

PLAY

ITS EDUCATIONAL VALUE AND ITS RELATION TO SCHOOL WORK



IN my many years of experience in school work among those of my own race I recognized the plays of my pupils as one of the educating agents of the school period—helpful to both teacher and pupil. The teacher is hardly worthy the name who has neglected the great pedagogical treatises as given in the plays of her pupils. In no other way can the teacher learn so much of the individualities of the children as by a close observation of them in their spontaneous activities. This knowledge is truly a beacon light to the teacher in the instruction of those under her care and in correction.

I have in mind unbossed play, true play of little children, in which they anticipate the work of later life and show to a very considerable extent what their lives are and have been. They choose their plays instinctively.

When I took up work among Indian children I came to the work full of theories, full of the philosophy of education, full of deductions from my past experiences; thinking myself equipped for the solving of almost any problem I might meet in the class-room. In my first experience, I found myself in a fairly well furnished, modern, school-room, in the presence of ninety-six Indian children from six to twenty years of age—fresh from the camps; not a half dozen of them understood a word of English. Some were there under protest, many of them for the “loaves and fishes,” but all looked at me with the look of great expectation on their faces. I made a careful visual survey of the room. I saw ninety-six bright, intelligent faces, eyes beaming with intelligence as good as our own, only lacking in the heritage of the ages which we have. My theory, that I should begin their education on their knowledge seemed a mistake. I was helpless for the moment by the overwhelmingness of wonder. In my mind I hunted up Rosenkranz, Herbert Spencer, Froebel, Pryer—I thought of fine theories to which I had listened from the best and most successful educators; none gave me any relief in the problem before me. From the emergency came a suggestion: The children of all races play. Play has always been. Then it occurred to me that I had seen some of the children that morning trying to look at themselves in the windows. I had a large mirror brought from my own room and placed in a convenient place; I brought brush, comb,