

CHILDREN, PAST AND PRESENT.

THERE is a story told of Professor Wilson, that one day, listening to a lecture on education by Dr. Whately, he grew manifestly impatient at the rules laid down, and finally slipped out of the room, exclaiming irately to a friend who followed him, "I always thought God Almighty made man, but *he* says it was the schoolmaster."

In like manner many of us have wondered from time to time whether children are made of such ductile material, and can be as readily moulded to our wishes, as educators would have us believe. If it be true that nature counts for nothing and training for everything, then what a gap between the boys and girls of two hundred years ago and the boys and girls we know to-day! The rigid bands that once bound the young to decorum have dwindled to a silver thread that snaps under every restive movement. To have "perfectly natural" children seems to be the outspoken ambition of parents who have succeeded in retrograding their offspring from artificial civilization to that pure and wholesome savagery which is evidently their ideal. "It is assumed nowadays," declares an angry critic, "that children have come into the world to make a noise; and it is the part of every good parent to put up with it, and to make all household arrangements with a view to their sole pleasure and convenience."

That the children brought up under this relaxed discipline acquire certain merits and charms of their own is an easily acknowledged fact. We are not now alluding to those spoiled and over-indulged little people who are the recognized scourges of humanity, but merely to the boys and girls who have been allowed from infancy that

large degree of freedom which is deemed expedient for enlightened nurseries, and who regulate their own conduct on the vast majority of occasions. They are, as a rule, light-hearted, truthful, affectionate and occasionally amusing; but it cannot be denied that they lack that nicety of breeding which was at one time the distinguishing mark of children of the upper classes, and which was in a great measure born of the restraints that surrounded them. The faculty of sitting still without fidgeting, of walking without rushing, and of speaking without screaming can be acquired only under tuition; but it is worth some little trouble to attain. When Sydney Smith remarked that the children of rank were generally so much better bred than the children of the middle classes, he recognized the greater need for self-restraint that entered into their lives. They may have been less natural, perhaps, but they were infinitely more pleasing to his fastidious eyes; and the unconscious grace which he admired was merely the reflection of the universal courtesy which surrounded them. Nor is this all. "The necessity of self-repression," says a recent writer in *Blackwood*, "makes room for thought, which those children miss who have no formalities to observe, no customs to respect, who blurt out every irrelevance, who interpose at will with question and opinion as it enters the brain. Children don't learn to talk by chattering to one another, and saying what comes uppermost. Mere listening with intelligence involves an exercise of mental speech, and observant silence opens the pores of the mind as impatient demands for explanation never do."

This is true, inasmuch as it is not