

## NURSERY GAMES FOR CHILDREN.

BY LADY HANKEY.

I HAVE been asked to contribute a paper on Children's Games in the Nursery, and the first idea that comes to me is that occupations would be a better word to use than games. When several children of the same age are together they play games, but when the children of a family are alone they seem to have such very definite occupations—quite as serious as those of the “grown-up”—that “games” seems altogether too frivolous a word to apply to them.

“It is blowing such a gale, so we are going to have a lovely long afternoon indoors,” is the delighted exclamation one hears occasionally during inclement weather. An hour or so later, on entering the nursery, one finds Baby seriously trying to construct the “Albert Memorial” or “Westminster Bridge” with blocks of many sizes and shapes, and if five-year-old Jack is helping him it is in serious collaboration, and it is a lovely game at the end, when it has been thoroughly admired, to pull out just one brick and send the whole structure pell-mell on to the ground. But until then it has been an occupation, which has demanded thought and perseverance and very steady little hands.

Meanwhile, Mary, aged 7, has had a washing day, and dollie's clothes, with some assistance from Nannie, look remarkably clean and are being taken to the airing room to dry. Jack has divided his attention between helping Baby and drawing a remarkable picture with crayons of a Dreadnought sinking a German battleship while a storm looms up on the horizon. Bob, aged 10, has constructed a crane with his Meccano, and has just succeeded in making it work with a small model engine. Meanwhile nurse is busy sewing, with a word of encouragement for each child [sic] After tea there is a rush and tumble game of hide and seek, “dressing

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up,” or acting, or round games and singing with mother in the drawing-room.

It is a great treat if Daddie is at home and he suggests building—St. Sophia of Constantinople is the favourite subject—and with the aid of articles collected from all over the house a wonderful structure rises on the nursery table, a large copper bowl making an excellent and striking dome, and birthday candles lighting up the interior,—in fact, everybody's ingenuity is taxed to the uttermost.

But it is a great mistake to make a practice of playing with the children, except as a treat and when their own ideas for amusing themselves fail. When Baby is quite tiny he should be left quietly in his pram. [sic] or cot, and when he is not asleep he will watch the moving boughs of a tree, the shadows and sunlight, or various objects in his nursery and fall asleep when he is tired of looking at them. I am assuming, of course, that he is a well-managed baby as far as his health and feeding arrangements are concerned. A placid, unstimulated baby like this is a joy to the whole household. As he grows older he will like to hold and explore various toys, and when able to sit up he loves an old box full of odds and ends, which he can play with in his cot or pram., and when these bore him he will throw each separately and very deliberately on to the ground. I do not know any occupation which affords Baby more satisfaction than this testing of the laws of gravitation. He should have his regular time every day when mother or nurse plays with him, usually the half hour or so before he goes to bed. But if baby is amused continually he

becomes a tyrant, who will never make play for himself and whose constant cry as he grows older is "What shall I do next?"

It is a mistake, in choosing a nurse, to insist on her being clever at amusing the children, endless resource in suggesting games and occupations for them is what is wanted, and a word of encouragement or some assistance when little fingers cannot accomplish their work.

Every nursery should have a box of wooden bricks—not fancy ones, though the children like to embellish their structures with these—but good, plain blocks of many sizes and shapes, and plenty of each size. When baby is still crawling he will place three of these together and call it a house or a bridge, and it is astonishing how steady he can keep his tiny hand if he wishes to make a tower, and what joy the accomplishment of his object will give him. The successful accomplishment sometimes requires a little surreptitious help from mother.

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Pencil and paper, or crayons and brown paper, afford much joy to quite a small child, and his apparently aimless scratchings mean so much—Zeppelins, aeroplanes and battleships he will point out. The wise mother or nurse will take care to see them, too, and if baby has any talent for drawing, this encouragement will spur him on to new and eventually successful attempts to express his ideas on paper. But do not try and show him the right way to hold his pencil and do not draw for him more than you can help. Give him good materials, a pencil which you would enjoy using yourself, and if he shows any aptitude at all plenty of ordinary cartridge paper. Children love a paint box and brushes, but as painting is usually a very messy operation (and one not usually suggested by Nannie), an efficient overall is an absolute necessity. I have seen marvellous sunsets produced and turbulent seas that quite make one dread one's next channel crossing. Little girls prefer to paint flowers, and marvellous princesses in gorgeous clothes, who walk in fields dotted with golden buttercups. Yes, a paint box and "proper" paint brushes must always have a place on the nursery shelf.

And here one may remark, how boys and girls in their play strike out in different directions; they do not care to paint or draw the same things, and most girls do not care to build or want to construct things nearly as much as boys do. It is a great relief if a little girl likes to sew, but, on the whole, she prefers to embroider Nannie's finished article, or to knit or crochet small articles and make little things for her doll's house. "The Little Girls' Sewing Book," by Flora Klickmann, has a great many excellent suggestions for little girls' work. The little girl should only start something which she can soon finish, a tedious piece of work is very wearisome to a child and makes her dislike sewing. Then little girls love to "help," and especially if there is a tiny baby in the family there are plenty of opportunities. To the little girl with a domestic turn of mind this is the very best game of all; to fold little garments, to fetch and carry give her much pleasure, but it sometimes requires tact and patience on the part of the grown up who is being helped.

While girls do not care so much for building with blocks, I have found that they love to make things with plasticine and to make models, etc., with cardboard for the doll's house. The greatest resource of all should be her dolls, and this, I fear, now-a-days is not so often the case as one would wish.

Children love to make their own toys, and anything they

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have made themselves gives more pleasure than the ready-made and often very expensive toy

which is played with a few times and cast on one side when its novelty has faded. The railway platform and bridge which has been made with blocks, pieces of board, etc., are constructed each time with renewed zest and make the game of trains very real; the old rowing boat or ship filled up by Bob with wooden paddles and a bit of elastic to make it go gives more satisfaction than a clockwork boat with a key that will get lost. A Dreadnought built of bricks on the lid of a box which sails about the nursery floor and carries quite a fine armament of guns, gives more pleasure than a model ship which requires plenty of water—(that forbidden joy)—to be played with satisfactorily. And then each time it is built it can be varied and improved upon.

Children are very up-to-date—a motor car or aeroplane takes the place of the horse and cart—once such a joy to the small boy—and two-year-old baby talks intimately of aeroplanes and submarines, and even tanks have become a household word.

In summer children who are lucky enough to live in the country spend most of their time out of doors. A heap of sand in a shady corner of the garden and a tub, or better still, a long trough of rainwater, which may be replenished from the house taps during a spell of dry weather, will provide the children with games of which they never tire. Clad in overalls, with sleeves tucked up, and either barefoot or in sandals, they may make as much mess as they wish. Castles with real moats rise up in the sand, rivers and lakes are made, and most fascinating mud pies. The older children sail boats and have harbours and docks in the tub, and with the assistance of tins and a yard or two of rubber tubing I have seen some quite interesting models made, which have shown that the boys had some idea of the use of water power. The fact is, if children are only put in the right surroundings, either indoors or outdoors, they will make their own games and develop all their powers of invention to make them as interesting as possible, and there is no doubt that they derive most satisfaction from the things that they make for themselves. What mother does not know of the priceless odds and ends that live in Tommy's pockets? Priceless to Tommy, for he knows the multifarious uses to which they may be put; and the many odds and ends that mother is called upon to provide, often at most inconvenient moments, certainly give her infinitely more trouble than the purchase of a ready-made toy.

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To return to our baby. We must not forget that if he is to have ideas for amusing himself he must see plenty of pictures and have books shown to him. There are certain books which live on the nursery shelves—pictures and books which Nannie shows, or which may be looked at alone at any odd time; but the drawing-room books are treats which are only shown by mother, pictures of other countries and our own, they show temples and churches, bridges and castles, mountains, rivers and lakes, all sorts of interesting things which may be played at later with blocks and other nursery "properties," and which also furnish new ideas for crayon and paint brush. Mother also reads aloud all the old fairy stories and legends and the many books which are the children's heritage. The fact that the children so often play at these stories afterwards show how much they appreciate them. Sometimes old tales are brought very much up to date, as on one occasion when a little girl was playing at Perseus and Andromeda with her brother of five, and not content with killing the dragon, she finished up by exhibiting the Gorgon's head to the Kaiser, and thus disposed of him for ever, the Kaiser being impersonated, very reluctantly, by the small brother.

Children play far more happily and spontaneously if they are not constantly supervised

by grown-ups, and they love to roam about the garden to be wizards and fairies, and to play their own imaginative games.

“When children are happy and lonely and good,  
The Friend of the Children comes out of the wood.”

They want plenty of leisure, which is not such an odd remark as it appears to be, for the daily walks with Nannie, and often a perambulator as well, do not count as playtime to children. I know that in my little family a hot afternoon spent in the garden and the wood, or a wet afternoon in the nursery, are the most enjoyable times of all.

The very fact that children tend to choose for their games just those occupations that interest their own little selves makes it important that as soon as they are old enough they should often play with children of their own age, so that they may learn to take their turn in a game, to forget their own interests in that of their side and to play a game of some one else's choice.

Children are so sensibly dressed now-a-days that it is almost superfluous to remark that they should not be hindered by their clothes. Little girls should wear knickers to match their dresses, so that they may have no fear of torn embroideries or soiled  
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petticoats, when they are climbing trees or playing rough and tumble games with their brothers, and I know of a resourceful nurse who cut Jack's old stockings short at the ankle and slipped them on over his knees when he lay about on the floor with soldiers, trains or blocks, thus saving herself much darning and endless injunctions to the child not to kneel so much.

I have said nothing about singing, which ought to figure largely in children's games with their elders, though this naturally depends a good deal on whether the family is a musical one. Children are very fond of rounds and glee singing, and lots of fun can be derived from them if some action can be introduced. A musical child of five or six will keep his part in a round or glee very successfully, and incidentally I am sure it helps considerably to cultivate an ear for music in the younger members of the family, who take it in unconsciously while they pursue their own occupations. A great many children now-a-days start at quite an early age their delightful singing lessons on Mrs. Curwen's or Yorke Trotter's method. To the small ones these are quite a game, and to be able to take a bigger and bigger share in the rounds with Daddie is a tremendous incentive to work at their music lessons.

Were my critic a child, he would exclaim, “Why, you have not told half the games I love to play!” and I am thankful that he is right and that children when left wisely alone have such infinite resources for amusing themselves.