WIDER FIELD FOR THE NEW CHILDREN'S THEATRE

Miss Herts Explains Her Plans and Tells of the Educational Value of the Proposed Institution

THOUSANDS of men, women and children who dwell on the East Side have been gladdened by the news that the Children's Educational Theatre is to be reestablished. In 1909, after eight years of noteworthy achievement, this organization came to an end. It was not and had not been a failure. On the contrary it had been pronounced a decided success. Educators, social workers, theatrical managers and dramatists had praised and helped it. It had met a long felt want.

The Children's Theatre was the consummation of a great educational principle long known but rarely employed. Battling against heavy odds at first and working among people who to some seemed to be hardly susceptible to its influence, it became an important factor in their everyday lives and a great influence for good. It taught the young and the old, it reformed bad children and encouraged good ones, it inspired the youth of the East Side to transcend the limitations of their environment, it brought parent and child together and it offered attractive and uplifting entertainment where cheap and harmful amusements prevailed. And it did all this without any outward appearance of being a charity, without introducing embarrassment or entailing the sacrifice of dignity on the part of those benefited.

In spite of its past success now that the Children's Theatre is struggling to come to life again it must not be assumed that its path is strewn with roses. It is laboring under many difficulties and it has to overcome some opposition. Certain men and women on learning that the Children's Theatre was to be reorganized have tried to alarm the public by charging that instead of educating the children of the East Side it merely spoils them for the duties of everyday life by inspiring them with the desire to become professional actors and actresses; that it spreads the use of cosmetics among the girls, &c. That such criticisms are not well founded is the belief of those who guided the course of the organization during its lifetime. Jane Addams, well known as an opponent of the professional child actor, unhesitatingly praises the fine influence of such a theatre.

More difficult to contend with is the apathy of a public which will give generously to a hospital or to any movement to eradicate physical disease and hesitates to subscribe to efforts that deal chiefly with moral conditions. The work of the Children's Theatre has been in the latter direction.

There has been much discussion of late as to the aim and destiny of the theatre. Generally it has been the benefit which the adult was to derive that has been considered. Rarely has the need of the child in this regard been discussed, and this in spite of the fact that the instinct of make-believe is most prominent in the adolescent and that the satisfaction of this instinct can, by employing proper methods, effect astonishing educational results.

But what is being done to give this instinct for "playing out" proper direction? Where can the child, especially the child of the poor, go to satisfy this craving? Where does such a child go? To the moving picture show, to the cheaper vaudeville houses. It is to such places that a vital part of the education of children is left. It is here that they get their first impression of the world outside of their own environment, and it is not to be wondered at if they show a misconception of this world when maturity throws them into the thick of the struggle for existence.

Three years ago, when the Children's Educational Theatre was still in existence, the situation was different. For thousands of children on the East Side the moving picture houses and cheap vaudeville theatres had become meaningless and unattractive. A more satisfactory substitute was offered. Not only could they see life as it is lived in the wide world but they could themselves actually take part in it. They found themselves in the care of men and women who were spending their time and energies in the effort that only wholesome influences should be brought to bear upon them. They appreciated what was being done for them and they responded faithfully and thoroughly.

At the head of the Children's Theatre was a woman who by training and equipment was well fitted for the work she had undertaken. This woman was Miss Alice Minnie Herts.

Miss Herts has for the past twenty-five years been active in charitable and philanthropic work. Her parents, of English extraction, had been prominent in social work. When in 1903 she turned all her attention to the founding of a children's theatre she believed that such an institution could be made a great factor in the work of social uplift to which she had dedicated herself, a greater factor than most people imagined.

When the news came out that the Children's Educational Theatre was to be reorganized after three years of inactivity with a new directorship and with new ideas and ideals a reporter of THE SUN called on Miss Herts at her home in West Ninety-third street.

"I am sorry," said Miss Herts in answer to the questions that were put to her, "that I cannot invite you to a performance at the Educational Alliance. You would find there the best exposition of our work. From time to time throughout the eight years that I was managing director of the Children's Theatre I invited prominent men to our performances and it required but one evening to convert them to our faith. They went away fully convinced of the excellent work we were doing.

"The existence of this institution is merely the result of a realization of the social value of the dramatic instinct. This instinct is a primitive impulse and can be made to achieve any and every educational result. It can be employed to educate along the line of least resistance by utilizing the eager craving of man, woman and child to realize the meaning of lives totally apart from their own restricted environment.

"Especially strong is this dramatic instinct in children. It is latent even in the dullest child and its awakening brings remarkable results. Its intelligent direction serves to fit young people with a better equipment in life.

"When in 1903, as a director of the Educational Alliance at Jefferson street and East Broadway, I was asked to take charge of the entertainment department I did not dream of evolving any great educational plan. Of all the activities at the Alliance this was the most poorly conducted and I took it in hand to reorganize it on a more efficient plan.

"Before I had been there very long I noticed that in this department there was a more insistent and steady demand among the people for plays than for any other kind of entertainment. I observed that they were giving plays in which children took the most active part and that at every performance they were able to fill the auditorium, which has a capacity of 900. Plays were given in Yiddish, Italian and what was thought to be English.

"From time to time those interested in the production of the plays came to me for suggestions in the way of costumes, properties and other details. I helped them whenever I had an opportunity, and they took up my suggestions with great eagerness. As time went on they came to me more and more frequently, until I found that I was giving a good part of my time to this one activity of the entertainment department, and once I had come in such intimate contact with the dramatic instinct of these children as I found it expressed in their eager but imperfect way I came to realize what a remarkable field for education I had before me.

"It was evident to me that these plays had a great drawing power. Many people had to be turned away at the performances. I saw also how they affected the conduct of the children and I realized that I had here a remarkable instrument for education.

"Even had I been content to let things go on as they had been going I could not have done so. The children had come to depend upon me for help and I was irresistibly drawn into the midst of their activities. Some of my critics have said that I should have let the people alone. They imagine I imposed this condition of things upon them, that I planted the insatiable demand for dramatic expression in them. It is clear that the original impulse came from the people themselves. I saw a way of organizing this impulse and giving it intelligent direction.

"I took the situation in hand and that year, 1903, we gave our first play, "The Tempest." Our first experiment proved an enormous success. When I announced the choice of the play to the boys and girls 350 applied for parts in the cast. Most of these were department store assistants, clerks, stenographers and operators.

"On the night of the performance as many people as were admitted into the auditorium were turned away at the door and it was necessary to give a second performance. The success of our venture was assured not only as an entertainment but as an educational factor in the lives of the people on the East Side. Word came from a nearby library that all of Shakespeare's plays were in circulation and that the great demand could not be supplied. We therefore got out a paper edition which we sold for 10 cents and in less than a month our entire supply of 1,000 was sold out.

"A keen interest in our work was awakened not only in the boys and girls with whom we came in direct contact, but in their parents and friends. As one little girl put it: 'All the people in the neighborhood know about "Tempest," and them which don't I tell them.' This interest on the part of the parents was especially gratifying. A new tie grew up between the foreign born parent and the American born child and as our work developed they began to find much in common. This influence is of signal importance, as so much of social work among immigrants has a disintegrating influence on the family circle.

"From that time on we began to give plays regularly and frequently. We became an institution, a need of the people. We produced 'Ingomar,' 'As You Like It,' 'The Prince and the Pauper,' 'The Little Princess,' 'Little Lord Fauntleroy' and many other plays of educational value.

"In 1908 the Children's Educational Theatre was incorporated. Its board of directors consisted of the late Mary Twain, the Rev. Percy Stickney Grant, Robert J. Collier, Otto H. Kahn and myself. By that time we were attracting the attention of the foremost educators in the country. We had many distinguished men at our performances. Letters by the hundred came from all countries asking for information about our work and our methods and the sincerity of the inquirers was amply proved by the fact that in all cases they enclosed stamps for replies.

"In 1909 I was taken seriously ill and I had to discontinue my active interest in the institution for a time. At that period we were also having money difficulties and our facilities for rehearsal and production were severely handicapped. As a result of my temporary withdrawal the work came to a halt and soon was suspended altogether. It is deplorable that such an important work as we were doing should have depended so vitally on a single individual and that money considerations should have been allowed to interrupt so worthy a movement.

"Is it not remarkable that so few people should realize the value of training the dramatic instinct in children? Certainly few see the absolute necessity of doing so. Yet neglect of this instinct is at the base of a good portion of the waywardness found in children of the poor, while its proper direction would work incalculable good.

"I am persuaded that misconduct on the part of minors is due in great part not to a native tendency toward evil, but is merely a perverted expression of the dramatic instinct. Take the case of a boy who has just seen a wild Indian show in one of the moving picture theatres. He becomes inspired with a desire to imitate what he saw, he paints his face, gathers a band of young redmen about him and starts out on a bloody raid. Without at all suspecting the significance of his action he may actually commit an incendiary act and set fire to a neighboring barn. The dramatic instinct in this child has been neglected and that is the price paid.

"But give this child an opportunity to act out his impulse under circumstances where no ill will result. Let him take the part of an Indian chief in a play and in that way give expression to his irrepressible impulse to act out what he has seen. He will get the same satisfaction as the actual reality could afford, and yet there would be no harmful results either to the child or to others. His instinct is gratified at the same time that it is trained. The emotional result is the same in both cases and the child learns a better lesson.

"This was one of the notable results of our work in the Children's Theatre. By giving a child a wicked part in a play we gratified his desire to play the bold bad man and so made it unnecessary for him to make his dramatic impulse an instrument for evil.

"On the other hand, by letting him play noble, heroic parts we stimulated him to emulate the characters he impersonated and his conduct on the stage became the criterion of his behavior outside. The moral good effected by our methods is nothing short of marvellous.

"I recall one day being invited to dine at a restaurant in the vicinity of the Educational Alliance with several boys who had come under the influence of the Children's Theatre. I came rather late and all my hosts were present and seated at a table. When I entered they all arose. They remained standing until I had taken my seat.

"In explanation of this mark of courtesy a little fellow later said: 'We fellers all do like that now since we saw the Earl of Dorincourt in 'Fauntleroy.' He always stands up till the lady sits down.'

"During the performance of 'Little Lord Fauntleroy' we received constant applications for tickets from probation court officers. They told me that the most intractable boy regarded these tickets as a great inducement and, encouraged by the promise of a seat for the play, would report regularly for six weeks. At this play the roughest and most obstreperous boys sat absorbed in breathless interest through the tender scenes between mother and son and they left the auditorium deeply impressed by what they had seen.

"Both actors and audience showed the influence of the wholesome lessons thus presented. The manners of the stage became the manners of the home and even the street. And the interesting thing about this method of education is that at no time were the children aware that they were being educated at all.

"Even in the matter of dress great changes took place. The little girls who were cast for parts invariably came to dress rehearsals in the most tawdry frocks imaginable. They were their best dresses and they were proud to appear in them. We suggested, however, that they were not appropriate and designed inexpensive garments that were more simple and in every way more effective.

"It was surprising to see how promptly the children developed a taste for simplicity and a dislike for the dowdy in dress. They discarded their flamboyant and considering the means of their parents, costly clothes and substituted others after the pattern of the neat and inexpensive ones we had designed. After that they showed a distinct improvement in their taste for clothes.

"One day as an experiment, I took some of the children to see a moving picture and vaudeville show, the sort they frequented before the advent of the Children's Theatre. They seemed terribly bored and declared that the did not enjoy the performance in the least. I think their testimony was genuine. They had become so accustomed to the more wholesome entertainment we were offering that the once popular moving picture show had lost its attraction for them.

"Not only did our institution offer the opportunity to see and to take part in the best plays but among the more mature boys and girls, and even among adults, it created a desire to study the more permanent works from a literary point of view. They discussed the characters, their motives and the larger meaning of the action, and this interest combined with the opportunity to interpret their views on the stage aroused a singularly intelligent and keen literary activity.

"Recently I met one of our girls. She had been associated with our work from the time she was a child and she was now almost twenty. She was delighted to hear that we were making an effort to revive the Children's Theatre.

"'I am so glad,' she said. 'I don't know what to do with my evenings.'

"'But,' I suggested, 'haven't you your clubs?'

"'Yes,' she replied, 'but they do nothing there but talk, talk, talk. They never do anything.'"

Miss Herts has evolved a plan for the new Children's Theatre which is the result of her long experience. She hopes to have a building erected in the vicinity of Cooper Union in the near future. This building will have an auditorium seating about 1,000, and will also include a hall for rehearsals and for parents' meetings, ten classrooms for classes in diction and acting, general offices, a wardrobe room for costumes, a property room and a storage room for scenery. This building will cost in the neighborhood of $125,000 and will ultimately become, Miss Herts thinks, a great civic asset and a powerful educational factor.

Those who have already associated themselves with her on the board of directors are Arthur D. Chandler of Orange, N. J.; Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Leeming of Brooklyn, Harry Content, the banker, and Miss Ethel Ehrmann, representing the junior department of the Children's Theatre.

Results Accomplished in the Way of Training Youthful Minds During Past Eight Years

Ingomar (produced 1904) Parthenia: "Use? They are Beautiful That is their Use"

The Tempest (produced 1903) Stephano: "Here's my Comfort."

Miss Alice Minnie Herts
MANAGING DIRECTOR OF THE CHILDREN'S EDUCATIONAL THEATRE

$350,000,000 FOR NEW YORK RAPID TRANSIT

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pecially as the flues provided for escape of the heated air are too small and too far apart.

In the new subways the right and left hand tracks are to be separated by concrete walls. Trains running in a given direction have a tube to themselves. Every train acts as a piston to push the air before it or draw it in suction from behind and thus carry it on to the openings where it may escape. Openings are to be placed at frequent intervals. For example, in the deep level tubes on Lexington avenue there are to be shafts up to daylight between all stations. In the old subway trains moving in the same chamber in opposite directions simply churn up the air without pushing it to the flues. The fans installed by the company are good things; but after all churning and fanning of overheated air is not the best solution of the problem.

Separate tunnels and frequent openings should give relief. The importance of frequent openings cannot well be overestimated. Multiple entrances at stations, both on the old and new lines, would be worth their cost for ventilation alone. Stand on the front platform of an express train, shut your eyes, hold the back of your hand in the breeze, by the cool freshness of the air as it strikes your hand you can tell whenever the train is passing a local station, with entrances at single points. If there were entrances at three places for each station the effect would be so much better.

Father Knickerbocker is doing some rather intensive farming in the transportation line. Take the junction of Broadway, Sixth avenue and Thirty-fourth street, for example. Up in the air is the Sixth avenue elevated. On the surface are the electric lines of Sixth avenue, Broadway, and Thirty-fourth street. Under the pavement of Sixth avenue are the McAdoo tubes. The four track Broadway subway of the Brooklyn Rapid Transit Company must cross the avenue and Thirty-fourth street at a still lower level. And underneath both of these tunnels must come the Thirty-fourth street crosstown subway which the commission tentatively authorized and thought of giving over to a moving platform, and then thought about the second time, taking no further action. Here are five transportation levels in a perpendicular row. It is believed to be a world's record.

There is to be a similar case over in Brooklyn, where at the corner of Fulton street and Flatbush avenue there are to be two elevated lines, the surface cars, the new Fourth avenue subway and the existing subway—five in another perpendicular row.

Talking of records, the new Lexington avenue four track subway is believed to be the most costly railway line in the world. When completed from about Thirty-second street to 135th street, a trifle over five miles, it is pretty sure the cost will not be less that $35,000,000. That is pretty nearly $7,000,000 a mile. The famous Mont Cenis tunnel through the Alps cost a little less than $2,000,000 a mile. The Broadway line, four tracks from about City Hall to Fifty-ninth street, is expected to cost at the rate of $6,000,000 a mile, and the new Seventh avenue line, also with four tracks, which is to form the western leg of the H operated by the Interborough, about $5,000,000 a mile.

Even this $7,000,000 a mile railway is not Father Knickerbocker's most costly subway construction. Over in Fulton street, Brooklyn, there is a short stretch where the cost rises to nearly $10,000,000 a mile of road, real estate included. There are from five to eight tracks; two theatres and a big public building have to be supported; the old subway where it crosses over the new line is carried on massive concrete arches; many buildings have to be underpinned and the work is carried on in loose, troublesome sand only fifteen feet above high water. Fortunately there is only 1,000 feet of this topnotch luxury in subway tidbits or the town might go broke.

In Greenwich and Church streets and Nassau and William streets, Manhattan, there are short pieces of road which will cost approximately as much as that 1,000 feet across the river because of the many large buildings which have to be underpinned, steampipes to be taken care of and other difficult work.

Estimates made for THE SUNDAY SUN by Public Service Commission engineers indicate that the new subways are going to cost relatively 40 per cent. more than the old subway. That is, 40 per cent. more per mile of track for the same type of road built under the same physical conditions. Twenty-five per cent. of this increase is estimated to be due to the method employed in construction, the prohibition of open ditch work such as was used in constructing the old subway—and the remaining 15 per cent. to the enhanced cost of labor and materials. Which means that it is costing the taxpayers not less than from $30,000,000 to $40,000,000 to build the subways in such way as to inflict the minimum disturbance of streets and interference with the even tenor of business. And it is worth it.

Outside engineers familiar with subway work at the present day think the estimates of the commission's staff of a 30 per cent. increase over the unit cost of the old subway are too low and that by the time the extras and contingencies are counted up at the end it will be found the cost is not less than one-half more.

The existing subway as first built in Manhattan and The Bronx cost only about $40,000,000. The Brooklyn extention and other additions and improvements have since pushed the total cost to the city up to $55,000,000. This is for the construction of the complete railway, including all branches. According to official estimates the Lexington avenue trunk to 135th street alone is to cost in the neighborhood of $35,000,000; the Broadway line up to Fifty-ninth street, $30,000,000; the Seventh avenue line to Forty-second street, $21,000,000; the Fourth avenue line in Brooklyn and the Centre street loop in Manhattan, $26,000,000. How the millions fly!

It is trite but true that New York is now engaged in by long odds the greatest railway construction scheme ever known within a single city. In fact, no other city ever came within miles of the mark this metropolis is now setting. No one knows exactly what the new system is going to cost. We already have a lot of contracts; but there are always extras and contingencies. We have intelligent estimates, but these nearly always fall short when put up against the final actualities. But here are the rough estimates:

COST OF THE NEW RAPID TRANSIT SYSTEM IN NEW YORK.

New Interborough subways	$120,000,000
New B. R. T. subways	100,000,000
Fourth avenue, Brooklyn, and Centre street loop (B. R. T.)	26,000,000
Real estate, &c.	14,000,000
Interborough third tracking elevated lines	10,000,000
Total new construction	$270,000,000
New equipment, power, cars, &c.	60,000,000
Contingent	20,000,000
Grand total	$350,000,000

The total cost of the Panama Canal when completed is estimated at $375,000,000, but will probably be more.

There is already invested in rapid transit lines in Greater New York approximately the following sums:

City subway: construction and equipment	$95,000,000
Manhattan elevated: construction and equipment	110,000,000
Brooklyn elevated lines: construction and equipment	20,000,000
Hudson tubes	20,000,000
Bridges used by rapid transit lines	100,000,000
Total	$375,000,000
Now to be added	350,000,000
Grand total investment in rapid transit lines	$725,000,000

*In Manhattan.

EXISTING RAPID TRANSIT RAILWAYS IN NEW YORK.

	Miles of Road.	Miles of Track.
Interborough subway	23	85
Manhattan elevated	58	118
Hudson tubes*	7	13
B. R. T. elevated	41	105
Totals	112	321

*In Manhattan.

RAPID TRANSIT LINES NOW TO BE BUILT.

	Miles of Road.	Miles of Track.
Interborough operation	47	147
B. R. T. operation	57	162
Manhattan elevated	2	31
Total new lines	105	340

RAPID TRANSIT SYSTEM OF NEW YORK WHEN NEW LINES ARE COMPLETED.

	Miles of Road.	Miles of Track.
Interborough Company	113	381
B. R. T. Company	98	257
Hudson Company	7	13
Totals	218	651

Great as is the cost of the new lines, it will be seen that the existing rapid transit system is virtually doubled so far as mileage is concerned. The capacity in cars an hour is not quite doubled, however, and with the higher cost of the new subways and no increase of capacity it will be necessary for the new lines to pay about 2 cents per fare in interest on construction cost, against less than about 1 cent per fare for the same purpose on the old subway. Which inevitably means great congestion for the public, small returns to the city.

The engineering staff of the Public Service Commission has done prodigious and admirable work in preparing the multitude of plans for this unparalleled construction programme.