The Nursery School.

By LILY G. WILLIAMS (Associate).

PART I.

OUR vitality as a nation depends always on the quality and stamina of our children. Energetic manhood can only be obtained by a healthy childhood and youth. The Nursery School is intended to further in every way the healthful growth and development of the young. Little children need no longer be sent into the gutters to pass their time as best they may, or be tied in a chair while their tired mothers attempt some of the many tasks before them. Thanks to the new Education Act put on the Statute Book in August, 1918, these children may be gathered together in safe, open spaces and allowed to develop in the way that nature intended.

If the Nursery School is to provide for the physical well-being of the children, it must be an open air school. It is impossible to lay too much stress on this point. Many children come to school heavy-eyed and weary, because they have been sleeping in a foul atmosphere in overcrowded rooms. They are being deprived of their rightful heritage—the free, pure air of heaven. A spacious garden is one of the first great essentials of the Nursery School.

The school buildings, however, are as important as the garden. They must give shelter without air-fouling or closeness, and that can be done for a large group of children only if the structures are on the outdoor principle. They should be corrugated iron or asbestos shelters facing south, or south-east. Thus only can we ensure the maximum amount of light and sunshine. The north and east sides should be provided with windows. The south side may be fitted with sliding screens. Some heating apparatus will be needed for the very cold weather ; this should be supplied by hot-water pipes and radiators.

Two shelters will be needed for every fifty children, one to be used as a dining and class room, and the other as a sleeping room. To save expense one large shelter could be arranged with a movable partition, thus forming two separate apartments.

The furniture in the class room should be light and movable. It should consist of tables large enough to accommodate two children during "occupations," and small chairs with straight legs. The height of the

chairs should be such as to encourage correct posture. When the weather is fine the children should have their meals in the garden.

A variety of toys and apparatus should be provided to suit the varying needs of the children. A plank raised at one end will be a great help in teaching the child to balance himself, and will help towards self-control.

A reception room should be provided where the children can be received each morning and submitted to a careful examination as a safeguard against the introduction of vermin and infection. As the onset of an infectious disease is often sudden, an isolation room should be provided, where doubtful cases could be transferred pending medical advice.

Ample cloak room should be provided, with pegs low enough for the children to reach. The pegs should be labelled with the children's names, and should be far enough apart to prevent one set of clothes from touching another. The cloak room should be supplied with hot water pipes, so that in wet weather the clothes can easily be dried.

A few complete sets of clothing of different sizes will be necessary for children who have not yet acquired clean habits; pretty overalls, with knickers to match, should be provided for children whose clothes would otherwise be an eyesore. This would tend to promote self-respect and prevent class distinction.

Adequate bathing and sanitary accommodation form one of the most essential parts of the Nursery School equipment. One room should be set apart for bathing only. Tiled shower baths, which can be filled from above, are most satisfactory. Hot and cold water should be laid on. Two such baths should be supplied for fifty children. In addition to these a small white pot bath, like a deep sink, should be supplied for delicate or rickety children.

A separate room should be fitted with wash basins. These should be placed low enough for the children to reach easily, and hot and cold water laid on. One room should be allowed for every fifty children. Ten basins should be supplied. These should not be arranged in one long row, but on two different sides of the wall, five on each. Each child should be supplied with a locker labelled with his name. These should be placed in two rows round the wall, one above the other with a space between. In the locker should be kept the child's own brush and comb, and small tooth comb, in a bag. On the outside of the locker there should be a narrow rod on which to hang his towel, and also a double peg for his face-cloth, tooth mug and tooth brush. A large cupboard for storing towels, soap, etc., should also be kept in this room. A small table and a low stool for the child to stand on while his hair is being done, are also necessary.

The water-closets should be easy of access from the sleeping room, and should, preferably, form part of the main building. Five should be supplied for fifty children. Where children up to seven years of age are admitted separate arrangements should be made for the boys. Low wash-down closets are suitable. They should be partially screened, so that the children cannot see one another, though the assistant can easily supervise them all.

Arrangements should be made for definite hours of rest during the day. Simply made stretcher beds, with collapsible legs, are very comfortable, and can be stored in a small space. Whenever possible the children should sleep in the garden. Sleep should be taken at the same hour every day.

It is preferable to arrange for the children's food to be cooked on the premises, so that they may have it hot and freshly cooked. The food should be wholesome and varied, and served in an appetising manner. Meals should be served at the same hour every day, and nothing should be eaten between meals. The children should be taught to chew their food thoroughly. Fresh fruit should frequently form part of their diet.

PART II.

Every child, no matter who his parents, is born with numerous possibilities, numerous tendencies both for good and evil. Heritage, however, is not quite final, and may be modified by education and training. The importance of the early years of his life is not yet fully recognised—years which Nature has set apart to give each generation a fresh start. The child is influenced for life by the early impressions which touch his mind and his body. The people around him, their speech, their habits, their passions, their ideals, all have their effect upon him. He is so plastic that his daily surroundings mould him as surely as a warm hand shapes a piece of wax. He is "wax to receive, marble to retain." In early childhood continuous living registration is taking place; the records may be dulled, but they will never be erased.

The child tends to adapt himself to his surroundings. If the child is to develop in the finest way, every possible influence which acts upon him should be controlled to serve the ends of development. The child responds to good influences as a flower opens to the sun. Plato says, "From everything that they see and hear loveliness, like a breeze, should pass into their souls and teach them."

The formation of character is a slow and gradual process which goes on in relation with all the circumstances of life. It is the main duty of the

educator to surround the child with such influences as will make for stability of character. If during the first years fundamental impressions are made, nerve and muscle are trained and good habits are formed, then the power to do well is more easily acquired. During these wonderful years of opportunity impulses are being strengthened or curbed, dangerous elements take deep root or perish. The sub-soil of the child's nature is being made rich or barren. The harvest in later life will depend on the seeds sown in childhood.

Nothing can do more to add to the richness and value of life than a true, deep love of Nature, and this can best be awakened when the child is young. Living things appeal to the little child. He sees the tiny green shoot appearing just above the ground, and as he comes day by day and watches it gradually pushing its way up to the light, he is filled with a great awe and wonder. Beautiful scenery, as such, will not appeal to him, but the "green things growing" cannot fail to attract. Never in after life will he be so receptive to these influences as in his early years. The trees with their tiny buds bursting forth into life, the newly opening flower, the riot of colour in the garden beds, the song and flight of the birds, the glory of the sun and sky are all making their impressions on his plastic mind. He begins to realise some great power at work outside his own puny strength, and this realisation brings with it a sense of reverence. Memories are being stored up. They will come back to him in later life. The scent of a flower, the sight of a bird may act as a restraining influence, a subtle something which bids him reach out after the highest.

Froebel believed that Nature was the garment of the invisible God, and that no child, touching that garment hem, could fail to receive moral and spiritual strength. "Development of a sense of beauty, especially beauty in Nature, offers the best means," says Froebel, "of awakening the senses as organs of the mind, counterbalancing sensual desires, and delaying as long as possible the awakening of the lower appetites."

There is no subject which can be sifted from all others and termed "moral education." We must begin by training the child to attend to living creatures, to the world of animals and the world of men. The little child is filled with wonder as he watches the rabbit feeding or the little bird taking his morning bath. Involuntarily he attends to these new things. Involuntarily the normal little child begins to attend to anything that astonishes him or awakes his curiosity. On this faculty of involuntary attention, attention sustained by emotion, depend not only the mental but the moral and spiritual advance. The child at the Nursery School,

supplied with a variety of pets, will be enjoying a great educational advantage; but the knowledge he gains about animals will be but a minor result. The more important result will be a moral one. Through attending to living creatures, loving them, feeding them, he will escape from the cruel instinct which led him to torture them. He can then be led a step further—to thoughtfulness for the people around him.

Bodily and mental powers are so closely intertwined that it is impossible to neglect the one without neglecting the other. If the child is to develop towards an ideal manhood he must be encouraged to put forth his strength in right and useful ways. The cultivation of creative power is most important in laying a ground-work, which will prevent the development of coarseness and immorality. Handwork is important, because it helps towards motor development and control, and makes for the perfection of the delicate network of fibres and cells, which is the physical basis of mental and moral growth. All exercises which awaken active powers and loving service possible to others, will have their part in the great work of character-building. Such creative work calls forth the exercise of the will and control of the thoughts, and this is as important a part of mental as of moral training.

Nutrition plays a great part in every kind of activity. To secure good nutrition, then, is the condition of intellectual and moral soundness. Oppenheim says of the child, "His principal work should lie in being formed, in getting a straight back, big lungs and a clean mind, in possessing a nervous constitution which, as one of its functions, is capable of elaborating a moral sense that points straight."

Bathing is one of the best means of ensuring not only the clean body but the clean mind. With a regular habit of bathing comes an increase of energy, and a gain in self-respect. It is far-reaching in its effects. It will act as an early preventive of disease, and will tend to depopulate hospitals, convalescent homes and asylums. Dr. Kerr says, "The majority of cases of injury to health may be traced originally to a want of cleanliness." In training the child education of the lower senses should be the starting point. This can be done by baths and massage. One doctor says, "A young man, clever and rational, suddenly gave himself to the worst tendencies. It was found that the sense of touch was lost and he felt nothing at all." Later, sensibility came back to the skin, and at the same moment the moral nature righted itself.

Sensory development lies in keeping fine the lower senses, and this depends on pure air, clean water, light, food, and a habit of attending to

sense impressions. The whole body becomes more responsive to subtle influences. The Americans have realised the importance of this in dealing with criminals, and by means of baths, massage and physical exercise, are inducing a new sensitiveness and, with this, a restoration of the culprit's moral life.

The sense of taste is the most easily depraved. It has been estimated that over three hundred meals must be taken in order to forget the sensation produced by an unwholesome dish such as tinned fish with vinegar. The slum child, rickety and starving, dislikes milk. It is months before he can tolerate wholesome food which, with proper training, he would have preferred. Parents rarely realise how much the question of diet has to do with the normal, healthy tone of their children's minds, how closely it concerns their peacefulness, cheerfulness and temperateness, their susceptibility to wholesome influences. There is a close connection between vicious traits and a vicious diet. The restoration of the sense of taste is a greater triumph than the mastery of the art of spelling. It results in a returning sensitiveness which is the owner's greatest safeguard against degrading vices. If this responsiveness were created in every child it would make slum life, with all its horrors, intolerable. Here is the opportunity for the Nursery School teacher. Her work will not only affect the child, but also the family and, further, the Nation.

Dirt, besides being one of the main causes of disease, acts as a great barrier. The child from the clean, well-regulated home involuntarily shrinks from his unfortunate class-mate, who comes to school with a dirty body and evil smelling clothes. He begins to avoid him, and, later, to dislike him. Such barriers tend to become higher and more insuperable. If the child is to obey the commandment, "Love one another," all such barriers must be removed. He must be taught to love the bath. It then becomes a source of great joy, and joy is one of the best stimulants for health. Cleanliness must be taught, not only by precept, but by example. Such teaching should be given in the same spirit as one teaches grace. It is one of the vital aids to beautiful human life as distinguished from the lower brute life.

Cleanliness must include, not only a clean body, but the breathing of clean air. The continual inspiration of foul air at last injures the delicate membrane of the nose, and if the child's nose and throat are in such a condition that full respiration is not possible, then oxidation is impaired, tissue-change is unnaturally limited, and consequently mental action and development are not normal. The health thus impaired results in mental

torpidity and even viciousness. On the other hand, in the child who spends the greater part of the day in the open air complete oxidation takes place and more energy is supplied to the body. The brain and nervous system are more richly nourished and their latent power developed. Thus the child attains a new freedom—a sense of moral repose.

DR. THOS. E. FRANCIS (Llanelly) suggested that nursery schools should not be permanently necessary institutions, but that with improvement in the economic circumstances of the working classes and the provision of separate gardens for each house, the child could receive proper attention and care at home, with its first lessons in general observation and nature study from its mother.

He desired further particulars of the cost per head of the school and of the number of scholars that could be looked after by each teacher. He pointed out that the children who most required the benefits provided by the nursery school, *i.e.*, those from neglected homes, would require to be brought to school and taken home by the teachers, owing to their youthful age and the danger of the streets.

MR. S. HURST SEAGER (Christchurch, New Zealand) was not convinced that it was desirable that purely open air schools should be advocated. A school-room, which could be converted on a suitable day into an open air room was certainly most desirable, but if there were no possibility of sheltering from the inclement weather, such as that which we are now experiencing in these summer months, much more harm than good would result.

They had heard very contrary opinions expressed with regard to heating and ventilation, so that they should take care not to be biassed by any report of any particular installation, without at first ascertaining whether the installation had been made in strict accordance with the principles which should govern it. He could not help feeling that the Plenum system was a remarkably good one, as the air could be perfectly controlled in respect to pureness, humidity and temperature, and any installation which was properly arranged on these lines might be very greatly improved by the installation of fans for the purpose of causing air currents within the room. Such air movements having been found by recent practical experience, to be quite as essential as purity of atmosphere.

DR. A. BERESFORD KINGSFORD (London) said the Plenum system was tried for some years in the O.P. department at University College Hospital, and was abandoned as a failure; the air was so dead alive. As regards Leonard Hill's experiments at the London Hospital they were very interesting as showing

the great value of the movement of air. They did not, however, show that the matter of chemical impurity was unimportant, but only that the value of movement had been underestimated, as compared with that of chemical purity, which we have sometimes exaggerated. Moreover, Hill's experiments were carried out only on healthy young adults for a limited period, and not daily repeated, and in these respects could hardly afford conclusive evidence as to what was best for young children in daily school.