GAMES AND WET DAY OCCUPATIONS.[1]

By MRS. C. M. PARKER.

The title of this lecture, 'Games and Wet-day Occupations,' was given to me in July, and for this reason I thought of it as being rather a pessimistic one. Yet, it almost seemed as if our Secretary had anticipated the wet August. I am sure a great many parents may have had to cater for wet afternoons or mornings spent indoors, and I hope that they will give their suggestions later as to how they occupied their children's time.

I propose taking the last part of the title first, the indoor or wet-weather occupations, as this is more in accord with my own work. At the end I shall take the subject of games and play.

We will suppose that you have two or three children to mind for a wet afternoon. I may say in passing that I do not think one should lay any great emphasis on a wet day, and if children are strong there is no reason why they should not go out if properly mackintoshed and gum-booted. For various reasons, however, we may have to keep them indoors, and if we know that this may have to be done frequently then there should be a wet-day routine, to which the children will naturally turn. What I am trying to emphasise is that I do not think that *all* the new toys and games should make their appearance on a wet day or that the grown-up should feel it her duty to give up all her time

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to amuse the children. This is to allow too much of the sweet things of life and will lead to frayed tempers for both at bed-time. The best method is to be very much absorbed in your own work while the children are playing. Choose some work for yourself which won't need much concentration on your part, for you can't expect quiet, but whatever it is let it keep you busy. Then, don't interfere with their play. Let it be spontaneous and unconscious. Let them invent their own and you will find that it will take very little material to amuse. Then also you will be fostering that happy gift of pleasure in simple things and an absorption and interest in the occupation in hand. Your aim is to let them create their own games, to amuse themselves. This is so necessary for their adult life, for you will be teaching them that their contentment is not necessarily dependent on external pleasures or the praises of the crowd.

Now, it would certainly not be advisable to put children into an empty room and say: 'Play together until tea-time!' With nothing more exciting to do, the result would probably be a fight. *You* must provide the materials, and I propose to tell you of these, some simple, some complicated, some dear and some inexpensive, but all have been chosen for their educational value as well as for the appeal they make to the child.

A nursery or playroom should always contain a cupboard where toys and materials can be stored. It is very necessary that children should have a place of their own for their toys and that they should tidy up themselves after their play. Give them plenty of warning that it is nearly time to pack away and then there will be no fuss. It would be better to keep one shelf for toys and another for materials, as the toys would be pulled out more often and at odd times, while the materials would probably be used for longer times of play. We will consider toys first.

The most satisfactory are those which are not used up in the playing but can be played with over and over again in a variety of ways. For example, painting books are not so valuable in this respect as building blocks. All ages are content to build, from the youngest, who is happy to

put one block on top of another and push it round the floor for a train, to the older child, who will build elaborate houses. Let the bricks you choose be
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large and of various sizes. A carpenter will make them for you if you give him the measurements.

Bead-threading and the making of patterns is another favourite. The Dryad Handicrafts have excellent ones. Square beads are best, as they will not roll away. There are different sizes but all have the same large hole. You can get these at Drummond's in Dawson Street and they cost 5*d*. per hundred. For threading you can use those coloured laces with a knot at one end. These can be bought at the Educational Company in Talbot Street. They also sell beads ready mixed at 5*d*. per hundred. Ordinary boot laces will do, only the tag comes off more easily and the lace is more clumsy. The beads can be stored in empty cream pots or the pots you buy preserved cherries in.

It is a great pity that there is not a good shop for kindergarten materials in Dublin, and the occupations that I shall show you now all came from England. There was a time when educational materials came into Ireland duty-free, but that is not now the case. In ordering materials, if you ask the firm to write on the outside 'For Education Purposes Only,' they are sometimes allowed in free of duty. The position now being that you may have good luck and no customs to pay or you may be charged duty.

This catalogue of Phillip and Tacey's, Putney, will give you a host of ideas, and also this one from the Educational Company in Holborn. The toys they produce are strong and made in clean, bright colours.

Paul and Marjorie Abbatt, of Tavistock Square, have invented very suitable toys. They are large, well-made and all allow plenty of scope for invention. Their illustrated catalogue will show how good these toys are; this is a quotation from it:—

> 'The daily playtime of the child between two and six years old remains constant at between eight and nine hours. It is a big slice of life. We can see at once that play and playthings are just as necessary for the child as food and clothes … It will be seen that the choosing of toys is an important matter and one better not left to chance.'

And also:—

> 'Children are sometimes destructive in the garden because they have no big enough task to try their strength on. Con-
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> structive toys have been too small. To build a wall with bricks the size of lumps of sugar tries the patience, and small boys need to climb higher than father's knee. Opportunities to climb and build something which encourages by its rapidly growing size turn the little misfit in the family circle into the happy sharer of its daily life.'

Such toys as the following are available:—

(1) The climbing frame.

(2) The hurdle.

(3) Large bricks.
(4) Sand-tray.
(5) Rocking fun boat.
(6) Noah's Ark animals.
(7) Fitting and matching toys, jig-saw puzzles.
(8) Large easel, crayons, paint box.

I have no doubt that there are other firms producing good toys. I have taken the above as examples.

Now to turn to the more easily obtained materials, and what I have to say will first be applicable to the five to eight-year-old child.

A good occupation is to make 'cut out' or 'tear out' pictures. For these you will need large sheets of dark brown paper, sheets of white paper and chalks. It is worth while buying good chalks, for example Reeves', as the colours are good and the results will be better. The cheap, fluffy kind very easily make a mess and the greasy kind melt in hot fingers. You will also need paste brushes (1*d*. at Woolworth's) and a pot of Gloy paste or its equivalent. Many young children find it easier to tear out the shape of a boat or a table than to cut it out. If the picture is to be cut out, then blunt-ended scissors should be used. The picture, illustrating some rhyme or story, is torn or cut out in the white paper, pasted on to the brown paper and then coloured.

A blackboard in the room fixed to the wall is a great boon, but if you do not wish to disfigure the room you can buy a material called slate cloth. This can be mounted on a roller and hung from a hook in the wall when needed. For painting you need large sheets of white paper, which a stationer will cut for
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you. Good brushes will last much longer than cheap ones and are more economical to buy, and get tubes of paint which can be squeezed out on to a saucer to give a large amount of clean colour.

Here is a suggestion which might be of use to someone. The idea is to have a wet-day box, made from a butter box, either varnished or covered with cretonne and fitted with a lid. These are the contents:—

Old dress catalogues.
Paint box and brushes.
Crayons and drawing books.
Paste and brushes.
Box of old Christmas cards (for scrap-books for hospitals).
Packet of coloured paper (to cut into squares, triangles, stars, etc.).
Two or three big reels with pins driven in for French knitting.
Odd pieces of loose-meshed woollen dress material and old bits of blanket, to be unravelled for cushion stuffings.
Empty boxes each containing some little things: a few buttons, shells, bag of marbles, bits of stuff, post-cards, wooden beads.
A pair of blunt-edged scissors.

Our own P.N.E.U. has produced a pamphlet called 'Occupations for Children under

School Age.' This can be had from the London office and is free to members. It is well worth the penny stamp on the postcard which will procure it for you. At the beginning it quotes some of Miss Mason's principles from *Home Education* and then it goes on to explain what 'occupations' should mean. I shall quote:—

> 'There should be no so-called "lessons" in the nursery. "Occupations" is the word Miss Mason used, and for these no time-table should be set and there should be a sense of freedom both in the manner and matter of "What shall we do next?" Again, just as the best-loved toys are the simplest in construction because they give full scope to the child's imagination, so all material used should be of the simplest kind. "Apparatus" should be avoided. A child's special "hour" (or half-hour, as
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> the case may be) should be a time of happy occupation and should be arranged at a time when the children cannot be out of doors. Stories, pictures, materials of all kinds are necessary because the provision must be no less liberal of its kind than that for an older child.'

At the end of the pamphlet is a list of suitable books for children under six and also suggestions as to the materials they could use and where these may be bought.

When we think of occupations for older children we are really considering hobbies. If you have let the young child invent its own games and occupy its free time without a grown-up's help, then you have sown the seeds for a contented leisure time in later life. This is becoming of much importance, for parents are being faced with the problem that, having educated their children, there does not seem to be an immediate prospect of a post. How will these people occupy their time contentedly if they have never been interested in some special pursuit? Therefore, encourage your children's hobbies, and to do this get them good books on whatever the subject may be. Let it be considered as scientifically as possible and not taken up haphazard. If it should be carpentry, then get the child lessons from a carpenter and let him or her have a decent set of tools and a carpenter's bench. I want to emphasise that the hobby, whatever it may be, should be treated as something real and vital and of immense importance.

Now to turn to the subject of games, or rather play, for this allows for all forms of games, imaginative, organised and spontaneous. When we use the word 'games' we are apt to think of it in its narrower sense as applying only to field games, and the term 'play' has a wider significance. Educationally the subject of play is thought of as being as important as work. Everyone has noticed the intense absorption and concentration on the part of a child at play, for example, building with bricks. All his interest is focussed on the work in hand, and in fact we see that the words 'work' and 'play' can be used synonymously. Bernard Shaw's words which he puts into the mouth of the mad priest in *John Bull's Other Island* come to our mind. The priest is talking of the ideal state and speaks of it as a place where

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'work is play and play is life.' This is the ideal, and educationalists have wondered—'Could we but get that same concentration in school-work, then how real the learning would be.' Much of Madame Montessori's method owes its success and appeal to this fact, and Mr. Caldwell Cook in his book, *The Play-way*, shows how this 'learning through playing' can be used with older

children.

Madame Montessori's apparatus is designed to make an appeal through play and yet be of educational value. As a Froebel-trained teacher, I do not agree with her censure on make-believe play. She holds that this leads to untruths, whereas the followers of Froebel welcome make-belief play as being a stimulus to the imagination and see value in fairy stories which the Montessorian would deplore. At the same time, we must help the child all we can to distinguish between fact and fancy, and therefore we should make it clear that fairy stories *are* pretend stories. Otherwise we shall find ourselves guilty of the same offence which we may be trying to cure in the child—that is the telling of romantic untruths. This can become a very big problem with the highly imaginative child. One would be very loath to crush this imaginative faculty, for it is a gift which we prize and nurture in later years. Ultimately it may produce the writer or artist or give to the world the sympathetic and understanding person.

Among psychologists there are two views taken as to the meaning of spontaneous play. One view is the biological interpretation which sees in play a recapitulation of the evolution of the race. An example of this can be seen in the hunting games of boys, recapitulating the time when man had to hunt to live. A second view sees in play a preparation for life. Professor Percy Nunn brings out this point when he remarks that those animals which are helpless at birth indulge in a long play period. He shows that the kitten running after the piece of string that we pull across the floor is rising to the same watchfulness and rapid spring which will be needed to catch its food. Similarly, the absorption with which the girl will play with her dolls is a preparation for the more serious occupation when she grows up. Here I may mention the intense interest with which children

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will play 'houses.' I remember hours spent under a special hedge in the garden where we collected all the broken pieces of china we could find to decorate the ledges and branches. Here the most elaborate mud-pies and mud-cakes were made, only the finest mud being used. The choicest came from a part of the garden walk where rain used to lie in wet weather. When this drained away a skin of extra fine mud was found.

I shall emphasise again before ending: interfere as little as possible with a child's spontaneous play. Having provided the best environment, then let well alone. This play tendency, fortunately, does not vanish with childhood but will remain with us all our lives as a blessed gift—only it has to be used wisely. An excess of it may lead the world to count you as a genius, but with less understanding you may be considered as mildly insane.

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[1] Lecture given to the Dublin Branch of the P.N.E.U.