

**Making Baby Useful.**

**LESSONS IN THE ART OF SELF-HELP.**

"I never teach my babies to be useful," said a friend of the writer's not long ago. "It makes them so horribly precocious!"

This was a mother who is supposed by her friends to be possessed of every natural virtue under the sun.

Yet not one of her five bairns has been taught to pick up a pin, or a more dangerous needle, from the nursery floor, much less assist in removing a pair of damp boots after the morning walk in cloudy weather.

Nothing could be more mistaken than the idea that a few daily lessons in the gentle art of self-help will rub off any of the tiny tot's natural "babyishness."

And, always provided that the lessons are conducted by the mother herself, and not by a jaded nurse, who might allow the child to fetch and carry in the wrong way, baby will receive the greatest advantage, both mentally and physically, from the training.

Now, how far to make her useful? Where to draw the line at which the tiny feet and brain must stand still?

The exercise of a little practical common sense will prevent mistakes and over-taught. And as to the training itself, begin early, and let it take the form to a large extent of play. The smallest child will appreciate being allowed to put on and take off her own gloves. Give her time and she will marshal the wee fingers in perfect order after a few trials.

The same with her gaiters. Almost in the cradle a baby will stretch forth its hands to play with a button. At two years of age the fascination of a button and a buttonhole is simply wonderful.

The day baby is allowed for the first time to try and button up her own soft cloth gaiter is one of epoch-making interest and pleasure to her.

The small hands will not prove very cunning at first; the willing little fingers will fall over and over again

at the outset. But before long what seemed an utter impossibility will become an ordinary detail of nursery routine, for no self-respecting tot will allow this interesting task to be performed by a grown-up when she has once learned to perform it herself.

The seeds of many an indolent character in after years have been sown by the over-zealous nurse, who continues to feed a child after it is big enough to hold its own spoon and guide it to the wee mouth.

**BABY AT EIGHTEEN MONTHS OLD.**

At eighteen months the intelligent baby will begin to have shrewd ideas as to the direction a spoonful of pudding ought to take in order that a boisterous appetite may be satisfied; and a year later no assistance need be rendered at meal time, as long as the nursery dinner consists of the ordinary soft foods, which can be easily manipulated with a spoon. An invalid mother known to the writer has derived unspeakable pleasure from teaching her three-year-old little son to dispense with the services of his nurse in the sick room. The child "minds" himself and gets into very little mischief that cannot be corrected from the invalid's couch.

A small chest of drawers has been placed against the wall, low enough for sonnie to reach the top drawer without having to mount on a chair, and herein is contained everything it is likely to want, both in the way of clothes and toys.

He takes out the tiny garments necessary for the daily walk, and carries them to his mother to be assisted into them, and replaces them in their appointed drawer upon his return. Nothing is ever out of place, yet for months no one has opened the drawers but the youngster himself, and nurse has never once had to be summoned to clear away the debris after a field display with toy guns and soldiers.

**"NIGHT TERRORS."**

The nervous tot who is subject to night terrors may be dealt with quite easily and simply if she is shown some simple means of helping herself out of the hysterical fear of her own loneliness, which now and then overtakes her in the hour of darkness. First of all the temptation to give way to a crying fit must be firmly repressed, and the best way of doing this is to have placed within the immediate touch some object by which the frightened bairn can summon the comforting presence of someone older than herself.

A bell-rope hung conveniently over the cot is an excellent idea, and the very fact of it being there will often check an inclination to scream out and get excited. Baby wakes up, finds herself alone, and being of a highly-strung, over-imaginative disposition, gives way to her terror in a crying fit, which may last for an hour or more. Nothing could be worse for either child or nurse, and more often than not the episode ends in a scolding, which only aggravates matters instead of soothing them.

Let the little one be taught that there is no need to cry out, that if she rings the bell over her cot someone will come; and let the bell always be answered promptly. She will soon cease to be troubled by terrors of any sort when she understands her own usefulness in summoning aid when aid is necessary.

While in the night nursery, one other point of self-help might be

touched upon—baby's bedroom slippers. She will soon learn to take these off and put them on herself if they are placed near to her hand each night.

A thoughtless or busy nurse will sometimes take her small charge out of the cot and stand her bare-footed on the floor while she makes the preparation for the morning toilet.

A thick rug may intervene between the wee feet and the carpet, but the practice is nevertheless a dangerous one, and best guarded against by baby herself. Let her have her bedroom slippers handy, and teach her never to leave the cot without first thrusting the pink toes into them. If they are nice and big and comfy, the little lady will grow to appreciate their services too well to forget them. A pretty ribbon, or a bright touch of colour in the wool of which they are composed, will add to their attractiveness in the young eyes enormously.

**PREPARING FOR "TUBBING."**

Baby's share of preparing for her bath must necessarily be somewhat limited; yet even here the training of usefulness need not altogether fallow. She will delight in getting ready the clean, neatly-folded towel, and in carrying to the bath-mat such needful articles as the sponge and soap.

All these little tasks will both amuse and instruct the average intelligent baby. There is no need to make them tedious. For instance, in teaching her to wash her own teeth every day, have the wee toothbrush and glass of clean water quite handy, so that the operation can be performed without any irksome ceremony.

**Words of Sympathy.**

Here again is a use of words which we all, but especially the young, hesitate over. "What are words at such a time?" we ask ourselves. And if our hearts urge us to try, we pause again and ask in sincere timidity, "What can I say that will do any good?"

This is more apt, much more apt to be the state of mind of young people on whom no great sorrow or bereavement has yet fallen. Just as soon as you have had to sit in the shadow, while death reigns in a house of mourning, you will realise how inexpressibly comforting words of sympathy—written or spoken—become to you. Just in proportion as you loved the one who has gone, you will value everything that is said. If people say they loved and honoured the dead, you are cheered by learning how many valued him or her who was so dear to you.

Never be afraid to follow out your first impulse, or to say what you mean in the simplest words which come to your mind. I have often noticed that in the homes of very poor people, one after another will come in and take the sorrowing mourner's hand and say earnestly, "I am very sorry for your trouble." There surely could not be anything more simple and commonplace than those seven words. Yet I have seen a broken-hearted widow dry her tears and gradually show an unmistakable sense of peace and comfort, which truly made her grief lighter. It is not what we say, but how we say to any suffering person that we share their pain, which gives relief.

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