

beginning to make use of it for broad, high, and deep jumping. It may once more be used to start pole-vaulting. Some tumbling may be done from it. On the solid side of it targets may be painted. The sand around it gives a good place for the sand play of small children, but also for a free bout of friendly wrestling of boys.

These pieces of apparatus cost but little to install, are well-nigh indestructible, cost therefore little or nothing for repairs, take up little space, lend themselves to a thousand and one uses at the hands of the playground instructor, and, what is still better, suggest as many and more uses to the child himself.

THE CHAIRMAN: In order to proceed with the program without delay, we will call upon Mr. E. B. DeGroot, Director of the Gynnasiums and Playgrounds of the South Park System, who will speak on "Recent Playground Development in Chicago."

Mr. DeGroot.

RECENT PLAYGROUND DEVELOPMENT IN CHICAGO

PAPER OF MR. E. B. DEGROOT

"Unparalleled in equipment and scope" were the words used by Dr. Gulick in expressing his appreciation of the Chicago South Park Playgrounds. This characterization was given expression to at the first annual convention of this Association held in Chicago in June, 1907, when Chicago's playgrounds were inspected and discussed by delegates and visitors from many different cities and states.

There was evidence of very general concurrence with Dr. Gulick in his characterization of the South Park Playgrounds, but there was just as general a query among the delegates as to whether Chicago had not overreached herself in her playground development—whether the north and west divisions of the city would follow the south division in similar development, or whether there would not be a return to the little cinder-yard

playground that had set the pace in Chicago until the advent of the South Park type of playgrounds.

The answer to these queries is that Chicago is not yet conscious of overreaching in this matter; there is no thought of a return to the little cinder-yard playground as a standard in type, and there is, on the contrary, a spread of the South Park type of playgrounds to the west and north divisions of the city.

The West Chicago Park Commission has been authorized to spend one million dollars for new small parks and playgrounds. The Lincoln Park Commission has been authorized to spend one-half million dollars for the same purpose. The South Park Commission has, since April, 1907, been authorized to spend three million dollars for further acquirement and improvement of parks.

With these funds available, the West Chicago Park Commission has opened two playgrounds and recreation centers similar in kind to the South Park type, and a third play park is in process of construction. A public golf course has also been opened by this park board.

The Lincoln Park Commission has opened one play park and recreation center similar in kind to the South Park type. A second play park and recreation center is in process of construction. The Lincoln Park Commission has also opened a playground out of funds not a part of the half-million dollar fund for new parks.

The South Park Commission has increased the areas of three play parks already acquired, and has acquired three new sites for play parks and recreation centers. Two sites will soon be improved with field houses, gymnasiums, baths, swimming-pools, playgrounds, running-tracks, ball-fields, etc., finer and more perfectly arranged and constructed than any in operation.

There is, therefore, this tangible evidence that Chicago is still going forward with the "unparalleled" type of playground development that was started by the South Park Commissioners in 1903.

The significance of Chicago's playground development, and the encouragement that may be gained by other cities from Chicago's success, is apparent when the different stages of development are traced. From 1893 to 1897 the Chicago playground movement was confined to individual efforts on the part of social settlements and their financial contributors in support of

their efforts. During this same period, however, the West Chicago Park Commission, urged by the German Turners, opened in one of the large parks an outdoor gymnasium and swimming-pool for both men and women.

In 1898 there was organized effort to give Chicago a system of schoolyard playgrounds, not under the management of the school board, but as a part of the vacation school movement created and managed by the women's clubs and supported by altruistic individuals and a special appropriation of one thousand dollars from the city council. This was the first official municipal recognition of the playground movement.

Official municipal efforts, following municipal recognition, were made the next year, 1899, when the mayor appointed the Special Park Commission (nine aldermen and six other citizens) to study and report upon the needs of Chicago with reference to small parks and playgrounds. This commission rendered a very comprehensive report and was instructed to continue its work by providing such playgrounds as the funds at hand would permit.

The Special Park Commission soon discovered, however, that the playground needs of Chicago were far greater than it, alone, could cope with. This commission, therefore, suggested to the existing park boards (three in number), operating independently of the city government, that they, with their greater power and resources, take up the playground movement and give to each of their respective divisions of the city adequate playgrounds. Acting upon this suggestion, and with the aid of the Special Park Commission, legislation was secured of the State legislator which enabled these park boards to acquire and improve new park territory. (The three park boards in Chicago are separate municipalities, deriving their powers from the State. They have absolute control of the parks and boulevards in their respective territories, independent, in every manner, of the city. This control involves matters of taxation, policing, lighting, maintenance, and all forms of ordinances respecting the use and control of the parks and boulevards.)

The South Park Commission was the first to take advantage of the enabling legislation. Beginning in 1903, the South Park Commission acted with such quietude, dispatch, and precision, and achieved such impressively good results, that many of the pioneer playground workers in Chicago have not yet regained their

normal vision after looking upon the work of the South Park Commission during the last four years.

These, in brief, are the three different stages in the development of Chicago's playgrounds as these stages relate to the propaganda, legislative, and acquisition aspects of the development.

Correspondingly interesting, especially to the student and supervisor of playgrounds, are the different stages of development that relate to the philosophy of playgrounds and playground possibilities.

Three stages may be noted. In the first stage there was little except vague thought concerning playground direction. There was sound conviction that a playground was necessary to keep children out of mischief and apart from the dangers of the streets and alleys, but there was not enough playground philosophy and skill at the helm to square with the conviction and make a real impression upon the problem.

In the second stage the dominant thought was to provide places in which children might play, even temporary playgrounds. In these playgrounds the philosophy of the movement was limited to a little discipline, a little first-aid to the injured, and a little help in play and "stunts". It was "nature faking" to attempt to supervise or direct the play of children, and it was ridiculous to attempt to devise attractive apparatus. Likewise, it was interfering with play to embellish the playground with shrubs and flowers.

The playground in this stage was merely a place in which children might play, a place where they might act and react upon each other without intimate contact with a stronger personality or the refining influences of cleansing and artistic equipment and surroundings.

The third stage is represented by the present South Park Playgrounds, where much of the playground philosophy advanced by this Association was anticipated and put into operation before the Association was organized—a stage and an achievement which added new significance to the term "public playground".

Chicago's present station in the playground movement has, therefore, been attained by three distinct groups of people and three distinct efforts and achievements by these groups.

The first was the group of earnest, altruistic individuals who raised the dead weight of indifference, who supported their own

convictions with their own money, and who urged the city officials to action.

The second was the Special Park Commission who investigated the needs of the city, a group of people who may properly be styled the official investigating, propaganda and legislative-framing group.

The third is the South Park Commission, whose contribution was a playground philosophy, an ideal equipment, and a concrete demonstration of playground possibilities.

Supplementing the efforts of the four park commissions who provide and operate all of our public playgrounds, recreation centers, play and athletic fields in the large parks, we have the Playground Association of Chicago, an association composed almost entirely of our pioneer playground workers. This Association, although only a little more than a year old, has assumed the following five tasks as a standing policy:

To promote the play spirit through festivals of play, sport, folk games, and national dances.

To investigate city conditions with reference to playground extension.

To secure more playgrounds and recreation centers.

To study and promote playground efficiency.

To encourage outdoor life and appreciation of the natural beauty around Chicago.

A public playground system, no matter by whom conducted, whether school board, park board, or city council, is peculiarly an institution wherein a great deal or a very little efficient work may be done with the general appearances being the same in either case.

A playground association composed of earnest and properly qualified men and women who are interested in and familiar with the philosophy of play, legislation for playgrounds, and the difference between records of attendance and records of efficiency, is a valuable adjunct to the official program of any city.

Such an association may not dictate policies or even directly suggest methods to be pursued by official bodies in charge of playgrounds, but it may disseminate knowledge concerning playgrounds, mould public opinion in favor of the best in playground work, and thus become a real leader in the movement.

There are two dangerous tendencies in the present stage of the playground movement which need counteracting forces,

such as may be applied by a playground association composed of courageous, sane, and business-like people.

The first danger is the exploitation of children in the playground movement by job- and power-seeking politicians.

Those who would raise their voices against the acquirement and administration of playgrounds for children are at once unworthy citizens.

Here, then, is the opportunity for men to acquire and administer an institution which you dare say nothing against, because it is in the interest of your children, but which, when you awake to the facts, is an institution acquired and administered primarily in the interest of individuals or an organization. This is what the men involved call "playing the game," but do not both our playground philosophy and experience call for a more careful selection of games? Is this a game we wish our children even remotely associated with?

The second dangerous tendency lies in the overemphasis placed upon acquiring playgrounds and the lack of emphasis or even appreciation concerning adequate maintenance and administration after the grounds are acquired.

The case may be likened to that of a group of men who resolve that they will form a manufacturing company. They proceed to build a factory, but wait until its completion before deciding what sort of goods are to be manufactured. It is finally decided that there is not a demand for new kinds of goods but that there is a demand for a better quality of all the goods that have been manufactured since the beginning of factory production. Operation of the factory soon reveals the fact that the building is inadequate, the cost of production too great, and that the factory needs a superintendent who knows the details of manufacturing. Retrenchment is ordered until the goods manufactured are as poor as those turned out in other factories.

Playgrounds acquired and operated without good business forethought and methods will turn out products no better than have been turned out by the street and alley playgrounds since the beginning of the city.

These are matters which independent playground associations, if they, too, are not exploiting children for selfish ends, may help to correct. These dangers are not fancied; they are real. They exist in some degree in all of the large cities where there are public playgrounds.

Chicago's contributions to herself in the playground move-

ment are definite, tangible, and increasingly good. Chicago's contributions to the country-wide movement are, if not definite, at least very suggestive. Recent developments suggest Chicago's courage and conviction concerning expenditures for playgrounds.

Chicago suggests that an all-year playground service is none too long. Juvenile mischief, delinquency, crime, the desire to play, and the necessity for physical and moral development are not peculiar to any particular season of the year; hence, the only adequate playground service is the all-year service.

Chicago's type of playgrounds suggests that the movement is vastly more significant than the common reference to teeters and swings for little children.

It is not the little children who find their way to the juvenile court. It is, rather, the boys and girls of 14, 15, and 16 years of age, whose lives, normally, are like volcanoes in action. Playgrounds suitable for little children are not strong enough in any sense to hold these boys and girls.

Chicago suggests that a playground service confined to school children is a very inadequate service, because in the large industrial centers, at least, the vast majority of children leave school to go to work as soon as the legal working age is attained. The fact that these children do leave school is all the more reason for a playground service that involves them at the earliest possible time in the scheme.

Chicago also suggests that our very inclusive term, "public playground", stands primarily not for swings and teeters, not for kindergarten and construction work, not for gardening and nature study, and not for an orthodox educational policy, but rather for *public recreation—a public recreation that has at one end the play of children and at the other end the relaxation of young men, young women, and adults.*

Strenuous as is the life of our people, the great danger in the American city is not in overwork, or in intense work, but in the relaxation of our people. Not until we care for the relaxation of the nation may we boast of a permanent and virile civilization.

The Chicago type of playgrounds, with indoor and outdoor gymnasiums, skating-ponds and swimming-pools, ball-fields and running-tracks, assembly- and dance-halls, club-rooms, reading-rooms, and refreshment service, suggests keen appreciation of George Eliot's dictum: "Important as it is to direct the industries of the world, it is not so important as to wisely direct the leisure (the relaxation) of the world."