

TOYS FOR TODDLERS

They're Better If They Come To Bits

IN the ordinary non-parent such as myself the word "toy" immediately suggests a large teddy bear, or a doll with eyes that open and shut, or a mechanical gadget that winds up. On Christmas Eve I gaze enraptured at toy shops, and having made my purchases, watch them disappear into their wrappings with a resignation born of the knowledge that the day after Christmas I shall be viewing the pieces. How, I ask myself, do parents manage in the matter of toys?

One aspect of the toy problem—toys for the twos to fives—is being solved by a committee of the Wellington Nursery Schools Association. The whole idea of the play centre is that the children should play, and it is the concern of the committee to provide suitable material

scrounging. The odds and ends of wood are sandpapered to remove splinters, and can be enamelled in bright colours. For younger children enamelling is a particular advantage, as the blocks can be scrubbed.

Mrs. Noah and an Aeroplane

Cotton reels and skewers play a very important part in the manufacture of playthings for children. I was shown what looked like a very professional conception of Mrs. Noah—a firm upright figure with stiff bell-shaped skirt, non-existent waist, round chest, and round head finished off by a hat set at an unrelenting angle. Dissection revealed that Mrs. Noah was merely a length of skewer set on a cotton reel base, three-quarters of a large cotton reel, two wooden beads of different size, and the top of another small cotton reel. The delightful thing about Mrs. Noah was that she could be taken apart and put together again.

"Don't you need to be something of a carpenter?" I asked.

"If you are I suppose it's all to the good. But I'm certainly not. The only type of skill needed for these toys is an ability to cut cotton reels in two and if necessary bore holes in them."

"And to colour them?"

"Yes, but that isn't always necessary. Some of the toys are better left uncoloured. And anyway you can often get coloured cotton-reels — these big red ones, for example. I had no idea how many kinds and shapes of cotton reels you could get, but you'd only got to canvass a few of the tailors and you get quite a variety."

"All our toys are made to be taken apart," explained my hostess. "Children are always curious about how things are made and what makes them go, and it's much more satisfactory for them if they can put them together again as well."

A brace and bit seems to be a necessary part of the equipment of the parent who wishes to make toys for the children. Young children enjoy threading things, and unless the parent intends to rely entirely on cotton-reels there are holes to be bored. And it's important to get the right size of hole, for even detachable toys should not be rickety at the joints, or inclined to come to pieces without the exercise of some ingenuity on the part of the child.

I came away from this display of home-made toys feeling confident that from the child's point of view everything was All for the Best.

Nor could we spare a tear for the thwarted parent who was no longer encouraged to go into a toy shop and buy himself a mechanical engine. For I gathered that both he and Mother would derive even more satisfaction from wielding brace and bit, paint and brush, sandpaper and saw, in the great cause of detachable toys.

—M.B.

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at reasonable cost. And the delightful thing is that the two-to-fives don't need expensive toys—that most of the material is ready to hand for parent or teacher.

For Children, Not Adults

The trouble with most of the people who buys toys for children, one of the committee members suggested to me, is that the adult has in mind what he himself would like to play with rather than what appeals to the child. The adult who buys a mechanical engine gets a lot of fun out of showing the children how to make it go, and is then surprised when the child insists upon taking the engine to bits. Young children are most interested in an engine they can drag on the end of a piece of string rather than in an engine that goes all by itself. As one small boy is reported to have said as he watched his mechanical engine going round, "But it's playing all by itself—I want it to play with me!"

The members of the toy committee of the Nursery Schools Association are at present hard at work preparing the kind of toys that can be played with. One member recently showed me the results of her work.

Blocks form the backbone of the collection. Not the uniformly square blocks you buy in the shops, but blocks of all shapes and sizes. If you're getting your house renovated they're particularly easy to come by, but she does not advise going to the length of getting the house renovated when the same amount of material can be collected by judicious

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