



A ROOF PLAYGROUND

Vacation Schools and Playgrounds

BY HENRY S. CURTIS

THE most noticeable movement in educational lines of recent years has been the rapid development of vacation schools and playgrounds in all the great cities of America. Not less noteworthy than the rapid growth of this system has been the process by which it has been taken over by the boards of education and become a part of the regular school system, until now the vacation work is a recognized part of the school activities of nearly every city. The vacation school and educational playground have come to stay. But in what form they will finally become a part of our school systems the future alone can decide. The work is still so new, its ideals are still so plastic in the minds of its organizers, that in each city it is taking on a specific form and assuming individual features. It is the great experiment station of the pedagogic world. Out of these various efforts of the different cities the system as a whole receives each year some new yet tried feature which can be safely added to the

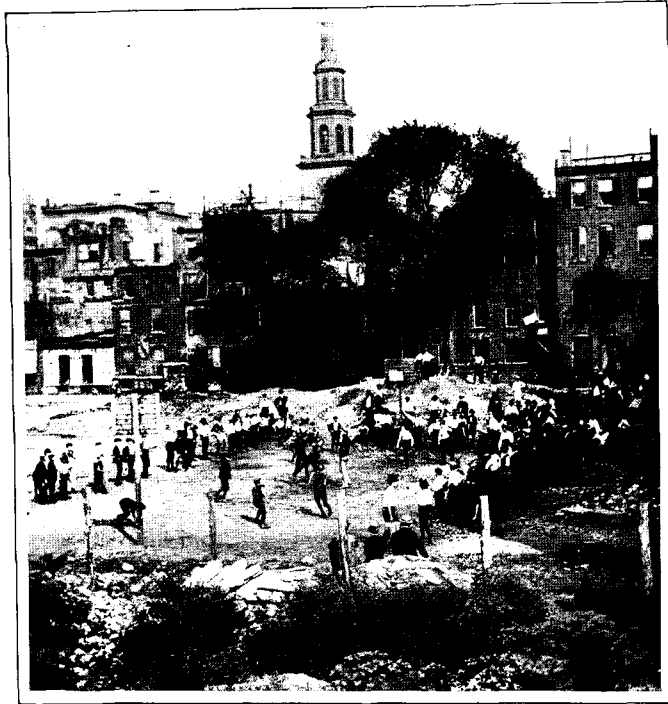
scheme of required work. The vacation work is the growing point of our educational system to-day, and I do not hesitate to say the time may soon come when we shall regard it as quite as important as the work of the rest of the year.

If we look at the biology of play, it seems that most plays are the modification of the pursuits of our ancestors. Just as the father in the humble family leaves his cast-off clothes to be cut over for his son, so the race has left all of its worn-out institutions to the children, who still accept them with pristine faith. It has left its folk-stories, which as fairytales are the chief treasure of the child's library; it has left its animism and anthropomorphic gods, and the child accepts them without question; it has left its astrology and sorcery, so that the child still cures warts by burying a piece of salt meat; finally, it has left its occupations, which survive for the child in the form of play. Play means to the child the rapid acquirement of physical adjustments and correlations through

movements made easy by the long history of the race; it means the awakening of the intellect through agents which are by heredity most stimulating; it means the merging of consciousness of self into interest in activity; it means action which is permeated by intense thought; hence it means the addition of grace to all action, for grace is the outcome of play, and no activity is ever graceful until it becomes play, or, in other words, is done for the pleasure of doing it, rather than for results.

How blessed is the heritage of the country child! Out in the sunshine, under the heavens, to roam the fields at will, to pluck the flowers, to search with curious eyes into the mysteries of nature, with his portion of work to give zest to his play, with his fields for base-ball and other games!

With the city boy all is different. Houses take possession of vacant lot after vacant lot until none remains. The school playground is squeezed out by the value of the land. There is no playground left but the streets, and these, too, have undergone transformation, which has kept pace with the other changes of the city. Narrow, full of carts, drays, horse-cars, and electric cars, how can a child play in these? The houses, too, have been subjected to the same contracting influence of land values, and the rooms have been reduced to cells eight or ten feet square. With two or three such rooms to a family of six or seven, what can the children do? Then, amidst these conditions, comes the summer; the burning rays of the sun strike down into these narrow tene-



A BASKET-BALL GAME

ments; they soak into the carpet and bedclothes so that these radiate heat until twelve o'clock at night; they reflect back from the high brick buildings across the way, and raise steam from the filthy streets below; the narrow tenement gives no opportunity for ventilation; the death-rate rises to a hundred a day. Where shall the children go through these burning summer days? There are no cool trees or broad fields for them. Go through our streets and see the children sitting in the doorways, serious, dejected, and uncomfortable. What a bitter parody on childhood is such a life! See them play half-hearted games in the filthy streets, constantly interrupted by teams and cars, always in danger of doing damage, always in danger of being run over. How can one look upon such a game without his heart rising up with sorrow and indignation! It was out of the realization of such conditions as these that the vacation schools and playgrounds sprung.

The first vacation school was founded in Boston by Miss Very in 1878. The

first vacation schools to become a part of a regular school system were founded in 1886 by Dr. William Barringer, then superintendent of the schools of New-ark.

The playground movement, like most educational movements of the past century, started in Germany. The first directed playground in this country seems to have been started in Boston in 1886. This was merely a play-place for small children, and was started in the yard of the Children's Mission on Par-meter Street. During these first years of the work a kindergartner usually gave her services, or was hired for a very small fee, to care for the children. The entire equipment generally consisted of a load of sand. The courts of the public schools were sometimes used, but it was more often a vacant lot. Since these primitive beginnings there has been great progress in every direction.

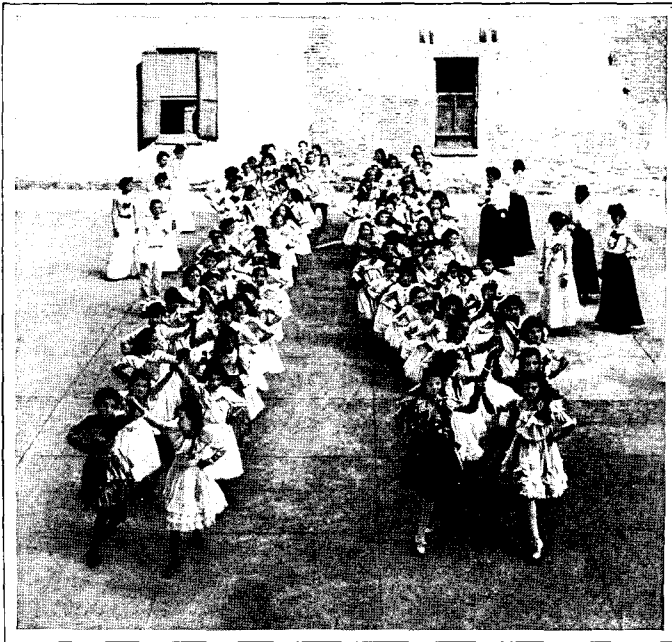
For several years the work in New York was carried on by the Society for Improving the Condition of the Poor. During 1897 this society operated ten vacation schools. In 1898 the work was taken up by the Board of Education.

Superintendent Stewart was placed in charge. This was a very happy selection. Superintendent Stewart is a man of progressive ideas and great originality. The system sprung forth and flourished like Jonah's gourd. Twenty-four playgrounds, three recreation-piers, twelve public baths, ten vacation schools, and an out-door gymnasium were opened in the first year. This started the movement on the highway to success, so that appropriations have increased year by year. All subsequent extension of the system has been the legitimate development along the lines so ably laid out.

Since then the work has settled together and become more of a system. It had more definite aims, and carried them out with more precision. Forty-six public-school playgrounds, sixteen vacation schools, fifteen swimming-baths, six recreation-piers, five out-door gymnasiums, ten evening play-centres, besides several out-door playgrounds and tent kindergartens, were opened. Nearly a thousand teachers were employed, and \$100,000 was expended on the work in Manhattan and Bronx alone.

Vacation work as a whole naturally

divides itself into two parts, the vacation school and the playground. The vacation school resembles the regular school in many particulars. It is held in the regular rooms in the regular school-buildings, and, so far as possible, is taught by regular teachers. In Greater New York during the past year there were twenty-eight vacation schools. These schools were located in the parts of the city where the population was densest. The sessions began at



AN EXHIBITION DRILL—THE SCHOTTISCHE

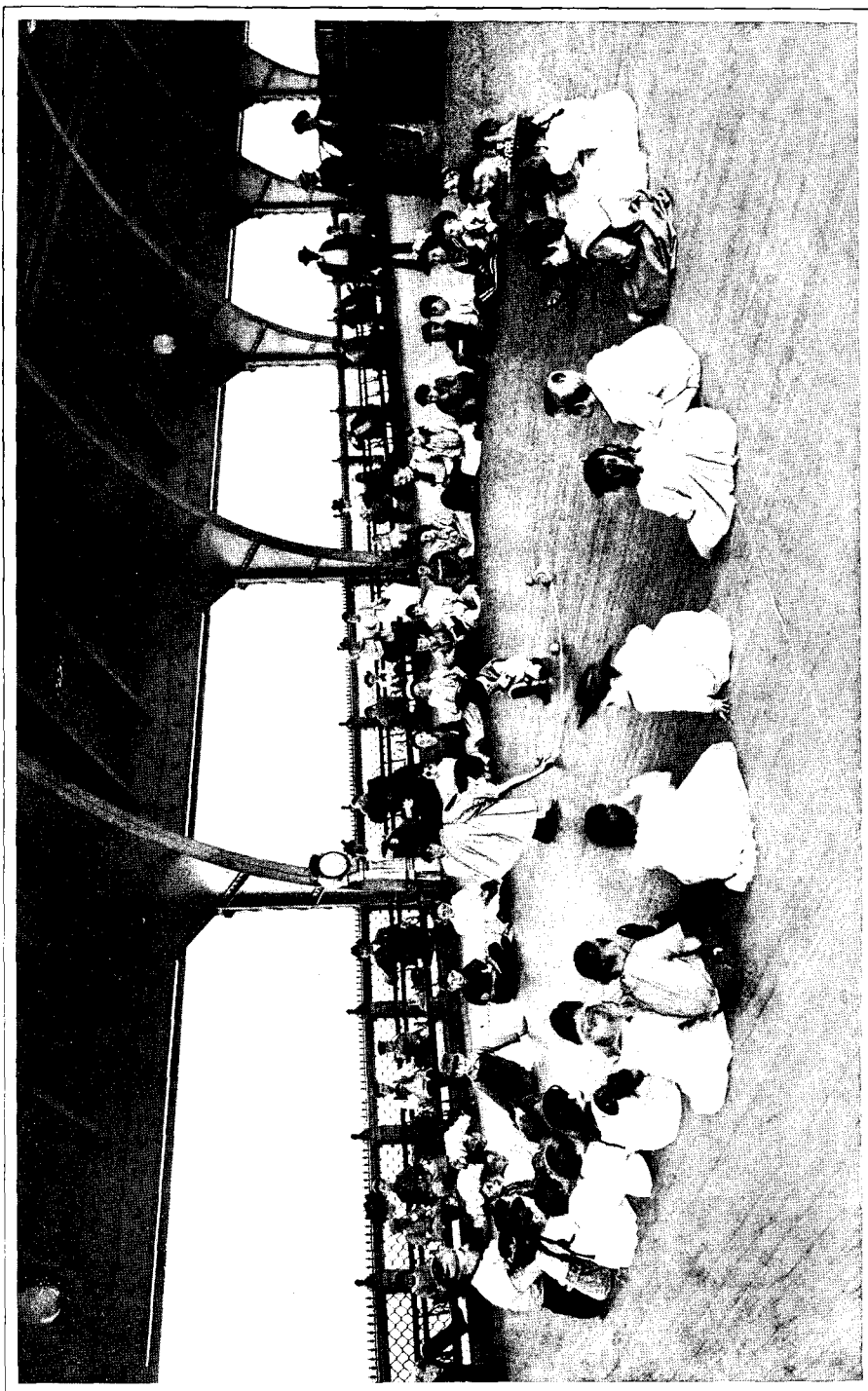
nine o'clock for five days a week, and closed at twelve. The curriculum varied in different schools, but in each there was a kindergarten for the smaller children.

We always associate with the idea of school the ideas of books and recitations, yet if you had visited the vacation schools of New York last summer, with the exception of the Bible on the desk, very likely you would not have seen a single book; if you had visited the class-rooms, you would have heard no recitations. The traditional idea of a school is that it is a sort of prison where the children are sent by their parents, a place to which they go with sorrow and from which they escape with joy; yet these children came to school during their vacation-time, when all sorts of diversion was going on around them. If you had looked closely, you would have seen that nearly every child looked happy and completely absorbed in his work. If you had questioned the teachers, you would have found that there are constant requests to be allowed to come back and work in the afternoon.

If you should start in with the kindergarten in one of the big public schools, you would find the children there playing kindergarten games much the same as in other kindergartens. You pass from there to a class in designing, and you find the pupils are making patterns, during the first period, of things which they expect to make in the remaining period. You pass into a third room, and there the girls are crocheting and embroidering. They scarcely notice you; they are too much absorbed in their work. You pass to another room; the girls are sewing, making dolls' dresses and other things. You are told that the dolls are furnished by the schools, and that the girls make six sorts of dresses for each one. You would not want to see a better dressed doll in the hands of your own little girl. In another room you find the girls busy with millinery. Their art is more extensive than that of the ordinary milliner, in that they first make the hat from raffia, or straw, or felt, and then trim it. In another room you find you have come upon a company of practical dressmakers, and the children are making dresses for themselves. The teacher calls up a little girl of

twelve, turns her around, and informs you that this little girl made this dress all herself. Then there are aprons and caps and other things in abundance, and you feel sure that these little girls will be better housekeepers and mothers some day for having learned these lessons as children. You pass on to another room, and here you find a trained nurse with a white cap and a long bandage in her hand; this seems a strange sight for a school-room, but, as you look more closely, you see all the girls are dressed in the same way. If you stay to watch the proceedings, you will find that half the class are patients to be cared for, and the other half are nurses. You will see feet bandaged and arms bandaged and fingers bandaged and heads bandaged, till the class-room looks like the accident ward in a large hospital. A little later one of the girls becomes a patient for the class, and is put to bed and nursed. If you should come into this class-room early some morning, you would find many of the girls bringing babies with them, who are to be washed and dressed by the class.

But the thing which delights you most of all is the cooking class. You have now made your way to the top floor, and feel tired. You are shown to a chair in a neatly draped little parlor. Presently a little girl in white cap appears, bearing a tray; she serves the guest of the hour with a cup of coffee or cocoa and a sandwich, both of which children have prepared especially for you. You pronounce the coffee excellent, and are quite delighted with your little hostess who has anticipated your wants so admirably. You go into the class-room and watch the preparation of the dishes. You find that this time it consists of making a very presentable pudding out of pieces of stale bread. You then begin to realize what such a course must mean for these crowded sections, for any one who knows the East Side knows that at present the people do not know how to utilize the odds and ends of the meal, so that large quantities of valuable food are daily thrown into the garbage-can; that the children are often left to themselves all day while the mother goes out to work, and have no warm meal until night unless they get it themselves.



KINDERGARTEN ON A RECREATION-PIER

Here you see the children are being taught those things especially which will enable the home to compete with the saloon; to make coffee, to set an attractive table, and to make a room look tidy. The influence of such a course on the homes will surely be very great, for no one can enter the tenements of the unnumbered poor without feeling how unattractive and barren of all that can make a home pleasant are these rooms. You feel that this course should be given in every vacation school, and that the children should sit down to a regular table afterwards, so that they might practise table etiquette as well.

You pass now to the room where the boys are at work. In the first room you find the lads busy caning chairs. In a second room the boys are making baskets out of rattan. In other rooms you find them engaged in toy-making, in Venetian iron-work, in fret-sawing, etc.

Forty-six of the public-school playgrounds were opened during the last summer. These playgrounds would not appeal to any country boy as a playground at all. In not one of them was there a square yard of grass; in not one of them was there a handful of earth; in most of them not even the sky was visible. The noise is such in New York that the first floor of the school-buildings cannot be used for school purposes; this is consequently covered with asphalt and used as a playground. Besides this there are usually two or three exterior courts, varying in size from twenty-five feet square to fifty or eighty feet square in one or two cases. And these, like the interior ones, are covered with asphalt or cement. Not a very attractive place to play, of course, but they are much cleaner and cooler than the streets, and there is no danger from cars or teams. In such limited areas the attendance varied from three hundred to forty-five hundred children per day.

In New York all varieties of playground work are specialized. There are four departments—gymnastics, athletics, kindergarten, and library. In no other city has the work been specialized in this way. Nearly every playground has four instructors in gymnastics, two for girls and two for boys. There were in each

playground one or two parallel bars, one or two bucks, one or two horizontal bars, a horizontal ladder, and from two to six mats. The workers were chosen by competitive examination, and afterwards trained by the general directors of gymnastics up to the time when the work began. Throughout the summer the department of gymnastics remained under the able supervision of these general directors. The interest of the children seemed almost unwearied, and the result, considering the time, was certainly remarkable.

If you had stepped into one of the playgrounds some day last summer, you would have very likely thought at first that all was chaos and noise. However, you soon began to see that there was a system running through it all. A teacher brings a class of boys from ten to twelve years of age up to the horizontal bars; you wonder what boys of that size can do on such a piece of apparatus. You are presently informed when you see a number of them do the full giant swing and snap off to turn summersaults in the air. On the mats on the floor you see boys turning front summersaults and back summersaults and side summersaults in rapid succession, and I venture that you have never seen many feats performed on the horizontal or parallel bars or buck or mat, either at college or circus, that you could not see done here. In another part of the playground you see an instructor putting a class through dumbbell or Indian-club drill, while in still another part they are having potato races, relay races, dashes, or general games.

Basket-ball was by far the best game in the playground. It is a good, vigorous exercise, and interesting enough to get a boy to practise. It admits more than most in-door games of the development of skill; and, best of all, it is a team game, and gives large opportunities for social and moral culture. If a boy can be taught to play the game so that the team may win, rather than to make star plays himself, he has laid a broad foundation for unselfishness in his other actions. A state of mind which prompts a boy to play basket-ball for the success of his team is essentially the same as that which prompts him to



A TENT KINDERGARTEN

strive for the good of his city or country later. Besides athletics, we had in most playgrounds one or two teachers who were appointed merely in order to play the general games with the children.

If you had gone over on the girls' side of the playground, you might have seen dumbbell drills, wand drills, and Indian-club drills, together with fancy marching, the schottische, and in many cases the two-step and the waltz. Toward the last of the summer an exhibition drill was given by some four hundred girls at School No. 177. They had never drilled together before, being made up of eight representatives from each school, yet so uniform had been the training, they went through the drills together without a break. The time has come when the two-step and waltz should be definitely added to the things taught. The dance is social in nature, and tends to promote good-fellowship among the children. It is good exercise, and much more pleasing than gymnastics. It teaches grace, which is as important as strength to a girl, and, most important of all, it takes the place of the dancing-school, where moral conditions are not always good.

The playground kindergarten was a constant delight. It was so well attended, the children seemed so happy, and so fond of their teachers, that one could not

but feel that they were both having a good time, and were being influenced for good in many ways. In each kindergarten there were from one to three kindergartners; but, instead of twenty children in the kindergarten ring, there were often three hundred in rings one inside the other.

The playground libraries last summer were in the class-rooms themselves. These consisted of a circulating library of about one hundred volumes, a reading-room department, consisting of the common children's magazines and two newspapers, together with many books of short stories such as could be read in the room. In connection with the library was the room for quiet games, such as dominos, crockinole, authors, checkers, chess, etc. These rooms were in charge of teachers appointed especially for this work.

The magnificent new recreation-piers, which jut out from the torrid summer clime of Manhattan Island into the cool breezes of the surrounding river, have also been brought into the summer system of playgrounds. On a warm summer afternoon these were literally crowded with mothers and children who were driven out of the stifling tenements by the intolerable heat. On each of these six great piers were from two to four kindergartners. The kindergarten rings

were formed away out at the end of the piers, where the breezes from the ocean swept up the river. There, undisturbed by the commerce that went and came on the river below, this child idyl was acted out, while the parents looked on and learned that children could be more easily managed by kindness than by blows.

Running around Manhattan Island is a great system of free swimming-baths. Fifteen of these were turned over to the Board of Education for certain days each week, and teachers were placed in charge. The boys had three forenoons and the girls three afternoons each week. These baths were furnished with belts, which could be put around a beginner. At the back of this belt was a ring, to which was attached a rope which travelled by a wheel on a guide-rope above, so that the boy could swim along, supported by the rope above, and stop when tired. Before going into the water they were taught the movements by an instructor. The water was simply alive with boys on warm days, and probably several thousand children were taught to swim.

Perhaps the department of playground work with the greatest possibilities in it is the evening play-centre. All of the arguments which can be adduced for keeping the children off the streets dur-

ing the day may be reiterated with increased emphasis for the evening.

Only a very small part of the possibilities of the evening play-centre are being realized; but yet, as it is, it is doing much good. These are open six days a week, fifty-two weeks a year. There are now ten such places on Manhattan Island, and six new ones are to be opened very soon. There are in each of them a gymnasium, a quiet-game room, a library, and certain class-rooms for clubs, which are partly social and partly literary, and are under the direction of a teacher appointed for this work.

Newark, for its size, has done far more in vacation schools than has New York, and the work is excellent in quality. Boston has done more than any other American city in the way of free open-air play-grounds. Providence has done more than New York in the way of nature study; but in no other city has the work blossomed out in so many different departments, been so frankly recognized as a part of the public-school system, or been so generously supported from the public treasury. I regard this as a great distinction for New York, for vacation schools and playgrounds are in many ways the highest point of the educational system to-day. They are striving for the highest ideals.



IN THE SAND

Eyes that Saw not

BY ONOTO WATANNA AND BERTRAND W. BABCOCK

GRAYTOWN had put out its lights and retired for the night, with the well-bred decorum of small-town respectability, when John Swinnerton came home smitten with blindness. Only the station porter saw the little party that met him almost at the door of the Pullman. John's mother was the first to greet him.

"John," she said, as he stepped off the train—"John, it will be all right. Mrs. Thomas knows a specialist in New York who—" The rest of the sentence was lost in the hubbub of arrival.

His father standing by heard and smiled in pity. "John, old man!" was all he said.

There was some little delay while Jerry clumsily drove his cab up to the board platform, and Elizabeth, who had also come down to the station, found herself alone with John for a moment.

"I'm so sorry, John," she said.

Her chagrin at the trite inadequacy of her words received instant compensation when John replied melodramatically, just as she feared he would:

"It is nothing. Say no more. The light without has gone to feed the flame within."

Then she guided him into the cab, and the others silently clambered after and took their places. Jerry's fumbling at the door-catch and the sharp bang of the door's closing awoke in each the same memory. Certainly there had been happier home-comings than this of John Swinnerton to Graytown.

There was no conversation during the long ride to the Swinnertons' home, the residence of Graytown's leading family. To Elizabeth's relief, John's mother had insisted upon sitting by him, and as John sat idly holding his mother's hand, Elizabeth was shocked to surprise herself smiling at the idea of John's fancying it to be her hand.

Once home, the party broke up imme-

diately. The hour was late, and John, the bereft sense of his affliction fresh upon him, craved the solitude of his old room. He could feel the way even now. His mother attempted, in the overflowing tenderness of her heart, to follow him.

"No, mother, not to-night," he remonstrated, kissing her, and gently pushing her from the room.

He heard her crying in his father's room as he undressed. Then he lay down, and, utterly fatigued and worn out, fell asleep almost instantly.

Graytown, after the manner of most inland towns, followed with close interest the careers of its young men, even after they had fled, as is their wont, to the great cities, which drew them forth into the vortex of human activity and strife. Nor was this interest less tenacious for the fact that they left behind them scores of young unmarried women, who watched their struggles for riches and honor, and while waiting found encouragement in sundry notes and epistles confided to envelopes bearing the postmark of one or another far-away metropolis. So was John's career the cynosure of Graytown in general and of Elizabeth in particular.

Graytown's solicitude for the welfare of the native was none the less genuine because an inquisitive sympathy was its accompaniment. Thus, on the morning following the sad reunion at the railroad station, John's arrival and misfortune were known to the whole town. Early-morning neighbors on their way to office and shop stared cautiously at the red curtains that shut out the light from John's room. The newsboy when he brought the morning paper asked the cook how John was. When John's mother opened the library door on the veranda to receive from the postman the day's mail, his inquiry brought tears to her eyes.

Behind those red curtains, insensible to the thrill of curiosity he was causing