

OUR PRIZE COMPETITION.

HOW MAY THE PLAY OF CHILDREN BE DIRECTED SO AS TO BE A MEANS OF EDUCATION?

We have pleasure in awarding the prize this week to Miss Emilie Mona Clay, Colwyn Crescent, Rhos-on-Sea, North Wales.

PRIZE PAPER.

In the year 1837, Friedrich Froebel opened his first Kindergarten at Blankenburgh. The idea of using play for educational ends was carried out by him in that early infants' school.

It was Friedrich Froebel who first thought of educational play, that is, of so using the natural characteristic of the child in loving play, to teach the child what it is good for him to know.

Froebel's explanation of why he thought it important to use play educationally would be something like this:—

It is the child's nature to play; it will be easiest to teach a child through play because the child loves to play.

By using nature and natural means, the child will learn unconsciously.

Play is a means of expression. This is important, because at an early age the child expresses himself more through actions than words.

Play is the child's world.

For these and other reasons, having regard to child psychology, it is important to use nature and what is natural to meet our ends educationally.

Thus, if we want a child to realise some of life's activities—the work of the baker, the shoemaker, the blacksmith, and so forth—we do not take a book and read to the child a discourse on the work of the baker, the shoemaker, the blacksmith, we follow nature, and we picture out through play the activities of these tradesmen. Or, again, we may be wishing to draw a child to close realisation of the beauties of nature, as in the life of the butterfly, the squirrel, the bee, the daffodil. To do this we may dramatise simply through play the simple facts of nature: the butterfly's beautiful transformation, the life of the squirrel in saving food, the wonders of bee life, the daffodil with other bulbs, and the future of that brown-looking object.

Through nature play the child sees his own life reflected in some life outside his own, and the plays or simple dramatisations make sure his knowledge about the animal life so near him. This kind of acquisition is the "learn by doing" which does not merely apply to

children's play, but is the great fundamental principle in all teaching.

The child who has pictured out the activities of the baker, the shoemaker, the blacksmith—or represented through play some of Nature's wondrous lore—will not forget the knowledge gained in this way. Such knowledge will be the child's very own in a more far-reaching sense than it could possibly be were the child only *told* about the baker, the shoemaker, the blacksmith, or about the butterfly, the bee, or the daffodil, the squirrel, and so on.

Educational play is learning by doing; it is using something so natural to the child, the love of play and activity and dramatisation, to impart that knowledge which in after years will be added to and glorified.

Froebel says in connection with hand plays:

If your child's to understand
Things which other people do,
You must let his tiny hand
Carry out the same thing too.

The hand plays were instituted as the earliest form of educational play. In these the child imitated the actions of the "other people" and of Nature's phenomena, as the turning round of a weather vane through the action of the wind, an unseen force which the child cannot see, but an early indication of the law of cause and effect, though not clear to the child at the moment.

Some have been heard to say that "educational play" is over-directed. It should not be this in the hands of a skilful teacher. She should tell the children in simple words the facts that need representing, and leave the representation to them. She should simply change the centre of interest for the children if the play is degenerating into uselessness, but she should *not* be the director of the play.

As cannot be too often said, "educational play" is only really successful when the teacher simply remains the inspirer, but not the manager of a game.

Educational play is a great factor in education of an all-round character, more than merely the imparting of facts and giving knowledge, it may be a means of moral training untold. It may well help to make citizens as well as professors!

HONOURABLE MENTION.

The following competitors receive honourable mention:—Miss M. M. G. Bielby, Miss R. E. S. Cox, Miss O. M. Balderton, Miss C. Wright, Mrs. Farthing.

QUESTION FOR NEXT WEEK.

What have you learnt of new nursing methods in a military hospital?

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