

The Creative Impulse in the Child

"Behold the child among his newborn blisses,
A six-years' darling of a pigmy size;
See where 'mid work of his own hand he lies,
Fretted by sallies of his mother's kisses,
With light upon him from his father's eyes!
See, at his feet, some little plan or chart,
Some fragment from his dream of human life,
Shaped by himself with newly-learned art."

The child's interests are many and varied, and to develop these fully we must give freedom, for through freedom and interest development along the lines of nature proceeds steadily and normally.

In no better way can freedom be allowed to the child than by presenting him with all the conditions for a choice of problem and materials for "work of his own hand," eagerly demanded and into which he throws himself with whole-hearted absorption. This freedom, backed by the sympathy of an adult who understands the child's needs and can utilise his interests, will pave the way upward to higher planes of achievement, knowledge, and understanding.

The creative impulse, as witnessed in constructive work, stands out pre-eminently among the interests and is common to the majority of normal children.

Its beginnings are seen in babyhood, at that destructive rampageous period when the active inquiring spirit creates havoc all along the line, burrowing into the inner workings of everything—putting the gramophone out of action, scribbling on the walls after successfully removing the paper thereof, peeping inside the pan of rising bread, splashing lather like daddy.

These very natural desires of babyhood must have lawful outlets if the disastrous effects to household goods and grown-up belongings are to be avoided; but the thwarting of curiosity and the craving for activity are a most serious disaster, for the child will suffer mentally and physically if he cannot satisfy these needs.

There is to the understanding, few more pitiful sounds than the deep, resigned sigh of the little active child, swept off its feet when set on some most alluring journey, and shaken into quiet. How can the active growing mind and limbs settle to the acquired static condition of an elderly person or indolent nurse-maid?

The tiny child in the nursery will use any material which comes to his hands merely for the sake of the activity and not for any purpose aim—immediate or distant. He enjoys tearing paper, delighting in the crackling noise and the joy of ripping it in every direction; the

How Mothers may Direct the Development of the Constructive Faculties of their Children

By EVELYN KENWICK.



pencil or chalk with which he scribbles, and the paint-brush scrubbed over a surface provide him with the same pleasurable experiences.

This first interest in experimenting with materials, this destructiveness, plays a great and important part in the child's mental and physical life. Futile and valueless as these activities appear at first sight, they must be regarded as a natural phase in development; for through them muscular control, independence, preservation of faith in himself are strengthened with a steady increase of ideas and a widening of interest.

By means of free play with toys and domestic apparatus (such as

somewhat perturbed at the lightening speed with which the clothes were fashioned. Mary's methods were primitive to a degree; having chosen the material and cut a hole for the doll's head to slip through, she kept the dress in position on the doll's body by a ribbon waist-band. Then the little parent's face glowed with happiness as she saw the garment she had made fulfilling a garment's purpose, viz., to cover.

"Why did Mary prefer these crude efforts to beautifully dressed dolls?" her mother asks herself, and: "Do these primitive attempts lead on to anything, or should I show Mary better ways of dressing so that she will learn neatness and make some-

reason that "cotton dresses are better for the summer, serge and velvet are too hot." So that through these first crude attempts the forces of suggestion, imitation and observation have been unconsciously at work, stirring and stimulating the child's reasoning powers. Mary has definitely arrived at a further stage of development both in mental attitude and actual workmanship.

As I write I have before me examples of other types of constructive work carried out by children of different ages, all of whom have had the wider experiences of trained adults to appeal to. An examination of these may help to prove the truth of the old maxim that "we learn by doing" and also to illustrate the power which this interest wields in the intellectual, physical, and moral life of the child.

Here is a scrap-book made by five-year-old Colin with pictures cut from catalogues and old picture-books, which is very illuminating when considered in the light of Colin's interests, attainments and development in three short weeks. The first few pages show a total disregard of arrangement, method of procedure, and inability to relate the pictures one to another. The early cut-outs, with their jagged edges, show that the child had very little control over his tools. Elephants and soldiers take their place with chickens of the same size cut from the same scrap-sheet, fancy goods from a draper's catalogue of twice the animals' dimensions are plastered on the same page.

After turning over half-a-dozen pages it is interesting to note that Colin has begun to classify his cut-outs and is using some judgment in his work. This page shows a train which has been carefully pasted at the foot of the page, while pencils and chinks have also been used to develop the picture—railway lines, signals, telegraph wires, sky and field being added. Still another page shows soldiers grouped in twos. This was a favourite page which gave Colin great joy in counting the men—thus he acquired much facility in dealing with groups of numbers. The book points to the fact that there has been a development in ideas as well as in manipulation of tools.

The Kindergarten children in Marjorie's school have made a pillar-box of corrugated paper covered with red paper in which the children are free to post letters to little friends; these are to be collected and delivered at certain times during the week. Marjorie's mother thoughtlessly remarks to her friends that the children are always "making and playing" and she does wish that they could be "taught to work instead." If she deferred passing such hasty and superficial judgments until she had considered the methods in the light of scientific educational research she might be surprised to find that though "making and playing" Marjorie is working very hard and is making great progress in both reading and writing because



CAMERA SHY

Youthful Members of the Maori Race.

A New Era Photo

washing and cleaning materials), a sand-tray, nests of bricks, chinks and blackboard, pencils, a Noah's ark, trolleys and so on, the child is prepared for the next stage.

In the baby stage he builds up, breaks down and rebuilds until the destructive tendencies are gradually sublimated and transformed into the higher and universal interest of creating or constructing.

Because this desire to create is recognised as a common characteristic of most normal children, the educator of young children should make it the centre of the educational programme and from it allow the paths of wider intellectual interests to diverge as development proceeds.

A year ago, when Mary was four years old, much of her time was engrossingly occupied in constructing doll's dresses. Her mother was interested and amazed at the child's power of concentration, though

thing worth-while?"

The first question can only be answered by observing that Mary's own work carried out in obedience of her creative impulse with the wonderful experience of "joy in the making" naturally gives a lasting happiness far beyond the evanescent pleasure aroused by the finished productions of other minds and hands.

Looking back over a year's interval the mother finds that time has given her the answer to the second question. Mary, now five years old, has used her mental powers, and a record of natural progress can be made; by observing and comparing her methods and her mother's, she sees that the use of newspaper patterns will result in her family being (relatively) well turned out. At the same time materials are chosen to satisfy some ideas of colour, while seasonal changes lead her to