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Editorial.

THE TRAINING OF CHILDREN UNDER FIVE

Nurses perhaps more than any class of the community, especially those who are engaged in district work, come in contact with the pitiful conditions in which the lives of numbers of small children in the metropolis are passed. Many parents can only afford the one small room, and that with difficulty, in a poor and crowded neighbourhood, in which the family of all ages and sizes eats, lives, and sleeps, and in which the washing and cooking is done by the over-worked mother. Is it any wonder that the small children, badly fed, dirty and peevish, are felt to be in the way of their elders? The little limbs, often rickety, alas! can only be exercised in the street. The happy play, the conditions suited to child-life are entirely absent in modern slum-land; the late hours and close confinement do not give the children a fair chance of healthy development, and they too often grow up undisciplined, unwisely indulged in some directions, unwisely checked in others, stunted in body, precocious in mind.

So amongst the problems discussed at the Conference of the London County Council School Teachers last week was that of Nursery Schools and Technical Education, and Dr. Kerr, Medical Officer in the Education Department of the London County Council, read a paper on the Physical Training of Children under Five, in which he expressed the opinion that the educational results obtainable between the ages of three and five were perhaps greater than in any other three years of school life. Habits of thought and deed were developed which influenced every later effort of the will. In the nursery school he advocated the employment of a nurse attendant, for many children coming to school at the age of three

had not acquired the habits of cleanliness which they should have acquired at that age. It was more important that a child of four should have its nose kept clean than that it should be able to count. Every child should learn walking and running, and should be made to jump from a small height in order to develop courage. The main thing was to teach the child who had come from the self-centred life of the home to adapt itself to the communal life of the school.

Miss G. E. Heaven, Head Mistress of the Haggerston Road School for Infants, followed with a paper on "The Mental and Moral Training of Children under Five," urging that nursery schools should form part of the elementary infants' schools, and that the individuals to be educated should be studied and the laws of their natural development followed. She was averse to large classes, and said that the ideal nursery school could not be attained if the classes contained more than thirty. These schools should not be merely free playgrounds. They wanted the children to be natural and free, but the spirit of obedience should also prevail.

Dr. Marion Hunter contended that the real object of the nursery school should be to turn out children who were, physically, perfectly well at the age of five. It did not in the least matter if they knew A from Z, so long as they were physically sound, healthy and happy. She thought the present infant school system absolutely wrong. Movement was the first essential to a normal healthy child, and there was little opportunity for this if children were crowded together in large classes. We hope the discussion may bear fruit in securing to very young children more orderly freedom and kindly discipline—both of which mean greater health and happiness in their lives.

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