

ALCOTT WILLIAM ANDRUS

THE YOUNG MOTHER:
MANAGEMENT OF
CHILDREN IN REGARD TO
HEALTH

William Alcott

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PREFACE

There is a prejudice abroad, to some extent, against agitating the questions—"What shall we eat? What shall we drink? and Wherewithal shall we be clothed?"—not so much because the Scriptures have charged us not to be over "anxious" on the subject, as because those who pay the least attention to what they eat and drink, are supposed to be, after all, the most healthy.

It is not difficult to ascertain how this opinion originated. There are a few individuals who are perpetually thinking and talking on this subject, and who would fain comply with appropriate rules, if they knew what they were, and if a certain definite course, pursued a few days only, would change their whole condition, and completely restore a shattered or ruined constitution. But their ignorance of the laws which govern the human frame, both in sickness and in health, and their indisposition to pursue any proposed plan for their improvement

long enough to receive much permanent benefit from it, keep them, notwithstanding all they say or do, always deteriorating.

Then, on the other hand, there are a few who, in consequence of possessing by nature very strong constitutions, and laboring at some active and peculiarly healthy employment, are able for a few, and perhaps even for many years, to set all the rules of health at defiance.

Now, strange as it may seem, these cases, though they are only exceptions (and those more apparent than real) to the general rule, are always dwelt upon, by those who are determined to live as they please, and to put no restraint either upon themselves or their appetites. For nothing can be plainer—so it seems to me—than that, taking mankind by families, or what is still better, by larger portions, they are most free from pain and disease, as well as most healthy and happy, who pay the most attention to the laws of human health, that is, those laws or rules by whose observance alone, that health can be certainly and permanently secured.

But these families and communities are most healthy and happy, not because they live in a proper manner, by fits and starts, but because they have, from some cause or other, adopted and persevered in HABITS which, compared with the habits of other families, or other communities, are preferable; that is, more in obedience to the laws which govern the human constitution. Not that even *they* are "without sin" or error on this subject—gross error too—but because their errors are fewer or less destructive

than those of their neighbors.

Now is it possible that any intelligent father or mother of a family, whose diet, clothing, exercise, &c. are thus comparatively well regulated, would derive no benefit from the perusal of works which treat candidly, rationally, and dispassionately, on these points? Is there a mother in the community who is so destitute of reason and common sense as not to desire the light of a broader experience in regard to the tendency of things than she has had, or possibly can have, in her own family? Is there one who will not be aided by understanding not only that a certain thing or course is better than another, but also WHY it is so?

It is by no means the object of this little work to set people to watching their stomachs from meal to meal, in regard to the effects of food, drink, &c.; for nothing in the world is better calculated to make dyspeptics than this. It is true, indeed, that some things may be obviously and greatly injurious, taken only once; and when they are so, they should be avoided. But in general, it is the effect of a habitual use of certain things for a long time together—and the longer the experiment the better—which we are to observe.

A book to guide mothers in the formation of early good habits in their offspring, should be the result of long observation and much experiment on these points, but more especially of a thorough understanding of human physiology. It should not consist so much of the conceits of a single brain—perhaps half turned—as of the logical deductions of severe science, and facts

gleaned from the world's history.

Here is a nation, or tribe of men, bringing up children to certain habits, from generation to generation—and such and such is their character. Here, again, is another large portion of our race, who, under similar circumstances of climate, &c. &c., have, for several hundred years, educated their children very differently, and with different results. A comparison of things on a large scale, together with a close attention to the constitution and relations of the human system, affords ground for drawing conclusions which are or may be useful. If this book shall not afford light derived from such sources, it were far better that it had never been written. If it only sets people to watching over the effects of things taken or used only for a single day, instead of leading them from early infancy to form in their children such habits as will preclude, in a great measure, the necessity of watching ourselves daily, then let the day perish from the memory of the writer, in which the plan of bringing it forth to the world was conceived. But he is confident of better things. He does not believe that a work which, to such an extent, **GIVES THE REASON WHY**, will be productive of more evil than good. On the contrary, it must, if read, have the opposite effect.

I do not deny that even after the formation of the best habits, there will be a necessity of paying some attention to what we eat and what we drink, from day to day, and from hour to hour; but only that the tendency of this work is not to increase this necessity, but on the contrary, to diminish it. In my own view;

these occasions of inquiry in regard to what is right, *physically* as well as *morally*, are one part of our trials in this world—one means of forming our characters. We are constantly tempted to excess and to error, in spite of the most firm habits of self-denial which can be formed. If we resist temptation, our characters are improved. And it is by self-denial and self-government in these smaller matters, that we are to hope for nearly all the progress we can ever make in the great work of self-education. Great trials of character come but seldom; and when they come, we are often armed against them; but these little trials and temptations, coming upon us every hour—these it is, after all, that give shape to our characters, and make us constantly growing either better or worse, both in the sight of God and man. But, as I have repeatedly said, the object of this work is to diminish rather than to increase the frequency of these trials, useful though they may be, if duly improved, in the formation of virtuous, and even of holy character.

There is a sense in which every infant may be said to be born healthy, so that we may not only adopt the language of the poet, Bowring, and say

—"a child is born;
Take it, and make it a bud of *moral* beauty,"

but we may also add—Take it and make it beautiful *physically*. For though a hereditary predisposition undoubtedly renders some

individuals more susceptible than others to particular diseases, yet when the bodily organization of an infant is complete, and the degree of vitality which nature gives it is sufficient to propel the machinery of the frame, it can scarcely be regarded as in any other state than that of health.

Now if it be the intention of divine Providence (and who will doubt that it is?) that the animal body should be capable of resisting with impunity the impressions of heat, cold, light, air, and the various external influences to which, at birth, it is subjected, it may be properly asked why this primitive state of health cannot be maintained, and diseases, and medicines, and even PREVENTIVES wholly avoided.

But the reason is obvious. Civilized society has placed the human race in artificial circumstances. Instead of listening to the dictates of reason, making ourselves acquainted with the nature of the human constitution, and studying to preserve it in health and vigor, we yield to the government of ignorance and presumption. The first moment, even, in which we draw breath, sees us placed under the control of individuals who are totally inadequate to the important charge of preserving the infant constitution in its original state, and aiding its progress to maturity. And thus it is that though infants, as a general rule, may be said to be born healthy, few actually remain so. Seldom, indeed, do we find a person who has arrived at maturity wholly free from disease, even in those parts of our country which are reckoned to have the most healthy climate.

It is indeed commonly said, that a large proportion, both of children and adults, among the agricultural portion of our population, are healthy. But it is not so. There is room for doubt whether, on the whole, the farmers of this country are healthier than the mechanics, or much more so than the manufacturers, or the whole mass of the country population healthier than that of the crowded city. The causes of disease are sufficiently numerous, in all places and conditions; and this will continue to be the fact, not merely until parents and teachers shall become more enlightened, but until many generations have been trained under their enlightened influence.

If the children and adults among our agricultural population derive from their employments in the open air a more ruddy appearance than those either of the city or country who are confined more to their rooms; or to a vitiated atmosphere, and to numerous other sources of disease, and if they *appear* more favored with health, I have learned, by accurate observation, that these appearances are somewhat deceptive. Their active sports and employments in the open air give them a stronger appetite than any other class of people; and the indulgence of this appetite, not only with articles which are heating or indigestible in their nature, but with an unreasonable quantity even of those which are considered highly proper, is almost in an exact proportion. And it is hence scarcely possible for the causes of disease and premature death to be more operative in factories and in cities than in farm houses and the country. Indeed it may

be questioned whether the abuses of the ANIMAL part of man—more common in some of their forms in country than in city—though they may be less conspicuous, are not more certainly and even more immediately destructive than those abuses which, in city life, and bustle, and competition, affect more the MORAL nature.

Be that as it may, however—for this is not the place for the grave discussion of so broad a question—one thing, to my mind, is perfectly clear, namely, that until physical education shall receive more attention from all those who hold the sacred office of instructors of the young, humanity can neither be much elevated nor improved. Mothers and schoolmasters especially—they who, as Dr. Rush says, plant the seeds of nearly all the good or evil in the world—must understand, most deeply and thoroughly, the laws which regulate the various provinces of the little world in which the soul resides, and which, like so many states of a great confederacy, have not only their separate interests and rights, but certain common and general ones; as well as those laws by which the human constitution is related to and connected with the objects which everywhere surround, and influence, and limit, and extend it.

This book contains little, if anything, new to those who are already familiar with anatomy and physiology. Indeed, whatever may be its claims, its merits or its demerits, it disclaims novelty. It is, indeed, in one point of view, *original*;—I mean in its form, manner, and arrangement. What I have written is chiefly from

my own resources—the results of patient study and observation, and careful reflection; but that study and observation of human nature, and this reflection, have been greatly aided by reading the writings of others.

In the prosecution of the task which I had assigned myself, no work has been of more service to me than an octavo volume of 548 pages, by Dr. Wm. P. Dewees, of Philadelphia, entitled, "A Treatise on the Physical and Medical Treatment of Children." It is one of the most valuable works on Physical Education in the English language, as is evident from the fact that notwithstanding its expense—three or four dollars—it has, in nine years, gone through five editions. If it were written in such a style, and published at such a price as would bring it within reach of the minds and purses of the mass of the community, its sale would have been, I think, much greater still; and the good which it has accomplished would have been increased ten-fold.

If the "YOUNG MOTHER" should be favorably received by the American community, and prove extensively useful, it will undoubtedly be owing to the fact that it presents so large a collection of facts and principles on the great subject of physical education, in a manner so practical, and at a price which is very low. To accomplish an object so desirable is by no means an easy task. It was once said by the author of a huge volume, that he wrote so large a work because he had not time to prepare a smaller one. And however unaccountable it may be to those who have not made the trial, it may be safely asserted, that to

present, within limits so small, anything like a system of Physical Education for the guidance of young mothers, requires much more time, and labor, and patience, than to prepare a work on the same subject twice as large.

Nor is it to be expected, after all, that the work is, in all respects, perfect. I have indeed done what I could to render it so; but am conscious that future inquiries may lead to the discovery of errors. Should such discoveries be made, they will be cheerfully acknowledged and corrected; truth being, as it should be, the leading object.

THE YOUNG MOTHER

CHAPTER I. THE NURSERY

General remarks. Importance of a Nursery—generally overlooked. Its walls—ceiling—windows—chimney. Two apartments. Sliding partition. Reasons for this arrangement. Objections to carpets. Furniture, &c. Feather beds. Holes or crevices. Currents of air. Cats and dogs. "Sucking the child's breath." Brilliant objects. Squinting. Causes of blindness.

It is far from being in the power of every young mother to procure a suitable room for a nursery. In the present state of society, the majority must be contented with such places as they can get. Still there are various reasons for saying what a nursery should be. 1. It may be of service to those who *have* the power of selection. 2. Information cannot injure those who *have not*. 3. It may lead those who have wealth to extend the hand of charity in this important direction; for there are not a few who have little sympathy with the wants and distresses of the adult poor, who will yet open their hearts and unfold their hands for the relief of suffering *infancy*.

Among those who have what is called a nursery, few select

for this purpose the most appropriate part of the building. It is not unfrequently the one that can best be spared, is most retired, or most convenient. Whether it is most favorable to the health and happiness of its occupants, is usually at best a secondary consideration.

But this ought not so to be. A nursery should never, for example, be on a ground floor, or in a shaded situation, or in any circumstances which expose it to dampness, or hinder the occasional approach of the light of the sun. It should be spacious, with dry walls, high ceiling, and tight windows. The latter should always be so constructed that the upper sash can be lowered when we wish to admit or exclude air. It should have a chimney, if possible; but if not, there should be suitable holes in the ceiling, for the purposes of ventilation.

The windows should have shutters, so that the room, when necessary, can be darkened—and green curtains. Some writers say that the windows should have cross bars before them; but if they do not descend within three feet of the floor, such an arrangement can hardly be required.

It is highly desirable that every nursery should consist of two rooms, opening into each other; or what is still better, of one large room, with a sliding or swinging partition in the middle. The use of this is, that the mother and child may retire to one, while the other is being swept or ventilated. They would thus avoid damp air, currents, and dust. Such an arrangement would also give the occupants a room, fresh, clean and sweet, in the morning, (which

is a very great advantage,) after having rendered the air of the other foul by sleeping in it.

In winter, and while there is an infant in the nursery, just beginning to walk, it is recommended by many to cover the floor with a carpet. The only advantage which they mention is, that it secures the child from injury if it falls. But I have seldom seen lasting injury inflicted by simple falls on the hard floor; and there are so many objections to carpeting a nursery, since it favors an accumulation of dust, bad air, damp, grease, and other impurities, that it seems to me preferable to omit it. Many physicians, I must own, recommend carpets during winter, though not in summer; and in no case, unless they are well shaken and aired, at least once a week.

No furniture should be admissible, except the beds for the mother and child, a table, and a few chairs. With the best writers and highest authorities on the subject, I am decidedly of opinion that all feather beds ought effectually and forever to be excluded from nurseries. The reasons for this prohibition will appear hereafter.

Every nursery should, if possible, be free from holes or crevices; otherwise the occupants will be exposed to currents of air, and their sometimes terrible and always injurious consequences. The room may, in this way, be kept at a lower medium temperature—a point of very great importance.

Cats and dogs, I believe, are usually excluded from the nursery; if not, they ought to be. For though the apprehension

of cats "sucking the child's breath," is wholly groundless, yet they may be provoked by the rude attacks of a child to inflict upon it a lasting injury. Besides, they assist, by respiration, in contaminating the air, like all other animals.

If there are, in the nursery, objects which, from the vivacity or brilliancy of their colors, attract the attention of the child, they should never be presented to them sideways, or immediately over their heads. The reason for this caution is, that children seek, and pursue almost instinctively, bright objects; and are thus liable to contract a habit of moving their eyes in an oblique direction, which *may* terminate in squinting.

Many parents seem to take great pleasure in indulging the young infant in looking at these bright objects; especially a lamp or a candle. If the child is naturally strong and vigorous, no immediate perceptible injury may arise; but I am confident in the opinion that the result is often quite otherwise. For many weeks, if not many months of their early existence, they should not be permitted to sit or lie and gaze at any bright object, be it ever so weak or distant, unless placed exactly before their eyes; and even in the latter case, it were better to avoid it.

Heat is also injurious to the eyes of all, and of course not less so to children than to adults. But when a strong light and heat are conjoined, as is the case of sitting around a large blazing fire—the former custom of New England—it is no wonder if the infantile eyes become early injured. No wonder that the generation now on the stage, early subjected to these abuses,

should be found almost universally in the use of spectacles.

This may be the most proper place for observing that great care ought to be taken, at the birth of the child, to prevent a too sudden exposure of the tender organ of vision to the light. We believe this caution is generally omitted by the American physician, though it is one which accords with the plainest dictates of common sense. Who of us has not experienced the pain of emerging suddenly from the darkness of a cellar to the ordinary light of day? The strongest eyes of the adult are scarcely able to bear the transition. How much more painful to the tender organs of the new-born infant must be the change to which it is so frequently subjected? And how easy it is to prevent the pain and danger of the change, by more effectually darkening the room into which it is introduced!

But we have testimony on this point. A distinguished German physician states that he has known many cases of permanent blindness from this very cause to which we have referred. The Principal of the Institution for the Blind, at Vienna, says he is confident that most children who appear to be born blind, are actually made blind by neglecting this same precaution.

CHAPTER II.

TEMPERATURE

General principle—"Keep cool." Our own sensations not always to be trusted. Thermometer. Why infants require more external heat than adults. Means of warmth. Air heated in other apartments. Clothes taking fire. Stove—railing around it. Excess of heat—its dangers.

There is one general principle, on this subject, which is alike applicable to all persons and circumstances. It is, to keep a little too cool, rather than in the slightest degree too warm. In other words, the lowest temperature which is compatible with comfort, is, in all cases, best adapted to health; and a slight degree of coldness, provided it amount not to a chill, and is not long continued, is more safe than the smallest unnecessary degree of warmth.

But the application of this rule to those over whom we have control, is not without its difficulties. Our own sensations are so variable, independently of external and obvious causes, that we cannot at all times judge for others, especially for infants. The absolute and real state of temperature in a room can only be ascertained by the aid of a thermometer; and no nursery should ever be without one. It should be placed, however, in such a situation as to indicate the real temperature of the atmosphere,

and not where it will give a false result.

No mother should forget that the infant, at birth, has not the power of generating heat, internally, to the extent which it possesses afterward. The lungs have as yet but a feeble, inefficient action. The purification of the blood, through their agency, is not only incomplete, but the heat evolved is as yet inconsiderable. In the absence of internal heat, then, there is an increased demand externally. If 60° be deemed suitable for most other persons, the new-born infant may, for a few days, require 65° or even 70° .

Much may and should be done in preserving the child in a proper temperature by means of its clothing. On this point I shall speak at length, in another part of this work. My present purpose is simply to treat of the temperature of the nursery.

The best way of warming a nursery—or indeed any other room, where MERE warmth is demanded—is by means of air heated in other apartments, and admitted through openings in the floor or fire-place. The air is not only thus made more pure, but every possibility of accidents, such as having the clothes take fire, is precluded. This last consideration is one of very great importance, and I hope will not be much longer overlooked in infantile education.

Next to that, in point of usefulness and safety, is a stove, placed near or IN the fire-place, and defended by an iron railing. Most people prefer an open stove; and on some accounts it is indeed preferable, especially where it is desirable to burn coal.

Still I think that the direct rays of the heat, and the glare of light from open stoves and fire-places, particularly for the young, form a very serious objection to their use.

One of the strongest objections to open stoves and fire-places in the nursery is, the increased exposure to accidents. I know it is said that this evil may be avoided by laying aside the use of cotton, and wearing nothing but worsted or flannel. This is indeed true; but I do not like the idea of being compelled to dress children in flannel or worsted, at all times when the least particle of fire is demanded; for this would be to wear this stimulating kind of clothing, in our climate, the greater part of the year.

Besides, I write for many mothers who are compelled to use cotton, on account of the expense of flannel. And if the stove be a close one, and well defended by a railing, cotton will seldom expose to danger. Still, as has been already said, the introduction of heated air from another apartment, whenever it can possibly be afforded, is incomparably better than either stoves or fire-places.

Dr. Dewees is fully persuaded that the excessive heat of nurseries has occasioned a great mortality among very young children. "In the first place," he says, "it over-stimulates them; and in the second, it renders them so susceptible of cold, that any draught of cold air endangers their lives. They are in a constant perspiration, which is frequently checked by an exposure to even an atmosphere of moderate temperature." If this is but to repeat what has been already said, the importance of the subject seems

to be a sufficient apology.

CHAPTER III.

VENTILATION

General ignorance of the constitution of the atmosphere. The subject briefly explained. Oxygen gas. Nitrogen. Carbonic acid. Fires, candles, and breathing dependent on oxygen. Danger from carbonic acid. How it destroys people. Impurity of the air by means of lamps and candles. Other sources of impurity. Experiment of putting the candle under the bed-clothes. Covering the heads of infants while sleeping—its dangers. Proportions of oxygen and nitrogen in pure and impure air. No wonder children become sickly. Particular means of ventilating rooms. Caution in regard to lamps. Washing, ironing, cooking, &c., in a nursery. Their evil tendency. Fumigation—camphor, vinegar.

Few people take sufficient pains to preserve the air in any of their apartments pure; for few know what the constitution of our atmosphere is, and in how many ways and with what ease it is rendered impure.

It is not my purpose to go into a learned, scientific account in this place, or even in this work, of the constitution of the atmosphere. A few plain statements are all that are indispensable. The atmosphere which we breathe is composed of two different airs or gases. One of these is called oxygen,¹ and the other

¹ Oxygen gas is the chief supporter of combustion, as well as of respiration. It is the

nitrogen. There is another gas usually found with these two, in smaller quantity, called carbonic acid gas; but whether it is necessary, in a very small quantity, to health, chemists, I believe, are not agreed. One thing, however, is certain—that if any portion of it is healthful, it must be very little—not more, certainly, than one-fiftieth or one-hundredth of the whole mass.

It is by means of the oxygen it contains, that air sustains life and combustion. Were it not for this, neither fires nor candles would burn, and no animal could breathe a single moment. Breathing consumes this oxygen of the air very rapidly. When the oxygen is present in about a certain proportion, combustion and respiration go on well, but when its natural proportion is diminished, the fire does not burn so well, neither does the candle; and no one can breathe so freely.

Not only are breathing and combustion impeded or disturbed by the diminution of oxygen in the atmosphere, but just in proportion as oxygen is diminished by these two processes, or either of them, carbonic acid is formed, which is not only bad for combustion, but much worse for health. If any considerable quantity of it is inhaled, it appears to be an absolute poison to the human system; and if in *very large quantity*, will often cause immediate death.

vital part, as it were, of the air. No animal or vegetable could long exist without it. And yet if alone, unmixed, it is too pure and too refined for animals to breathe. Nitrogen gas, on the contrary, while alone, will not support either respiration or combustion; mixed, however, with oxygen, it dilutes it, and in the most happy manner fits it for reception into the lungs.

It is this gas, accumulated in large quantities, that destroys so many people in close rooms, where there is no chimney, nor any other place for the bad air to escape. But it not only kills people outright—it partly kills, that is, it poisons, more or less, hundreds of thousands.

In a nursery there is the mother and child, and perhaps the nurse, to render the air impure by breathing, the fire and the lamp or candle to contribute to the same result, besides several other causes not yet mentioned. One of these is nearly related to the former. I allude to the fact that our skins, by perspiration and by other means, are a source of much impurity to the atmosphere; a fact which will be more fully explained and illustrated in the chapter on Bathing and Cleanliness. It is only necessary to say, in this place, that it is not the matter of perspiration alone which, issuing from the skin, renders the air impure; there are other exhalations more or less constantly going off from every living body, especially from the lungs; and carbonic acid gas is even formed all over the surface of the skin, as well as by means of the lungs.

One needs no better proof that carbonic acid is formed on the surface of the body, than the fact that after the body has been closely covered all night, if you introduce a candle under the bed-clothes into this confined air, it will be quickly extinguished, because there is too much carbonic acid gas there, and too little oxygen.

We may hence see at once the evil of covering the heads of

infants when they lie down—a very common practice. The air, when pure, contains a little more than 20 parts of oxygen, and a little less than 80 of nitrogen. Breathing this air, as I have already shown, consumes the oxygen, which is so necessary to life and health, and leaves in its place an increase of nitrogen and carbonic acid gas, which are not necessary to health, and the latter of which is even positively injurious. But when the oxygen, instead of forming 20 or more parts in 100 of the atmosphere of the nursery, is reduced to 15 or 18 parts only, and the carbonic acid gas is increased from 1 or 2 parts in 100, to 5, 6, 8 or 10—when to this is added the other noxious exhalations from the body, and from the lamp or candle, fire-place, feather bed, stagnant fluids in the room, &c., &c.—is it any wonder that children, in the end, become sickly? What else could be expected but that the seeds of disease, thus early sown, should in due time spring up, and produce their appropriate fruits?

It is sometimes said that fire in a room purifies it. It undoubtedly does so, to a certain extent, if fresh air be often admitted; but not otherwise.

I have classed feather beds among the common causes of impurity. Dr. Dewees also condemns them, most decidedly; and gives substantial reasons for "driving them out of the nursery."

In speaking of the structure of the room used for a nursery, I have adverted to the importance of having a large or double room, with sliding doors between, in order that the occupants may go into one of them, while the other is being ventilated. But

whatever may be the structure of the room, the circumstances of the occupants, or the state of the weather, every nursery ought to be most thoroughly ventilated, once a day, at least; and when the weather is tolerable, twice a day. If there is but one apartment, and fear is entertained of the dampness of the fresh air introduced, or of currents, and if the mother and babe cannot retire, there is a last resort, which is for them to get into bed, and cover themselves a short time with the clothing. For though I have prohibited the covering of the face with the bed-clothes for any considerable length of time together, yet to do so for some fifteen or twenty minutes is an evil of far less magnitude than to suffer an apartment to remain without being ventilated, for twenty-four hours together—a very common occurrence.

When a lamp is kept burning in a nursery during the night, it should always be placed at the door of the stove, or in the chimney place, that its smoke, and the bad airs or gases which are formed, may escape. But it is better, in general, to avoid burning lamps or candles during the night. By means of common matches, a light may be produced, when necessary, almost instantly; especially if you have a spirit lamp in the nursery, or what is still better, one of spirit gas—that is, a mixture of alcohol and turpentine.

It is highly desirable that all washing, ironing, and cooking should be avoided in the nursery. They load the air with noxious effluvia or vapor, or with particles of dust; none of which ought ever to enter the delicate lungs of an infant.

Fumigations with camphor, vinegar, and other similar substances, have long been in reputation as a means of purifying the air in sick-rooms and nurseries; but they are of very little consequence. Fresh air, if it can be had, is always better.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CHILD'S DRESS

General principles. SEC. 1. Swathing the body—its numerous evils.—SEC. 2. Form of the dress. Fashion. Tight lacing—its dangers. Structure and motion of the chest. Diseases from tight lacing.—SEC. 3. Material of dress. Flannel—its uses. Cleanliness. Cotton—silk—linen.—SEC. 4. Quantity of dress. Power of habit. Anecdote. Begin right. Change. Dampness.—SEC. 5. Caps—their evils. Going bare-headed.—SEC. 6. Hats and bonnets.—SEC. 7. Covering for the feet. Stockings. Garters. Shoes—thick soles.—SEC. 8. Pins—their danger. Shocking anecdote.—SEC. 9. Remaining wet.—SEC. 10. Dress of boys. Tight jackets. Stocks and cravats. Boots.—SEC. 11. Dress of girls—should be loose. Temperature. Exposure to the night air.

Dress serves three important purposes:—1. To cover us; 2. To defend us against cold; 3. To defend our bodies and limbs from injury. There is one more purpose of dress; in case of deformity, it seems to improve the appearance.

In all our arrangements in regard to dress, whether of children or of adults, we should ever keep in mind the above principles. The form, fashion, material, application, and quantity of all clothing, especially for infants, ought to be regulated by these

three or four rules.

The subject of this chapter is one of so much importance, and embraces such a variety of items, that it will be more convenient, both to the reader and myself, to consider it under several minor heads.

SEC. 1. *Swathing the Body*

Buffon, in his "Natural History," says that in France, an infant has hardly enjoyed the liberty of moving and stretching its limbs, before it is put into confinement. "It is swathed," says he, "its head is fixed, its legs are stretched out at full length, and its arms placed straight down by the side of its body. In this manner it is bound tight with cloths and bandages, so that it cannot stir a limb; indeed it is fortunate that the poor thing is not muffled up so as to be unable to breathe."

All swathing, except with a single bandage around the abdomen, is decidedly unreasonable, injurious and cruel. I do not pretend that the remarks of M. Buffon are fully applicable to the condition of infants in the United States. The good sense of the community nowhere permits us to transform a beautiful babe quite into an Egyptian mummy. Still there are many considerable errors on the subject of infantile dress, which, in the progress of my remarks, I shall find it necessary to expose.

The use of a simple band cannot be objected to. It affords a general support to the abdomen, and a particular one to the

umbilicus. The last point is one of great importance, where there is any tendency to a rupture at this part of the body—a tendency which very often exists in feeble children. And without some support of this kind, crying, coughing, sneezing, and straining in any way, might greatly aggravate the evil, if not produce serious consequences.

But, in order to afford a support to the abdomen in the best manner, it is by no means necessary that the bandage should be drawn very tight. Two thirds of the nurses in this country greatly err in this respect, and suppose that the more tightly a bandage is drawn, the better. It should be firm, but yet gently yielding; and therefore a piece of flannel cut "bias," as it is termed, or, obliquely with respect to the threads of which it is composed, is the most appropriate material.

If the attention of the mother were necessary nowhere else, it would be indispensable in the application of this article. If she do not take special pains to prevent it, the erring though well meaning nurse may so compress the body with the bandage as to produce pain and uneasiness, and sometimes severe colic. Nay, worse evils than even this have been known to arise. When a child sneezes, or coughs, or cries, the abdomen should naturally yield gently; but if it is so confined that it cannot yield where the band is applied, it will yield in an unnatural proportion below, to the great danger of producing a species of rupture, no less troublesome than the one which such tight swathing is designed to prevent.

But besides the bandage already mentioned, no other restraint of the body and limbs of a child is at all admissible. The Creator has kindly ordained that the human body and limbs, and especially its muscles, or moving powers, shall be developed by exercise. Confine an arm or a leg, even in a child of ten years of age, and the limb will not increase either in strength or size as it otherwise would, because its muscles are not exercised; and the fact is still more obvious in infancy.

There is a still deeper evil. On all the limbs are fixed two sets of muscles; one to extend, the other to draw up or bend the limb. If you keep a limb extended for a considerable time, you weaken the one set of muscles; if you keep it bent, you weaken the other. This weakness may become so great that the limb will be rendered useless. There are cases on record—well authenticated—where children, by being obliged to sit in one place on a hard floor, have been made cripples for life. Hundreds of others are injured, though they may not become absolutely crippled.

I repeat it, therefore, their dress should be so free and loose that they may use their little limbs, their neck and their bodies, as much as they please; and in every desired direction. The practices of confining their arms while they lie down, for fear they should scratch themselves with their nails, and of pinning the clothes round their feet, are therefore highly reprehensible. Better that they should even occasionally scratch themselves with their nails, than that they should be made the victims of injurious restraint. Who would think of tying up or muffling the young lamb or kid?

And even the young plant—what think you would be the effect, if its leaves and branches could not move gently with the soft breezes? Would the fluids circulate, and health be promoted: or would they stagnate, and a morbid, sickly and dwarfish state be the consequence?

Those whose object is to make infancy, as well as any other period of existence, a season of happiness, will not fail to find an additional motive for giving the little stranger entire freedom in the land whither he has so recently arrived, especially when he seems to enjoy it so much. Who can be so hardened as to confine him, unless compelled by the most pressing necessity?

SEC. 2. *Form of the Dress*

On this subject a writer in the London Literary Gazette of some eight or ten years ago, lays down the following general directions, to which, in cold weather, there can be but one possible objection, which is, they are not *alamode*, and are not, therefore, likely to be followed.

"All that a child requires, so far as regards clothing, in the first month of its existence, is a simple covering for the trunk and extremities of the body, made of a material soft and agreeable to the skin, and which can retain, in an equable degree, the animal temperature. These qualities are to be found in perfection in fine flannel; and I recommend that the only clothing, for the first month or six weeks, be a square piece of flannel, large enough

to involve fully and overlap the whole of the babe, with the exception of the head, which should be left totally uncovered. This wrapper should be fixed by a button near the breast, and left so loose as to permit the arms and legs to be freely stretched, and moved in every direction. It should be succeeded by a loose flannel gown with sleeves, which should be worn till the end of the second month; after which it may be changed to the common clothing used by children of this age."

The advantages of such a dress are, that the movements of the infant will be, as we have already seen, free and unrestrained, and we shall escape the misery of hearing the screams which now so frequently accompany the dressing and undressing of almost every child. No chafings from friction, moreover, can occur; and as the insensible perspiration is in this way promoted over the whole surface of the body, the sympathy between the stomach and skin is happily maintained. A healthy sympathy of this kind, duly kept up, does much towards preserving the stomach in a good state, and the skin from eruptions and sores.

But as I apprehend that christianity is not yet very deeply rooted in the minds and hearts of parents, I have already expressed my doubts whether they are prepared to receive and profit by advice at once rational and physiological. Still I cannot help hoping that I shall succeed in persuading mothers to have every part of a child's dress perfectly loose, except the band already referred to; and that should be but moderately tight.

Common humanity ought to teach us better than to put the

body of a helpless infant into a *vise*, and press it to death, as the first mark of our attention. Who has not been struck with a strange inconsistency in the conduct of mothers and nurses, who, while they are so exceedingly tender towards the infant in some points as to injure it by their kindness, are yet almost insensible to its cries of distress while dressing it? So far, indeed, are they from feeling emotions of pity, that they often make light of its cries, regarding them as signs of health and vigor.

There can be no doubt, I confess, that the first cries of an infant, if strong, both indicate and promote a healthy state of the lungs, to a certain extent; but there will always be unavoidable occasions enough for crying to promote health, even after we have done all we can in the way of avoiding pain. They who only draw the child's dress the tighter, the more it cries, are guilty of a crime of little less enormity than murder.

"Think," says Dr. Buchan, "of the immense number of children that die of convulsions soon after birth; and be assured that these (its cries) are much oftener owing to galling pressure, or some external injury, than to any inward cause." This same writer adds, that he has known a child which was "seized with convulsion fits" soon after being "swaddled," immediately relieved by taking off the rollers and bandages; and he says that a loose dress prevented the return of the disease.

I think it is obvious that the utmost extent to which we ought to go, in yielding to the fashion, as it regards form, is to use three pieces of clothing—the shirt, the petticoat and the frock; all of

which must be as loose as possible; and before the infant begins to crawl about much, the latter should be long, for the salve of covering the feet and legs. At four or five years of age, loose trousers, with boys, may be substituted for the petticoat; but it is a question whether something like the frock might not, with every individual, be usefully retained through life.

I wish it were unnecessary, in a book like this, to join in the general complaint against tight lacing any part of the body, but especially the chest. But as this work of torture is sometimes begun almost from the cradle, and as prevention is better than cure, the hope of preventing that for which no cure appears yet to have been found, leads me to make a few remarks on the subject.

As it has long been my opinion that one reason why mothers continue to overlook the subject is, that they do not understand the structure and motion of the chest, I have attempted the following explanation and illustration.

I have already said, that if we bandage tightly, for a considerable time, any part of the human frame, it is apt to become weaker. The more a portion of the frame which is furnished with muscles, those curious instruments of motion, is used, provided it is not *over-exerted*, the more vigorous it is. Bind up an arm, or a hand, or a foot, and keep it bound for twelve hours of the day for many years, and think you it will be as strong as it otherwise would have been? Facts prove the contrary. The Chinese swathe the feet of their infant females; and they are not only small, but weak.

I have said their feet are smaller for being bandaged. So is a hand or an arm. Action—healthy, constant action—is indispensable to the perfect development of the body and limbs. Why it is so, is another thing. But so it is; and it is a principle or law of the great Creator which cannot be evaded. More than this; if you bind some parts of the body tightly, so as to compress them as much as you can without producing actual pain, you will find that the part not only ceases to grow, but actually dwindles away. I have seen this tried again and again. Even the solid parts perish under pressure. When a person first wears a false head of hair, the clasp which rests upon the head, at the upper part of the forehead, being new and elastic, and pressing rather closely, will, in a few months, often make quite an indentation in the cranium or bone of the head.

Now is it probable—nay, is it possible—that the lungs, especially those of young persons, can expand and come to their full and natural size under pressure, even though the pressure should be slight? Must they not be weakened? And if the pressure be strong, as it sometimes is, must they not dwindle away?

We know, too, from the nature and structure of the lungs themselves, that tight lacing must injure them. Many mothers have very imperfect notions of what physicians mean, when they say that corsets impede the circulation, by preventing the full and undisturbed action of the lungs. They get no higher ideas of the *motion* of the *chest*, than what is connected with bending the body forward and backward, from right to left, &c. They know that,

if dressed too tightly, *this* motion is not so free as it otherwise would be; but if they are not so closely laced as to prevent that free bending of the body of which I have been speaking, they think there can be no danger; or at least, none of consequence.

Now it happens that this sort of motion is not that to which physicians refer, when they complain of corsets. Strictly speaking, this bending of the whole body is performed by the muscles of the back, and not those of the chest. The latter have very little to do with it. It is true, that even *this* motion ought not to be hindered; but if it is, the evil is one of little comparative magnitude.

Every time we breathe naturally, all the ribs, together with the breast bone, have motion. The ribs rise, and spread a little outward, especially towards the fore part. The breast bone not only rises, but swings forward a little, like a pendulum. But the moment the chest is swathed or bandaged, this motion must be hindered; and the more, in proportion to the tightness.

On this point, those persons make a sad mistake, who say that "a busk not too wide nor too rigid seems to correspond to the supporting spine, and to assist, rather than impede the efforts of nature, to keep the body erect."

Can we seriously compare the offices of the spine with those of the ribs, and suppose that because the former is fixed like a post, at the back part of the lungs, therefore an artificial post in front would be useful? Why, we might just as well argue in favor of hanging weights to a door, or a clog to a pendulum, in

order to make it swing backwards and forwards more easily. We might almost as well say that the elbow ought to be made firm, to correspond with the shoulders, and thus become advocates for letting the stays or bandages enclose the arm above the elbow, and fasten it firmly to the side. Indeed, the consequences in the latter case, aside from a little inconvenience, would not be half so destructive to health as in the former. The ribs, where they join to the back bone, form hinges; and hinges are made for motion. But if you fasten them to a post in front, of what value are the hinges?

If mothers ask, of what use this motion of the lungs is, it is only necessary to refer them to the chapter on Ventilation, in which I trust the subject is made intelligible, and a satisfactory answer afforded.

But I might appeal to facts. Let us look at females around us generally. Do their countenances indicate that they enjoy as good health as they did when dress was worn more loosely? Have they not oftener a leaden hue, as if the blood in them was darker? Are they not oftener short-breathed than formerly? As they advance in life, have they not more chronic diseases? Are not their chests smaller and weaker? And as the doctrine that if one member suffers, all the other members suffer with it, is not less true in physiology than in morals, do we not find other organs besides the lungs weakened? Surgeons and physicians, who, like faithful sentinels, have watched at their post half a century, tell us, moreover, that if these foolish and injurious

practices to which I refer are tolerated two centuries longer, every female will be deformed, and the whole race greatly degenerated, physically and morally.

Those with whom no arguments will avail, are recommended to read the following remarks from the first volume of the Library of Health, p. 119:

"It is related, on the authority of Macgill, that in Tunis, after a girl is engaged, or betrothed, she is then *fattened*. For this purpose, she is cooped up in a small room, and shackles of gold and silver are placed upon her ancles and wrists, as a piece of dress. If she is to be married to a man who has discharged, despatched, or lost a former wife, the shackles which the former wife wore are put on the new bride's limbs, and she is fed till they are filled up to a proper thickness. The food used for this custom worthy of the barbarians is called *drough*, which is of an extraordinary fattening quality, and also famous for rendering the milk of the nurse rich and abundant. With this and their national dish, *cuscasoo*, the bride is literally crammed, and many actually die under the spoon."

We laugh at all this, and well we may; but there are customs not very far from home, no less ridiculous.

"There is a country four or five thousand miles westward of Tunis, where the females, to a very great extent, are emaciated for marriage, instead being fattened. This process is begun, in part, by shackles—not of gold and silver, perhaps, but of wood—but instead of being put on loosely, and causing the body or

limbs to fill them, they are made to compress the body in the outset; and as the size of the latter diminishes, the shackles are contracted or tightened. As with the eastern, so with the western females, many of them die under the process; though a far greater number die at a remote period, as the consequence of it."

SEC. 3. *Material*

I have already committed myself to the reader as favoring the use of soft flannel in cold weather, especially for children who are not yet able to run about freely in the open air. The advantages of an early use of this material, at least for under-clothes, are numerous. The following are a few of them.

1. Flannel, next to the skin, is a pleasant flesh brush; keeping up a gentle and equable irritation, and promoting perspiration and every other function which it is the office of the skin to perform, or assist in performing.

2. It guards the body against the cooling effects of evaporation, when in a state of profuse perspiration.

3. By preventing the heat of the body from escaping too rapidly, it keeps up a steadier temperature on the surface than any other known substance. The importance of the last consideration is greater, in a climate like our own, than elsewhere.

But there are limits to the use of this article of clothing. Whenever the temperature of the atmosphere is so great, even without artificial heat, that we no longer wish to retain the heat

of the body by the clothing, then all flannel should be removed at once, and linen should be substituted; taking care to replace the flannel whenever the temperature of the atmosphere, as indicated by the thermometer, or by the child's feelings, may seem to require it.

It should also be kept clean. There is a very general mistake abroad on this subject. Many suppose that flannel can be worn longer without washing than other kinds of cloth. On the contrary, it should be changed oftener than cotton, or even linen, because it will absorb a great deal of fluid, especially the matter of perspiration, which, if long retained, is believed to ferment, and produce unhealthy, if not poisonous gases. For this reason, too, flannel for children's clothing should be white, that it may show dirt the more readily, and obtain the more frequent washing; although it is for this very reason—its liability to exhibit the least particles of dirt—that it is commonly rejected.

One caution more in regard to the use of flannel may be necessary. With some children, owing to a peculiarity of constitution, flannel will produce eruptions on the skin, which are very troublesome. Whenever this is the case, the flannel should be immediately laid aside; upon which the eruptions usually disappear.

If parents would take proper pains to get the lighter, softer kinds of flannel for this purpose, and be particular about its looseness and quantity, I should prefer, as I have already intimated, to have very young children, in our climate, wear this

material the greater part of the year, excepting perhaps July and August.

My reasons for this course would be, first, that I like the stimulus of soft flannel on the skin, if changed sufficiently often, better than that of any other kind of clothing. Secondly, cotton is so liable to take fire, that its use in the nursery and among little children seems very hazardous. Thirdly, silk is not quite the appropriate material, as a general thing, besides being too expensive; and fourthly, linen is not warm enough, except in mid-summer.

Except, therefore, in July and August, and in cases of idiosyncrasy, such as have just been alluded to, I would use flannel for the under-clothes of young children, throughout the year. But whenever they acquire sufficient strength to walk and run, and play much in the open air, I would gradually lay aside the use of all flannel, even in winter. Great attention, however, must be paid to the *quantity*. The parent who, guided by this rule, should keep on her child the same amount of flannel, and of the same thickness, from January to June 30th, and then, on the first of July, should suddenly exchange it for thin linen, in moderate quantity, might find trouble from it. It is better to make the changes more gradually; otherwise, whatever may be the material of the dress, the child will be likely to suffer.

SEC. 4. *Quantity*

The quantity of clothing used by different individuals of the same age, in the same climate, possessing constitutions nearly alike, and following similar occupations, is so different as to strike us with surprise when we first observe the fact.

One will wear nothing but a coarse linen or cotton shirt, coarse coat, waistcoat, and pantaloons, and boots, in the coldest weather. He never, unless it be on the Sabbath, puts on even a cravat, and never in any case stockings or mittens.

Another, in similar circumstances in all respects, constantly wears his thick stockings, flannel wrapper and drawers, and cravat; and seldom goes out, in cold weather, without mittens and an overcoat. He is not a whit warmer: indeed he often suffers more from the cold, than his neighbor who dresses in the manner just described.

Why all this difference? It is no doubt the result of habit. Any individual may accustom himself to much or little clothing. And the earlier the habit is begun, the greater is its influence.

Some persons, observing how little clothing one may accustom himself to use and yet be comfortable, have told us, that so far as mere temperature is concerned, we need no clothing at all. They relate the story of the Scythian and Alexander. Alexander asked the former how he could go without clothes in such a cold climate. He replied, by asking Alexander how he

could go with his face naked. "Habit reconciles us to this;" was the reply. "Think me, then, *all* face," said the Scythian.

But admitting that certain individuals, and even a few rude tribes, have gone without clothing; did they therefore follow, in this respect, the intentions of nature? The greatest stickler for adhering to nature's plan, cannot prove this. Analogy is against it. Most of the other animals, even in hot climates, are furnished with a hairy covering from the first; and in cold climates, the Author of their being has even provided them with an increase of clothing for the winter. Their fur, on the approach of cold weather, not only becomes whiter, and therefore conducts the heat away from the body more slowly, but, as every dealer in furs well understands, it becomes softer and thicker. And yet the blood of the furred animals of cold countries is as warm as ours, if not warmer.

The inferences which it seems to me we ought to make from this are, that if other animals require clothing, and even a change of clothing, so does man; and that as the Creator has left him to provide, by his own ingenuity, for a great many of his wants, instead of furnishing him with instinct to direct him, so in relation to dress. And even if it could be proved that dress were naturally unnecessary, with reference to temperature, I should still defend its use on other principles. The few speculative minds, therefore, that in the vagaries of their fancy, but never in their practice, reject it, are not to be regarded.

The principle laid down in the commencement of the chapter

on Temperature, is the great principle which should guide us in regard to dress. But although we should always keep a little too cool rather than a little too warm, it is by no means desirable to be cold. Any degree of chilliness, long continued, interrupts the functions which the skin ought to perform, and thus produces mischief.

The same rules, in this respect, apply to eating, as well as to dress. It is better to eat a little less than nature requires, than a little more. It is a generally received opinion, however, that mankind frequently, at least in this country, eat about twice as much as health requires. This is owing to habit; and perhaps the power of the latter is as great in this respect as in regard to dress.

The great point in regard to food or dress is, to *begin* right, and, observing what nature requires—studying at the same time the testimony of others—to endeavor to keep within the bounds she has assigned. It has already been more than intimated, that if the nursery be kept in a proper temperature, a single loose piece of dress is, for some time, all that is required. In pursuance of this principle, through life, I believe few persons would be found who would need more at one time than a single suit of woollen clothes, even in the severest winters of our northern climate.

I have always observed that they who wear the greatest amount of clothing, are most subject to colds. There are obvious reasons why it should be so. This, then, if a fact, is one of the strongest reasons in favor of acquiring a habit of going as thinly clad as we possibly can, and not at the same time feel any inconvenience.

But after all, whether it be winter or summer, we must vary our clothing with the variations of the weather, as indicated by the thermometer, and our own feelings. Sometimes, in our ever-changing and ever-changeable climate, it may be necessary to vary our dress three or four times a day. Some cry out against this practice as dangerous, but I have never found it so. I have known persons who made it a constant practice; and I never found that they sustained any injury from it, except the loss of a little time; and the increase of comfort was more than enough to compensate for that. There is one thing to be avoided, however, whether we change our clothing—our linen especially—twice a day, or only twice a week—which is, *dampness*.

SEC. 5. *Caps*

The practice of putting caps on infants is happily going by; and perhaps it may be thought unnecessary for me to dwell a single moment on the subject. But as the practice still prevails in some parts of the country, it may be well to bestow upon it a few passing remarks.

Many mothers have not considered that the circulation of the blood in young infants is peculiarly active; that a large amount of blood is at that period carried to the head; that in consequence of this, the head is proportionably hotter than in adults; and that from this source arises the tendency of very young children to brain-fever, dropsy in the head, and other diseases of this part of

the system. But these are most undoubted facts.

Hence one reason why the heads of infants should be kept as cool as possible; and though a thin cap confines less heat than a thick head of hair does when they are older, yet they are less able to bear it. The truth is, that nature furnishes a covering for the head, just about as fast as a covering is required, and the child's safety will permit.

At the present day, few persons will probably be found, who will defend the utility of caps, any longer than till the hair is grown. The general apology for their use after this period, and indeed in most instances before, is, that they look pretty. "What would people say to see my darling without a cap?"

But when the head is kept, from the first, totally uncovered, the hair grows more rapidly, dandruff and other scurfy diseases rarely attack the scalp; catarrh, snuffles, and other similar complaints, and above all, dropsy in the head, seldom show themselves; and the period of cutting teeth, that most dangerous period in the life of an infant, is passed over with much more safety.

"Nothing but custom," says a foreign writer, "can reconcile us to the cap, with all its lace and trumpery ornaments, on the beautiful head of a child; and I would ask any one to say candidly, whether he thinks the children in the pictures of Titian and Raffaele would be improved by having their heads covered with caps, instead of the silken curls—the adornment of nature—which cluster round their smiling faces. If there were no other

reason for disusing caps for infants, but the improvement which it produces in the *appearance* of the child, I would maintain that this is a sufficient inducement." And I concur with him fully.

As to the notion—now I hope nearly exploded—that it is necessary to cover up the "open of the head," as it is called, nothing can be more idle. This part of the head requires no more covering than any other part; and if it did, all the dress in the world could not affect it in the least, except to retard the growth of the bones, which, in due time, ought to close up the space; and this effect, anything which keeps the head too hot might help to produce. Of the folly of wetting the head with spirits, or any other medicated lotions, and of making daily efforts to bring it into shape, it is unnecessary to speak in the present chapter.

SEC. 6. *Hats and Bonnets*

The hats worn in this country are almost universally too warm. But if it is a great mistake in adults to wear thick, heavy hats, it is much more so in the case of children.

The infant in the nursery, as we have already seen, needs no covering of the kind. It is absolutely necessary that the head should be kept as cool as possible; and absolutely dangerous to cover it too warmly. At a later period, however, the danger greatly diminishes, because the circulation of the blood becomes more equal, and does not tend so much towards the brain.

Still, however, the head is hotter than the limbs, especially

the hands and feet; and I cannot help thinking that the hair is the only covering which is perfectly safe, either in childhood or age; except in the sunshine or in the storm. There may be—there probably is—some danger in going without hat or bonnet in the hot sun; though I have known many children, and some grown persons, who were constantly exposed in this way, and yet appeared not to suffer from it.

But this may be the proper place to state that we are ever in great danger of deceiving ourselves on this subject. If the individuals who follow practices usually regarded as pernicious, while their habits in other respects are just like those of other persons around them who have similar strength, &c. of constitution,—if these individuals, I say, were wholly to escape disease, through life, or if they were to be so much more free from it, and live to an age so much greater than others as to constitute a striking and obvious difference in their favor, we might then safely argue that the practices which they follow are at least without dangers, if not of obvious advantage. But when we see them beset with ills, like other people, it is not safe to pronounce their habits favorable to health, since it is impossible to know whether some of the ills which they suffer are not produced by them.

These remarks are applicable to the disuse of any covering for the head in the sun and in the rain. For you will find those who adopt this practice from early infancy,² subject to as many

² I say, from early infancy; because we may adopt the best habits in mature years,

diseases as those around them with similar constitutions, but with habits somewhat different; and as our diseases are generally the consequences of our errors in one way or another, it is impossible to say with certainty that some of them might not have arisen from exposure of the head.

I should not hesitate, therefore, to advise all mothers to put a light hat or bonnet on the heads of their children, whenever they are to be exposed to the direct rays of the summer sun, or to the rain. And as we cannot always foresee when and where these exposures will arise, and as it is believed that these coverings, if light, will never be productive of much injury while we are abroad in the open air, it will follow that it is better to wear than to omit them.

But while I contend for their use as consistent with health and sound philosophy, I must not be understood as admitting the use of such hats as are worn at present, even by children. They are, as I have said before, too hot. What should be substituted, I am unable to determine; but until something can be supplied, which would not be half so oppressive as our common wool hats, I should regard it as the lesser evil to omit them entirely. The danger of going bare-headed, if the practice is commenced early, we know from the customs of some savage nations, can never be very great.

after our constitutions have been broken up by error and vice, without effecting anything more than to keep us from actually sinking at once. Indeed, in most cases we ought not to expect more.

SEC. 7. *Covering for the Feet*

The same reason for avoiding the use of any covering for the head, in early infancy, is a sufficient reason for covering the feet well. For just in proportion as the blood is sent to the head in superabundance, and keeps up in it an undue degree of heat, just in the same proportion is it sent to the feet in too *small* a quantity, leaving these parts liable to cold. Now it is a fundamental law with medical men, that the feet ought to be kept warmer than the head, if possible; especially while the child is very young, and exposed to brain diseases.

So long, therefore, as children are young, and unable to exercise their feet, stockings ought to be used, both in summer and winter; but I prefer to have them short, unless long ones can be used without garters. Everything in the shape of a garter or ligature round the limbs, body, or neck of a child, except a single body-band, already mentioned in another chapter, ought forever to be banished.

It has often been objected, I know, that stockings will make the feet tender. But as no child was ever hardened by *continued* and severe cold applied to any part of the body, but the contrary, so no one was ever made more tender by being kept moderately warm. Excess of heat, like excess of cold, will alike weaken either children or adults; but there is little danger of heating the feet and legs of infants too much during the first year of infancy.

It is also said that stockings are apt to receive and retain wet. But as I shall show in another place that wet clothes should be frequently changed, this objection would be equally strong against wearing coats and diapers.

As to shoes, there is some variety of opinion among medical men. A few hold that they cramp the feet, and prevent children from learning to walk as early as they otherwise would. If it were best for children that they should learn to walk as early as possible, the last objection might have weight. But it seems to me not at all desirable to be in haste about their walking. Indeed, I greatly prefer to retard their progress, in this respect, rather than to hasten it.

As to the first objection, that shoes cramp the feet too much, nearly its whole force turns upon the question whether they are made of proper materials or not. There is no need of making them of cow-hide, or any other thick leather. The soles are the most important part. These will defend the feet against pins, needles, and such other sharp substances as are usually found on the floor; and the upper part of the shoe, so long as the wearer remains in the nursery, may be made of the softest and most yielding material—even of cloth. Infants' shoes should always be made on two lasts, one for each foot.

The philosopher Locke held, that in order to harden the young, their shoes ought to be "so that they might leak and let in water, whenever they came near it." There may be and probably is, no harm in having a child wet his feet occasionally, provided he

is soon supplied with dry stockings again; but it is hazardous for either children or adults to go too long in wet stockings, and especially to sit long in them, after they have been using much active exercise. I am in favor of good, substantial shoes and stockings for people of all ages and conditions, and at all seasons, and believe it entirely in accordance with sound economy and the laws of the human constitution.

SEC. 8. *Pins*

The custom of using ten or a dozen pins in the dressing of children, ought by all means to be set aside. They not only often wound the skin, but they have occasionally been known to penetrate the body and the joints of the limbs. So many of these dreadful accidents occur, and where no accident happens, so much pain is occasionally given by their sharp points to the little sufferer, who cannot tell what the matter is, that it is quite time the practice were abolished.

Do you ask what can be substituted?—The following mode is adopted by Dr. Dewees in his own family, as mentioned in his work on the "Physical and Medical Treatment of Children," at page 86.

"The belly-band and the petticoat have strings; and not a single pin is used in their adjustment. The little shirt, which is always made much larger than the infant's body, is folded on the back and bosom, and these folds kept in their places by properly

adjusting the body of the petticoat: so far not a pin is used. The diaper requires one, but this should be of a large size, and made to serve the double purpose of holding the folds of this article, as well as keeping the belly-band in its proper place; the latter having a small tag of double linen depending from its lower margin, by which it is secured to the diaper, by the same pin.

"Should an extraordinary display of best 'bib and tucker' be required upon any special occasion, a third pin may be admitted to ensure the well-sitting of the 'frock' waist in front;—this last pin, however, is applied externally; so that the risk of its getting into the child's body is very small, even if it should become displaced."

The writer from whom the last two paragraphs are taken, says he has seen needles substituted for pins; and relates a long story of a child whose life was well nigh destroyed in this manner. It underwent months of ill health, and many moments of excruciating agony, before the cause of its trouble was suspected. Sometimes its distress was so great that nothing but large doses of laudanum, sufficient to stupify it, could afford the least relief. At last a tumor was discovered by the attending physician, near one of the bones on which we sit, and a needle was extracted two inches long. The needle had been put in its clothes, and, by slipping into the folds of the skin, had insinuated itself, unperceived, into the child's body. It is pleasing to add, that, although the little sufferer had now been ill seven or eight months, and had endured almost everything but death,—fever, diarrhoea,

and the most excruciating pain,—it soon recovered.

This shocking circumstance is enough, one would think, to deter every mother or nurse, who becomes acquainted with it, from using needles in infants' clothes. Happy would it be, if, in banishing needles, they would contrive to banish pins also, and adopt either the plan of Dr. Dewees, or one still more rational.

SEC. 9. *Remaining Wet*

On the subject of changing the wet clothing of a child, there is a strange and monstrous error abroad; which is, that by suffering them to remain wet and cold, we harden the constitution. The filthiness of this practice is enough to condemn it, were there nothing else to be said against it.

It is insisted on by many, I know, that as water which is salt, when it is applied to the skin, and suffered to remain long, while it secures the point of hardening the child, prevents all possibility of its taking cold, it hence follows, that wet diapers are not injurious. But this is a mistake. Every time an infant is allowed to remain wet, we not only endanger its taking cold, but expose it to excoriations of the skin, if not to serious and dangerous inflammation. In short, if frequent changes are not made, whatever some mothers and nurses may think, they may rest assured, that the health of the child must sooner or later suffer as the consequence.

Nor is it enough to hang up a diaper by the fire, and, as soon

as it is dry, apply it again. It should be clean, as well as dry. Let us not be told, that it is troublesome to wash so often. Everything is in a certain sense troublesome. Everything in this world, which is worth having, is the result of toil. Nothing but absolute poverty affords the shadow of an excuse for neglecting anything which will promote the health, or even the comfort of the tender infant.

Of the impropriety and danger of suffering wet clothes to dry upon us, I shall speak elsewhere; as well as of the evil of suffering children to remain dirty,—their skins or their clothing.

SEC. 10. *Remarks on the Dress of Boys*

Whatever tends to disturb the growth of the body, or hinder the free exercise of the limbs, during the infancy and childhood of both sexes is injurious. And as every mother has the control of these things, I have thought it desirable to append to this chapter a few thoughts on the particular dress of each sex. I begin with that of boys.

"Nothing can be more injurious to health," says a foreign writer, "than the tight jacket, buttoned up to the throat, the well-fitted boots, and the stiff stock." And his remarks are nearly as applicable to this country as to England. The consequences of this preposterous method of dressing boys, are diminutive manhood, deformity of person, and a constitution either already imbued with disease, or highly susceptible of its impression.

No part of the modern dress of boys is more absurd, than the

stiff stock, or thick cravat. It is not only injurious by pressing on the *jugular* veins, and preventing the blood from freely passing out of the head, but, by constantly pressing on the numerous and complex muscles of the neck, at this period of life, it prevents their development; because whatever hinders the action of the muscular parts, hinders their growth, and makes them even appear as if wasted.

It would be a great improvement, if this part of dress were wholly discarded; and when is there so appropriate a time for setting it aside, as *before we began to use it*; or rather while we are under the more immediate care of our mothers?

The use of jackets buttoned up to the throat, except in cold weather, is objectionable; but this is very fortunately going out of fashion.

Boots, if used at all, should fit well; to this there can be no possible objection. What the writer, whom I have quoted, referred to, was probably the tight boot, worn to prevent the foot from being large and unseemly; but producing, as tight boots inevitably do, an injurious effect upon the muscles, a constrained walk, and corns.

What can be more painful, than to see little boys—yes, *little* boys—boys neither fifteen, nor twenty, nor twenty-five, walk as if they were fettered and trussed up for the spit; unable to look down, or turn their heads, on account of a thick stock, or two or three cravats piled on the top of each other—and only capable of using their arms to dangle a cane, or carry an umbrella, as they

hobble along, perhaps on a hot sun-shiny day in July or August?

But this evil, you who are mothers, have it very generally in your power to prevent, if you are only wise enough to secure that ascendancy over your children's minds which the Author of their nature designed. At the least, you can prevent it for a time—the most important period, too—by your own authority. This you will not need any urging to induce you to do, if you ever become thoroughly convinced of its pre-eminent folly.

SEC. 11. *On the Dress of Girls*

The same general principles which should guide the young mother in regard to the dress of boys, are equally important and applicable in the management of girls. The whole dress should, as much as possible, hang loosely from the shoulders, without pressing on the body, or any part of it. This, I say, is the grand point to be aimed at; and this is the only great principle, whatever some mothers may think, which will lead to true beauty of person, and gracefulness of gesture.

There is, however, a slight difference to be made between the dress of girls and that of boys. The greater delicacy of the female frame requires that the surface of the body should be kept rather warmer, as well as better protected from the vicissitudes of the atmosphere.

But is this the fact? Is not the contrary true? While boys in the winter are clad in warm woollen vestments, covering every part

of their trunk, many portions of the female frame, and especially many parts of their limbs, are left so much exposed, that in cold weather you scarcely find a girl abroad, who appears to be comfortable.

Nay, they are not only uncomfortable abroad, but at home, and if I were to present to mothers in detail, a tenth of the evils which their daughters suffer from not adopting a warmer method of clothing, I should probably be stared at by some, and laughed at by others. All this, too, without speaking of going out of warm concert rooms, theatres, ball rooms and lecture rooms, into the night air, or out of school rooms and churches, to walk home with measured and stiffened pace, lest the sin unpardonable of walking swiftly or RUNNING,—that active exercise which health requires, which youthful feeling prompts, and which duty ought to inspire,—should unwarily be committed.

The tremendous evils of confining the lungs have been adverted to at sufficient length. In reference to that general subject, I need only add, that if the chest be not duly exercised and expanded, the liver, the lungs, the stomach, digestion, absorption, circulation and perspiration, are all hindered. And even so far as the various internal organs of the body *are* active, they act at a great disadvantage. The blood which they "work up," is bad blood, and must be so, as long as the lungs do not have free play. Hence may and do arise all sorts of diseases; especially diseases of OBSTRUCTION; and such as are often very difficult of removal.

What can be a more pitiable sight than some modern girls going home from school or church in winter? Thinly clad, the blood is all driven from the surface upon the internal organs, and what remains is so loaded with carbon, which the lungs ought but cannot discharge, that her skin has a leaden hue; her teeth chatter; her very heart is chilled in her panting, frozen bosom; she cannot run, and if she could, she must not, for it would be vulgar! Every mother should shrink from the sight of such a picture.

CHAPTER V. CLEANLINESS

Physiology of the human skin. Of checking perspiration. Diseases thus produced. "Dirt" not "healthy." How the mistake originated. "Smell of the earth." Effect of uncleanness on the morals. Filthiness produces bowel complaints. Changing dress for the sake of cleanliness.

No mother will ever pay that attention to cleanliness which its importance to health and happiness demands, till she perceives its necessity. And she will never perceive that necessity till she has studied attentively the machinery of the human frame—and especially its wonderful covering.

The skin is pierced with little openings or *pores*, so numerous that some have reckoned them at a million to every square inch. At all events, they are so small that the naked eye can neither distinguish nor count them; and so numerous, that we cannot pierce the skin with the finest needle without hitting one or more of them.

When we are in perfect health, and the skin clean, a gentle moisture or mist continually oozes through these pores. This process is called *perspiration*; and the moisture which thus escapes, the *matter* of perspiration.

Perspiration may be checked in two ways. 1. by filth on the

skin; 2. by what is commonly called taking cold—for taking cold essentially consists in chilling the skin to such a degree as to stop, for some time, the escape of this moisture. Most persons have doubtless observed, that in the first stages of a cold, they frequently have a very dry skin. Whereas, when we are in health, the skin usually feels moist.

Our health is not only endangered, and a foundation laid for fevers, rheumatisms, and consumptions, by stopping the pores of the skin with dirt, or anything else, but there is also danger from another and a very different source.

The blood, in its circulation through the body, is constantly becoming impure; and as it thus comes back impure to the heart, is as constantly sent to the lungs, where it comes in close contact with the air which we breathe, and is purified. But this same purifying process which goes on in the lungs, goes on, too, if the skin is in a pure, free, healthy condition, all over the surface of the body. If it is not—if the skin cannot do this part of the work—an additional burden is thus laid on the lungs, which in this way soon become so overworked, that they cannot perform their own proportion of the labor. And whenever this happens, the health must soon suffer.

The strange belief, that "dirt is healthy," has much influence on the daily practice of thousands of those who are ignorant of the human structure, and the laws which govern and regulate the animal economy. It has probably originated in the well-known fact, that those children who are allowed to play in the dirt, are

often as healthy—and even *more* healthy—than those who are confined to the nursery or the parlor.

Now, while it is admitted that this is a very common case, it is yet believed that the former class of children would be still more vigorous than they now are, if they were kept more cleanly, or were at least frequently washed. It is not the dirt which promotes their health, but their active exercise in the open air; the advantages of which are more than sufficient to compensate for the injury which they sustain from the dirt. That is to say, they retain, in spite of the dirt, better health than those who are denied the blessings of pure air and abundant exercise, and subjected to the opposite extreme of almost constant confinement.

There is something deceitful, after all, in the ruddy, blooming appearance of those children who are left by the busy parent to play in the road or field, without attention to cleanliness. If this were not so, how comes it to pass that they suffer much more, not only from chronic, but from acute diseases, than children whose parents are in better circumstances?

I am the more solicitous to combat a belief in the salutary tendency of an unclean skin, because I know it prevails to some extent; and because I know also, both from reason and from fact, that it is a gross error.

It is, however, true, that years sometimes intervene, before the evil consequences of dirtiness appear. The office of the vessels of the skin being interrupted, an increase of action is imposed on other parts, especially on those internal organs commonly called

glands, which action is apt to settle into obstinate disease. Hence, at least when aided by other causes, often arise, in later life, after the source of the evil is forgotten, if it were ever suspected, rheumatism, scrofula, jaundice, and even consumption.

There is a strange notion abroad, that the *smell* of the earth is beneficial, especially to consumptive persons. I honestly believe, however, that it is more likely to create consumption than to cure it. Besides, in what does this smell consist? Do the silex, the alumine, and the other earths, with their compounds, emit any odor? Rarely, I believe, unless when mixed with vegetable matter. But no gases necessary to health are evolved during the decomposition of vegetable matter; on the contrary, it is well known that many of them tend to induce disease.

I am thoroughly persuaded that too much attention cannot be paid to cleanliness; and the demand for such attention is equally imperious in the case of those who cultivate the earth, or labor in it, or on stone, during the intervals of their useful avocations, as in the case of those individuals who follow other employments.

I must also protest against the doctrine, that the smell or taste of the earth, much less a coat of it spread over the surface, and closing up, for hours and days together, thousands and millions of those little pores with which the Author of this "wondrous frame" has pierced the skin, can have a salutary tendency.

The opinion has been even maintained, that uncleanly habits are not only unfavorable to health, but to morality. There can be no doubt that he who neglects his person and dress will be found

lower in the scale of morals, other things being equal, than he who pays a due regard to cleanliness.

Some have supposed that a disposition to neglect personal cleanliness was indicative of genius. But this opinion is grossly erroneous, and has well nigh ruined many a young man.

I am far from recommending any degree of fastidiousness on this subject. Truth and correct practice usually lie between extremes. But I do and must insist, that the connection between cleanliness of body and purity of moral character, is much more close and direct than has usually been supposed.

But to return to the more immediate effects of cleanliness on health. There is one class of diseases in particular which, in an eminent degree, owe their origin to a neglect of cleanliness. I refer to the bowel complaints so common among children during summer and autumn. Except in case of teething, the use of unripe fruits, or the *abuse* of those which are in themselves excellent, it is probable that more than half of the bowel complaints of the young are either produced or greatly aggravated by a foul skin.

The importance of washing the whole body in water will be insisted on in the chapter on Bathing; it is therefore unnecessary to say anything farther on that subject in this place, except to observe that whether the washings of the body be partial or general, they should be thorough, so far as they are carried. There are thousands of children who, in pretending to wash their hands and face, will do little more than wet the inside of their hands, and the tips of their noses and ears unless great care is taken.

Few things are more important than suitable changes of dress. There are those, who, from principle, never wear the same undergarment but one day without washing, either in summer or winter; and there are others who, though they may wear an article without washing two or three successive days, take care to change their dress at night—never sleeping in a garment which they have worn during the day.

It is a very common objection to suggestions like these, that they will do very well for those who have wealth, but not for the poor;—that *they* have neither the time nor the means of attending to them. How can they change their clothes every day? we are asked. And how can they afford to have a separate dress for the night?

There must be retrenchment in some other matters, it is admitted. In order to find time for more washing, or money to pay others for the labor, the poor must deny themselves a few things which they now suppose, if they have ever thought at all on the subject, are conducive to their happiness—but which are in reality either useless or injurious. Something may be saved by a reasonable dress, as I have already shown. Other items of expense, which might be spared with great advantage to health and happiness, and applied to the purpose in question, will be mentioned in the chapter on Food and Drink.

CHAPTER VI. ON BATHING

Danger of savage practices. Rousseau. Cold water at birth. First washing of the child. Rules. Temperature. Bathing vessels. Unreasonable fears. Whims. Views of Dr. Dewees. Hardening. Rules for the cold bath. Securing a glow. Coming out of the bath. Local baths. Shower bath. Vapor bath. Sponging. Neglect of bathing. The Romans. Treatment of children compared with that of domestic animals.

Some of the hardy nations of antiquity, as well as a few savage tribes of modern times, have been accustomed to plunge their new-born infants into cold water. This is done for the two-fold purpose of washing and hardening them.

To all who reason but for a moment on this subject, the danger of such a practice must be obvious. So sudden a change from a temperature of nearly 100° of Fahrenheit to one quite low, perhaps scarcely 40°, must and does have a powerful effect on the nervous system even of an adult; but how much more on that of a tender infant? We may form some idea of this, by the suddenness and violence of its cries, by the sudden contractions and relaxations of its limbs and body, and by its palpitating heart and difficult breathing.

Every one's experience may also remind him, that what

produces at best a momentary pain to himself, cannot otherwise than be painful to the infant. In making a comparison between adults and infants, however, in this respect, we should remember that the lungs of the infant do not get into full and vigorous action until some time after birth; and that, on this account, the hold they have on life is so feeble, that any powerful shock, and especially that given by the cold bath, is ten times more dangerous to them than to adults, or even to infants themselves, after a few months have elapsed.

It is surprising to me that so sensible a writer as Rousseau generally is on education, should have encouraged this dangerous practice; and still more so that many fathers even now, blinded by theory, should persist in it, notwithstanding the pleadings of the mother or the nurse, and the plainest dictates of common sense and common prudence.³

A child plunged into cold water at birth, by those whose theories carry them so far as to do it even in the coldest weather, has sometimes been twenty-four hours in recovering, notwithstanding the most active and judicious efforts to restore it. In other instances the results have been still more distressing.

³ Nothing is intended to be said here, which shall encourage unthinking nurses or mothers in setting themselves against measures which have been prescribed by higher authority,—I mean the physician. There are cases of this kind, where it requires all the resolution which a father, uninterrupted, can summon to his aid, to administer a dose or perform a task, on which he knows the existence of his child may be depending: but when the thoughtless entreaties of the mother or nurse are interposed, it makes his condition most distressing. Mothers, in such cases, ought to encourage rather than remonstrate. They who *do not*, are guilty of cruelty, and—perhaps—of infanticide.

Dr. Dewees is persuaded that he has "known death itself to follow the use of cold water," in this way—I believe he means *immediate* death—and adds, with great confidence, that he has "repeatedly seen it require the lapse of several hours before reaction could establish itself; during which time the pale and sunken cheeks and livid lips declared the almost exhausted state" of the infant's excitability.⁴

We need not hesitate to put very great confidence in the opinion here expressed; for besides being a close and just observer of human nature, Dr. D. has had the direction and management, in a greater or less degree, of several thousands of new-born infants.

Nothing, indeed, in the whole range of physical education, seems better proved, than that while some few infants, whose constitutions are naturally very strong, are invigorated by the practice in question, others, in the proportion of hundreds for one, who are *less* robust, are injured for life; some of them seriously.

Nor will spirits added to the water make any material difference. I am aware that there is a very general notion abroad, that the injurious effects of cold water, in its application both internally and externally, are greatly diminished by the addition of a little spirit; but it is not so. Does the addition of such a small quantity of spirit as is generally used in these cases, materially alter the temperature? Is it not the application of a cold liquid to

⁴ "Dewees on children" p. 72.

a heated surface, still? Can we make anything else of it, either more or less?

I do not undertake to say, that the cold bath may not be so managed in the progress of infancy, as to make it beneficial, especially to strong constitutions. It is its indiscriminate application to all new-born children, without regard to strength of constitution, or any other circumstances, that I most strenuously oppose. Of its occasional use, under the eye of a physician, and by parents who will discriminate, I shall say more presently.

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