

BUILDING UP A BABY.*

BY RUTH BREWSTER SHERMAN, R.N.

Betty was one of "my babies," the fourth child of healthy parents, herself well developed, healthy and normal in every way. She was nursed for two weeks, then fed on modified milk—weight, 8½ lb. at birth; at one month, 10½ lbs. Her mother died last year, and the baby was later cared for by an opinionated elderly nursemaid, who took directions from neither family nor doctor. When Betty was twenty-two months old, I took charge of her for three weeks, while her nurse took a vacation.

This is what I found: a chilly nursery with windows closed; a pale, quiet, unanimated child with insufficient clothing. Her flesh was flabby, hands and feet cold, expression wistful and anxious, appetite poor. There were blue hollows under the eyes, a greenish tinge around the mouth, lustreless hair. On her chin was a small bleeding sore of the kind often found on children of low vitality and poorly nourished, on her cheeks were the blue marks left by two previous sores. Evidently Betty, though not sick, was far below a normal condition.

Her outdoor exercise had been riding in her carriage or in a carriage with closed windows. Her diet had been diluted milk, chicken broth, toast and unsweetened cereals with limited drinking water, one ounce of orange juice daily, and daily medicine for constipation. Though nearly two years old she weighed only 22½ lb. Directions for a mild iron tonic and an extended diet had been disregarded because "they upset the baby." Every sign of ailment was treated by diminishing the diet and diluting the milk.

Cautiously, but as rapidly as possible, I began a new regime. First, the milk was given whole, then its amount increased until she took nine ounces in each of the several bottles. Next was added plenty of sugar on the cereals and abundant butter on the toast; then one new article of food was given daily and later, two, but with care not to overtax her half starved little system, until she was eating freely milk, toast, soft eggs, baked potato, beef tea, bacon, bread and crackers, stewed fruits, baked apple, boiled and baked custard, chocolate blancmange and all the cereals, the juice of a large orange daily and water freely at all times. She had sugar, maple syrup or rock candy syrup on her cereals, and once or twice daily I gave her several squares of sweet milk chocolate, using them as bribes or rewards.

It was both pathetic and gratifying to see the baby eat. She would sit on my lap gripping the bowl or saucer tight in her tiny hands and as the well-sugared oatmeal or the crisp bacon went into her mouth her big eyes would lift, and she would say, "Good, good," in tones of eager pleasure, exactly as a little chicken lifts its head

after drinking. Soft milk toast, full of butter, or well salted beef-tea with crackers always called forth a rapturous "licious," and an eager attention which soon emptied the bowl. If her appetite ever flagged, the chocolate was held out as a reward, but I took care that she should have plenty of it any way for its nourishing and fattening value.

An open fire kept Betty's nursery warm and comfortable, and care was taken to have it especially warm when she came in from outdoors, as it was cold, autumn weather. The windows were open all night, always when she was out of the room and often when she was in it.

We put away the fine silk coat, lace bonnet, short open-work lisle hose and thin-soled baby shoes, as insufficient for the weather and her needs. Instead she was provided with soft wool stockings which reached nearly to her hips, and were pinned to her warm shirt; stout shoes with thick soles and sensible little rubbers to keep the ground chill from striking through to her tender feet. She had an unused set of fleecy, woolly leggings reaching to the waist, coat coming well over the hips, close-fitting hood and mittens. With these Betty was well protected and ready for healthy out-door exercise. We ignored the baby carriage. For two hours each morning we were in the garden or on the street, Betty on her feet all the time. "A cold day," she would exclaim, and start off on a trot. We played games, which kept her running, blood circulating quickly and her cheeks rosy.

And how she bloomed, growing more flower-like every day. . . . She gained firm flesh instead of loose, empty tissue, colour in cheeks, lips and ears, warm hands and feet, a bright, alert expression, activity and animation, appetite, ambition to do things herself, which is a mark of health. The sore on her chin healed slowly, as she became less anæmic and her vitality improved. Her increased energy, her look of health and well-being were evident to all. Her hair seemed to grow longer and more lustrous.

These results were due to steady attention to three points: first, rational diet with plenty of fats and sugars; second, proper exercise for the weak, undeveloped muscles; third, careful preservation of the body heat. This last point is very important in the care of young children, though it is often ignored. We should, at all times, preserve their vital body-heat just as carefully as we preserve the blood in their veins. Betty had plenty of fresh air but was never chilled. Clothing, bath water, towels, food, were all warm; she slept in a flannel gown and on very cold days or nights, I put an old afghan between her crib sheets, so that no chill should strike through to her body. In all these ways her vitality was preserved, increased and improved. . . .

Surely some advance had been made and the baby started on the road to healthier childhood. Who helps establish the health of a baby girl, helps the future mother of other babies. Can a nurse find a better work?

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