



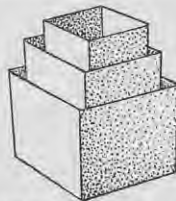
"The best play occupation of a tiny baby is to be supported in his pram, shielded from too keen a wind and too strong a sun, but with the opportunity to look and listen to all the exciting 'events' of his immediate environment—the wind rustling in the trees, the inter-play of sun and shadow, the barking of dogs, the clucking of hens, the chatter of children, the bustle of people going to and fro. All these varied stimuli may impinge on the baby's newly-awakening senses." (Dr. Agatha Bowley in "Natural Development of the Child.")

Things and Persons

There are two aspects of play. In one, children are exploring the world of things—manipulating them, gaining the knowledge which develops their individual skill, self-reliance, and independence. In the other, children are learning their way about in the world of persons, slowly building the intricate web which binds them to their fellows.

As they play in the world of things they learn much that will lead to perseverance, initiative, and the power of concentration. When they are tiny, their span of attention is very small, and they play for only a few minutes with each toy, going quickly from one to another. Gradually they learn to do what they purpose, and when 3 years old they can do an astonishing number of things. They will keep on doing one thing for quite a while; they will even return to the same occupation after a break. "Those moments when they give their whole attention to some task are the moments when they grow intellectually." (Miss M. V. Gutteridge, B.Sc., principal of the Kindergarten Training College, Kew, Melbourne.) Each time they meet a new situation, whether plaything or friend, and deal with it

satisfactorily, they grow. They develop more power especially when their action is of their own choice rather than that of older people in their little world.



Therefore they need plenty of things to do and the right toys and equipment, space and freedom, for their play. If they have the right playing space and playthings (which does not mean the most expensive), they will show creative powers in their play, and they will be laying the foundation of qualities they will need later—for example, initiative, enthusiasm, and the will to succeed.

Indoor Playing Space

Children need space for their activities, both indoors and outdoors. If it is not possible for them to have a whole room, they should have the end of a verandah or a sunporch for their own, preferably with access to the garden. When old enough they should be able to enter and leave sunporch and garden at will. They should be allowed to realise that the space is their own, with their own possessions, and they will soon know their things and learn to respect those of other people. They need tables and chairs suitable to their size. The provision of low shelves and cupboards in which to keep their toys makes putting things away much easier, and also makes easier an understanding of and a pride in orderly arrangement.

A sense of order and power to achieve it is not part of the early equipment of human beings but the result of careful teaching over quite a long period, and sometimes it can

be achieved at too great a cost. Creativeness can be sacrificed if order is too rigidly enforced, and the wisdom of making the putting away of toys an issue resulting in a battle of wills between adults and children is doubtful. In any case, in the interest of encouraging children's powers of concentration, they must be able to come back to their "work" and resume where they left off.

Respect for Children's Activities

Children should not be interrupted needlessly in their play. It is as important to them as adult's work is, and both rightly resent interruption. If meals or baths are due, give children warning—for example, that after the train has gone once more round the track it will be time to wash their hands for lunch. If possible they should be allowed to return to their play where they left off.

This applies to older children, too. There is a salutary warning about it in Dr. K. Walker's interesting book, "I Talk of Dreams." This book is a special kind of autobiography in that the author, who is a physiologist and psychologist, sets out to analyse his early experiences and trace their impact on his later life. The whole book is well worth reading, especially for parents. This is what he says (page 21):—

"Never take the play of a child lightly, for it is the most serious and the most urgent of all occupations, of greater importance even than a grown-up's affairs, since it is the father of these. I doubt whether I have ever completely forgiven my mother for her irreverent attitude to my play. Somewhere in those unlit and not very pleasant cellars of the mind, which the analysts are always seeking to enter, there lie the remnants of an old grudge against her for