EXPERIENCE WITH TOY-MAKING

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After reading the debate on the value of toy-making as a therapeutic occupation in the February number of the Archives of Occupational Therapy, I would like to relate my experience with a group of patients making toys in the Pennsylvania Hospital for Mental and Nervous Diseases.

The shop is a very attractive vine-covered building, set in a beautiful, restful spot, the entire building being one large room in which the crafts are carried on. Basketry, weaving, and toy-making were at the time, about two years ago, the major crafts used. The average number of patients working at one time was about twenty-five.

In the group of toy-makers there were five or six patients, at times fewer, several of whom were not most easily interested. They all seemed to enjoy it. Patients from around the shop would come over every once in a while to see the progress and praise the workers. Other patients, and visitors to the shop were always enthusiastic about the work. The toys were to a certain degree realistic (as Dr. Hall says, if we copy nature too exactly we fail miserably), were harmonious in color and pleasing.

One patient who had done almost no work for a long time, and who talked a great deal in a loud, distressing way, which had its effect on the other patients, was very enthusiastic about the work in toy-making, learned to use the jigsaw on heavy wood remarkably well, was very accurate in her work, and learned to paint so well that she could paint narrow outlines, separating masses, very creditably. She became so absorbed in the work that it was often an hour or more when she said nothing except to advise with me in a very quiet, calm tone.

Another patient, quite a young woman, with two small children at home, could not be aroused to try other forms of occupation,
but was so pleased, especially with the color, that she became much interested in the work and did remarkably well.

Still another, who was very pleasant at times, but who showed ill feeling very often, forgot about her ill feeling and did very beautiful work.

In fact there was not one in the group, including the aide, who was not delighted with it all, and who did not learn to work well.

So much for the therapy side. I believe firmly that toy-making has a very important place in the work.

As for selling the toys, we had no difficulty at all, and had many calls for more.

In summing up I would say:

1. That toys to a certain degree realistic and harmonious in color have an elevating effect upon the worker.

2. As from my experience I believe toy-making to be highly curative, I believe the time and energy consumed is fully repaid, I do not think the competition with factory made toys is any more marked than the competition with factory made baskets or other things. The making of basket bases or simpler things would not compare in bringing the joy and uplift that the making of toys does.

3. While it is true that more of the time of the aide must be given to the individual patient in toy-making than is necessary to give in some other occupations, that to me does not weigh in the balance.

4. I believe the necessity for good workmanship in toy-making is very great if the best work is to be done. The brush is difficult to manage, while the toys are painted in broad masses and probably outlined, which requires steadiness of hand, the practice of which is valuable to the patient.