

Section IV

FUNICULARS, MARBLE TOWERS, CASTLES AND WAR GAMES, BUT VERY LITTLE OF WAR GAMES

I have now given two general types of floor game; but these are only just two samples of delightful and imagination-stirring variations that can be contrived out of the toys I have described. I will now glance rather more shortly at some other very good uses of the floor, the boards, the bricks, the soldiers, and the railway system--that pentagram for exorcising the evil spirit of dulness from the lives of little boys and girls. And first, there is a kind of lark we call Funiculars. There are times when islands cease somehow to dazzle, and towns and cities are too orderly and uneventful and cramped for us, and we want something--something to whizz. Then we say: "Let us make a funicular. Let us make a funicular more than we have ever done. Let us make one to reach up to the table." We dispute whether it isn't a mountain railway we are after. The bare name is refreshing; it takes us back to that unforgettable time when we all went to Wengen, winding in and out and up and up the mountain side--from slush, to such snow and sunlight as we had never seen before. And we make a mountain railway. So far, we have never got it up to the table, but some day we will, Then we will have a station there on the flat, and another station on the floor, with shunts and sidings to each.

The peculiar joy of the mountain railway is that, if it is properly

made, a loaded car--not a toy engine; it is too rough a game for delicate, respectable engines--will career from top to bottom of the system, and go this way and that as your cunningly-arranged switches determine; and afterwards--and this is a wonderful and distinctive discovery--you can send it back by 'lectric.

What is a 'lectric? You may well ask. 'Lectrics were invented almost by accident, by one of us, to whom also the name is due. It came out of an accident to a toy engine; a toy engine that seemed done for and that was yet full of life.

You know, perhaps, what a toy engine is like. It has the general appearance of a railway engine; funnels, buffers, cab, and so forth. All these are very elegant things, no doubt; but they do not make for lightness, they do not facilitate hill-climbing. Now, sometimes an engine gets its clockwork out of order, and then it is over and done for; but sometimes it is merely the outer semblance that is injured--the funnel bent, the body twisted. You remove the things and, behold! you have bare clockwork on wheels, an apparatus of almost malignant energy, soul without body, a kind of metallic rage. This it was that our junior member instantly knew for a 'lectric, and loved from the moment of its stripping.

(I have, by the by, known a very serviceable little road 'lectric made out of a clockwork mouse.)

Well, when we have got chairs and boxes and bricks, and graded our line skilfully and well, easing the descent, and being very careful of the joining at the bends for fear that the descending trucks and cars will jump the rails, we send down first an empty truck, then trucks loaded with bricks and lead soldiers, and then the 'lectric; and then afterwards the sturdy 'lectric shoves up the trucks again to the top, with a kind of savagery of purpose and a whizz that is extremely gratifying to us. We make switches in these lines; we make them have level-crossings, at which collisions are always being just averted; the lines go over and under each other, and in and out of tunnels.

The marble tower, again, is a great building, on which we devise devious slanting ways down which marbles run. I do not know why it is amusing to make a marble run down a long intricate path, and dollop down steps, and come almost but not quite to a stop, and rush out of dark places and across little bridges of card: it is, and we often do it.

Castles are done with bricks and cardboard turrets and a portcullis of card, and drawbridge and moats; they are a mere special sort of city-building, done because we have a box of men in armor. We could reconstruct all sorts of historical periods if the toy soldier makers would provide us with people. But at present, as I have already complained, they make scarcely anything but contemporary fighting men. And of the war game I must either write volumes or nothing. For the present let it be nothing. Some day, perhaps, I will write a great book

about the war game and tell of battles and campaigns and strategy and tactics. But this time I set out merely to tell of the ordinary joys of playing with the floor, and to gird improvingly and usefully at toymakers. So much, I think, I have done. If one parent or one uncle buys the wiselier for me, I shall not altogether have lived in vain.