

TOYMAKING.

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PART I.

“THE child is eternal, and so are toys and tears and laughter. When the house is put in order by strange men, when the clothes that were worn and the tools that were used are put away, there will be found an upper room full of toys. These remain.”

Children like to be busy, their restless little hands crave for work, but like adults they want to work with a purpose, they want a definite goal. Now toymaking is particularly valuable as a handicraft for children for several reasons. They work with a purpose because they want their toys either to play with or for ornaments, or as one child said, to remind her of her youth when she was old, and they work to make their toys look beautiful. This desire for perfection can be encouraged but it is folly to expect from a child the accurate work of a grown up person. Accuracy comes with time and training, but unfortunately time and training have a tendency to rob the growing child of his fresh imagination.

The little toy maker of four or five sees very fair visions of toys, he sees them still in the crude little idols he makes and he wonders at our blindness when we fail to recognize his toys. As he grows older he becomes more critical and sees the difference between the toy he makes and the toy he plans to make—the ideal and the real. It is well for him if he does not lower his standard, but remains faithful to his ideal in spite of failures.

Again toymaking is valuable as a handicraft because such a variety of materials can be used, such odd pieces of wood—cigar boxes, match boxes, corks, paper, etc. There are too such a variety of models to be made and such need for inventiveness and artistic ability. Apart from these advantages toymaking is worth teaching for its own sake—it brings happiness and leisure occupation to the child, a hobby, a glad memory and a possible means of livelihood to the man. Teachers and all who deal with little people will find it a useful occupation, through it they can healthily amuse themselves and renew their youth, through it they will have an enduring bond of interest with their children, and through it they can make their children's leisure hours profitable—a very important work. Our knowledge of history, mathematics, or similar subjects often fails to impress our children, they probably think we are a little foolish to burden our heads with so many facts that seem to have no connection with their radiant world, but when we can use our hands and make a toy they see us with other eyes—we are to them really clever people.

It is interesting to get at the child's point of view, to know what the child thinks of toymaking. Some little girls of nine and ten were asked if they thought learning how to make toys would be of any value to them when

they were grown up. The majority, in their answers (which they wrote down) looked forward to the joy of mending their own little girls' toys (not one mentioned a little boy), some looked forward to mending broken chairs or door handles, one said "it will teach me to earn my fortune," and one wrote philosophically "ordépents" (all depends).

A little girl of eleven wrote the following about her hand work lessons:—

"I think most girls like handwork and so do I. I think it teaches us to do everything we attempt well. I have learnt that everything must be done properly because I made a motor car and gave it to my little sister, but she happened to drop it and it came unstuck. My brother thinks it is silly for girls to learn handwork and everything I bring home he says, "I should not have done it like that" and goes on to explain how he would have done it, although he has never learnt himself. I don't like the part much when you have to prepare everything to put together, I like putting it together and then you can see something for your work".

Another wrote:—

"There are many things you can make, and if you take great pains with them they become really pretty little ornaments, in fact I am thinking of having some shelves specially for my toys. The hardest tool to use, I find is the saw, you have to have a steady hand to use it. When I first took handwork lessons I used to think it hard work, but now I think otherwise, and feel rather grand when I show my parents the things I have made. The most important use of handwork is that when you are older you can knock a nail in or mend anything that needs mending in the wooden line, instead of having to wait until father, brother or husband comes home tired. As well as this there might come a time when the making of toys would help to earn the daily bread."

The child of twelve or thirteen desires to make something useful—knife-boxes, salt boxes, writing cases begin to take the place of engines, dolls' houses and motor cars. This desire to make useful things is largely due to the influence of those parents who see in toys no beauty, but who understand the use of the salt box or knife box. One can hear such parents when visiting a toymaking class exclaiming, "why not teach them to make something useful?" They see in this class only an attempt to pander to children's tastes and lead them along the Primrose Path of Education.

(To be continued.)

The toymaking should appeal to nurses who have charge of sick children.—Ed.

(George Harrap & Co. are publishing, early in the spring, a book on "Toymaking," written by the writer and her sister. It will contain descriptions of toys that can be made by children from three to thirteen, and suggestions for the use of so called waste material.)