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### WHAT BECOMES OF ALL THE CLEVER CHILDREN ?

*From Chambers' Edinburgh Journal.*

During a visit to a friend in the country, I was enjoying a walk in his garden before breakfast on a delightful morning in June, when my attention was suddenly arrested by the pensive attitude of a little boy, the son of my host, whom I observed standing before a rose-bush, which he appeared to contemplate with much dissatisfaction. Children have always been to me a most interesting study; and yielding to a wish to discover what could have clouded the usually bright countenance of my little friend, I inquired what had attracted him to this particular rose-bush, which presented but a forlorn appearance when compared with its more blooming companions. He replied: "This rose-bush is my *own*; papa give it to me in spring, and promised that no one else should touch it. I have taken great pains with it; and as it was covered with beautiful roses last summer, I hoped to have had many fine bouquets from it; but all my care and watching have been useless: I see I shall not have one full-blown rose after all."

"And yet," said I, "it appears to be as healthy as any other bush in the garden: tell me what you have done for it, as you say it has cost you so much pains?"

"After watching it for some time," he replied, "I discovered a very great number of small buds, but they were almost concealed by the leaves which grew so thickly; I therefore cleared away the greater part of these, and my little buds then looked very well. I now found, as I watched them, that though they grew larger every day, the green outside continued so hard, that I thought it impossible for the delicate rose-leaves to force their way out: I therefore picked them open; but the pale, shriveled blossoms which I found within never improved, but died one after another. Yesterday morning I discovered one bud which the leaves had till then hidden from me, and which was actually streaked with the beautiful red of the flower contained in it; I carefully opened and loosened it, in the hope that the warm sun would help it to blow: my first thought this morning was of the pleasure I should have in gathering my one precious bud for mamma—but look at it now?"

The withered, discolored petals to which the child directed my eye did indeed present but a melancholy appearance, and I now understood the cause of the looks of disappointment which had at first attracted my attention. I explained to the zealous little gardener the mischief which he had unintentionally done by removing the leaves and calyx with which nature had covered and inclosed the flower until all its beauties should be ready for full development; and having pointed out to him some buds which had escaped his care, I left him full of hope that, by waiting patiently for nature to accomplish her own work, he might yet have a bouquet of own roses to present to his mother.

As I pursued my walk, it occurred to me that this childish incident suggested an answer to the question asked by Dr. Johnson, "What becomes of all the clever children?" Too often, it is to be feared, are the precious human buds sacrificed to the same mistaken zeal that lead to the destruction of the roses which had been expected with so much pleasure by their little owner. Perhaps a few hints, suggested—not by fanciful theory, but by practical experience in the mental training of children—may help to rescue some little ones from the blighting influences to which they are too often exposed.

The laws by which the physical development of every infant,

during the earliest period of its existence, is regulated, seem to afford a striking lesson by the analogy which they bear to these laws on which the subsequent mental development depends; and by the wise arrangement of an ever-kind Providence, this lesson is made immediately to precede the period during which it should be carried into practice. On the babe's first entrance into the world, it must be fed with food suitable to its delicate organs of digestion; on this depends its healthful growth, and likewise the gradual strengthening of those organs. Its senses must at first be acted upon very gently: too strong a light, or too loud a noise, may impair its sight or hearing for life.

The little limbs of a young infant must not be allowed to support the body before they have acquired firmness sufficient for that task, otherwise they will become deformed, and the whole system weakened; and last, not least, fresh and pure air must constantly be inhaled by the lungs, in order that they may supply vigour to the whole frame. All enlightened parents are acquainted with these laws of nature, and generally act on them; but when, owing to judicious management, their children emerge from boyhood in full enjoyment of all the animal organs, and with muscles and sinews growing firmer every day in consequence of the exercise which their little owners delight in giving them, is the same judicious management extended to the mind, of which the body, which has been so carefully nourished, is only the outer case? In too many cases it is not. Too often the tender mind is loaded with information which it has no power of assimilating, and which, consequently, it cannot nourish. The mental faculties, instead of being gradually exercised, are overwhelmed: parents who would check with displeasure the efforts of a nurse who should attempt to make their infant walk at too early a period, are ready to embrace eagerly any system of so-called education which offers to do the same violence to the intellect; forgetting that distortion of mind is at least as much to be dreaded as that of the body, while the motives held out to encourage the little victims are not calculated to produce a moral atmosphere conducive either to good or great mental attainments. Children are sometimes met with—though few and far between—whose minds seem ready to drink in knowledge in whatever form or quantity it may be given to them; and the testimony of Dr. Combe, as well as of many other judicious writers, proves the real state of the brain in such cases, and also the general fate of the poor little prodigies. Such children, however, are not the subject of these observations, of which the object is to plead for those promising buds which are closely encased in their "hard" but protecting covering; to plead for them especially at that period when the "beautiful red streak" appears; in other words, when, amid the thoughtless sports and simple studies of childhood, the intellect begins to develop itself, and to seek nourishment from all that is presented to it. There exists at the period alluded to a readiness in comparison, and a shrewdness of observation, which might be profitably employed in the great work of education. And here it may be observed, that as to "educate" signifies to *bring out*, the term *education* can only be applied with propriety to a system which performs this work, and never to one which confines itself to laying on a surface-work of superficial information, unsupported by vigorous mental powers. Information may be acquired at any age, provided that the intellectual machinery has been kept in activity; whereas, if the latter has been allowed to rust and stiffen from disease, the efforts of the man—supposing him to have energy