

Floor Games

By

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Section I

THE TOYS TO HAVE

The jolliest indoor games for boys and girls demand a floor, and the home that has no floor upon which games may be played falls so far short of happiness. It must be a floor covered with linoleum or cork carpet, so that toy soldiers and such-like will stand up upon it, and of a color and surface that will take and show chalk marks; the common green-colored cork carpet without a pattern is the best of all. It must be no highway to other rooms, and well lit and airy. Occasionally, alas! it must be scrubbed--and then a truce to Floor Games. Upon such a floor may be made an infinitude of imaginative games, not only keeping boys and girls happy for days together, but building up a framework of spacious and inspiring ideas in them for after life. The men of tomorrow will gain new strength from nursery floors. I am going to tell of some of these games and what is most needed to play them; I have tried them all and a score of others like them with my sons, and all of the games here illustrated have been set out by us. I am going to tell of them here because I think what we have done will interest other fathers and mothers, and perhaps be of use to them (and to uncles and such-like tributary sub-species of humanity) in buying presents for their own and other people's children.

Now, the toys we play with time after time, and in a thousand permutations and combinations, belong to four main groups. We have (1)

SOLDIERS, and with these I class sailors, railway porters, civilians, and the lower animals generally, such as I will presently describe in greater detail; (2) BRICKS; (3) BOARDS and PLANKS; and (4) a lot of CLOCKWORK RAILWAY ROLLING-STOCK AND RAILS. Also there are certain minor

objects--tin ships, Easter eggs, and the like--of which I shall make incidental mention, that like the kiwi and the duck-billed platypus refuse to be classified.

These we arrange and rearrange in various ways upon our floor, making a world of them. In doing so we have found out all sorts of pleasant facts, and also many undesirable possibilities; and very probably our experience will help a reader here and there to the former and save him from the latter. For instance, our planks and boards, and what one can do with them, have been a great discovery. Lots of boys and girls seem to be quite without planks and boards at all, and there is no regular trade in them. The toyshops, we found, did not keep anything of the kind we wanted, and our boards, which we had to get made by a carpenter, are the basis of half the games we play. The planks and boards we have are of various sizes. We began with three of two yards by one; they were made with cross pieces like small doors; but these we found unnecessarily large, and we would not get them now after our present experience. The best thickness, we think, is an inch for the larger sizes and three-quarters and a half inch for the smaller; and the best sizes are a yard square, thirty inches square, two feet, and eighteen inches square--one or two of each, and a greater number of

smaller ones, 18 x 9, 9 x 9, and 9 x 4-1/2. With the larger ones we make islands and archipelagos on our floor while the floor is a sea, or we make a large island or a couple on the Venice pattern, or we pile the smaller on the larger to make hills when the floor is a level plain, or they roof in railway stations or serve as bridges, in such manner as I will presently illustrate. And these boards of ours pass into our next most important possession, which is our box of bricks.

(But I was nearly forgetting to tell this, that all the thicker and larger of these boards have holes bored through them. At about every four inches is a hole, a little larger than an ordinary gimlet hole. These holes have their uses, as I will tell later, but now let me get on to the box of bricks.)

This, again, wasn't a toy-shop acquisition. It came to us by gift from two generous friends, unhappily growing up and very tall at that; and they had it from parents who were one of several families who shared in the benefit of a Good Uncle. I know nothing certainly of this man except that he was a Radford of Plymouth. I have never learned nor cared to learn of his commoner occupations, but certainly he was one of those shining and distinguished uncles that tower up at times above the common levels of humanity. At times, when we consider our derived and undeserved share of his inheritance and count the joys it gives us, we have projected half in jest and half in earnest the putting together of a little exemplary book upon the subject of such exceptional men: Celebrated Uncles, it should be called; and it should stir up all who

read it to some striving at least towards the glories of the avuncular crown. What this great benefactor did was to engage a deserving unemployed carpenter through an entire winter making big boxes of wooden bricks for the almost innumerable nephews and nieces with which an appreciative circle of brothers and sisters had blessed him. There are whole bricks 4-1/2 inches x 2-1/4 x 1-1/8; and there are quarters--called by those previous owners (who have now ascended to, we hope but scarcely believe, a happier life near the ceiling) "piggys." You note how these sizes fit into the sizes of the boards, and of each size--we have never counted them, but we must have hundreds. We can pave a dozen square yards of floor with them.

How utterly we despise the silly little bricks of the toyshops! They are too small to make a decent home for even the poorest lead soldiers, even if there were hundreds of them, and there are never enough, never nearly enough; even if you take one at a time and lay it down and say, "This is a house," even then there are not enough. We see rich people, rich people out of motor cars, rich people beyond the dreams of avarice, going into toyshops and buying these skimpy, sickly, ridiculous pseudo-boxes of bricklets, because they do not know what to ask for, and the toyshops are just the merciless mercenary enemies of youth and happiness--so far, that is, as bricks are concerned. Their unfortunate under-parented offspring mess about with these gifts, and don't make very much of them, and put them away; and you see their consequences in after life in the weakly-conceived villas and silly suburbs that people have built all round big cities. Such poor

under-nourished nurseries must needs fall back upon the Encyclopedia Britannica, and even that is becoming flexible on India paper! But our box of bricks almost satisfies. With our box of bricks we can scheme and build, all three of us, for the best part of the hour, and still have more bricks in the box.

So much now for the bricks. I will tell later how we use cartridge paper and cardboard and other things to help in our and of the decorative make of plasticine. Of course, it goes without saying that we despise those foolish, expensive, made-up wooden and pasteboard castles that are sold in shops--playing with them is like playing with somebody else's dead game in a state of rigor mortis. Let me now say a little about toy soldiers and the world to which they belong. Toy soldiers used to be flat, small creatures in my own boyhood, in comparison with the magnificent beings one can buy to-day. There has been an enormous improvement in our national physique in this respect. Now they stand nearly two inches high and look you broadly in the face, and they have the movable arms and alert intelligence of scientifically exercised men. You get five of them mounted or nine afoot in a box for a small price. We three like those of British manufacture best; other makes are of incompatible sizes, and we have a rule that saves much trouble, that all red coats belong to G. P. W., and all other colored coats to F. R. W., all gifts, bequests, and accidents notwithstanding. Also we have sailors; but, since there are no red-coated sailors, blue counts as red.

Then we have "beefeaters," (Footnote; The warders in the Tower of London are called "beefeaters"; the origin of the term is obscure.) Indians, Zulus, for whom there are special rules. We find we can buy lead dogs, cats, lions, tigers, horses, camels, cattle, and elephants of a reasonably corresponding size, and we have also several boxes of railway porters, and some soldiers we bought in Hesse-Darmstadt that we pass off on an unsuspecting home world as policemen. But we want civilians very badly. We found a box of German from an exaggerated curse of militarism, and even the grocer wears epaulettes. This might please Lord Roberts and Mr. Leo Maxse, but it certainly does not please us. I wish, indeed, that we could buy boxes of tradesmen: a blue butcher, a white baker with a loaf of standard bread, a merchant or so; boxes of servants, boxes of street traffic, smart sets, and so forth. We could do with a judge and lawyers, or a box of vestrymen. It is true that we can buy Salvation Army lasses and football players, but we are cold to both of these. We have, of course, boy scouts. With such boxes of civilians we could have much more fun than with the running, marching, swashbuckling soldiery that pervades us. They drive us to reviews; and it is only emperors, kings, and very silly small boys who can take an undying interest in uniforms and reviews.

And lastly, of our railways, let me merely remark here that we have always insisted upon one uniform gauge and everything we buy fits into and develops our existing railway system. Nothing is more indicative of the wambling sort of parent and a coterie of witless, worthless uncles than a heap of railway toys of different gauges and natures in the

children's playroom. And so, having told you of the material we have, let me now tell you of one or two games (out of the innumerable many) that we have played. Of course, in this I have to be a little artificial. Actual games of the kind I am illustrating here have been played by us, many and many a time, with joy and happy invention and no thought of publication. They have gone now, those games, into that vaguely luminous and iridescent into which happiness have tried out again points in world of memories all love-engendering must go. But we our best to set them and recall the good them here.