

## OUR DELICATE CHILD.

(A LEAF FROM A YOUNG MOTHER'S JOURNAL.)



**T**RULY I don't know what we should do without Dr. Fuller! He is such a friend! He does not merely come, look at your tongue, feel your pulse, and write a prescription, but he makes a most careful study of each; not so much with a view to curing us of our ailments, as to keeping us in health. He sometimes says, laughingly, that of all the blunders the foolish public ever made, quite the most foolish is to fee its doctors for curing (or trying to cure!) disease. "Tis for keeping our clients *in health* that we should be paid! and that well, too." Now, this is what he does for us—the fact that he is a family friend, no doubt, makes it the easier for him to look after us: he will come in the evening to smoke a pipe with John, but I notice he always manages to get here before the children are packed off, and one may see him glance round and take in the general condition of each.

I thought that on Sunday evening he looked rather anxiously at Teddy, so I was not surprised when he called this morning. We had noticed a falling off. The child seems to get easily tired; his lessons worry him; he does not like to be teased; does not eat a good dinner, and is looking thin about the eyes; his flesh is not so firm as it was, either. We should have thought more of all this ourselves, only Teddy is such an eager little soul that the minute you think he is failing, up he is again with a sudden spurt, all agog about some new joy; so we tried to persuade ourselves that our fears for our bright little son were fanciful.

"The fact is, Mrs. Jervis, that boy of yours is a bundle of nerves!"

"Oh, doctor!" and I had visions of disabled nervous sufferers, paralytics, and I don't know what. It is marvellous how rapid thought is.

"What's the matter? I've not pronounced his doom. He's not going to die, and, for the rest, nervous people do the work of the world. The child is full of brain-power, but the keen instrument is wearing the sheath, that's all."

And enough too, I thought, as the fragile little body rose before me.

"Help us; what must we do? Ted is very precious to us."

"Why, he's precious to me! A sort of professional investment. I've a great notion that Ted will distinguish himself one day, and I mean to have a finger in the pie—

"This is the man that made the pills,  
That cured the ills,"

and so on. But we must look after him, or else—By-the-way, do you know my pet story about 'Or else'?"

"Thank you, doctor, I know that tale; and do not mean to be frightened about Ted, so you needn't try

to amuse me. I only want you to tell me what we're to do for him. He must give up lessons, I suppose?"

"H—m! that's not so easily settled. The fact is, the worry about lessons, the knowledge that certain work, however little, must be done by a given time, is very bad for him. When the nervous system has lost tone, one can stand work, but not worry. The slightest feeling of anxiety, of responsibility, is not only distressing, but damaging."

"Why, then, nothing can be easier. The child must give up work absolutely, and amuse himself as he likes. There will be plenty of time, afterwards, for him to make up; at present, our only care must be to get him set right."

"As usual, there are only two sides to a question, in the eyes of wom—(cough)—of a great many people. Now, here, it is not simply a case of 'Do, and it hurts you; don't, and it heals you.' As a matter of fact, his lessons are a bagatelle to a child with Ted's brain-power, and are nowise to blame for this little collapse. Does he never ask you odd questions?"

"Oh, the most puzzling, and, if one can say so of a child's prattle, profound."

"Just the sort of thing I should have expected! Now, don't you see, a brain like that is never idle. It is for ever turning *something* over to find out the why, because, and all the ins and outs. You can't keep it quiet. If a fly walk across the window-pane, that is enough for endless speculations and imaginations. 'If boys walked across window-panes?' will be so agitating a problem, that he will slip on the floor with the notion that it is a perpendicular pane! Now, the fact is—and here is what many persons fail to see—that the regularity, the very tediousness of task-work, is a most wholesome curb on the over-active brain. Pegasus *must* work in harness. But, on the other hand, how to get rid of the anxiety aroused by the fact that certain work *must* be done!"

"That is the difficulty with Ted; we can't get the child to leave a single lesson undone; and when he has prepared a task thoroughly and said it to us, at it he'll go again, for fear he should forget it by next morning."

"Ah, that's bad, and must be put a stop to. But how to avert this anxious scrupulousness is just the problem with overwrought brains of all ages."

Dr. Fuller walked up and down the dining-room in a brown study, forgetful of my existence, I do believe. How I kept quiet I don't know, for no one knows like the mother of an ailing child what an oracle "the doctor" can become. At last he drew up with—

"I have it! I wonder I didn't think of that before. In the first place, the child must—live—out—of—doors. Nothing is so healing, and nothing is so feeding to shattered nerves, as pure, fresh, out-of-doors air. The very feel of the wind in your face is meat and drink! I know, for 'I guess I've been there, too,' as

our American friends say. Believe me, there's no nerve-restorer like air; if that doesn't answer, try more air; and if that fails, more air still!"

"Nothing could be easier! Ted can play in the garden all day; luckily, the weather is suitable, just now, at any rate."

"Play in the garden all day! Much you know about nerves, my dear lady! or rather, I'm afraid you do know, but you do not apply your knowledge. Why, the poor little man, left to himself in the garden, would simply spend the time in devouring his own

give themselves the trouble to find out with what desires and what powers children are made, and, conversely, with what capabilities they are *not* endowed. Now, the child comes to us endowed with inordinate, ravenous curiosity; not a quality to be snubbed, by any means; the play of curious thoughts in a child's mind is like the play of the tentacles by which a sea anemone sustains its life. But all is not fish that comes to the child's net; there are things the knowledge of which is as meat and drink to his hungry intelligence, and there are things the knowledge of which is as saw-



"HE DOES NOT LIKE TO BE TEASED" (p. 408).

brain! To think of all the matters for speculation he would turn up, the while he dawdles about in the idle way which only by a very broad stretch can we call play! No; that won't do; he must hardly ever be left to himself; you and his brothers and sisters must keep him constantly amused for months to come."

"But would not that be to sacrifice all to one? Why should the others stop their lessons? And as for amusing him, why, Ted gets tired in no time of games, picture-books, and that kind of thing."

"Naturally so; but has it never struck you that children were not made for books? and think of the cruel energy spent in the making of many books for their mortification!"

"I don't think I quite see what you mean."

"Very likely not; nobody does; people will not

dust—sawdust of the mind. In our teaching we should follow the lines of a child's curiosity; depend upon it, that curiosity of his has not come by accident. Had he been born with a silver spoon in his hand, we should have guessed that he was meant to feed himself with it; and just such a silver spoon is the child's restless desire to know. But what in the world is the use of a spoon if there's no porridge? He has the spoon; it's our business to serve the porridge; porridge, mind you, good nourishing food, none of your sawdust."

"I perceive that sawdust isn't satisfying; but what about Ted?"

This brought him out of the clouds, with a great laugh.

"You have me there, Mrs. Jervis! Trust a woman

for playing 'Quits. Once more, back to Ted. I know I'm a horrible bore once you mount me on a hobby. You tell me his appetite is falling off, just when we want him to eat well. Of course, I can keep him going with cod-liver oil, but poor stuff are all the substitutes for meals eaten with an appetite. Now, don't be dismayed; we must set Ted to work; for man and boy it holds good, that if a man do not work neither shall he eat. But the work must be labours he delights in, and without the least shadow of anxious responsibility."

"Poor Ted! I'm afraid it's not much work of any kind we shall get him to do just now. When he's well, he delights, like other children, in invention and construction. 'Man is a tool-using animal,' you know. But just lately, I can't get him to take up any of his old joys; he won't even sow seeds in his bit of garden; and I know how bad it is for him to mope!"

"Of course. Now, listen to my plan: I've been looking out a long time for a mother with sense enough to carry it out; and now, here are you, the very mother of my choice, *obliged* to do it for the restoration of your most promising child! Now, don't interrupt, madam; listen to my plan in detail, and then, when you have had time to take the whole thing in, if you see fatal objections, why, I must bear it, I suppose."

"Please go on, doctor."

"What does Ted want? Air, in the first place; unlimited air, free from every taint of humans, and *fresh*, in the sense of 'change of air'; not that a single change of air will do—he wants frequent changes. What else does he want? Work, exercise for limbs and lungs. Well, fresh air such as I have in view, will make him run and shout with the bravest. He wants more—healthy work for his wits; he wants to see, and touch, and know the reason why of all the moving things and growing things he will come upon away from man-defiled towns. Presto! an appetite—and bread and milk to feed it upon. Three months of this, and Ted will be himself again and very much 'more so.'"

"We must send him away, then? But I'm sure I don't know where; we have no friends whatever in the country, and I don't like to trust the child amongst strangers."

(*Sotto voce.*)—"I knew I should not get a full hearing!" (*Aloud.*)—"To send him away would not do at all. The one thing to be avoided is letting the child prey upon himself, think his own thoughts in a corner, and, worse than all, feel himself lonely and unloved. Do not be shocked; Teddy, just now, wants the entire devotion of his entire family—father and mother, brothers and sisters; nothing else will do, and nothing less; he'll pay you all for it some day, if it's only through the glorification of belonging to a great man."

"Do you mean we should all go away? It's utterly impossible. Even if the children and I could go into the country, I cannot leave my husband; and then, think of the expense of keeping up two households. Besides, don't think me careless about my child—nobody knows what Ted is to his mother—but I do

not see that the other children should be sacrificed; to lose three months' lessons is a serious matter, especially with those who go to school."

"You must do as you like about the two seniors; but, believe me, instead of a loss it would be pure gain in the matter of learning, as in every other way. As your husband lunches in town, I see no obstacle whatever; but were it otherwise, why, in this case, his interests must give way to the child's."

"Well, but your plan, doctor!"

"Why, even living in the heart of London as you do, in half or three-quarters of an hour you can get out to commons or woods, where you can take in great draughts of air—relatively untainted. Do this every reasonably fine day, taking, at any rate, the three little ones."

"But the expense! We simply could not afford it; and how could I neglect all household duties, and all the oversight necessary to secure my husband's comfort?"

"What if it cost a pound a week—not more, or £10 in the three months? What of that, if it prove the saving and the making of Teddy? Take it out of your savings if necessary; but I doubt if you need do that; many household expenses will be reduced; the children will thrive on bread and milk dinners, and their clothes for climbing trees and tumbling about on the furzy commons will cost little enough. 'Tis my belief you would *save*. As for Jervis, I suppose we mustn't curtail the prerogatives of his highness; but don't you see, suppose you left home at half-past nine, and got back by half-past four, you would get six clear hours in the open, suppose it took an hour to go and return, and you would still have an hour at each end to put things in trim for the evening meal of the worshipful head of the house."

"A neat calculation which does you credit, but what in the world should I do with the children in the 'open,' as you call it, for six long hours—not once in a way, but every day?"

"Now, that really is to take the wind out of one's sails! It isn't only being in the air, but what you do when you get there that I care about. That's your time for filling your children with field-lore. Do they know our common forest trees? Let them watch ash and beech, elm and sycamore, through flower and leaf-bud to full summer foliage, and they will, though! Let them make friends of the trees; know one and all by bark and bole, by leaf and leaf-bud, by flower and fruit, by pose and contour, so that they can pronounce on elm or ash three fields off—and there's knowledge worth the having! 'Tis a disgrace not to know the names and the ways of all within reach of us, from 'shepherd's purse' to 'lords and ladies'; then, consider the fowls of the air, know them by sight and by note; and the lesser winged creatures. Why, there's no end to what you may learn in the fields. But—no books! Not a printed page! Learn your thing out of doors and find out its name at home, if you like, but that's all!"

"It sounds too delicious! I will talk it over with John."

CHARLOTTE M. MASON.