

PART II

OUT-OF-DOOR LIFE FOR THE CHILDREN

I.—A GROWING TIME

Meals out of Doors.—People who live in the country know the value of fresh air very well, and their children live out of doors, with intervals within for sleeping and eating. As to the latter, even country people do not make full use of their opportunities. On fine days when it is warm enough to sit out with wraps, why should not tea and breakfast, everything but a hot dinner, be served out of doors? For we are an overwrought generation, running to nerves as a cabbage runs to seed; and every hour spent in the open is a clear gain, tending to the increase of brain power and bodily vigour, and to the lengthening of life itself. They who know what it is to have fevered skin and throbbing brain deliciously soothed by the cool touch of the air are inclined to make a new rule of life, "Never be within doors when you can *rightly* be without."

Besides the gain of an hour or two in the open air, there is this to be considered: meals taken *al fresco* are usually joyous, and there is nothing like gladness for converting meat and drink into healthy

blood and tissue. All the time, too, the children are storing up memories of a happy childhood. Fifty years hence they will see the shadows of the boughs making patterns on the white tablecloth; and sunshine, children's laughter, hum of bees, and scent of flowers are being bottled up for after refreshment.

For Dwellers in Towns and Suburbs.—But it is only the people who live, so to speak, in their own gardens who can make a practice of giving their children tea out of doors. For the rest of us, and the most of us, who live in towns or the suburbs of towns, that is included in the larger question—How much time daily in the open air should the children have? And how is it possible to secure this for them? In this time of extraordinary pressure, educational and social, perhaps a mother's first duty to her children is to secure for them a quiet growing time, a full six years of passive receptive life, the waking part of it spent for the most part out in the fresh air. And this, not for the gain in bodily health alone—body and soul, heart and mind, are nourished with food convenient for them when the children are let alone, let to live without friction and without stimulus amongst happy influences which incline them to be good.

Possibilities of a Day in the Open.— 'I make a point,' says a judicious mother, 'of sending my children out, weather permitting, for an hour in the winter, and two hours a day in the summer months.' That is well; but it is not enough. In the first place, do not send them; if it is anyway possible, take them; for, although the children should be left much to themselves, there is a great deal to be done and a great deal to be prevented during these long hours in the open air. And long hours they should be;

not two, but four, five, or six hours they should have on every tolerably fine day, from April till October. 'Impossible!' says an over-wrought mother who sees her way to no more for her children than a daily hour or so on the pavements of the neighbouring London squares. Let me repeat, that I venture to suggest, not what is practicable in any household, but what seems to me *absolutely best for the children*; and that, in the faith that mothers work wonders once they are convinced that wonders are demanded of them. A journey of twenty minutes by rail or omnibus, and a luncheon basket, will make a day in the country possible to most town-dwellers; and if one day, why not many, even every suitable day?

Supposing we have got them, what is to be done with these golden hours, so that every one shall be delightful? They must be spent with some method, or the mother will be taxed and the children bored. There is a great deal to be accomplished in this large fraction of the children's day. They must be kept in a joyous temper all the time, or they will miss some of the strengthening and refreshing held in charge for them by the blessed air. They must be let alone, left to themselves a great deal, to take in what they can of the beauty of earth and heavens; for of the evils of modern education few are worse than this—that the perpetual cackle of his elders leaves the poor child not a moment of time, nor an inch of space, wherein to wonder—and grow. At the same time, here is the mother's opportunity to train the seeing eye, the hearing ear, and to drop seeds of truth into the open soul of the child, which shall germinate, blossom, and bear fruit, without further help or knowledge of hers. Then, there is much to be got by

perching in a tree or nestling in heather, but muscular development comes of more active ways, and an hour or two should be spent in vigorous play; and last, and truly least, a lesson or two must be got in.

No Story-Books.—Let us suppose mother and children arrived at some breezy open “wherein it seemeth always afternoon.” In the first place, it is not her business to entertain the little people: there should be no story—books, no telling of tales, as little talk as possible, and that to some purpose. Who thinks to amuse children with tale or talk at a circus or a pantomime? And here, is there not infinitely more displayed for their delectation? Our wise mother, arrived, first sends the children to let off their spirits in a wild scamper, with cry, halloo, and hullabaloo, and any extravagance that comes into their young heads. There is no distinction between big and little; the latter love to follow in the wake of their elders, and, in lessons or play, to pick up and do according to their little might. As for the baby, he is in bliss: divested of his garments, he kicks and crawls, and clutches the grass, laughs soft baby laughter, and takes in his little knowledge of shapes and properties in his own wonderful fashion—clothed in a woollen gown, long and loose, which is none the worse for the worst usage it may get.

II.—‘SIGHT-SEEING’

By-and-by the others come back to their mother, and, while wits are fresh and eyes keen, she sends them off on an exploring expedition—Who can see the most, and tell the most, about yonder hillock or