

## 19<sup>th</sup> Century literary non-fiction

### Source B

This is an 1890 extract from *Ladies' Home Journal*, an American magazine started in 1883. The regular 'Talks with the Doctor' column dealt with everyday issues of health and wellbeing. In this edition, it is about clothing toddlers.

#### Talks with the Doctor

##### About Children's Clothing &c.

I noticed a dear little lad a few days ago – perhaps three years old – beautifully dressed as far as expensive and fancy clothes went, but I made up my mind that his mother ought to have a good “talking to,” – indeed his father too, for in my opinion every father should consider it his duty and privilege to look after the comfort and health of his little ones and to help his partner by suggestions.

But what vexed me was the condition of this poor baby's “underpinnings.” The little feet were in dainty slippers – then came little socks just above his ankles – *then* the little bare legs completely decorated with mosquito bites! Poor little fellow – how he suffered – and such unnecessary suffering too! But this is the least baneful of the effects of this barbarous fashion of dressing children.

Did you ever think that perhaps it is cold? Did you ever think that perhaps you are training up your child in the way he should go to reach bronchitis\*, indigestion, rheumatism\*, &c? And I want to include too, the bare arms and low neck fashions as cruel and barbarous. You say it is not cold? that you only dress the children so during the very warm weather, and *then* only in the hottest part of the day?

You may mean well – you may intend this, but either you forget or neglect, or else the nurse does, for I see them around in the early evening, and I have noticed them in the cool breeze that comes after a shower. Satisfy yourself. Select some secluded spot outdoors, and take off your boots and stockings and expose your bare limbs to the air – to your knees – not for a minute or so but for as long as your child stands it.

Then remember that no matter how delicate you may be, you are from two to ten times as strong as your three year old baby.

You say that only a few generations ago the children used to go exposed – necks and legs – much more than they do now? I believe it. One need only compare the death rate among children now, with that of fifty years ago, to be convinced that some changes for the better are going on.

Now you may depend upon this – no child can afford this waste of heat.

30 The very same supply of nerve force which is drawn upon for breathing is drawn upon for digestion. The same reservoir is tapped for circulating the blood, and we have this same nerve force for producing the animal heat.

Now don't you see that if we take too much of to-day's supply of this force to keep up the animal heat, we will surely run short with some of the other functions?

35 For instance, we have a large factory heated by steam from the same boiler which supplies steam for the engine which runs the machinery. Suppose on a cold day we open all the windows, and turn all the steam into the radiators for heating. What is the consequence? Why the engine stops for want of steam. What is the remedy?

We must get another and larger boiler – make more steam and *leave the windows open!*

40 In our baby's case, we can use the nerve force to keep up the necessary heart, and the department of digestion in his fearful and wonderful little establishment runs on short allowance, and then comes constipation (sometimes diarrhoea) and all sorts of trouble, and I firmly believe that every one of these "children ailments" have an effect in a greater or less degree upon the health and general comfort of the "grown up child."

45 Better not mind the fashion. Let baby's stockings come away up over his knees and fasten to elastics from his waist.

## Glossary

\* bronchitis – a chest cold or disease of the lungs which causes coughing, wheezing and shortness of breath

\* rheumatism – any disease marked by swelling and pain in the joints, muscles, or tissues

This extract is from Volume 7, Issue 6 of *Ladies' Home Journal* (May 1890) and the full text can be found online at

<https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015012341569?urlappend=%3Bseq=81>.

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