

THIS SCHOOL HUNTS FOR GENIUS IN ITS PUPILS

A Chance for the Bright Child Provided by the Plan Principal Rabenort Is Trying

Up in a big public school in The Bronx they are working to give the bright child a chance. So much has been done in recent years for the backward child that in the general desire to help him it has seemed sometimes as if the needs of the precocious youngster were being overlooked.

So up at Public School 9 Principal William T. Rabenort and his assistants, Miss Abby Porter Leland and Frederick F. Crooker, are working to discover genius and to cultivate it. Not that they do not work just as hard for the little deficient, as he is called, to save him from submergence; on the contrary, he is a constant source of study to them, but they look on him not as a psychological bugbear, but as an individual whose problem can be solved only by individual treatment.

Individuality is the keynote of the educational philosophy of these teachers. Columbia University last spring conferred the degree of Doctor of Philosophy on Mr. Rabenort and Miss Leland, while Mr. Crooker, a graduate of the City College, has the degree of Master of Arts from Columbia. They claim nothing new for the work they are doing, nothing original in the way they are approaching the problems presented to them by the 2,300 children of all kinds and conditions that make up the enrollment of the school; but in spite of this assertion there is human interest in the way they go about their work of giving every child a fair chance.

It is in the matter of grading their pupils that Dr. Rabenort and his assistants are breaking away from the conventional system.

"The attempt to classify children, to lay down rules for the so-called average child and then proceed on the basis that all children are average is all wrong," said Dr. Rabenort. "Whenever we use such expressions as 'in general' or 'as a rule' or 'the average,' in our study of children and our treatment of them we are putting ourselves on a false foundation.

"There is no average child, there is no general rule to apply to children. Every child should be developed according to his own needs, and the rules governing the process are rules not in the sense that they are applicable to every child but in the sense that all of them have been found to work at one time or another and one or more of them may work in this particular case."

"Grading is at its best a mechanical process, since the first condition is necessarily the number of rooms available. We have fifty rooms, therefore we have our 2,300 children divided into fifty groups, the basis for the grouping being age and natural capacity.

"If we could attain our ideal we would abolish the grading idea, which is after all only a frame on which to hang our own ideas of the needs of the children and the best way to supply them. We would have 2,300 grades instead of fifty, that is, each child would be studied and taught, and his capacities developed not only as a member of a group but as an individual and also as a member of society.

"The bright child would be inspired to develop to the top of his powers, while the dull child would be encouraged not only in his studies but in habits of industry, which so often pass as a very fair substitute for brains. Every child would be strengthened in his weak spots and developed in his strong ones."

In every group of children, whether it be large or small, a family or a class in a public school, there are some bright children and some dullards, and to whom the acquiring of knowledge is as simple and as natural as play, and others in whom every possible physical handicap has been removed there is simply a lack of brains.

More costly, so far as the properties are concerned, than any others to be seen at the Metropolitan. In the first scene, showing the gaming room, the chairs are of wood and real leather, the tables and the buffet are handsome pieces of furniture and the wine coolers and similar articles on the buffet are of good plated silver. In the second scene the chairs are of gilt and brocade, there are several handsome tables and a beautiful chandelier which was made to order.

The opera house is pretty well fixed to repel an attack, for in the property master's department there are about 500 swords of all shapes and sizes, 350 helmets, 100 breastplates, 8 full suits of armor, scores of spears, a lot of guns and even some big sticks which would make T. R. himself sit up and take notice. The last named belong to the giants in the Ring and cause an ordinary shillelagh to look like a baby's rattle.

All those little flowering shrubs for "Madama Butterfly" are properties. So are the bunches of flowers used in the second act of that opera, the garlands used in "Lobetsanz" and other pieces, the apple blossom leaves showered on the "Gosse Girl" in "Königslieder" and the dead leaves which drop in "Parfall." There is a pretty good sized vegetable kingdom, in fact, under the property man's care.

He is the Jove too who launches the thunderbolts by means of the thunder drum, although the lightning owes allegiance only to the chief electrician. The thunder drum, which looks more like an overgrown squirrel cage than a drum, is classed as one of the fifty-five real musical instruments which belong in the property department.

These are not the fake harps, as in "Lobetsanz," or other imitation instruments but the real thing. They are all numbered, 1 to 85, and include such a curious variety as the thunder drum above mentioned, whistles, wind makers, bells, trumpets, a piano and the great pipe organ itself.

Mighty few persons in the audience

is created. They too have a teacher of special qualifications who is capable of bringing out the good points of their minds, of encouraging them in their failings as well as in their accomplishments. The children are not forced beyond their mental strength but are to be kept always interested and busy.

"In this way," said Dr. Leland, in speaking of the results of the work so far accomplished and her hopes for the future, "we are developing ambition in the child, and not destroying it. Perhaps we cannot build up enough ambition to carry him very far in the school, but one thing is certain, when he leaves us he will

the little mental deficient, a hope that has already been fulfilled in several cases and which will be fulfilled in an increasing ratio, is that after a year or two in these classes, where his capacity for work is developed and his weakness strengthened by individual attention and treatment, he will be able to take his place with the average child—the expression seems inevitable—with the stigma of 'backward' removed for all time."

In connection with these special classes for deficient the work of Mr. Crooker makes a story all by itself. He is in charge of special classes for boys, boys seemingly so markedly deficient that every ordinary

many of them, with sad, wise faces, with police records longer than their school records.

It is for these 'charges' of Mr. Crooker that the Board of Superintendents with the approval of the Board of Education has made special provision for cutting away all the red tape of the course of study or of grading. Mr. Crooker is able to alter the course of study to suit his puzzling problem. He is able to omit whole courses and thus to focus all his powers on the absolute essentials, reading and writing or example. He is able to divide his boys into small groups and make frequent promotions, a step that is

Good Results Secured by Enabling Each Pupil to Work to the Top of His Powers.

metic studies and put them into one division. Likewise they put together all those children whose arithmetic is easy for them but whose reading and spelling are woefully difficult. Then the teachers are instructed to follow the

No one can realize how practical is the working of this system of grading and promotion and child development until he has seen it in actual operation. First he would visit a room made up of children placed there by the ordinary mechanical process of promotion.

Everything about the room is just average; in spite of Dr. Rabenort there is no other word to describe it. Most of the children are attentive and interested, but a few of them with bright eyes and alert little faces are listening to the lesson with half their minds and thinking of mischief with the other, while still others sit with stolid faces and lack lustre eyes, groping for what is eluding them, or more often in hopeless indifference to everything around them.

Go from this class to a group of so-called dull children and you will at once feel the difference in the atmosphere. Here every child, no matter if his face be dull and heavy, no matter if he be ever so far from the mark, is doing as interested, and the cheerful optimistic teacher, encouraging them with word and look, keeps every one of them alert. She can do this because she has none to hold back, none to push forward; she has all of them to help.

On some of these little faces discouragement has already set its mark, but on more of them the light of aroused ambition is dawning. The discipline of the room is better than that of the preceding one, because here there are no idle hands or idle brains. Every one is busy.

Go from this room to one where forty of the brightest boys and girls of the grade are gathered. Here there are no dull faces, nor mischief lurking around for idle hands to do. Every one is keen and every one shows it in his face. Here competition is life. There are no easy laurels. Every one must work, actually work, to keep up.

There is every sort of child in this room; for this is a democracy of ability, and nothing else counts. There are children with round rosy faces and carefully tied hair ribbons and pretty well made dresses, and there are children with pale faces and spindling arms from which hang worn, ragged sleeves.

One of the little girls in this class was ill earlier in the winter. She came to school as usual, but something was evidently wrong. On being questioned she admitted that at home they had had only tea and bread to eat for three days, and not very much of that. And yet this little girl was one of the brightest in the room.

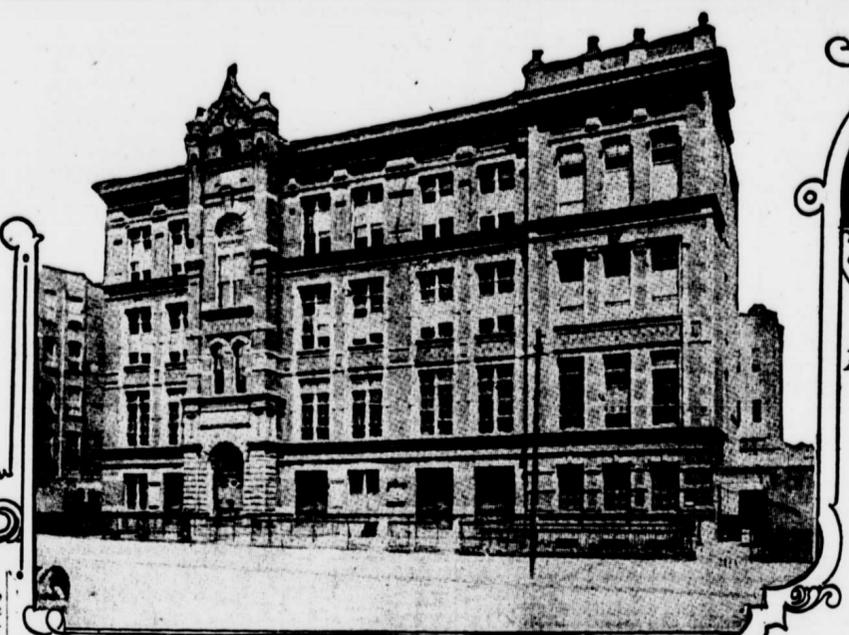
The teacher announces a rest period and calls on one small Herbert to "take the class." On the school register and in his official notebook Herbert rejoices in the name of Herbert Spencer Lightstone. Now, bursting with his responsibility, he steps quickly to the front of the room, his eyes snapping, his figure erect.

Quickly and clearly he gives the orders for the exercises by which small backs are rested and small muscles stretched. Quickly he gives the commands for deep breathing, with such enthusiasm in his "Inhale" and "Exhale" that the exercise is near to becoming an exhibition of panting, rather than deep breathing. Then with a flash in his dark eyes and a look on his round cheeks that make every woman in the room wish he belonged to her, Herbert goes back to his seat and the lesson is resumed.

Dr. Leland as she turned away, "And think of the chance they have, the chance to work for himself to the top of his powers, with nothing to hold him back or delay his progress, and with every help that the trained study and analysis of his individuality can put in his way. I wonder what will become of them. I wish they would all be teachers, every one. But they won't—they will be educators, and lawyers and Judges, and maybe Presidents."



DR. ABBY PORTER LELAND



PUBLIC SCHOOL NO. 9



DR. WILLIAM T. RABENORT



MR. FREDERICK F. CROOKER

a good teacher he will be able at the same time to hold the attention of the bright child, whose mental capacities are, however, never fully exerted, and also to interest the dull one, who is overstrained in an effort to keep up. But if he is just an average teacher the result is that the bright child becomes inattentive and the dull child discouraged and disinterested.

It is this inflexibility of the teaching methods, a problem as old as the schools themselves, and with as many theories for its solution as there are earnest conscientious teachers, that Dr. Rabenort, Dr. Leland and Mr. Crooker are giving their thought and their enthusiasm.

When the promotions are made the brightest ten, perhaps, of the class—the number ten is used entirely as an example and not because it is in any sense fixed—are not put into a room with the ten or fifteen dull minds that have been left behind by the class ahead and that offers to them no possible stimulation. Instead they are put into a class with three or four other groups of the brightest children from other rooms.

To them is assigned a teacher of special capacity, who is instructed to let the children go just as fast in their work as they are able. He must not push them beyond their ability, but he must keep them working. Such a group of children easily does three terms of the ordinary course of study in two terms. They are eager and attentive and they feel the spur of wholesome competition which was practically nonexistent for them when they were classified, willy nilly, with the dull children.

Equally in line for special treatment are the last group on the teachers' list, the poor little dullards. They are taken away from the discouraging competition with the bright minds and are put into a class with children of approximately the same mental capacity, so that for them too the stimulant of competition

take with him an ideal of good work. He will not have spent his time killing through lessons that have been beyond his mental grasp. Whatever he has done with us will have been done thoroughly. He will have learned the great lesson of doing work right.

"Our hope for these special classes for method for their instruction has failed. Here are boys who have failed in everything they have ever undertaken in school work; who have never succeeded in making a passing mark under the ordinary conditions in any study; boys with whom every ordinary method of discipline has failed to be effectual and boys,

of great value when it is considered that with children such as these promotion at the end of five months is so hopelessly distant as to make it not worth working for.

So Mr. Crooker has these boys of his, deficient every one, in rooms to themselves, with the windows full of blooming plants and singing birds, working out his own scheme for their mental and moral salvation.

Third in the list for special treatment comes the "average" child, to which description Dr. Rabenort objects, not that Dr. Rabenort ranks him third in importance; on the contrary, he recognizes no rank at all, but asserts that each of his 2,300 children is a problem of equal importance and interest. This average child, with his strong points and his weak ones, is subjected to a minute analysis. If he is strong in arithmetic and has made poor marks in reading and spelling, for instance, the teacher and principal work together to find out just the reason for the inequality. Satisfied as to this, they then set to work to remedy it.

ordinary procedure in the easy studies and to lay special stress on the difficult ones. Every day there are a few minutes of unassigned time, not regulated by the requirements of the course of study, and this is always devoted to building up the deficient study. As all are backward in the same thing no one is being neglected by the special emphasis.

Then another device for strengthening the weak spots of the youngsters is still more special teaching. In many schools teachers remain after hours in the afternoon to help the backward ones, but Dr. Rabenort does not believe in this, as he says the children are dull and tired from the day in school and need to be outdoors at play. So he calls for volunteers among the teachers to come at 8 o'clock in the morning to help the little stumbling feet over the rough places on the road to knowledge.

Then he formed classes of the children who needed just that little bit more help to get along—just a little encouragement here, just a little careful individual explanation there—and over them he put the earnest minded teachers who had offered their services. He called too for volunteers among his older pupils to help along the younger ones. Without a single exception, he says, the children of the seventh and eighth grades who responded to this call were the bright, clever, capable members of the classes.

Several of these pupils were assigned to each group each morning. They sat in the seats with the backward ones, going over the lessons with them, pronouncing the hard words or explaining the puzzling arithmetic problems.

This plan has had quite an unexpected result, by the way, for not only has it been of immense value in doing the work for which it was intended but it has developed a hitherto unsuspected phase of ability among the young pupil teachers themselves.

"They are as good teachers as we have found yet for the backward children," said Dr. Leland. "They seem to know by instinct just what the trouble is. They approach the child's difficulty from the child's point of view, a hard thing to do, by the way, and they discover perfectly simple expedients for surmounting them that the best of us never thought of. I am not just sure what a born teacher is, but I think we have some of them right in these upper grade pupils."

TWENTY THOUSAND DISTINCT OBJECTS IN THE OPERA'S PROPERTY ROOM

They Range From a Feather to a Set of Furniture, Include Armor, Food Supplies and Fans, and Show in Every Detail Careful Attention to Artistic and Historic Veracity.

One of the busiest men in this strenuous town is Edward Siedel of the Metropolitan Opera House. If you should run across a man wearing a black fedora hat on his head, an anxious frown upon his corrugated brow and a cigar between his teeth, seek no further. You will have found the hero of this tale.

Twenty-four hours out of the day Mr. Siedel is technical director of the opera house. The rest of the time he eats, sleeps and diverts himself. He got two weeks of sleep one night last week. That was overlooking himself by one wink, but he doesn't expect it to happen again this year.

Mr. Siedel is the high muckamuck to whom all the stage hands, carpenters, electricians, property men and so forth are responsible. As an example of the extent of his duties take a single one of these departments, that of properties. Maybe everybody knows that a stage property, or "prop," is everything used in a stage setting except the main scenery. Also everything carried by members of the company, artists, chorus or supers, except the clothes actually worn, which come under the head of costumes, and the wigs, which have a classification all their own.

In charge of the property department is a master of properties who has to look after an insignificant total of about 20,000 objects. These range all the way from so trivial a thing as a single feather to whole sets of expensive furniture. The feather does duty in various operas in which a quill pen is needed, as in "Tosca," where it is used to write the unhappy singer's passport before she assassinates Scarpia.

The opera house property department has enough furniture to fill a hotel. There are over 100 side chairs, as those without arms are called, about forty arm chairs and fifteen sofas, not counting various settees, benches and wooden stools. In the same category are about fifty tables, several screens, batracks, a cheval glass, chests and so on. All this is real furniture.

In "Donne Curiose" the settings for the two scenes of the first act are perhaps

that listen to "Aida," for instance, know that there is a stage band at the opera house entirely separate from the orchestra. Its members play those silver trumpets in "Aida" and they are the heralds in "Lohengrin." In fact whenever any instrument is to be played on the stage itself a member of this band does it.

If the property master should take a notion to lose himself among the bewildering objects under his care he could stay lost as effectively as Charlie Ross. He wouldn't even lack for victuals and drink if certain operas were put on often enough and he could get at the estates before the artists saw him. In "Donne Curiose," for instance, there's enough food provided to make a fairly good meal if a person's appetite isn't too grasping. Not a very filling diet perhaps, but what there is of it is first class.

In the first act Scotti gets a dish of perfectly good ice cream; while in the last act the four inquisitive ladies swipe real cakes of *Harlequin's* tray. The opera company buys these latter dainties from one of the best caterers in New York and pays 84 cents a dozen for them.

After *Harlequin* has been robbed of his pâtisseries he again raids the support table and reappears with a saucer of white stuff which he spoons down with much gusto. This is whipped cream from Charlotte russe, bought for this particular incident.

There is also a beautiful cake from which a large slice is apparently cut. The cake is of papier mâché, a permanent institution with a wedge opening into which a slice of real cake is inserted when the opera is to be given.

"In the first act of 'Madama Butterfly' Martin and Scotti are the gay boys with their real whiskey and soda and cigarettes, all furnished by the benevolent property department. That sounds good to some folks, but there are even more joyous occasions in certain operas, when the company tickles the palates of the pampered singers with genuine champagne. A fine imported brand.

wine that sends it on its way is excellent claret.

This combining of victuals and vocalization is not a task which any singer relishes. When the property man is asked whether the artists ever express a preference for a particular brand of wine or whiskey and whether the ladies insist on some favorite kind of cakes or candy—there is confectionery in "Butterfly"—he said they hadn't got quite so finicky yet.

"We give them the best of everything," he said. "They ought to be satisfied." In "Donne Curiose" there are short columns on which candlesticks are placed. But they are always called "Pique Dames" columns because they were made for it in the first place. The same way with some tablecloths which are used in several productions. The plot book always calls them "Traviata tablecloths" because they were first provided for that opera.

More interesting even than the size of this great mass of material is the attention to artistic and historical veracity in its selection and designing. One would think the same swords and spears could be made to do duty in many operas. Of course the same ones occasionally reappear, as in the Ring, but not often. Even the poles to which banners and pennants are attached are not the same in "Carmen," for instance, as they are in "Le Cid" or "Le Prophète." The fashion in the metal points which crown these poles wasn't any more the same in different periods than the style of headgear was the same for Queen Elizabeth and Queen Victoria.

So just because of that one detail there are a dozen different sets of these poles and spears at the opera house. Probably not half a dozen persons in the audience would know whether a spearhead was historically correct even if they happened to notice its shape. But if the point was radically wrong some one would be sure to see it and apparently wouldn't be able to see anything else in the entire production. Not long ago one of these particular persons wrote to the management complaining about the revolvers in "The Girl of the Golden West."

Oddly enough this connoisseur of gun-craft was a woman. She said she was amazed that the Metropolitan Opera Company, usually so careful about historical accuracy, should have in the Pacific opera demand a Conquest revolver. Scarpia's headstuck is only gin bread, trimmed to a tenderloin design and garnished with parsley. Although the stake is only gingerbread, the

Then there is the detail of playing cards. Anybody would think a pack of ordinary cards would serve every purpose. Not at the Metropolitan! Those in "The Girl" are American cards; those in "Carmen" are foreign ones with quite different pictures from ours, and those in "Donne Curiose" are a different shape, much longer and wider than cards of the present day.

Fans, too! Of course there must be real Japanese fans for "Butterfly," and these are easily secured. For "Carmen," however, it isn't always a simple matter to find just the right thing. It must be a large fan painted with scenes of bull fights.

Last year the property man was down in Mexico, and seeing a lot of fans which were just the right thing and cheap too, he laid in a liberal supply. The Metropolitan company hasn't given "Carmen" since, but when it does the fans will be ready.

In "La Gioconda" the ballet dancers representing the noon hours have fans of an unusual design. And in "Donne Curiose" Geraldine Farrar carries a small fan, but it is her own. She is said to be the only Metropolitan artist, by the way, who provides her own properties. She does it from choice. The only "prop" she does not furnish is the dagger with which she kills herself in "Butterfly."

The only other artist who provides any of the props (except that some have their own swords) is Emmy Destinn, who in the last act of "La Gioconda" uses her own dagger and her own basket of flowers.

"You would think," said the property man, "that they would rather furnish certain small articles, such as eyeglasses or watch fobs. They could keep them with the costumes with which they should be worn."

"Sometimes they must have a key or some coin or a purse in their pocket, and you would think they might keep these to themselves. But they don't. Of course you can understand why. It would make them responsible for having the thing when it was needed on the stage."

"As it is, the property man has to see that the key is in the artist's pocket, that he has his eyeglasses or locket (just the right pair too), his purse or loose coin or dagger, or poison vial, or ring, or whatever he is going to use. If he or she, as in 'Tosca,' is to carry a walking stick, we must hand it out and not make any mistake about it either. Not such a simple matter when you realize that we have

about fifty of these sticks of different designs."

In addition to the mass of less frequently used properties which are distributed among the storerooms there are at the opera house itself five large rooms filled with hundreds and hundreds of the objects oftenest in demand. In one of these rooms, which is called the armory, are rows of helmets, great stands of spears, racks full of guns, innumerable swords, including the famous one of *Siegfried*, the white one of *Lohengrin* and that of *Tristram*. Here is Caruso's armor, anything heavy, is made of aluminum. His helmets are of aluminum too. These stage weapons are never sharp enough to do any damage, even if some one accidentally got in their way.

The guns are the real thing and are loaded with powder. A permit to keep explosives on the premises has to be had every time an opera is given in which guns are fired or confagurations imitated.

In one of the property rooms at the opera house, which is always spoken of as "Frank Furst's room," an employee is generally at work rubbing up gun barrels, swords and armor, or polishing brass armlets. Guns are used not only on the stage, as in "Tosca" and "Carmen," but off stage in taking up cues.

If a great crash is to be produced half a dozen stage hands are armed with loaded guns and some one stands beside them with a prompt book following the score. As the cue approaches he counts, "one, two, three, four, five!" At five they fire simultaneously, while at the same time there comes a clap of stage thunder. The resulting noise is big enough for any kind of a crash.

A curious phase of the property department's job is the way it sometimes has to do with a work with some other department. For instance, in the last act of "Tosca" there is a flag which floats on top of the tower. It really does float, the breeze blowing it with every appearance of naturalness. An electric fan adjusted behind the side scenes provides the breeze. In this case the fan is put in place by the property department, while the electric fan belongs to the electrical department, which must see that it is set up and running.

In the second act of "Madama Butterfly" several large Japanese lanterns with standards are brought in by *Suzuki* and set about the stage. Lights are burning inside them. The third act opens with

the same scene after a lapse of several minutes, which passage of time is indicated by having the lights in the lanterns flicker and go out by one. This is the way it is done. When the lanterns are brought on they contain lighted candles which come under the head of properties and which therefore are put in and lighted by some one in that department.

When the curtain goes down a property man takes out these candles. Then an electrician sees that the standards are placed over metal plates in the matting. *Suzuki* having set them in approximately the correct position. Then he puts in electric bulbs, wires from under the stage are connected with the metal plates, contact is secured through the base of the standard and the resulting light is then turned on and off from below to simulate a flickering candle flame. After the scene the electrician comes and gets his bulbs before the property man can carry off the lanterns.

When the latter was asked what is the hardest part of his work he sighed and said he thought it was clearing the stage after an act and getting it ready for the next one. In theatrical and ordinary musical companies the chorus and supers are required to go to the property room after the things they are to carry and to return them there when they are through. But this isn't the custom in grand opera.

No matter how much truck has been in use, guns, spears, swords, garlands of flowers and any number of smaller things, everybody just dumps what he or she is carrying, throws it down wherever it happens to fall and rushes off to the dressing rooms. Immediately carpenters strike the scenery and others begin to set it for the next act.

In the midst of this turmoil the property man must gather up the things left lying around by the members of the company before they can proceed to put out the new set of props. What care and quickness this entails can be understood by studying some complicated scenes, as the first two in "The Girl of the Golden West."

In each of these over 100 properties must be correctly placed before the curtain goes up. Actual point of those in the second act runs away up beyond a hundred and includes such a wide range of things as paper mache' papposes, furniture, draperies, toilet articles, trunks, tinware, white oil papers, white cotton gloves, pairs of playing cards, whiskey bottle, candles, matches, trunks, a washing hanging on a line (or it looks like it, at least), and so on. These not only have to be put on but got off too. The latter is generally accomplished by rapidly dumping all small articles into cloth baskets. They can be sorted out later if necessary.