THE DUTIES OF CHILDREN

The duties of children are very simple, but very important,
And they know them better than any nurse or guardian,
For Nature whispers them softly in the heart from day to day;
They are her commands and the great first law.

The foremost duty of children is growth;—
From nourishment and sweet air, from exercise and deep rest,
The marvelous, steady approximation of manhood and womanhood:
Growth, the expansion of the body, the mind and the human spirit,
The preparation for effectual living.

And the second duty of children is experiment.
Babies must handle their pink toes and pull their father’s hair;
They must creep on the floor and gurgle ineffectually:
Later they must learn the environment,
Must understand a little of animals and plants, of wood and of stone,
Must attempt to fashion things of clay and grass.
They must ask many questions and brood long over the answers.
They must try many things many times and fail,
In order that finally they may succeed.

And the third duty of children is play, rich, buoyant play;—
The game of marbles or tag, the riotous race all alone through the clover fields;
The masquerade as Indians or pirates; on rainy days checkers, on fair days baseball.
And surely it is a joy almost divine to swim long and luxuriantly in the pool outside the village.
Or to know some wondrous flight of the imagination into vistas never thoroughly explored.
All true play is true gladness and the best preparation for the efforts of the man and woman.

Those who hinder the child in the performance of these, his sacred duties, are at war with health.
They balk the future progress of the race.

Marguerite Ogden Bigelow.