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The Sunday School Guardian

Rev. W. H. Withrow, M.A. Editor.

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[LETTER FROM THE EDITOR.]

CHILD-LIFE IN EUROPE.

MY DEAR YOUNG FRIENDS,—

I have been greatly interested in travelling through Europe in observing the characteristics of child-life in the different countries through which I have passed. I have seen much that was pleasant, but much also that was very sad. Parents everywhere love their children, but where the great mass of the people are very poor, even a parent's love can do little to lift from the young shoulders the heavy burdens which, all too soon, are laid upon them. The mass of children in Europe have to work, and work hard, at a time when the children of Canada think only of play, and of their school and story books. Now, learning to work does them no harm and is far better than all play; but the work is often too hard, especially for the younger children. It has sometimes made tears come to my eyes, as I have seen boys and girls who ought to have been at school, toiling along in the burning sun, or climbing a steep mountain beneath heavy loads, or sometimes harnessed, like a beast of burden, to a waggon or cart. At Naples it was worse than anywhere else. I saw young boys working hard, wearing nothing but a pair of short linen pants not worth a shilling. And they live in such wretched narrow streets, and eat such coarse cheap food, that I wonder that they live at all.

The quick hot temper of those Southern mothers often leads to cruel outbursts of passion that are painful to witness. I asked one woman in Naples the way to some place, and because her little child happened to get in her way she gave it a cruel slap that was quite undeserved. I saw another woman rush at her little girl, and seizing her arm with a panther-like fierceness, raise it to her teeth and bite it viciously. I thought it the most inhuman thing I ever saw.

I am sorry to say the Neapolitan children are not, as a rule, very well behaved. Many of them are bold, forward, and importunate little beggars. They will also throw flowers, boxes of fuseses, and the like into your carriage and refuse to take them back, so that one fee's bound, unless he wants to steal them, to pay for them. One pert and pretty little minx, about eight years old, fastened a flower in my coat as I sat in the park. I showed her that I had one, when taking it she tore it up, and insisted on my buying one from her. I had to appeal to a policeman for protection.

In Switzerland, on the other hand, I found the children very polite and respectful. They set an example indeed that might often be followed in Canada. As I passed them on the highway or in the village streets, they would bow or curtsey, and say, "Gut morgen, Herr. Gut abend, Herr,—Good morning, or, good evening, Sir," very politely.

Nowhere have I seen better provision made for the education of children than in Switzerland. In some respects they are far ahead of us in Canada. Their kinder garten system,—the "Child Garden" as it means,—must make school the very paradise of the wee things just taken from their mothers. They have all sorts of games with toys and coloured papers, balls, sticks, cords and the like; and their very complete system of object-lesson teaching is more like play than work. The fine art teaching was also very superior. The specimens of drawing, modeling and carving done by youthful hands, were wonderful. Yet the country is very poor, and the school age is much shorter than in Canada. My heart has sometimes ached as I have seen boys and girls, and old women, stagger.