

THE EVILS OF HOTEL LIFE FOR CHILDREN.



IN the rush to the South, during the winter, whole families migrate—and it is a never-ending surprise to see how many discomforts and disagreeables these flocks of travellers will put up with in order to obtain the sunshine which they seem to think is unobtainable nearer home. Of late years the custom of taking children on these yearly expeditions seems to have much increased, and these few notes on the evils of hotel life for children may be of interest to those who contemplate taking their little ones to spend some weeks or months in the Sunny South. These notes were made during a long stay in many hotels on the Riviera, when I had endless opportunities of observing “the manners and customs” of large numbers of these unfortunate hotel children.

Children, at an age when they ought to be feasting on mutton and rice-pudding in their nurseries, are, when on these travels, brought to a *table d'hôte* dinner at least once, and often twice a day, or if not old enough to be promoted to this dignity, are banished with their respective nurses to the far-off regions where maids, *couriers*, and children, have the equally unwholesome fare which their elders and betters are enjoying above. Perhaps the unwholesomeness of the fare is compensated for in their parents' eyes by the educational advantages they must gain from the conversation going on around them,* and from the knowledge that at three or four years old they are cultivating a discriminating taste for champagne—*couriers* and maids being in this respect almost invariably better served than their masters. In many cases it is probable that the mother is the last person who will find out of what the children's dinner consists on these occasions, but, surely, if misfortune obliges her to bring her children abroad, her duty would oblige her to see that they were cared for, both physically and mentally. Rich people travelling with “children and suite,” and engaging as often as not the best salons in the house for their private use, are quite awake to the fact that by sending the “suite” (including their children) to dine in company with other “suites” a perceptible difference will be noticeable in their weekly bill without having themselves suffered any inconveniences from the economy.

A lady having written to the manager of a large hotel to arrange prices for a prolonged stay for herself, her husband, her little girl, and the governess, was surprised to find at the end of the first week that her bill was nearly twice as much as she had been led to expect. Repairing to the bureau she interviewed the

autocrat, who calmly replied, “You desired that your daughter and her governess should dine with you in the *salle à manger*.” “Well,” said the lady, “and how does that affect the terms I arranged with you before I came?” “Of course, madam,” was the answer, “I took it for granted that the governess and child would dine with the waiters and maids.” Under these circumstances a rearrangement of terms was clearly the only way out of the difficulty for the amazed and indignant mother. Were there a few more travelling mothers such as these, it might be worth an hotel manager's while to add a third “*salle*” to his public rooms, viz., a children's dining-room, such as there is on most large steamers, where a good wholesome nursery dinner could be served to the children and their guardians; where a leg of mutton and simple puddings should take the place of a lunch or dinner of four or six courses, and where the children, at least inasmuch as eating and drinking is concerned, should continue to lead the wholesome life to which some of them are, we hope, accustomed at home. But as long as parents are content to save a few francs a day at their children's expense, and are avowedly unmindful of their well-being or comfort, why should the manager or owner of an hotel be “*plus royaliste que le roi*.”

Of course there are so many ways in which money must be spent upon children, that any saving such as we have mentioned must be considered. The same children who are grudging the money which would secure for them wholesome food in wholesome surroundings are clothed in purple and fine linen for fear of any discredit being reflected on their owners, and there are few more pathetic sights than to watch a little group of smartly-dressed hotel children sent out to play in the garden, and watched not only by mamma and her friends, but also by a jailer or two in the shape of a nurse, who has her eye not so much on her charges as on the clothes of her charges. “Baby, dear, you mustn't pick up a stone, or you will soil your gloves—there, put it down, dear, and don't sit down on the ground;” as baby, deprived of one amusement, and thinking, no doubt, that nurse's attention had now wandered to her brother's white suit, bethought her of the harmless occupation of sitting down by the side of her little bucket and filling it with stones, scraped up with a diminutive spade, hands being forbidden. But the white frock was now in danger, and baby was set on her legs and the spade confiscated. Occupation number two was forbidden, and so it went on. One thought of the time-honoured legend in *Punch* when Ethel is bidden to “go and see what baby is doing, and tell him he is not to,” and only wondered how long it would be before the temper of this fairy-like little apparition in white-silk frock and sun-bonnet would be ruined. A few hours romping in unspoilable holland smocks would be worth any number of weeks of this so-called “play” to these luckless and trim little mortals.

And how unchildlike they are—shyness is unknown, and they welcome new acquaintances in a manner which would make one smile were it not so pathetic. To talk to these small people of dolls, or pet animals is to cause them to look at you critically as though they were wondering what manner of person you could be, and what language you were talking. But ask them about their travels, where they have been, when they are “going on,” how they like the hotel, what they think of the food and the wine, and their tongues are unloosed. How can they remain children when their lives are stripped of all that makes a child's life worth living? And

what do they gain in exchange for the loss of a free life? Not long ago talking to a small boy of ten, who ought to have been at school learning cricket, if nothing else, I ventured to inquire whether he had, during some months' stay in Italy, learnt much of the language. He replied that it was entirely unnecessary, whereupon I suggested that as he was to “make his money in business,” such he had informed me was his intention—it might perhaps come in useful. Also, I added, you may never have such a good opportunity again. “I guess there's no Italian worth doing business with in New York, who can't speak German or English,” he retorted. These were the two languages with which he had been familiar from babyhood, and with the help of which he intended making his way in the world. Months spent in France, and months in Italy had taught him not one word of French or Italian.

But so many tales are told of the independence and precocity of American children that one ceases to be surprised at fresh instances of it.

What comes upon us with a shock is to realise that as regards this precocity and unchildlikeness English children are becoming painfully like their American cousins. In fact we, too, are in great danger of losing our children, and substituting for them these queer little puppets with the manners and tastes of men and women of the world. What can be expected of a little girl who at three years old is brought down to a long seven o'clock *table d'hôte* dinner, and who, in order to fit her for any gaieties, which may be going on afterwards, demands regularly her cup of black coffee “to wake me up,” as the poor mite explains in her prim little voice. Night after night during a long stay under the same roof have I gone upstairs at ten o'clock leaving this white-faced, white-froaked, baby, still awake—still chattering among a crowd of grown-up people in the brightly-lighted salons. Will she ever rest or ever have one hour of wholesome sleep or play. People talk much of the unwholesome life led by the children employed in the pantomimes at Christmas-time. The excitement of such a life, it is said, unfits them for settling down in after years to any more monotonous employment, the glamour of the stage blinds them for ever to the interest of ordinary occupations, and their lives are often ruined. What a valuable comparison might be made between the months of stage life in one instance and the months of hotel life in the other. In one case the children are taken from poor and cramped homes, they are subjected to discipline and healthy exercise. Singing and dancing are natural pleasures to children, so that their work is their pleasure. Their education is continued, in many cases at a theatre-school, whereby unnecessary fatigue is saved, and against these advantages are to be weighed the disadvantages of excitement and late hours. Yet more advantage must be mentioned. It is asserted by doctors that in cases of severe illness the theatre-children, among the children of the poor, have the best chances of recovery—the happiness and brightness brought into their lives doing more towards a cure than anything else. So much for the months of stage life. In the second case children are taken from comfortable and specially-arranged nurseries to hotel rooms where space is paid for almost by the inch. I have heard of a small, single room serving as day and night nursery for a nurse and her two little charges for months at a time.

They get, as we have seen, little or no play, for their free time is often employed in being taken for excursions which they rarely care

* In one case the subject under discussion was whether a certain lady—the mother of three children present—had, or had not, any pretensions to good looks.

about, and which generally overtire and upset them. Their education is neglected, inasmuch as lessons are given spasmodically instead of regularly. In the garden, or in the public salons, children are often to be found "doing their lessons" under what, to both child and teacher must be almost insurmountable difficulties, perpetual coming and going, and ceaseless chatter. At other times the poor little victim may be found fighting alone with French exercises or Latin verbs, while "papa" or "mamma" are having a walk.

Again, would-be readers and lovers of quiet are distracted by the patient practising of scales and exercises in the public rooms. The excitement and the late hours are equally applicable to both cases; but in the second case we must not forget that unwholesome living (especially accustoming children to the habitual use of wine) is to be added to these two evils.

If the months of theatre life strike some people as undesirable, how much more undesirable must the months of hotel life appear. How will a quiet home life with its ordinary occupations strike girls brought up from infancy to the excitements arising from this public life. They are *blasé* at six years old, and accomplished flirts at ten. What will the discipline of school do for boys whose earliest ideas have been gathered from foreign waiters, valets, and hotel managers, and who prefer claret to gingerbeer.

As I write I have in my mind a scene I witnessed only last year, evening after evening, for several weeks. Between his parents at the dinner-table sat a little boy not yet promoted to knickerbockers. Solemnly he went through the long dinner, duly demanding a tooth-pick to be handed to him after the

joint, and alas! having his champagne-glass duly looked after by the admiring waiter. Night after night was he carried from the room at the end of dinner, after having vainly attempted to walk alone, and on more than one occasion have I come across him lying half-stupefied on the stairs or fighting violently with the nurse who was endeavouring to get him to bed.

But enough examples have been given to prove that cruelty to children may take a form which cannot be dealt with by any society, but which may yet effectually destroy the present happiness, and ruin the hereafter of many of the children who are supposed to be living in the lap of luxury. "Charity begins and ends abroad," is the nineteenth-century version of the old saying that "Charity begins at home." Much thought and more money are expended in schemes for the well-being of the "ne'er-do-weel," and to be thoroughly wicked or thoroughly disreputable is to possess the "open sesame" to all the good things of this world.

Meanwhile much thought as to the welfare of many of the children of these same charitable folk is an impossibility—the poor demand all one's time. Children who happen to be the property of poor or improvident parents clearly deserve the first consideration. These children are to be forcibly taken from the sphere into which, as we used to be taught in an old-fashioned catechism, "it has pleased God to call them," and to be boarded out or received in institutions where they will have a happy and child-like education, together with a liberal allowance of toys and cakes and holidays in the country or at the seaside. The wherewithal to provide all this for other people's children is generally asked for in

"the name of your own little ones." So while on the one hand the lot of the children of the "masses" is being made every day more happy and luxurious, while endless new schemes are forthcoming to relieve their parents from all responsibility connected with them (for the mere fact that such and such parents possess more children than there is any possibility of being able to keep alive, let alone clothe and educate, is the surest passport to the favour and the purse of these sentimental beggars of other people's goods); on the other hand the children of the richer classes seem to be every day less considered.

The children of the lowest classes are eagerly sought for, and to pay for their maintenance and education is fast becoming a fashionable craze.

The children of parents well-off, from a monetary point of view, often have far less thought and no more care expended on them than these little arabs. Once more it must not be forgotten that unless the welfare of the latter is looked after by their lawful guardians it will be looked after by no one. In this respect they are decidedly worse off than the former.

No—the children of the well-to-do are equally dependent on their parents, and surely a very little thought and a very little experience would prove that if the children of the street must have their toys, and their games, and their "child-like life," so also ought the children of the well-to-do, who are now so often defrauded of their childhood and made old and terribly wise by the publicity and unwholesomeness of their lives. Hotel life, above all else, kills child-life as surely as the hot-house kills the wild roses.



A PIT-BROW LASSIE.

CHAPTER I.

If ever you wander through the busy mining and manufacturing portions of that busiest of counties, Lancashire, you will doubtless find many girls of the class and type of the one I am about to describe—girls who earn their bread by the sweat of their brow, independent of male support, and who think they have as much right to their own opinions and ideas as Queen Victoria, with all her regal power. Cringing servility is unknown to the Lancashire pit-brow lassies.

Rachel Stowe was a tall, stalwart maiden with ruddy cheeks, bright black eyes, and arms that would have put to shame many a masculine limb. Hard labour had developed Rachel's muscles and rendered a blow from her hand a thing undesirable, as several of her friends could testify. Rachel possessed a hasty temper, and generally avenged insults with her fist or foot. The girl had many faults, but some exception should be taken to her conduct, when it is considered that her mother

was a coarse, swearing shrew, her father a drunkard, and from earliest infancy she had been nurtured in the lap of poverty and cruelty, bad language and blows being her daily portion. But in spite of the evils of her environments Rachel throve in body if not in soul, and at the age of nineteen she could earn from one and eight pence to two shillings a day. Her work was dirty and not very agreeable, but still Rachel was tolerably happy, for she knew no different sphere and possessed no aspirations after a higher mode of living. If she ever heard of her more favoured and delicately nurtured sisters, a sneer would come over her face and she would exclaim scornfully, "Oh, they are grannies!"

Rachel in her working costume and Rachel in her "Sunday best" were two different personages. On Mondays she wore skirts which just reached below her knees, short trousers, dark hose with never a wrinkle (for whoever saw a pit-brow lassie with untidy ankles?) and clogs. Over her head a dark shawl was fast-

ened which held across her brow a smaller scarlet one to protect her hair from the flying coal-dust.

On Sundays the coal-dust was washed away and Rachel's face shone bright and smiling. Her hair was tangled into a huge frizz above her brow, and a cardinal gown, ill-fitting but brilliant, took the place of the short skirt and trousers. A large hat, resplendent with a white feather and azure ribbons, completed a costume which at least was conspicuous.

In spite of many inconsistencies and much that was repulsive, Rachel had a true heart, and to invalid Nellie Brown, who saw the diamond beneath the coal-dust, she was a gentle and considerate friend. Nellie suffered from a special complaint, or to use her mother's words she had a "spine iv'er back," and lay long, weary hours upon her bed a burden to herself and those around her. The poor have not much time to nurse, and know very little of the thousand and one attentions which help to make a sick bed easier.