Work for the centralization of playground interests. In many of our cities the playground movement is divided among the city, school, park departments, and some civic organizations.

Much valuable energy is wasted by this scattering of forces that have but one object, and that is the common good. There should be a combination of all playground interests in our cities, and this should include bath-houses, city camps, and recreation centers. It will take time to bring about this happy condition, but we have made so much progress throughout the United States in the last few years in our playground movement that anything and everything seems possible for the future.

THE CHAIRMAN: Dr. Winthrop Talbot: "The School Camp."

Dr. Talbot delivered a most interesting paper, of which, however, he did not submit a copy for publication.

Owing to the lateness of the hour, Mr. Howard Bradstreet did not read his paper on "The Need of a Play Organizer," but it is here presented.

THE NEED OF A PLAY ORGANIZER

PAPER OF MR. HOWARD BRADSTREET

The need of a play organizer is founded on the same argument as that upon which the playground itself rests. It is not based upon a fad, nor the kindly desire to provide positions for an especially equipped class, any more than the playground has for its basis a concerted action to sell real estate to the city under a popular and plausible guise.

The introduction of the playground is the logical and sensible method of helping to relieve childhood from the flat-head Indian treatment to which civilization has unwittingly but inexorably submitted it—a treatment all the more harmful for being psychical rather than physical, *en masse* rather than individual.

It is the recognition of child life, its importance to the community, and its true nature as studied at first hand, upon which the playground rests its claim for consideration—a claim estab-

lished in theory and a theory verified in practice. The need of the play organizer is based likewise upon the same rock-like foundation of observation and experiment.

There is no topic upon which people in general feel freer to pass observations than upon child life—and no topic upon which a larger percentage of observations are worthless. For although every one has passed personally through the period of childhood, he has done so but once, and of that experience retains a memory corroded or glorified by the passage of years.

The value of observation depends upon the number of cases observed, and to accept in the treatment of childhood the dictum of a man engrossed in cares and responsibilities of an unromantic world, based upon the fancied remembrance of early days, would be as futile as to accept the view of a physician who had observed the symptoms of none other than himself.

There are those whose daily life takes them into the ways of the child—either in school room, or court room, or institution, or the open air—and not of the one child but the many, and it is from such as these observers who know the child as the hunter his game, that the demand for the playground comes, and that upon the playground shall be the play organizer.

It is by them that the experiment has been so repeatedly made that it is no longer an experiment, but a verified conclusion, that for the best results to the child and for the largest use of the ground an organizer is essential.

There are two widely different aspects in which the playground may be regarded—the mechanical and the vital; the first regarding it as a negative and impassive, the second as a positive and active, element in the community.

Very generally, the cities of the country now see that no rational provision has been made heretofore for their children, that they have been left to the chance lot or to the street, and an aroused and enlightened conscience no longer makes necessary the argument and agitation of early days to secure action in setting aside places for the play of children. Having equipped them with swings, see-saws, poles, ladders, rings, and bars, according to the spirit of liberality and the length of the purse, a keeper for the place is provided, and the whole thrown open for the children to enjoy with profit to themselves and relief to the community.

The nature of the keeper and his qualifications may vary

according to the dominant factor in the body providing the grounds. It may be a young political follower, an old Grand Army veteran, a woman of quality reduced in circumstances, or a college girl with a yearning to do good. He or she may or may not have an acquaintance with children, but if this person can see that patriotism is developed by saluting the flag with unfailing regularity, that the swings are kept greased, that the boys do not invade the territory of the girls, that girls do not "pump" on the swings, that rebellions are subdued, that invasions of older youths are repelled, that the grounds close promptly,—the community is filled with a soothing satisfaction that it has a good playground, well equipped, and an excellent caretaker. If such a ground be in the densely crowded section, there will be a crowd swinging, climbing, running in and out with a gratifying spontaneity, while in a less densely crowded district, the absence of children is explained by the hot weather, while eyes are kept closed to the vigorous games in process in the street near by at the same time.

Such a playground is not altogether unknown, and is the product of those Olympian ideas of childhood which see in things and space the only gratification of childhood's needs.

The second attitude toward the playground begins at the other end. It is not so much concerned in soothing the conscience of the community as in caring for the child. It begins its study with the child and ends it with the child, or would do so, did not the study of the child lead it out into the study of the needs of those past childhood, but who still retain instincts and impulses for recreation and enjoyment just as necessary for the welfare of the community to be gratified as those of children.

Its advocates see in the playground a vital, active, and positive force in the community life, and insist that equipment and keeper should contribute to the realization of that ideal.

They know that apparatus alone cannot compete in interest successfully with the simple toys of the street, nor with the group games as played with the added zest furnished by the ever-shifting setting of the highway.

They know and have experienced how lack of direction leads to over-exercise by those least needing it, and under-exercise by those who need it most, that the law is "might makes right," and to the strong belongs the swing. But more than this they

know the danger to society of the youth trained in the individualism and irresponsibility of undirected play.

It may be the function of the school to teach responsibility and coöperative effort, but it is for the playground to practise it.

They know that so far as any moral effect upon youth is concerned, bars, posts, and swings are neutral, that where a successful school of crime is organized a personality is at its center who skillfully draws out the evil and benumbs the good, turning loose upon society a product successfully trained to prey upon it, that if the good is to be brought out and the evil benumbed, a personality is equally necessary, and must be added to the neutral material equipment of a ground if its balance is to be turned in favor of a desirable citizen product.

But the advocate of the mechanical playground objects that a playground should be free, and asserts that the children are under the teacher's thumb already more than is good for them, and spontaneity is desirable above all else.

He is both right and wrong. Play should be free, but there was no lack of spontaneity on the part of the youngsters following Froebel, and far more pleasure than before appeared on their horizon. His mission was to give the spirit of play an opportunity for expression, and it is not for the play organizer on a spot dedicated to play to ignore his methods.

It does not make for a decrease in personal freedom to participate in group games or to submit one's mind to an influence which in the guise of play transforms it from a free-booting individualistic trend to one which is orderly and social-horizoned.

This is the function of the play organizer, and many playgrounds in many cities have those who come within visible distance of such standards, remote as they may seem.

A letter received within a few days in response to a note of thanks for a favor rendered such a playground worker illustrates the possibility and the actuality. It comes spontaneously from a workingman in a neglected corner of the city:

"Your letter of August 30th received with thanks from you for the part that the local committee took in making the festival at our playground a success. I would like to say that too much praise cannot be given to Miss —— for the work that she is doing in the playground with the children, and no man in the neighborhood ought to expect any thanks for helping out a

cause like this, as it certainly showed what result should be obtained from children where they are under the proper hands, and I assure you that Miss —— is second to none that I came across in taking care of children, and I hope that we may be able to stir up enough sentiment in the neighborhood for a permanent park to extend to the river front, as this little playground showed that we need it for the children."

The work of such a play organizer cannot be demonstrated by talk nor illustrated in a play festival. Were all play organizers as equipped with the two great requisites, the spirit of play and the social sense, as this one, the fears of the mechanical advocate would be groundless. Unfortunately, there is a warning in his attitude. There are many useful devices, which have been introduced on the playground and taught to prospective instructors, which are in danger of becoming lords and masters rather than servants. When this has happened, and the place of freedom has become the home of routine, the life of the playground has departed, and with it the last resource of the child for a place truly his own.

In enriching the life of the child the playground has revealed the poverty of the parent's resources—a poverty just as necessary to the community to enrich.

While slowly, here and there, this fact is anew discovered and efforts are painfully made to reach the ideal more and more, wonderment and admiration must be given to the miraculous, Minerva-like birth of the Chicago system of grounds, fully equipped from the start to administer to the wants of all when the spirit should fill its form. The workingman in his letter used the expression all unconsciously that "the little playground showed us that we need it." It is the same with the play organizer and the creative work he may do in interpreting the neighborhood to itself—his need is not felt until he has shown by demonstration how indispensable he is.