

RECREATION FROM AN EDUCATIONAL POINT OF VIEW.*

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COMING now to the large and important class—children. It seems a mere commonplace to say that children ought to be allowed to run about and romp and play as much as ever they like or can. Yet this commonplace is far from having a common place in the usages of modern society. Among the upper classes children are much too frequently restrained from taking their full amount of natural play, either by preposterous ideas of genteel decorum, or by the respect due to expensive clothing; while among the lower classes the playground is too often restricted by the limits of the gutter, and even in the parks we too often witness the melancholy spectacle of children still a long way from their teens acting the part of nurse to still younger members of the family. To remedy these evils in the case of the upper classes there is nothing to suggest, except that fathers and mothers should cease to regard their children's clothes as of more importance than their children's health, and learn to estimate at its due value the responsibility of fostering the most precious of their possessions—these living, feeling, loving little ones whose capacities of life-long happiness are being moulded by their parents' wisdom, or destroyed by their parents' folly. In the case of the lower classes the *crèche*, or public nursery, where abundance of romping play is permitted, deserves the most strenuous

encouragement. Children of all classes will play as they ought to play if only Nature is allowed to have her course without let or hindrance from artificial restraints.

But, as the only object in rearing children is not that of making them healthy animals, some amount of artificial restraint is necessary when the time of systematic mental training arrives. Nevertheless, as bodily health is the most essential condition even to mental training, the most fundamental principle which ought to guide the latter is that of supplying it with the minimum cost of the former. Yet in school life this fundamental principle is almost universally disregarded. So long as the general health of a school is maintained at a level compatible with work, and not below the level that declares itself by conspicuous "break-downs," so long nobody cares to reflect whether the system of school discipline is in all particulars the best for maintaining the general health at the highest possible level. I will not wait to consider the disgraceful food which, even in many of our better-class schools, is deemed sufficiently good for growing children to thrive upon; nor will I wait to inveigh against the system of competition which, when encouraged beyond moderate limits, acts as a baleful stimulus to the very pupils who least require to be stimulated. But, confining my remarks to the one particular of punishment, I should like to put it as a question of common sense, whether it

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