

Great Work Being Done on Omaha School Play Grounds



IN THE face of the indisputable fact that play is the essential factor in the child's physical growth, and also in the formation of his ideals, all good people should pray that some day soon all the school children of Omaha will have the time, the place and the intelligent direction which are needed for their best all around equipment for that higher and better citizenship demanded by the times."

In this expression Mrs. Nora H. Lemon has put forth the thought of probably every school teacher in Omaha. Some of the schools, notably the Lothrop, where Mrs. Lemon is principal, have grounds large enough for almost any sort of game to be played. Many others, however, have very small space that may be used for play, or none at all. In these cases the children overflow into the street. Where no street cars run this condition is not bad in itself; but there are school locations in this city where the need of a fairly commodious playground is severely felt.

While it is a fact that systematic play, under the direction of teachers, is just beginning to attract attention in Omaha schools, the development of this feature of school life is most encouraging. Superintendent Davidson and his staff of principals have entered into the work of development with a keen interest. Naturally, not all of the principals are as enthusiastic as Mrs. Lemon, largely, perhaps, because they have not the room or the facilities; but taking the schools as a whole, the play idea is now given an important place in the daily plans of the Omaha school teachers.

The observant person can see from the sidewalks or from the street cars any morning or afternoon at recess time whirling, running, frisky and frolicsome groups of children having a most joyous time in the abandon of play. These men and women of the Greater Omaha, that is to cut so large a figure tomorrow in the life of the buoyant, progressive, growing west, play-hard while they are at it. They start quick when they leave the school door, and they crowd into the few minutes allowed them enough energy and activity to astonish the person, if such there be, who has forgotten his own days on the school ground.

Very little of it is play without purpose, because the children have been drilled in the thought that order and courtesy in their games is as important as the play itself; and they fall very easily into this scheme of things. Experience has proven that thus do they get the best results, the most satisfaction, and everybody can be included in the fun.

No prettier sight can be imagined than what Mrs. Lemon calls "a moving picture" on a school playground. "No picture is more fascinating," she says, "than a school at play during the recent period. Study

the exuberant life, the ceaseless activities, the radiant joy, the unconscious grace, the kaleidoscopic changes of pose, of color and of motion, and listen to the accompanying music of the laughter and their merry shouts. And then you will know that about the best gift the schools can confer upon the children is the chance to play.

"In all this fair city there is no interest so vital as these children, and the various civic organizations and clubs can engage in work no more profitable than that of equipment of play places for the children of today, where they may know the joy of association in games and play with their school fellows on playgrounds as ample and generous as those now enjoyed by only a few of our city schools.

"Perhaps Omaha has been a little slow in awakening to the fact that it owes to its school children the chance for better health, for better manners and morals, and that this chance is afforded in large measure by the judicious use of the play time and the playgrounds."

Superintendent Davidson and his staff of teachers insist that in no place or at no time can "manners and morals," subjects conspicuous today in all courses of study, be more forcefully or more practically taught than on the playground. Here every fellow must take his turn; he must "play fair and square;" he must show consideration for the little ones and be kind to the unfortunate; he must be courteous and obedient to signals used in the games. When children are playing they are happy and when they are happy all these things are natural and easy.

"Then, there is the hygienic side," said Mrs. Lemon. "Look at these children as they enter the building at the expiration of the fifteen minutes spent in 'God's out of doors.' The glowing cheek, the brightened eyes, tell best the story of their happiness. And somehow it always seems that happy folks do so much better work than the other kind. And now after the splendid exercise in deep breathing, after the muscles have all been brought into play, the nerves rested and the whole physical being invigorated, behold, the last hour of the session proves to be the best one, while under the old regime it was always the most irksome.

"Nor are the children the only beneficiaries of the outdoor recreation, for at last the teacher has come into her kingdom, and is as much at home on the playground as in the school room.

"Nowhere may the individual child be so advantageously studied as when he is at play and the skillful teacher is quick to recognize this, and, though she is not primarily interested in the activities of the children, she can with profit be among them, while her presence is a gentle reminder that the uncouth word or action is out of place. In this natural, unconscious way the discipline of each group is taken care of. But fun is contagious and often before she knows it the teacher has become an eager participant in the game, the result of an evolution most interesting.

"When first the gospel of good health and play was promulgated it was a little difficult for the teacher to convince herself that she had time to lay aside crayon or blue pencil—for there are always outlines to be written and papers to be corrected—and when, a little reluctantly, she joined the children in their sports her interests were divided. But before she knows it she is giving the children hints and directions for some particular game before they leave the room for play; often appointing leaders and teams. Then she must watch the game to be sure that it is properly conducted, and, next, she is a leader herself. How those children enjoy her, and it goes without saying that any teacher who can control and direct her school at play without detracting from their pleasure has immeasurably increased her power to control the children in their class work.

"An additional advantage gained by the teacher comes through the relaxation, for without the actual experience the high nervous tension under which the teacher's work is done cannot be estimated. But it would be an unusual thing to see a teacher returning from the playground looking pale or tired or nervous. On the contrary, the cobwebs have been brushed away, her interest in the individual child has been broadened and her sympathy has been deepened. She thinks more of the children and they like her better. And all of this without any sacrifice of true dignity or womanliness."

Effie Reed, principal of the Kellogg school, says there is no question before the teaching body today that has in it more of interest to the child than that of play. "We catch his interest at that point," says Miss Reed, "for that is where he lives, and we may find him there at any and all times. I like to think of the playground movement as beginning 1,800 years ago, when the 'grown-ups' made that circle



READY FOR THE RACE



ON THE BARS

mated digesting machines. Animals have a period of youth in which to play; for only by so doing can they supplement the insufficient hereditary endowment with individual experience, in view of the coming tasks of life."

"In the advance guard," continued the principal of Kellogg, "stand Dr. Gulick, George Ellsworth Johnson, Edward Howard Griggs, Jane Addams, and a host of others, pointing the way. And we in Omaha are following as rapidly as it is possible for large bodies to move. To be effective, it must be a concerted movement. Superintendent Davidson, who believes that teachers as well as children should develop initiative, has encouraged us to work out our own salvation, giving us, however, much wise counsel and his hearty approval and co-operation.

"In the Kellogg school the children have done much during the inclement weather with games in the school room. These have been along the lines of individual play, competitive and co-operative games. During suitable weather the children are encouraged to play out of doors, the teachers giving only such supervision as will guide the child in giving and taking the 'square deal.'

She believes, now that we consider play not a luxury, but a necessity, we are rapidly reorganizing our forces within the walls of the school room so that we may invite the parents to send the "entire boy" to school, since we are planning to take care of him in that entirely.

Miss Reed says further, out of her experience in a typical American school: "It is a fact, scientifically proved, that it is only the higher grade of animals which play." And she refers to a noted biologist who has written: "The lower grade animals are only ani-

Omaha School Children Make Generous Contributions to Thanksgiving Joy



OMAHA SCHOOL CHILDREN THIS YEAR BROKE ALL PREVIOUS RECORDS FOR CONTRIBUTIONS BROUGHT IN TO BE DISTRIBUTED TO THE POOR, THE SICK AND THE INMATES OF THE OLD FOLKS' HOMES—SUPPLIES TO THE AMOUNT OF SEVERAL CARLOADS WERE BROUGHT BY THE PUPILS TO THE THIRTY-FIVE CITY SCHOOLS WEDNESDAY MORNING AND WERE LATER DISTRIBUTED IN WAGONS.