

Nesbit Edith

# Wings and the Child: or, The Building of Magic Cities



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# **Nesbit E. Edith**

## **Wings and the Child; Or, The Building of Magic Cities**

### **PART I**

#### **CHAPTER I Of Understanding**

It is not with any pretension to special knowledge of my subject that I set out to write down what I know about children. I have no special means of knowing anything: I do, in fact, know nothing that cannot be known by any one who will go to the only fount of knowledge, experience. And by experience I do not mean scientific experience, that is the recorded results of experiments, the tabulated knowledge wrung from observation; I mean personal experience, that is to say, memory. You may observe the actions of children and chronicle their sayings, and produce from these, perhaps, a lifelike sketch of a child, as it appears to the grown-up observer; but observation is no key to the inner mysteries of a child's soul. The only key to those mysteries is in knowledge, the knowledge of what you yourself felt when you were good and little and a child. You can remember how things looked to you, and how things looked to the other children who were your intimates. Our own childhood, besides furnishing us with an exhaustless store of enlightening memories, furnishes us with the one opportunity of our lives for the observation of children – other children. There is a freemasonry between children, a spontaneous confidence and give-and-take which is and must be for ever impossible between children and grown-ups, no matter how sympathetic the grown-up, how confiding the child. Between the child and the grown-up there is a great gulf fixed – and this gulf, the gulf between one generation and another, can never be really bridged. You may learn to see across it, a little, or sometimes in rare cases to lean very far across it so that you can just touch the tips of the little fingers held out from the other side. But if your dealings with those on the other side of the gulf are to be just, generous, noble, and helpful, they must be motivated and coloured by your memories of the time when you yourself were on the other side – when you were a child full of your own hopes, dreams, aims, interests, instincts, and imaginings, and over against you, kindly perhaps, tenderly loving, often tenderly loved, but still in some mysterious way antagonistic and counting as "Them," were the grown-ups. I might say elders, parents, teachers, spiritual pastors and masters, but the word which the child himself uses seems to me, for all reasons, to be the best word for my use, because it expresses fully and finally the nature of the gulf between. The grown-ups are the people who once were children and who have forgotten what it felt like to be a child. And Time marks with the same outward brand those who have forgotten and those who do not forget. So that even the few who have managed to slip past the Customs-house with their bundle of memories intact can never fully display them. These are a sort of contraband, and neither the children nor the grown-ups will ever believe that that which we have brought with us from the land of childhood is genuine. The grown-ups accuse us of invention, sometimes praise us for it, when all we have is memory; and the children imagine that we must have been watching them, and thus surprised a few of their secrets, when all that we have is the secrets which were our own when we were children – secrets which were so bound up with the fibre of our nature that we could never lose them, and so go through life with them, our dearest treasures. Such people feel to the end that they are children in a grown-up world.

For a middle-aged gentleman with a beard or a stout elderly lady with spectacles to move among other elderly and spectacled persons feeling that they are still children, and that the other elderly and spectacled ones are really grown-ups, seems thoroughly unreasonable, and therefore those who have never forgotten do not, as a rule, say anything about it. They just mingle with the other people, looking as grown-up as any one – but in their hearts they are only pretending to be grown-up: it is like acting in a charade. Time with his make-up box of lines and wrinkles, his skilful brush that paints out the tints and the contours of youth, his supply of grey wigs and rounded shoulders and pillows for the waist, disguises the actors well enough, and they go through life altogether unsuspected. The tired eyes close on a world which to them has always been the child's world, the tired hands loose the earthly possessions which have, to them, been ever the toys of the child. And deep in their hearts is the faith and the hope that in the life to come it may not be necessary to pretend to be grown-up.

Such people as these are never pessimists, though they may be sinners; and they will be trusting, to the verge of what a real grown-up would call imbecility. To them the world will be, from first to last, a beautiful place, and every unbeautiful thing will be a surprise, hurting them like a sudden blow. They will never learn prudence, or parsimony, nor know, with the unerring instinct of the really grown-up, the things that are or are not done by the best people. All their lives they will love, and expect love – and be sad, wondering helplessly when they do not get it. They will expect beautiful quixotic impulsive generousities and splendours from a grown-up world which has forgotten what impulse was: and to the very end they will not leave off expecting. They will be easily pleased and easily hurt, and the grown-ups in grain will contemplate their pains and their pleasures with an uncomprehending irritation.

If these children, disguised by grown-up bodies, are ever recognised for what they are, it is when they happen to have the use of their pens – when they write for and about children. Then grown-up people will call them intelligent and observant, and children will write to them and ask the heart-warm, heart-warming question, "How did you know?" For if they can become articulate they will speak the language that children understand, and children will love, not them, for their identity is cloaked with grey grown-up-ness, but what they say. There are some of these in whom the fire of genius burns up and licks away the trappings under which Time seeks to disguise them – Andersen, Stevenson, Juliana Ewing were such as these – and the world knows them for what they were, and adores in them what the uninspired it would decry and despise.

To these others who have the memories of childhood untainted and yet have not the gift and relief of words, to these I address myself in the first instance, because they will understand without any involved explanation on my part what it is that I am driving at, and it is these who, alone, can teach the real grown-ups the things which they have forgotten. For these things can be taught, these things can be re-learned. I would have every man and woman in whom the heart of childhood still lives, protest, however feebly and haltingly, yet with all the power of the heart, against machine-made education – against the instruction which crams a child with facts and starves it of dreams, which forces the free foot into heavy boots and bids it walk on narrow pavement, which crushes with heavy hand the wings of the soul, and presses the flower of imagination flat between the pages of a lexicon.

## CHAPTER II

### New Ways

"What," we ask with anxious gravity, "what is the best sort of teaching for children?" One might as sanely ask what is the best sort of spectacles for men, or the best size in gloves for women. And the blind coarse generalisation which underlies that question is the very heart and core of the muddled, musty maze we call education. We talk of the best sort of education for children, as we might talk of the best sort of polish for stoves, the best sort of nourishment for mice. Stoves are all alike, they vary in ugliness perhaps, but the iron soul of one is as the iron soul of the other. The polish that is good for one is good for all. Mice may, and do, vary in size and colour; their mousehood does not vary, nor their taste for cheese. In the inner nature, in the soul and self of it, each child is different from any other child, and the education that treats children as a class and not as individual human beings is the education whose failure is bringing our civilisation about our ears even as we speak.

Each child is an explorer in a new country – an explorer with its own special needs and curiosities. We put up iron railings to keep the explorers to our own sordidly asphalted paths. The little free wild creatures would seek their meat from God: we round them into herds, pen them in folds, and feed them with artificial foods – drab flat oil cakes all alike, not considering that for some brown nuts and red berries, and for some the new clean green grass, may be the bread of life.

Or, if you take the mind of a child to be a garden wherein flowers grow that might be trained to beauty, you bring along your steam-roller, and crush everything to a flat field where you may grow cabbages. It is so good for the field, you say – because you like cabbages.

Liberty is one of the rights we claim for ourselves, though God knows we get little enough of it and use still less; and Liberty is one of the rights that a child above all needs – every possible liberty, of thought, of word, of deed. The old systems of education seem to have found it good to coerce a child for the simple sake of coercion – to make it do what the master chose, to make it leave undone those things which it wished to do and to do those things which it did not wish to do – nay, more, wished violently and conclusively not to do. To force the choice of the teacher on the child, to override the timid natural impulses of the child with the hard hoofs of the teacher's individuality, to crush out all initiative, to force the young supple mind into a mould, to lop the budding branches, nip off the sensitive seeking tendrils, to batter down the child's will by the brute force of the grown-up will, to "break the child's spirit," as the cursed phrase used to run – this was, in effect, what education meant. There was a picture in *Punch*, I remember – at least I have forgotten the picture, but I remember the legend: "Cissy, go and see what Bobbie's doing, and tell him not to."

It did not much matter what you made a child do, so long as it was something against the grain. He was to learn, not what he with his wonderful new curiosities and aptitudes longed to learn, but what you wished to teach; you with your dulled senses – dulled in the same bitter school as that in which he was now a sad learner.

Generation after generation has gone on, pounding away at the old silly game, each generation anxious and eager to hurt the new one as it, in its time, was hurt. Each generation must, one would have thought, have remembered what things hurt children and how much these things hurt, and yet this intolerable cycle of bullying and punishment and repression went on and on and on. Children were bullied and broken – and grew up to bully and break in their turn. It must be that this was because the grown-ups did not remember. Those who have the care of children, who work for them, who teach them, should be those who do remember: those who have not forgotten what it feels like to be a child – any sort of child. For, though children are all different, there is a common measure among them as there is among men. A law for men cannot be good if it be made – as indeed but too often happens – by those who have forgotten what it used to feel like to be a man; and what sort of poetry do you get from one who has forgotten beauty and sorrow, and the Spring, and how it feels to

be young and a lover? And if the people who have the care of children have forgotten what it feels like to be a child, those who do remember should remind them. They should be reminded how it feels to be not so very much higher than the table, how it feels not to be so clever as you are now, and so much more interested in so much more – how it feels to believe in things and in people as you did when you were new to the journey of life – to explore every road you came to, to trust every person you met. It is a long time ago, but can you not remember the days when right and wrong were as different as milk and mud, when you knew that it was really wrong to be naughty and really good to be good, when you felt that your mother could do no wrong and that your father was the noblest and bravest of men? Do you remember the world of small and new and joyous and delightful things? Try to remember it if you would know how to help a child instead of hindering it – try to look at the world with the clear, clean eyes that once were yours in the days when you had never read a newspaper or deceived a friend. You will then be able to see again certain ideals, unclouded and radiant, which the dust of the crowded highway and the smears of getting-on have dimmed and distorted – quite simple ideals of love, faith, unselfishness, honour, truth. I know these words are often enough on the lips of all of us, but a child's ear will be able to tell whether the words spring from the lips or the heart. Look back, and you will see that you yourself were also able to distinguish these things – once.

Education as it should be, the unfolding of a flower, not the distorting of it, is only possible to those who are willing and able themselves to become as little children.

It is because certain great spirits have done this and have tried to teach others to do it, that reforms in education have begun to be at least possible. Froebel, Pestalozzi, Signora Montessori and many a lesser star has shone upon a new path. And public interest has centred more and more on the welfare of the child. Books are written, societies formed, newspapers founded in the interests of the child, and true education becomes a possibility.

And well indeed it is for us that this is so. For the education of the last three hundred years has led, in all things vital and spiritual, downhill all the way. We have gone on frustrating natural human intelligences and emotions, inculcating false doctrines, and choking with incoherent facts the souls which asked to be fed with dreams-come-true – till now our civilisation is a thing we cannot look at without a mental and moral nausea. We have, in our countrysides, peasants too broken for rebellion, in our cities.

The mortal sickness of a mind  
Too unhappy to be kind.

If ever we are to be able to look ourselves and each other in the face again it will be because a new generation has arisen in whose ears the voice of God and His angels has not ceased to sound. If only we would see the things that belong to our peace, and lead the children instead of driving them, who knows what splendid thoughts and actions they in their natural development might bring to the salvation of the world?

In the Palace of Education which the great minds have designed and are designing, many stones will be needed – and so I bring the little stone I have hewn out and tried to shape, in the hope that it may fit into a corner of that great edifice. For if anything is to be done, it is necessary that all who have anything to give, shall give it. As Francis Bacon said:

"Nothing can so much conduce to the drawing down, as it were, from heaven a whole shower of new and profitable Inventions, as this, that the experiments of many ... may come to the knowledge of one man, or some few, who by mutual conference may whet and sharpen one another, so that by this ... Arts may flourish, and as it were by a commixture and communication of Rays, inflame one another... This sagacity by literate experience may in the mean project and scatter for the benefit of man many rudiments to knowledge which may be had at hand."



And that is why I have left for a little while the telling of stories and set myself to write down something of what I know about children – know by the grace of memory and by the dreams of childhood, to me, thank God, persistent and imperishable.

## CHAPTER III

### Playthings

The prime instinct of a child at play – I do not mean a child at games – is to create. I use the word confidently. He will make as well as create, if you let him, but always he will create: he will use the whole force of dream and fancy to create something out of nothing – over and beyond what he will make out of such materials as he has to hand. The five-year-old will lay a dozen wooden bricks and four cotton reels together, set a broken cup on the top of them, and tell you it is a steam-engine. And it is. He has created the engine which he sees, and you don't see, and the pile of bricks and cotton reels is the symbol of his creation. He will silently borrow your best scissors and cut a serrated band of newspaper, which he will fasten round his head (with your best brooch, if he cannot find a pin), hang another newspaper from his shoulders, and sit in state holding the hearth-brush. He will tell you that he is a king – and he is. He has created crown, robes, sceptre, and kingship. The paper and the rest of it are but symbols.

And you shall observe that the toys which the child loves best are always those toys which lend themselves to such symbolic use.

Christmas is at hand. You go to buy gifts for the child, in memory of that Other Child whose birthday gifts were gold, frankincense, and myrrh. You go into the toyshops, elbowing your way as best you can, looking for such toys as may aid the child in his work of creative imagination.

You find a vast mass and litter and jumble of incredible futilities – things made to sell, things made by people who have forgotten what it is like to be a child. Mechanical toys of all sorts, stupid toys, toys that will only do one thing, and that thing vulgar and foolish. And, worst outrage of all, ugly toys, monstrosities, deformities, lead devils, grinning humpbacked clowns, "comic" dogs and cats, hideous mis-shapen pigs, incredible negroes, intolerable golliwogs. All such things the natural child, with a child's decent detestation of deformity, will thrust from it with screams of fear and hatred, till the materialistic mother or nurse explains that the horror is not really, as the child knows it to be, horrible and unnatural, but "funny." Thus do we outrage the child's inborn sense of beauty, which is also the sense of health and fitness, and teach it that deformity is not shocking, not pitiable even, but just "funny." All these ugly toys are impossible as aids to clean imagination.

So, almost in as great, though not in so harmful a degree, is the "character doll." The old doll was a doll, and not a character. Therefore she could assume any character at your choice. The character doll is Baby Willy, and can never be anything else, unless imagination, exasperated and baffled, christens him Silly Billy in the moment of furious projection across the nursery floor. But the old doll, with her good, expressionless face and clear blue eyes, could be a duchess or a dairymaid, a captive princess or a greengrocer's wife keeping shop, a cruel stepmother or Joan of Arc. I beg you to try Baby Willy in the character of Joan of Arc.

You cannot hope to understand children by common-sense, by reason, by logic, nor by any science whatsoever. You cannot understand them by imagination – not even by love itself. There is only one way: to remember what you thought and felt and liked and hated when you yourself were a child. Not what you know now – or think you know – you ought to have thought and liked, but what you did then, in stark fact, like and think. There is no other way.

Do you remember the toys you liked, the toys you played with? Do you remember the toys you hated – after the fading of the first day's flush of novelty, of possession? The houses with doors that wouldn't open? The stables with horses that wouldn't stand up? The shops whose goods were part of their painted shelves, whose shopmen were as fast glued behind the counter as any live shop-assistant before the passing of the Shops Act?

And the mechanical toys – the clockwork toys. The engine was all right, even after the clockwork ran down for the last time with that inexorable whizz which told you all was over; you

could build tunnels with the big brown books in the library and push the engine through with your hand – it would run quite a long way out on the other side. But the other clockwork things! How can one love and pet a mouse, no matter how furry its superficial exterior, when underneath, where its soft waistcoat and its little feet should be, there is only a hard surface from which incompetent wheels protrude? And the ostrich who draws a hansom cab, and the man who beats the boy with a stick? When they have whizzed their last, who cares for the tin relics outliving their detestable activities?

Think of the toys you liked: the Noah's Ark – full of characters. What stirring dramas of the chase, what sporting incidents, what domestic and agricultural operations could be carried out with that most royal of toys. Mr. Noah, I remember, was equally competent and convincing as ploughman or carter. But his chief rôle was Sitting Bull. His sons were inimitable as Chingachgook and scalp hunters generally. You cannot play scalp hunters with the mechanical ostrich indissolubly welded to a hansom cab.

You loved your bricks, I think, especially if you lived in the days when bricks were of well-seasoned oak, heavy, firm, exactly proportioned, before the boxes of inexact light deal bricks, with the one painted glass window, began to be made in Germany. How finely those great bricks stood for Stonehenge, and how submissively Anna, the Dutch doll, whose arms and legs were gone, played the part of the Sacrifice. If you remember those bricks you will remember the polished, white wooden dairy sets in oval white boxes – churns and tubs and kettles and pots all neatly and beautifully turned. You will remember the doll's house furniture, rosewood, duly mitred and dovetailed, fine cabinet-makers' work, little beautiful models of beautiful things. Now the dolls' house furniture is glued together. You can't trust a light-weight china doll to sit on the kitchen chairs... But you can get your mechanical ostrich and your golliwog...

Children in towns are cut off, at least for most of the year, from the splendid and ever-varying possibilities of clay and mud and sand, oak-apples and snow-berries, acorn-cups and seaweed, shells and sticks and stones which serve and foster the creative instinct, the thousand adjuncts to that play which is dream and reality in one.

For them, even more than for the happier country children, it is good to choose toys which shall possess, above and before all, the one supreme quality of a good toy. Let it be a toy that is not merely itself, like the ostrich of whom I hope you are now as weary as I, but a toy that can be, at need, other things. A toy, in fine, that your child can, in the fullest and most satisfying sense, play with.

## CHAPTER IV

### Imagination

To the child, from the beginning, life is the unfolding of one vast mystery; to him our stalest commonplaces are great news, our dullest facts prismatic wonders. To the baby who has never seen a red ball, a red ball is a marvel, new and magnificent as ever the golden apples were to Hercules.

You show the child many things, all strange, all entrancing; it sees, it hears, it touches; it learns to co-ordinate sight and touch and hearing. You tell it tales of the things it cannot see and hear and touch, of men "that it may never meet, of lands that it shall never see"; strange black and brown and yellow people whose dress is not the dress of mother or nurse – strange glowing yellow lands where the sun burns like fire, and flowers grow that are not like the flowers in the fields at home. You tell it that the stars, which look like pin-holes in the floor of heaven, are really great lonely worlds, millions of miles away; that the earth, which the child can see for itself to be flat, is really round; that nuts fall from the trees because of the force of gravitation, and not, as reason would suggest, merely because there is nothing to hold them up. And the child believes; it believes all the seeming miracles.

Then you tell it of other things no more miraculous and no less; of fairies, and dragons, and enchantments, of spells and magic, of flying carpets and invisible swords. The child believes in these wonders likewise. Why not? If very big men live in Patagonia, why should not very little men live in flower-bells? If electricity can move unseen through the air, why not carpets? The child's memory becomes a store-house of beautiful and wonderful things which are or have been in the visible universe, or in that greater universe, the mind of man. Life will teach the child, soon enough, to distinguish between the two.

But there are those who are not as you and I. These say that all the enchanting fairy romances are lies, that nothing is real that cannot be measured or weighed, seen or heard or handled. Such make their idols of stocks and stones, and are blind and deaf to the things of the spirit. These hard-fingered materialists crush the beautiful butterfly wings of imagination, insisting that pork and pews and public-houses are more real than poetry; that a looking-glass is more real than love, a viper than valour. These Gradgrinds give to the children the stones which they call facts, and deny to the little ones the daily bread of dreams.

Of the immeasurable value of imagination as a means to the development of the loveliest virtues, to the uprooting of the ugliest and meanest sins, there is here no space to speak. But the gain in sheer happiness is more quickly set forth. Imagination, duly fostered and trained, is to the world of visible wonder and beauty what the inner light is to the Japanese lantern. It transfigures everything into a glory that is only not magic to us because we know Who kindled the inner light, Who set up for us the splendid lantern of this world.

But Mr. Gradgrind prefers the lantern unlighted. Material facts are good enough for him. Until it comes to religion. And then, suddenly, the child who has been forbidden to believe in Jack the Giant Killer must believe in Goliath and David. There are no fairies, but you must believe that there are angels. The magic sword and the magic buckler are nonsense, but the child must not have any doubts about the breastplate of righteousness and the sword of the Spirit. What spiritual reaction do you expect when, after denying all the symbolic stories and legends, you suddenly confront your poor little Materialist with the Most Wonderful Story in the world?

If I had my way, children should be taught no facts unless they asked for them. Heaven knows they ask questions enough. They should just be taught the old wonder-stories, and learn their facts through these. Who wants to know about pumpkins until he has heard Cinderella? Why not tell the miracle of Jonah first, and let the child ask about the natural history of the whale afterwards, if he cares to hear it?

And one of the greatest helps to a small, inexperienced traveller in this sometimes dusty way is the likeness of things to each other. Your piece of thick bread and butter is a little stale, perhaps, and bores you; but, when you see that your first three bites have shaped it to the likeness of a bear or a beaver, dull teatime becomes interesting at once. A cloud that is like a face, a tree that is like an old man, a hill that is like an elephant's back, if you have things like these to look at, and look out for, how short the long walk becomes.

And in the garden, when the columbine is a circle of doves, with spread wings and beaks that touch, when the foxglove flower is a little Puck's hat which will fit on your finger, when the snapdragon is not just a snapdragon, but a dragon that will snap, and the poppies can be made into dolls with black woolly hair and grass sashes – how the enchantment of the garden grows. The child will be all the more ready to hear about the seed vessels of the columbine when he has seen the doves, and the pollen of the poppy will have a double interest for her who has played with the woolly-haired dolls. Imagination gives to the child a world transfigured; let us leave it that radiant mystery for the little time that is granted.

I know a child whose parents are sad because she does not love arithmetic and history, but rather the beautiful dreams which the Gradgrinds call nonsense. Here are the verses I wrote for that child:

## **FOR DOLLY**

### **WHO DOES NOT LEARN HER LESSONS**

You see the fairies dancing in the fountain,  
Laughing, leaping, sparkling with the spray.  
You see the gnomes, at work beneath the mountain,  
Make gold and silver and diamonds every day.  
You see the angels, sliding down the moonbeams,  
Bring white dreams, like sheaves of lilies fair.  
You see the imps scarce seen against the noonbeams,  
Rise from the bonfire's blue and liquid air.

All the enchantment, all the magic there is  
Hid in trees and blossoms, to you is plain and true.  
Dewdrops in lupin leaves are jewels for the fairies;  
Every flower that blows is a miracle for you.  
Air, earth, water, fire, spread their splendid wares for you.  
Millions of magics beseech your little looks;  
Every soul your winged soul meets, loves you and cares for you.  
Ah! why must we clip those wings and dim those eyes with books?

Soon, soon enough, the magic lights grow dimmer,  
Marsh mists arise to veil the radiant sky.  
Dust of hard highways will veil the starry glimmer;  
Tired hands will lay the folded magic by.  
Storm winds will blow through those enchanted closes,  
Fairies be crushed where weed and briar grow strong...  
Leave her her crown of magic stars and roses,  
Leave her her kingdom – she will not keep it long!



## CHAPTER V

### Of Taking Root

When the history of our time comes to be written, it may be that the historian, remarking our many faults and weaknesses, and seeking to find a reason for them, speculating on our civilisation as we now speculate on the civilisations of Rome and Egypt, will come to see that the poor blossoms of civic virtue which we put forth owe their meagreness and deformity to the fact that our lives are no longer permitted to take root in material possessions. Material possessions indeed we have – too much of them and too many of them – but they are rather a dust that overlays the leaves of life than a soil in which the roots of life can grow.

A certain solidness of character, a certain quiet force and confidence grow up naturally in the man who lives all his life in one house, grows all the flowers of his life in one garden. To plant a tree and know that if you live and tend it, you will gather fruit from it; that if you set out a thorn-hedge, it will be a fine thing when your little son has grown to be a man – these are pleasures which none but the very rich can now know. (And the rich who might enjoy these pleasures prefer to run about the country in motor cars.) That is why, for ordinary people, the word "neighbour" is ceasing to have any meaning. The man who occupies the villa partially detached from your own is not your neighbour. He only moved in a month or so ago, and you yourself will probably not be there next year. A house now is a thing to live in, not to love; and a neighbour a person to criticise, but not to befriend.

When people's lives were rooted in their houses and their gardens they were also rooted in their other possessions. And these possessions were thoughtfully chosen and carefully tended. You bought furniture to live with, and for your children to live with after you. You became familiar with it – it was adorned with memories, brightened with hopes; it, like your house and your garden, assumed then a warm friendliness of intimate individuality. In those days if you wanted to be smart, you bought a new carpet and curtains: now you "refurnish the drawing-room." If you have to move house, as you often do, it seems cheaper to sell most of your furniture and buy other, than it is to remove it, especially if the moving is caused by a rise of fortune.

I do not attempt to explain it, but there is a certain quality in men who have taken root, who have lived with the same furniture, the same house, the same friends for many years, which you shall look for in vain in men who have travelled the world over and met hundreds of acquaintances. For you do not know a man by meeting him at an hotel, any more than you know a house by calling at it, or know a garden by walking along its paths. The knowledge of human nature of the man who has taken root may be narrow, but it will be deep. The unrooted man who lives in hotels and changes his familiars with his houses, will have a shallow familiarity with the veneer of acquaintances; he will not have learned to weigh and balance the inner worth of a friend.

In the same way I take it that a constant succession of new clothes is irritating and unsettling, especially to women. It fritters away the attention and exacerbates their natural frivolity. In other days when clothes were expensive, women bought few clothes, but those clothes were meant to last, and they did last. A silk dress often outlived the natural life of its first wearer. The knowledge that the question of dress will not be one to be almost weekly settled tends to calm the nerves and consolidate the character. Clothes are very cheap now – therefore women buy many new dresses, and throw the shoddy things away when, as they soon do, they grow shabby. Men are far more sensible. Every man knows the appeal of an old coat. So long as women are insensible to the appeal of an old gown, they need never hope to be considered, in stability of character, the equals of men.

The passion for ornaments – not ornament – is another of the unsettling factors in an unsettling age. The very existence of the "fancy shop" is not only a menace to, but an attack on the quiet dignity in the home. The hundreds of ugly, twisted, bizarre fancy articles which replace the old few serious

"ornaments" are all so many tokens of the spirit of unrest which is born of, and in turn bears, our modern civilisation.

It is not, alas! presently possible for us as a nation to return to that calmer, more dignified state when the lives of men were rooted in their individual possessions, possessions adorned with memories of the past and cherished as legacies to the future. But I wish I could persuade women to buy good gowns and grow fond of them, to buy good chairs and tables, and to refrain from the orgy of the fancy shop. So much of life, of thought, of energy, of temper is taken up with the continual change of dress, house, furniture, ornaments, such a constant twittering of nerves goes on about all these things which do not matter. And the children, seeing their mother's gnat-like restlessness, themselves, in turn, seek change, not of ideas or of adjustments, but of possessions. Consider the acres of rubbish specially designed for children and spread out over the counters of countless toy-shops. Trivial, unsatisfying things, the fruit of a perverse and intense commercial ingenuity: things made to sell, and not to use.

When the child's birthday comes, relations send him presents – give him presents, and his nursery is littered with a fresh array of undesirable imbecilities – to make way for which the last harvest of the same empty husks is thrust aside in the bottom of the toy cupboard. And in a couple of days most of the flimsy stuff is broken, and the child is weary to death of it all. If he has any real toys, he will leave the glittering trash for nurse to put away and go back to those real toys.

When I was a child in the nursery we had – there were three of us – a large rocking horse, a large doll's house (with a wooden box as annexe), a Noah's Ark, dinner and tea things, a great chest of oak bricks, and a pestle and mortar. I cannot remember any other toys that pleased us. Dolls came and went, but they were not toys, they were characters, and now and then something of a clockwork nature strayed our way – to be broken up and disembowelled to meet the mechanical needs of the moment. I remember a desperate hour when I found that the walking doll from Paris had clockwork under her crinoline, and could not be comfortably taken to bed. I had a black-and-white china rabbit who was hard enough, in all conscience, but then he never pretended to be anything but a china rabbit, and I bought him with my own penny at Sandhurst Fair. He slept with me for seven or eight years, and when he was lost, with my play-box and the rest of its loved contents, on the journey from France to England, all the dignity of my thirteen years could not uphold me in that tragedy.

It is a mistake to suppose that children are naturally fond of change. They love what they know. In strange places they suffer violently from home-sickness, even when their loved nurse or mother is with them. They want to get back to the house they know, the toys they know, the books they know. And the loves of children for their toys, especially the ones they take to bed with them, should be scrupulously respected. Children nowadays have insanitary, dusty Teddy Bears. I had a "rag doll," but she was stuffed with hair, and was washed once a fortnight, after which nurse put in her features again with a quill pen, and consoled me for any change in her expression by explaining that she was "growing up." My little son had a soap-stone mouse, and has it still.

The fewer toys a child has the more he will value them; and it is important that a child should value his toys if he is to begin to get out of them their *full* value. If his choice of objects be limited, he will use his imagination and ingenuity in making the objects available serve the purposes of such plays as he has in hand. Also it is well to remember that the supplementing of a child's own toys by other things, *lent for a time*, has considerable educational value. The child will learn quite easily that the difference between his and yours is not a difference between the attainable and the unattainable, but between the constant possession and the occasional possession. He will also learn to take care of the things which are lent to him, and, if he sees that you respect his possessions, will respect yours all the more in that some of them are, now and then, for a time and in a sense, his.

The generosity of aunts, uncles, and relations generally should be kindly but firmly turned into useful channels. The purchase of "fancy" things should be sternly discouraged.

With the rocking horse, the bricks, the doll's house, the cart or wheel-barrow, the tea and dinner set, the Noah's Ark and the puzzle maps, the nursery will be rudimentarily equipped. The



supplementary equipment can be added as it is needed, not by the sporadic outbursts of unclish extravagance, but by well-considered and slow degrees, and by means in which the child participates. For we must never forget that the child loves, both in imagination and in fact, to create. All his dreams, his innocent pretendings and make-believes, will help his nature to unfold, and his hands in their clumsy efforts will help the dreams, which in turn will help the little hands.

## CHAPTER VI

### Beauty and Knowledge

Clever young people find it amusing to sneer at the old-fashioned ideal of combining instruction with amusement – a stupid Victorian ideal, we are told, which a progressive generation has cast aside. Too hastily, perhaps – too inconsiderately. "Work while you work and play while you play" is a motto dealing with a big question, and one to which there are at least two sides. Entirely to divorce amusement and instruction – may not this tend to make the one dull and the other silly? In this, as in some other matters, our generation might well learn a little from its ancestors. In many ways no doubt we have far surpassed the simple ideals of our forefathers, but in the matter of amusements, in the matter of beauty, in the matter of teaching children things without boring them, or giving powders really and truly concealed in jam – have we advanced so much?

To begin with, the world is much uglier than it was. At least England is, and France, and Belgium, and Italy, and I do not suppose that Germany, so far ahead of us with airships, is far behind in the ugliness which seems to be, with the airship, the hall-mark of a really advanced nation.

We are proud, and justly, of the enormous advances made in the last sixty years in education, sanitation, and all the complicated and heavy machinery of the other 'ations, the 'ologies, and the 'isms; but in these other matters how is it with us? We have grown uglier, and the things which amuse no longer teach.

For a good many years now – more than three hundred – old men have said "Such things and such were better in our time." And always the young have disbelieved the saying, which in due course came from their own lips. Has it ever occurred to any one that the reason why old people say this is quite the simplest of all reasons? They say it because it is *true*, and true in our land in quite a special manner. The chariot wheels of advancing civilisation must always furrow some green fields, grind some fair flowers in the dust. But the chariot wheels in which civilisation to-day advances grows less and less like a chariot and more and more like a steam-roller, and unless we steer better there will very soon be few flowers left to us.

Those of us who have reached middle age already see that the old men spoke truly. Things are not what they were. Without dealing with frauds and adulterations and shoddy of all sorts we can see that things are not so good as they were, nor yet so beautiful.

And I do not think that this means just that we are growing old, and that the fingers of Time have rubbed the bloom from the fruit of Life. Because those things which must be now as they used to be, trees, leaves, rivers, and the laughter of little children, flowers, the sea at those points where piers are impracticable, and mountains – the ones stony and steep enough to resist the jerry-builder and the funicular railway – still hold all, and more than all, their old magic and delight.

It seems that it is not only that the ugly and unmeaning things have grown, like a filthy fungus, over the sheer beauty of the world, but that the things that people mean to be beautiful are not beautiful, and the things they mean to be interesting lack interest.

And the disease is universal: it attacks new things as well as old. The cinematographs even, newest of the new, as things went in the old world; already the canker has eaten them up. In the first year of Picture Palaces we all crowded to see beautiful pictures of beautiful places: Niagara, the Zambesi Falls, the Grand Cañon. The comic pieces were perhaps French, but they were certainly funny. Also we saw the way the world lived, when it was the other side of the world: "Elephants a-piling teak," naked savages, or as near naked as don't matter, moving in ceremonial dance before the idols that were the gods of their deep dangerous faith. Dramas of love and death and pity and poverty. Quite often in the early days the cinematograph tale was of some workman driven by want to the theft of a loaf. It is true that the story generally ended in his conviction and the adoption of his charming baby girl by the wife of the *Juge d'Instruction*, but all the same people saw some one

poor and sad and tempted, and were sorry and sad for his sake. Also we had tales of Indians with men that rode amain, and horses that one longed to bestride, such beauties they were, all fire and delicate strong temperament. War dramas too there were, where the hero left his sweetheart, and turned coward perhaps, redeeming himself with magnificent completeness in the splendid *débâcle* of a forlorn hope. That is all over. Already the sordid, heavy hand that smears commercial commonplace on all the bright facets of romance has obscured the vivid possibilities of the cinematograph. We have now for fun the elaborate hurting of one American person by another American person; for scenery, American flat-iron buildings; for romance the incredibly unimportant emotions of fleshy American actresses and actors. There are two girls, good and bad; two men, bad and good. In the end the good man gets the good girl, which is, of course, as it should be, or would be if we could believe in any moral quality in these fat-faced impersonators. You don't care a bit who wins, but none the less, the four of them mouth and mop and mow and make faces at you through five interminable acts, and when the good young man marries the good young woman in a parlour grossly furnished according to American ideals, you feel that both of them are well punished for their unpardonable existence. All real and delicate romance has, we observe, been wiped out by the cinematograph.

It has long been the fashion to sneer at the Crystal Palace, and indeed the poor dear has gone from bad to worse. There are exhibitions there all exactly like all other exhibitions: Switch-backs, *Montagnes Russes*, Silhouettes, Tumble-scumbles, Weary waves, Threepenny thrills (where you hustle against strangers and shriek at the impact). But once the Crystal Palace was otherwise. In the Victorian days we sneer at, when our fathers could not see that there was any quarrel between knowledge and beauty, both of whom they loved, they built the Crystal Palace as a Temple vowed to these twin Deities of their worship. Think what the Crystal Palace was then. Think what its authors intended it to be. Think what, for a little time, it was. A place of beauty, a place where beauty and knowledge went hand in hand. It is quite true that a Brobdingnagian Conservatory does not seem so beautiful to us as it did to the Prince Consort and Sir Joseph Paxton. It is true that even in the palmiest days of the Crystal Palace you barked your shins over iron girders – painted a light blue, my memory assures me – and that the boards of the flooring were so far apart that you could lose, down the cracks of them, not only your weekly sixpence or your birthday shilling, but even the sudden unexpected cartwheel (do they still call a crown that?) contributed by an uncle almost more than human. It is true that the gravel of the paths in the "grounds" tired your feet and tried your temper, and that the adventure ended in a clinging to bony fingers and admonitions from nurse "not to drag so." But on the other hand...

Think of the imagination, the feeling for romance that went to the furnishing of the old Crystal Palace. There was a lake in the grounds of Penge Park. How would our twentieth century *entrepreneurs* deal with a lake? We need not pause to invent an answer. We know it would be something new and nasty. How did these despised mid-Victorians deal with it? They set up, amid the rocks and reeds and trees of the island in that lake, life-sized images of the wonders of a dead world. On a great stone crouched a Pterodactyl, his vast wings spread for flight. A mammoth sloth embraced a tree, and I give you my word that when you came on him from behind, you, in your six years, could hardly believe that he was not real, that he would not presently leave the tree and turn his attention to your bloused and belted self. (Little boys wore caps with peaks then, and blouses with embroidered collars.) Convinced, at last, by the cold feel of his flank to your fat little hand, that he was but stone, you kept, none the less, a memory of him that would last your life, and make his name, when you met it in a book, as thrilling as the name of a friend in the list of birthday honours. There was an Ichthyosaurus too, and another chap whose name I forget, but he had a scalloped crest all down his back to the end of his tail. And the Dinosaurus ... he had a round hole in his antediluvian stomach: and, with a brother – his own turn to come next, as in honour bound – to give you a leg-up, you could explore the roomy interior of the Dinosaur with feelings hardly to be surpassed by those of bandits in a cave. It is almost impossible to over-estimate the Dinosaurus as an educational influence. On

your way back to the Palace itself you passed Water Temples surrounded by pools where water-lilies grew. Afterwards, when you read of tanks and lotuses and India, you knew what to think.

There were Sphinxes – the correct plural was told you by aunts, and you rejected it on the terrace – and, within, more smooth water with marble at the edge and more lilies, and goldfish, palms, and ferns, and humming pervasive music from the organ. There were groves or shrubberies; you entered them a-tremble with a fearful joy. You knew that round the next corner or the next would be black and brown and yellow men; savages, with their huts and their wives and their weapons, their looking-glass-pools and their reed tunics, so near you that it was only a step across a little barrier and you could pretend that you also were a black, a brown, or a yellow person, and not a little English child in a tunic, belt, and peaked cap. You never took the step, but none the less those savages were your foes and your friends, and when you met them in your geography you thrilled to the encounter.

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