I did not feel sure that I had a right to call my paper "Occupational Therapy for Children," as I should have liked to, but I may call it "Occupation for Children in Hospitals."

What I have tried to do in the Children’s Ward of the Massachusetts General Hospital is to make children happy by forgetting their troubles and learning something at the same time.

In order to do this, for children of all ages—from those of a few months old up to those of thirteen years—I have had to use all I have had in experience and training. My training has consisted of a course in kindergarten and some years of teaching. A course in Montessori methods and some months observance of its working in the schools of Rome, Italy; three years experience in story-telling in libraries, and—most valuable of all—I have had, for twenty years, all the children for their first year in one of the Boston Settlement Houses.

It has seemed to me that no matter how much doubt there was as to the desirability of the new method of education, the Project Method, that it was surely advisable to use it working with sick children. I have never yet forced any child to do what he did not wish to, or urged any child to finish work when he said he was tired. When I have thought certain work especially desirable for a child in using stiff muscles, for instance, I have presented it in as alluring a light as possible.

When a child has been unreasonable in repeated demands for new occupations I have called a halt, often appealing to the children themselves in some such way as this (the children call me the Play Lady or Miss Isabelle).

1 Read at Fifth Annual Meeting of the National Society for the Promotion of Occupational Therapy (now the American Occupational Therapy Association), held in Baltimore, Md., October 20–22, 1921.
“Children, how many Play Ladies are there?”
“One” comes the shout.
“How many children, let’s count them!”
“Twelve.”
“Oh, well, then, how many can I attend to at once?” And there is no more trouble.

With the youngest babies, those of a few months, up to two years old, I tie a soft worsted ball on the side of the crib so that it swings gently to and fro. A swinging red object is supposed to be the first thing that a newly born baby notices. Watching it is his first lesson in concentration. Another day I take a yellow ball, often using balls of all six primary colors when I want to stimulate a convalescing baby. I teach babies the meaning of certain terms, with the balls, as “up, up, up, up high,” “down, down, down,” and “swing, swing, swing, swing.”

Besides this, which I consider the babies’ work, we play. I do the “creep-a-mouse, creep-a-mouse, creep-a-mouse, eee little baby down there!” and “Peek-a-boo,” letting the baby pull the handkerchief from his eyes. When I want to make a baby laugh aloud I have discovered a clown-like way of advancing toward the crib, wagging my head and laughing myself which is always successful.

For older children, I use the kindergarten methods of paper folding and cutting and clay. A good many of the kindergarten gifts and occupations I do not use, as good work with them requires more supervision than I can give one child alone, and some of the occupations (sewing cards) I find, make them nervous and fidgety. I do, however, use the kindergarten method of making programs for work suggested by the four seasons and the holidays.

I find many of the Montessori materials ideal for work in the hospital. Madame Montessori’s whole idea was to find things so fascinating that, once given to the child, you could leave him to amuse and educate himself with them—and this generally happens when they are presented in the right way. I give children two years old, the set of graduated cylindrical solid wooden insets
which he puts into and takes out of the solid wooden bar, sometimes forty-three times, with eager interest. The series of graduated square red wooden blocks fascinate a child for twenty minutes at a time. They are so much less complicated than the general run of blocks, with letters, numbers, and pictures and, for very young children, to learn of graduated sizes and about piling things up, is enough.

Most useful of all to me is the set of wooden frames with which I teach buttoning, hooking, ball and socketing, lacing and tying bows. I always follow up this work with experiences with practical things like buttoning up their own blanket wrappers and lacing boots. Several children unable to dress themselves when they arrived in the hospital, have gone home quite capable of dressing themselves and are able to help mother in her need.

For play, these children like to cut out paper dolls and animals, and they especially like to play with a motley collection of things I have picked up, and put together a table made of the wooden socket in which the leg of a piano once rested, and a large wooden spool as a foundation, and a wooden chair and settee and a roughly hewn sideboard with cupboard. Two incomplete sets of toy dishes, wooden and pewter, accompany this.

Older children use the flat metal cut-out geometrical insets. They like to put the squares, circles and triangles into their right places blindfolded, and I tell them of diagonals, diameters, angles and circumferences as I give them new figures. Then I let them draw the figures and fill them in with colored crayons and print names underneath.

Sometimes the doctors question the hearing of a child, and I use my series of wooden boxes containing materials from flaxseed to stones. I shake them, asking which is loudest, and from these boxes we can get the superficial-verdict as to hearing which is required. So much for the Montessori materials which I find hold the concentrated attention of children without too much excitement.

I find that all children like to blow bubbles and children of all ages like the balloons I buy for them at the Five and Ten
Cent Store. And they like my handkerchief tricks—the little boy that dances when you count three, the rabbit that hops and the graceful court lady that courtesies.

For children beyond the kindergarten and Montessori age, I get ideas for educational work from the Audobon charts, the American Forestry Department cards, the Geographical Magazine and my map of Fairyland.

I hang up one of the Audobon Bird Charts in the spring and ask a child to pick out a bird which he likes. We find out the bird's name from the numbered glossary at the foot of the chart, and I read the account of that bird from the Burgess Bird Book, in which Peter Rabbit and Jennie Wren gossip about their bird neighbors.

The Forestry cards give colored plates of the Gypsy and Brown-tailed Moths, with their antidote, the Calsoma beetle. I tell the children in summer, about these tree pests and the beetle that was brought across the ocean to destroy them, and they promise to cherish the "good one" and destroy the "bad one."

Some copies of the Geographical Magazine a few years ago, contained delightful pictures of our wild flowers. One little cardiac boy had this pile of pictures by his bedside for several months this summer. I brought him a new wild flower every day. He looked over the flower pictures and told me the flower's name.

Beside the flower number, there was one issue devoted to flags, of all the different countries, which the older boys like to look at. They pick out a flag which I draw, and they put in the right colors with water colors or crayons. Children of this age like to play dominoes, which familiarizes them with numbers, also checkers.

My big, beautiful map of Fairyland, is valuable in suggestion for the telling of old-fashioned fairy stories that children ought to know. To see the houses in which Little Red Riding Hood, the Three Bears, and Cinderella live, makes them want to know about them right away. A child knowing all the people alluded to in this colored map, would come pretty near to being well educated from a literary standpoint.
Other suggestions for story-telling are in the rolls of crepe paper that I buy at Dennison's. They contain pictures of the Pied Piper of Hamlin, followed by the children, some pictures of Puritan youths and maidens, Xmas pictures, etc. These we cut out after the stories are told and they are kept to show father and mother on visiting day.

While the older boys are making flags, I am teaching the older girls to knit and crochet wash cloths and dolls' afghans, and to make worsted flowers by needle-work. The worsted morning-glories have been a very popular industry this summer, and, as trimming for hats should save some money for impecunious parents in future millinery bills.

Sometimes I resort to definite lessons in spelling and arithmetic, but not often, and never unless children are especially interested, for stays in the hospital are generally short and school days are long, although one little boy said to me last winter, "Why, Play Lady, when I was in school I didn't know I liked spelling, but I guess I do."

Another diabetic girl I found, who liked arithmetic. Each day as the ample dinner of chicken, potato, spinach and ice-cream came in for the other children, this girl would go away by herself and cry over her scarcity and lack of appetizing food,—each day until I asked her if she would like—of all things—a lesson in arithmetic! Partly because I praised her, and partly because she could show off before the happily eating children, she no longer dreaded the mid-day meal.

I use a great many picture puzzles for all ages of children. I cut pictures from the covers of magazines, or advertisements, paste them on to cardboards and cut them up in various shapes. Sometimes it is the simple picture of a baby learning to walk, which I cut into eight square pieces. Sometimes it is an elaborate picture of a country school cut into thirty irregular shapes. I follow them with the task of putting together the map of the United States and North America. The latter is the task of the oldest children. Quite young children will put together the easier pictures, which I try to make so bright and funny that the children laugh when they see them completed.
Besides regular play, we have a party once a month. At all parties my fairy chair appears. It is a small, gilded chair, prettily upholstered, with a music box inside the seat; a chair that I have had for twenty-five years. Hundreds of children have sat in it. I say,

"When a good child sits in it, it plays a tune." One by one, I wrap each child that may be moved, in a blanket, and place him in the chair. My chair does not play directly a child sits in it. There is a slight pause, during which I watch the moment of suspense on the child's face when he evidently remembers with consternation, all the naughty things he has ever done, and wonders if the chair knows—the tune begins and a gasp of ecstatic joy is the result. They usually end by asking me to sit down in it. I refuse, principally I acknowledge, to hear their assurance, "Oh, Play Lady, I know it will play if you sit in it." I have used this chair at times to distract the attention of a nervous child who must be examined. Another thing that makes a party is a lovely pink crepe-paper, flower-petaled Jack-Horner-Pie. I fasten little toys to the ends of a pink ribbon, and each child pulls out one—a wooly lamb, a tin automobile, etc. Also I have sometimes fancy bon-bon crackers for special celebrations. There are three stages to this pleasure. The little stiff strip of paper sticking out, that you pull and it snaps,—the present, a tin ring, etc., and the colored paper cap.

We have so many foreign children that I try to do a bit of Americanization work sometimes. For several days before the Fourth of July this summer, we were talking about the American flag and making it. Then I taught them all how to salute. On July 4th, I borrowed the big and very beautiful silk flag from the hospital library and marched around the wards with it, pausing at each bedside for their salute.

Just now we are making sets of dolls' furniture out of horse chestnuts with pins and brown floss, and drawing and coloring maple leaves, and Jack-O-Lanterns come towards the end of this month. Thanksgiving occupations follow, then the making of Christmas presents.
My work in the hospital confirms me in my belief that there are no naughty children. I did have one boy who tried to steal everything that I gave him. When he wanted me, he ordered, "Isabelle, come here" but I feel sure he was not a normal child, although there was no diagnosis to that effect. The other children reproved him for his bad manners much more severely than I did. This often happens, that children reprove each other more severely and effectively than do their Olympians.

The other day a new boy called me,

"Nurse, nurse, come here. I want you."

Another boy in the neighboring bed scowled at him.

"You shut up," he cried, "she ain't no nurse, she's a play lady."

There is one more pretty showing of appreciation on a child's part I want to repeat, at the risk of your thinking me too personal. I had spoken of getting my train.

"Why, Play Lady, don't you live in Boston?" a boy asked.

"No, I come in from Milton every day."

"Do you? How far is it?"

"It takes about an hour from my house to the hospital."

"Does it? Why do you come? Do you get paid?"

"No, I do it because I love children and like to be with them."

"Well, now, I call that pretty good."

My failures, so far, have been in finding enough things to interest the oldest boys. I think a short course in basketry would help, and I should like any other suggestions. I have failed too in getting the sand box that I wanted for our outdoor porch, and I have not been able to find any substitute for the live thing, cat or dog, that they tell me is unsanitary—the live pet that I want in this ward in order to teach children responsibility and proper care of dumb animals, as this class of children are apt to be very cruel to animals in their homes.

Work with children in a big hospital ward keeps one eager, because of its variety and its necessary makeshifts. Difference in age of children and the degree of strength of a child, makes changing and adapting as important as the original knowledge of appropriate employment, and is always interesting.