suffers, and are to account for most of the deaths.

One other error in children's diet must be pointed out, for it is a most fatal one. I refer to eating between meals. It induces infantile dyspepsia, peevishness, and altogether a bad habit of body, with often enough outbreaks of various kinds of skin complaints.

Ordinary cautions are these: slow mastication; midday meal to be the dinner; supper light; no heating dishes; no condiments except salt; tea and stimulants not at all; drink to be milk and water filtered, sometimes even boiled; regularity and cleanliness above everything.

And cleanliness is everything too, in dress and in skin. We cannot have a child healthy unless the bath and frequent ablution be the standing rules of

\* Temse—Old Saxon for a winnowing sieve.



the nursery. The skin is of the very highest importance in the animal economy. Unless it is healthy, the child must languish and grow up—if he lives to grow up—puny and weak in nerve and will.

While young, the bath should be a warm one. After fourteen it should be gradually reduced, and at about fifteen every boy or girl should take the cold morning tub, unless the family physician positively forbids its use.

There is no necessity for remaining above a minute in the bath, just long enough to sponge well all over. It is a good plan to wash the whole body first with warm water and a *mild* soap. The body is to be dried with roughish towels.

I have frequently used the word "nursery." It is, however, a word I have no great partiality for. It is suggestive of fragile flowers and hot-house plants generally. For a truly healthy, manly boy, or one who desires to become so, the proper nursery is to be found out of doors, romping, and running, and shouting *ad libitum*, so long as the shouting does not annoy the neighbours. And it is in the open air that exercise should be taken.

A boy or girl cannot have too much exercise nor too much fresh air, not if he or she were out in it all day and all night as well.

I am certainly not advising outdoor exercise after sunset, however, albeit there is not that danger to health from night air that our forefathers used to attribute to it. Night air used to be a terrible bogle, but the bogle is dead and gone, and need not trouble us any more.

In a climate like ours, however, children must be a good deal indoors in summer as well as in winter. It is our bounden duty, therefore, to see that the rooms they occupy by day and by night are kept thoroughly clean, and supplied with an abundance of pure air. Emanations from the skin, emanations from the curtains or carpets, and from the furniture itself, meet together and breed sickness—sow the seeds of disease, in fact—and if children constantly pent up in badly ventilated rooms actually escape severe illnesses, they nevertheless are certain to suffer from blood deterioration.

Even ventilation is not everything. A nursery should have nothing in it that will harbour impurities. In this respect it really should resemble a sick-room. The lighter the furniture the better; cushions, curtains, and carpets should be banished, and the floor frequently scoured with a good disinfecting soap. A regular plan of ventilation should be adopted. Opening the window a little way when the children are out is of no practical use, but only a miserable makeshift.

I do not hold with the plan of making children hardy by exposing their limbs and shoulders to every wind that may blow, but they are too often most unwholesomely clad out of doors by being too heavily

and cumbersomely dressed. Let the clothing be warm and light, so that every limb may have fair play and free play.

Here are three things that go hand-in-hand in keeping children well and happy: exercise, gymnastics, and amusement. Amusement, I mean, must be combined with both or either, and all three must be taken or had in abundance day after day, and all the year round. Whenever exercise ceases to interest it becomes that very instant a penance, and will do more harm than good.

Much may be said for or against the hand-feeding or rearing of children. If a child is to be fed by hand from its birth, the utmost care is needed with regard to obeying the rules of hygiene. It is a well-known fact that the feeding-bottle may become a source of illness, or even disease, if not kept most perfectly clean and free from all acidity. It is the india-rubber nipples and tubes that are most to blame. Whenever the child has been fed, these should be taken out and cleaned with the brush for this purpose, using some disinfectant solution, care being taken that it is harmless. They should be kept in a solution of the same sort until wanted, but before being used they must be rinsed again with clean cold water.

The bottle itself will be more easily kept clean, but a little sand will sometimes be useful in rinsing this. Nurses should remember that it is acidity that does the most harm.

Let the child sit half up when being fed. The milk given should be pure and fresh. Never keep food any time before it is presented to the child, nor let baby have that to the next meal which has been left from the previous.

See that the cow or cows from which the milk is procured are healthy. Sometimes it is better to boil the milk and then place it in a refrigerator. The jug or basin in which the milk is brought from the dairy must likewise be perfectly clean.

I am too near the end of my space to say anything about the school life of children. I am not sorry for this; I fear I should have a difficulty in writing calmly on the subject. Some of our boarding-schools for the middle classes have a good deal to account for; many of our day schools and board schools far more. We have made a dash and a dive at raising the standard of national education, and pretty specimens of elevated manhood we are turning out: part ape, part parrot, short-sighted, and with a tendency to lateral curvature. This is true, and there must arise amongst us some scholastic John Knox before we can even hope for reformation.

Meanwhile, we can do our best for our children when at home, and remembering that their bones are but "green," take care they do not suffer from errors in dress or clothing, or from badly assumed postures while at work or lessons.

