THE LITTLE MISS ES MISERABLE

BY MEDICUS

I think," said the father presently, "that poor little Buttons is far too clever to live long.

The child looked up from her work now as if she had quite understood the remark, which perhaps she had.

"Oh, bless ye, daddy," she said with extreme sagacious gravity, "Buttons is going to live till oo is tired of her.

"May heaven grant it," said the father with something like moisture in his eyes.

Buttons proceeded leisurely with the dressing of her doll, and nothing more was said on the subject for the time. It is fortunate, perhaps, that a little Miss Miserable like Buttons generally manages to make herself a favourite, and be very much beloved in a family, partly, no doubt, because pitty is akin to love, and because such children are usually original and amusing in their remarks.

I never found out what became of Buttons, else I should tell you a little more of her story; but there are so many of these Buttons about, that I may be doing good to some, and pleasing some of our grown-up readers, if I give a few hints about the harmless way of rearing delicate children of this sort.

First, then, it should be remembered that they are really fragile and tender from birth; that their little hearts are very frail, and that their digestion is very far indeed from being strong. Overfeeding would assimilate kill such babies, just as you might kill a delicate old woman by feeding her with too much milk. I am not sure even if the favourite motto of "Little and often" holds true in such cases. But I am sure enough, on the other hand, that the constant giving of too strong food of any sort is very deleterious, and causes indigestion. But a weakly child should always be allowed to eat whenever she is hungry, even if it does spoil her appetite for the next meal. I am convinced that one-half of the children of the Miss Miserable class are killed by kindness and ignorance combined. The child has been fed upon the feeding system, instead of using them to grow up stronger, makes them every day more weakly, which either impoverishes the blood, or renders it grossly impure. Now, feeding, in the case of delicate children, is of the very first importance. I will presume that the reader's little one has cut her temporary teeth, and that she has been fed hitherto principally on milk. This is of course the correct diet for young infants. But having got these teeth, it is time she had something to taste them on. Therefore, though the milk diet is not to be wholly discontinued, she must have an allowance of animal food. We generally advise an interval of four hours between meals, although in the case of the weakly something may be given between meals if the child craves for it—but not otherwise.

Now, supposing that Miss Miserable has been put early to bed, and has had a good night's rest, she ought to be all alive attendant, particularly if she has been wakened in the morning. Do not feed her in bed, however. Breakfast in bed is good for no one who is not already up. Let her be bathed and dressed, therefore. She will thus have a far better appetite for her first meal. What should this consist of? Well, there is nothing too strong for them, and should be eaten with as much milk, so long as it agrees. But of course there is porridge to fall back upon, and this is even more nourishing—if it can be borne—than stops of bread and milk. I am correct, I believe, in stating that all our royal children are fed on solid porridge, and they are strong and bonne. Besides, porridge is slightly laxative. But too much care cannot be bestowed in the making of it. The meal must be finely new-ground. Oh, those porridges that has no warm flavour, or "nip," which would indicate the presence of a mint. Place the saucepan over a very clear fire and add a little salt to the water; as soon as the water comes to the boil begin to "mee in," stirring as you do so till the porridge is of fairly thick consistence; then let it boil for five minutes—not one moment longer unless the meal be the round sort; but that should never be used—it should always be the medium. This is the only pure good way of making porridge, and it cannot be too well known that London, in the case of the medium oatmeal, renders the mess slimy and unpalatable, as well as indigestible. Having made the porridge, be sure to let it cool; if eaten hot it often produces dire sickness. Let it be cooled, therefore, and then eaten with nice creamy milk. Pray fix it up for the milk without sugar, or you will do wrong to the child. Such a mess is hardly fit for a sick puppy.

Let the child sip the porridge with a spoon, and take a mouthful of milk between each mouthful; so shall she have the full benefit of this royal breakfast. Sugar should never be eaten with porridge unless you wish to induce indigestion. Yet you constantly see English children eat their breakfasts and evening suppers with porridge, to the intense horror of those who know better.

Well, now, this first meal should be partaken of not later than eight o'clock, and the dinner should follow at about half-past twelve—certainly not later; and the nurse or mother should bear in mind that if she keeps the child waiting, she is injuring her both bodily and mentally. Variety should be studied each day; thus, the weakly bairn should have nice broth, with an allowance of bread in it, every day food, to follow this, one day tender beef, the next day mutton, and the third day white fish—not salmon or any of the oily fishes. Well-mashed potatoes are very nourishing. I need hardly say that a portion of puddling will always be relished, or that the dinner may often be almost wholly puddling. But in rearing little Miss Miserable, let me give you a warning two. She must be taught to eat very slowly, and to masticate well, and she must not eat too much of the first or second course if there is pudding to follow. At five o'clock, or a quarter before five, tea will be looked for; and I need hardly say, as far as tea is concerned, that luxury should be confined only by its absence. Bread and butter with plenty of good milk must form the staple of this meal. These three meals, then; and with these, and plenty of sleep, most children should thrive. But if the little one gets hungry later on, there cannot be the slightest objection to some lunch biscuits and another glass of milk. I want you to call your attention to the fact that a child who has not been properly brought up—of course we have a weakly child may have a bite of something to eat between meals if she craves for it, the healthy should be taught to wait for their bread and pudding, and their evening suppers, and if the child has a little appetite for either tea or dinner. We must never forget that a healthy appetite depends upon a good digestion, and upon something else, and if the organs of digestion are not in any rest, nervous force will be absent. Do not forget that many children are
reared, and reared well too, who never see or touch animal food from one year's end to another. In a word, they are better to a small quantity of animal food, especially if the child be very young.

This paper is devoted to the little Misses Miserable, or children, suffering from cold- ing mothers, that in allowing their children to become fat from overfeeding, especially with animal food, they are sowing the seeds of disease that cannot be eroded unless preventive care is attempted at once, and the extra supply cut off. Besides, a fat child can never be a clever one, although he may be, and it is not at all disagreeable to the body of any child, but his parents. Fat in either child or adult is a disease of itself, and you should not for- get.

The best of animal foods are mutton, tender beef, chicken, lamb, white fish, eggs, and milk. The worst sorts are pork, veal, game, rabbit, salmon, herring, mackerel, eels, and plaice. Eggs should be lightly boiled. As to puddings, we have a large choice, but they should not be too rich as far as the Misses Miserable are concerned. Pudding is bad for such as these; but rice, suge, tapioca, corn-flour, risings, and plain bread-and- butted pudding, are all good, though they may not be quite so good too rich with eggs. One egg in a tolerable large pudding is quite enough for a young child.

Beware of giving too much sugar or sweets to children. And if you don't think about getting fat, these should be stopped altogether. But a delicate girl may have a fair proportion of sugar. There is a medium in all things, however.

We must not give fruits indiscriminately to Miss Miserable; a little does good, nevertheless, but they must be well chosen. They should be fresh, and neither too ripe, nor too green. Strawberries, gooseberries, rasp- berries, oranges, greengages, and peaches, are all good in their way; but apples, unless leached, and nearly all wild fruits, are best avoided.

We must not give dried fruits; and even preserves should be dealt with sparingly.

But what should little Miss Miserable drink? Now this is a question of some considerable importance. Probably the child is frequently thirsty; that there is plenty of milk, and this must always be boiled. If a little good lime-juice be added to it, it will be all the more palatable, and will tend not only to quench the thirst, but cool and purify the blood and system generally. The Montserrat lime-fruit cordials are very wholesome, and in my own family I constantly use them. Then there is milk; but this is not always boiled as a drink, and in reality it is as much, if not more, of a food than a drink. A cup of nice cocoa, headed with plenty of good milk, will often be greatly relished, and is very satisfying as well as very nutritious. Get only the best cocoa that is to be had in the market. Bad cocoa or chocolate is positively poison. While mentioning chocolate, I should not forget to add that the pure chocolate sweets, made only by one or two of the best firms, are about the best substitute for a lack of a better form of other delicacy that can have. A little tea or coffee may be given to a child over six, but either should be very weak. Venous stimulants in no form should be given unless ordered by the family physician—they are most injurious; and the same may be said about strong tea or coffee. Good whey, or buttermilk that is not met with very nice drinks, especially in summer weather.

Aired drinks are not generally good for children, and you can be no harm and form of them which contains phosphorus or any other drug. It is only too much the fashion nowadays, I am sorry to say, to use phosphorus in some form. Quacks tell us that it feeds the brain, and cures debility in every shape or form. But phosphorus is known to produce the most terrible and loathsome diseases, and alarmed, and it gives both for yourself and child.

How shall Miss Miserable be clothed? This is another consideration, is, that if we would have the girl make old bones, and yet it is one about which the most grave mistakes are made every day. If a child is strong and healthy, we should adopt clothing, as it is, in every shape or form. By clothing a child too much we are in reality making a hothouse plant of it; and this climate of ours is by no means one for a childly nature, and quite the reverse. On the other hand, if the child is one of our little Misses Miserable, we are bound to take extra care that she is properly and warmly clad, so that the seeds of disease may not be sown in her. If fashion in dress is to be studied, therefore, and I for one confess that I like to see a child well dressed—be care- ful to select that for her which shall be easy and as loose as possible, giving unrestrained liberty to her every movement. It should be wool— all wool in winter and summer, and instead of being heated or chilly, it should be as light as dress itself.

As for night-dresses, the rule should be, never to put a child to bed in under-clothing that she has worn all day. And whether she be weakly or the reverse, a bath should be taken every second night. Indeed, the baths in this particular season, has often given a very pleasant bath, that has led in course of time to good health and bounding strength. On evenings when the bath is not felt, instead of cold water, hot water should be always washed, and she will sleep all the better for it.

I am fully aware that it is unnecessary to tell them the harm that cold and mothers, but at the same time, there are an equal number of people who either do not know them, or, knowing them, take good care not to bother themselves about carrying out these rules of health.

For the strong, the morning tab is much to be recommended; but your weakly child has a tin heart of her own, and it would never do to put too much strain or stress on that. Morning ablutions, in cases where the cold both is marked and the system is not as possible, and most careful drying and rubbing must not be neglected.

A mild soap is requisite. There are a great many soaps, both in the market, but, anyhow, never use the ordinary alkaline soap, nor a cheap soap of any kind; it is not merely a matter of cheap and nasty, but cheap and detrimental to the skin and the health as well.

Now for a word or two about Little Miserable's bedroom. I have oftentimes in this season, noticed an over-ventilated room even for the strong; but when it comes to advising for a tender child I do not feel that I can put the matter too strongly; but ventilation alone is injurious in the extreme to the inmate.

Mothers would keep the child's room much sweller if it were not for the slippery; cold; but ventilation can now be carried out so scientifically, that catching cold in bed is a matter of impossibility. The weather will arrange this, or show how best it can be done, though without diagrams it is difficult to de-scribe on paper.

I have a new shade in what I am now about to say, so important do I consider it: (1) Fresh air by night and by day is quite as valuable to a child as food itself; (2) A child, and par- ticularly a tender one, should never put to bed in a close, ill-ventilated room, is almost sure to awake badly rested, hot, and uncom- fortable, and unless she is a little angel in

short frocks, very peevish; (3) Children may not show the effects of sleeping in a badly- ventilated room all at once; but be assured that the course of time will tell on them, and it gives the tender child not the ghost of a chance of becoming hearty and strong; (4) Says Sir Thomas Watson, "If there be any immediate danger, it is, that, by the coolness of the air, that disease is undoubtedly scrofula," so let mothers take warning; (5) Say another tender and incurable disease that is fostered by insecure air; (6) But even your delicate child escape the more dreaded ailments that this uncertain climate can cause; and, the strong able to, she will have impulse block. Beds be not well ventilated, and she cannot therefore be expected to thrive.

Taking care of little Miss Miserable is of very great benefit to the deli- cate among our children. This ought to go hand in hand with fresh air. We do not get too large a supply of sunshine in this country; but this is all for the more reason that we should take advantage of the little we are allowed. Believe me, then, when I say that a sunshine bath, or rather a succession of such baths, is cheaper than the best medicine you can let a tender child take.

Just a word or two about SLEEP. Good refreshing sleep depends upon a variety of cir- cumstances, and yet that is one of the most injurious health duties that we are bound to attend to, but the absence of any one of which may cause poor little Miss Miserable a restless night and a nervous day to follow. The circumstances are these: Judicious feeding, exercise during the day in the fresh air, proper clothing by day, a comfortable, not over-warm, bed, quiet, and, but not least, a well-ventilated bed- room. Sleeping draughts are the admitted fresh air and well- ventilated rooms, but in almost every case they are positively poisonous. But if a mother leaves the care of her bed to the tender (5 meries) of the nurse, she need not be so worried out, that some of the so-called soothing medi- cines are used to procure rest for the little one. A nurse may give these without the slightest intention of doing any harm; but harm is thus done without doubt, and if a child that has been much dosed with syrup of poppies, or opium in any form, grows up at all, it is invariably delicate in body and feeble in mind.

The little Misses Miserable require any- thing in the shape of drugs? This is a question that should generally be left to the medical adviser. But there are times when medical assistance is not easily procurable, or one may be compelled from a doctor of any kind, so that a mother should always know the value of certain drugs, and keep a small supply in the house. I hope, however, to be able to devote a whole paper some day to a consideration of the medicines best suited for children, and shall do so, touch on the subject to-day. But there is one little point that does not mean good at times to delicate children: I allude to the syrup of the sapperphosphate of iron, which is given in the preparation called Hospital Food. It is an excellent tonic, and tends to the growth of bone. The dose for a child of one year is twenty drops in a little water, or simply by itself, and so on up to one drachm three daily, according to age.

I have purposely coached this article in the simplest language I can command, so that she who can't read may read. Simple though it be, however, it contains many a wholesome truth, and if my advice were followed to the letter, the child be far from being Miss Miserable in the world. I trust that this will be an autumn paper, so that in my next I may have a chance of redeeming the promise made in the beginning of winter. To the delicate, that, if taken, shall help to harden them to the rigors of the winter still before us.