

## THE PHYSICAL EDUCATION OF GIRLS—II.

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## EXERCISE.

HAVING cleared the way, by first reviewing the question of dress, for what may be called the more positive part of our subject, let us now consider exercise, and see whether the rights of girl children to a free development of their faculties are not here also ignored.

Little girls of the working classes are exercised often severely enough. They are less likely to be dragged down by the weight of their skirts; the danger is rather that their garments are both too few for warmth, and of unsuitable materials. They are less often cramped by stiff stays than girls of the richer classes, but when they are put into stays, the consequences are in some respects even more disastrous.

Little girls of the working classes, if they are not dragged down by heavy skirts, are very commonly weighed down by heavy babies. The practice either of making an older child act as nurse to her little brothers and sisters, or of sending out very young or slight, delicate girls into service as nursemaids, as the lightest and most suitable work for them, is the most frequent cause of spinal curvature and its long train of evils in the children of the poor. Boys, when they are made to nurse the baby, and this they have to do as a rule only when there are no sisters old enough to do it—the work is never evenly divided among the boys and girls of a family—are both a little stronger to bear the burden, and less conscientious about their little charges than

girls are. They run away, and cannot be made to give up their lives to the service of the baby as girls often have to do, a girl sometimes nursing through a large family of brothers and sisters—at least this was so before the days of School-boards—now there is less chance of it—and it is one of the most useful services which School-boards are rendering to the community, that they are delivering little girls from the thralldom of the baby, and removing one of the most prolific causes of crooked backs in girls. It may be that they are substituting others; but of this more anon.

It has long been known that, if you overload a young horse or other beast of burden, its back bends, and its future serviceableness is impaired; and yet I have known honest, hardworking English mothers who hardly ever took up their babies except to suckle them, but left the entire nursing of them to the eldest little girl of the family, to her physical injury and to the neglect of her schooling. It used to be no rare thing to find the eldest girl in fairly prosperous working men's families unable to read or write like the rest, because she had only had two or three quarters' schooling, having been kept at home to mind the successive babies, of which there was always one from the time she could walk alone until she was sent out into service to earn her own living. Truly when we reflect that nothing short of compulsory education has sufficed to lift from the shoulders of little girls so heavy a burden, it may be said that "Evil is wrought by want of thought as well as by want of heart;" and when