

For the REVIEW.]

**The Educative Value of Play.**

"In my home, in your home  
Over the way  
What is it that we hear the children say?  
'Let's play.'"

The period of childhood is pre-eminently one of play. This universal instinct of play means something, and it should be turned to good account.

To a very great many the idea of connecting what seem like direct opposition — namely education and play — may be very ridiculous. It is nevertheless true that they are connected, and that very intimately. Indeed in the education of children play lends a valuable helping-hand; one not to be discarded. But how many realize this? Only a very few of the great, great number, who undertake the care of children.

Mothers say: "I keep my children well supplied with toys. I get all the newest for them and let them play just as much as they like. What more can I do?" What more? Foolish mother! In your anxiety to make the children happy, you do too much. It is this forcing upon them of an overabundance of perfected toys that is tending to make them dull and dissatisfied. The children are being robbed of their right to be happy by what has been termed toy-indigestion. The toys are heaped upon them in a jumbled mass, without order and connection; and they are expected to play and be happy.

What opportunity is there for creation and reproduction in the majority of the present century playthings. None at all! There is nothing left undone for the child to complete. He has no opportunity for exercising his constructive powers. What does he do? In nine cases out of ten he exercises the opposite power — namely the destruction — and the costly toy has to suffer.

And has the play of children as it is seen in the average home, any definite aim? Very seldom. Mothers are busy. They have scarcely time for their household duties and the duties of society. A few moments cannot be spared to the children. They are told to "run away and play." How vague! The restless activity must be satisfied. And so it is. But with what results. Do not the fantastically carved window ledges and chairs, the up-rooted plants, the dirty baby faces and hands, and torn frocks, each tell its own tale?

Let us turn from the consideration of play and playthings and hear what Aristotle says: "Let the very playthings of your children have a bearing upon the life and work of the coming man." But Aristotle did not go far enough. It was left for Fröbel to systematize play. He saw everywhere in his study

of children, activity expressing itself in play; for "play is the natural and appropriate occupation of childhood." But he also saw that this play could be made of educational value, with proper guidance. After watching children at play he said: "I see that these children delight in movement. They are always running, jumping and hopping; and moreover are pleased with rythmical movement. I can contrive means for the same use of the limbs which shall result in increased physical power, and shall train the children to a conscious control of their bodily organs."

Furthermore he says: "I see that they observe, but their observations are indefinite and unfruitful. I will concentrate their attention by exciting their curiosity and interest, and thus teach them how to observe. Thus they will gain clear and definite perception, bright images instead of blurred ones."

And so in his Kindergarten system he has contrived means by which all children's activities, energies, amusements and occupations may be converted into work that shall be in the truest sense regulated activity and an education. It is from his play and playthings that the child should gain his early education. For we are told that the first mental as well as physical development goes on in its play.

Should this stage of development be left to chance? No! It should be as much systematized and directed as the instruction imparted at a later age. In our every day life we see good or bad results the outcome of good or bad beginnings. Do we expect to have good solid structures if the foundation is not firmly and securely built? Do we expect to have a sturdy, thriving plant, if we have not carefully tended the seed from the time it was placed in suitable soil?

To both of these questions the answer readily given is No. Then how can we expect a complete and natural development of the child, if the first stage of that development has been neglected. Do not consider the early play of the child useless or meaningless. As Aristotle says, it should be made to have a bearing on the life and work of the coming man. "The creative spirit must be allowed to work in them, that thus the rising generation may be saved from the demon of excitement seeking, which is ruining morality in our days. Action in the form of play must supply the elements of all knowledge and practice.

"The purpose of all play and playthings should be to facilitate from the very first the perception of outward objects; by the simplicity, the method, and above all the fitness of the things set before the child to enable it the more easily to take in form, size, color, number, etc.; and by their definiteness, serial order, and connection, to produce clear and distinct impressions corresponding to the first budding powers of comprehension.

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