

A general view of the Wonderful Islands, showing Captain F. R. W.'s ship at anchor

FLOOR GAMES

BY

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AUTHOR OF "TONO-BUNGAY," "THE NEW MACHIAVELLI,"
ETC., ETC.

*With Photographs by the Author and Marginal
Drawings by J. R. Sinclair*



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REMARK: GET LONG BEACH

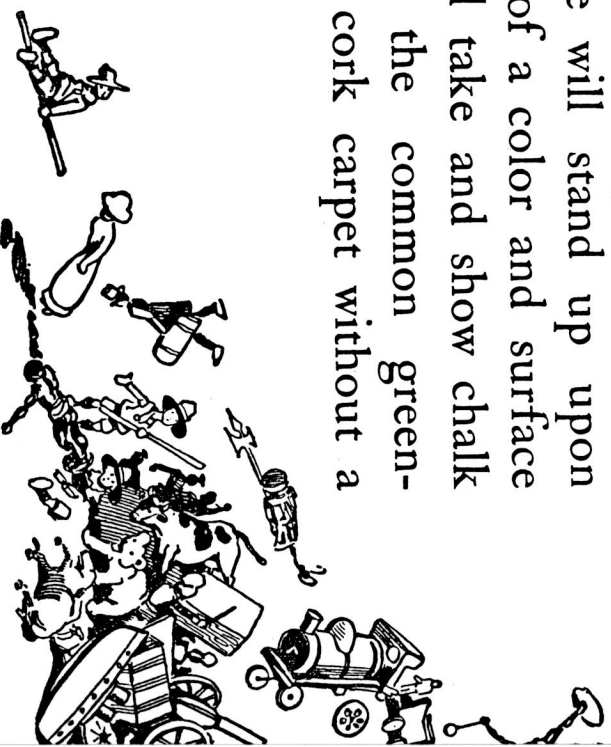
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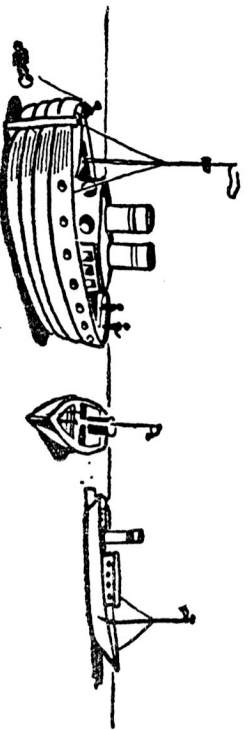
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THE TOYS TO HAVE

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 to-morrow 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 subspecies 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 combi-

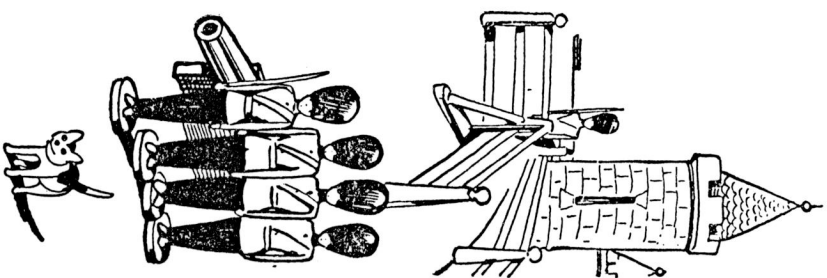


nations, belong to four main groups. We have (1) SOLDIERS, and with these I class sailors, railway porters, civilians, and the lower animals generally, such as I will presently describe in greater detail; (2) BRICKS; (3) BOARDS AND PLANKS; and (4) a lot of CLOCKWORK RAILWAY ROLLING-STOCK AND RAILS. Also 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



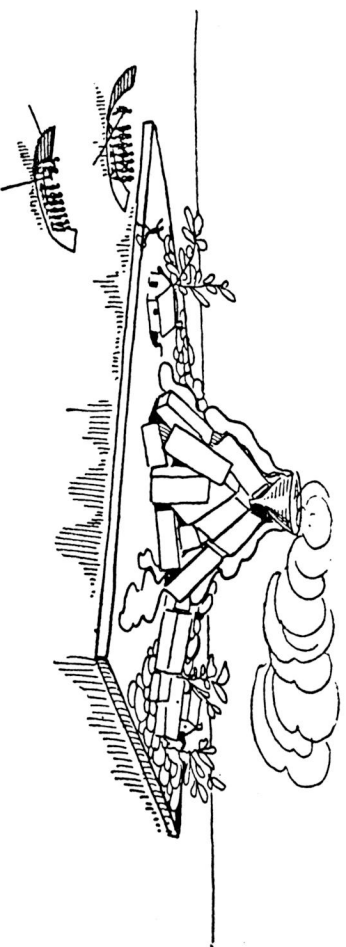
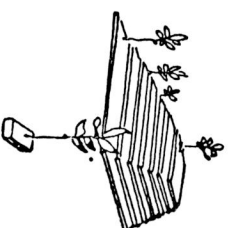
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them. The toyshops, we found, did not keep anything of the kind we wanted, and our boards, which we had to get made by a carpenter, are the basis of half the games we play. The planks and boards we have are of various sizes. We began with three of 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



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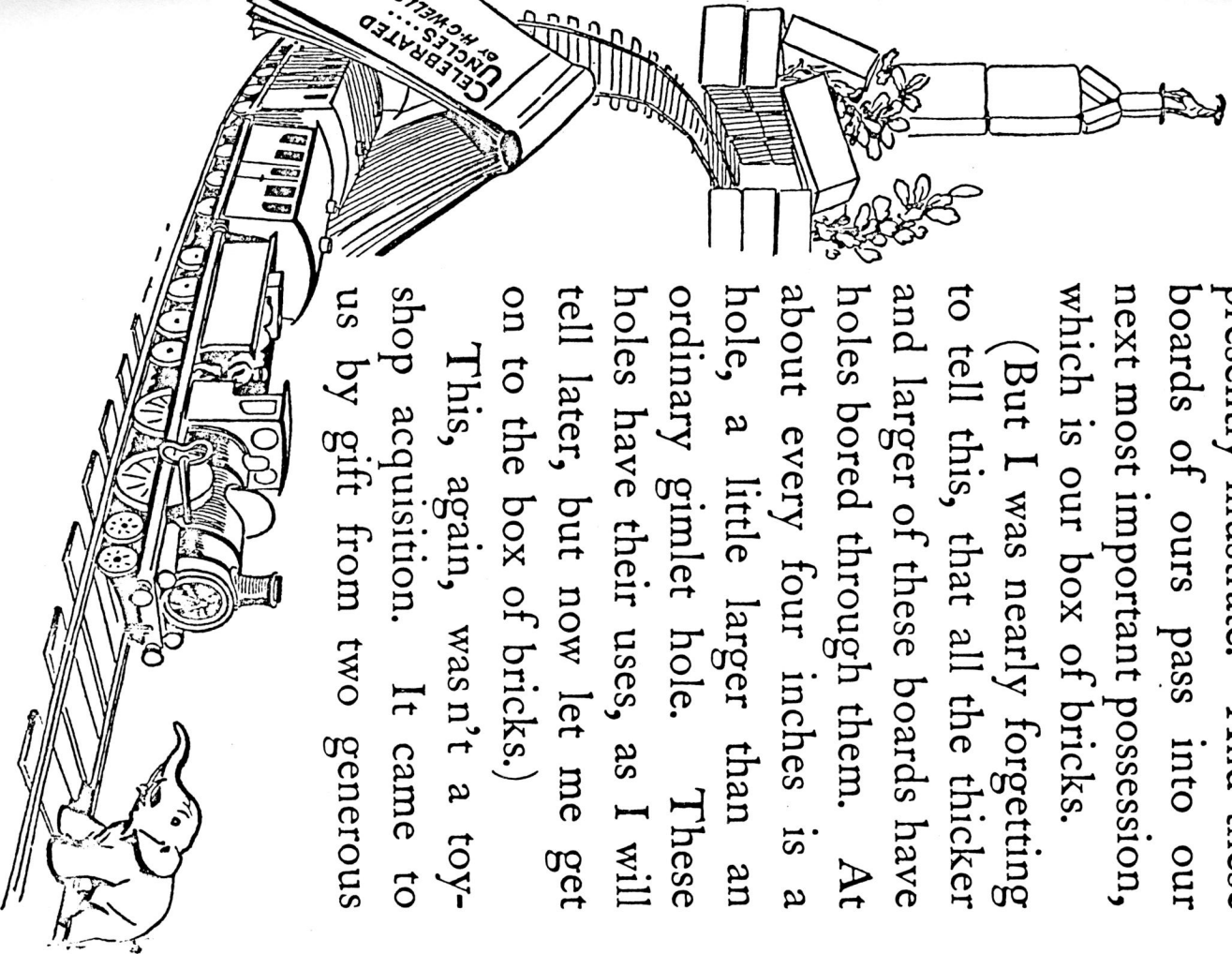
and a half inch for the smaller; and the best sizes are a yard square, thirty inches square, two feet, and eighteen inches square — one or two of each, and a greater number of smaller ones, 18×9 , 9×9 , and $9 \times 4\frac{1}{2}$. With the larger ones we make islands and archipelagos on our floor while 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



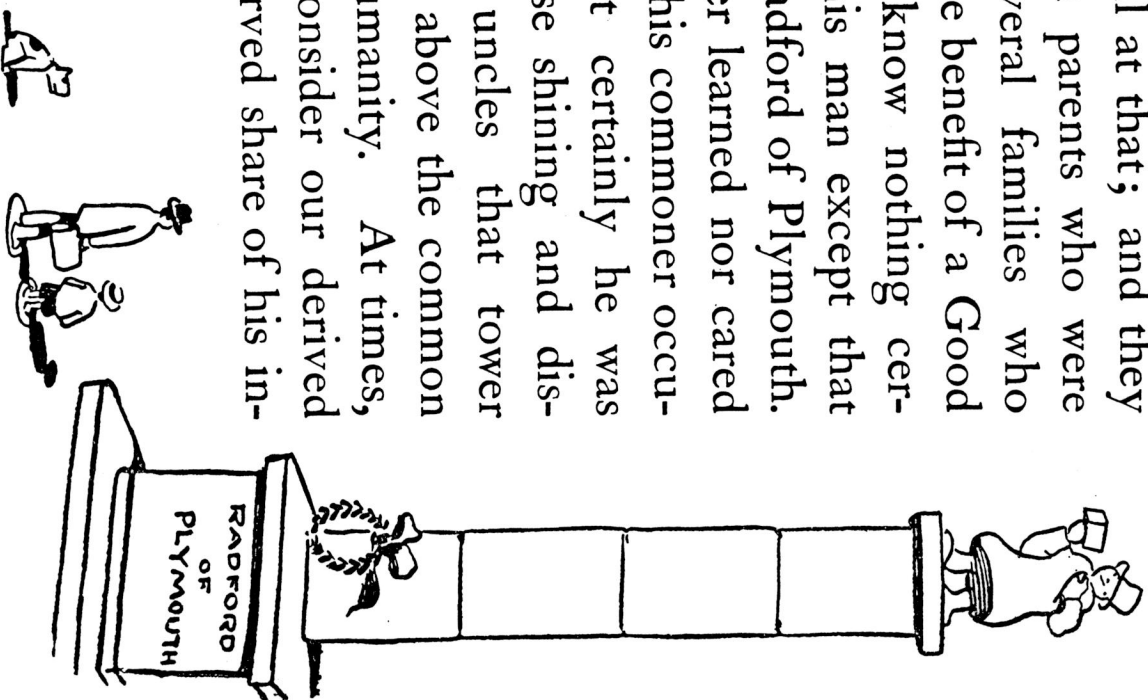
presently illustrate. And these boards of ours pass into our next most important possession, which is our box of bricks.

(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.)

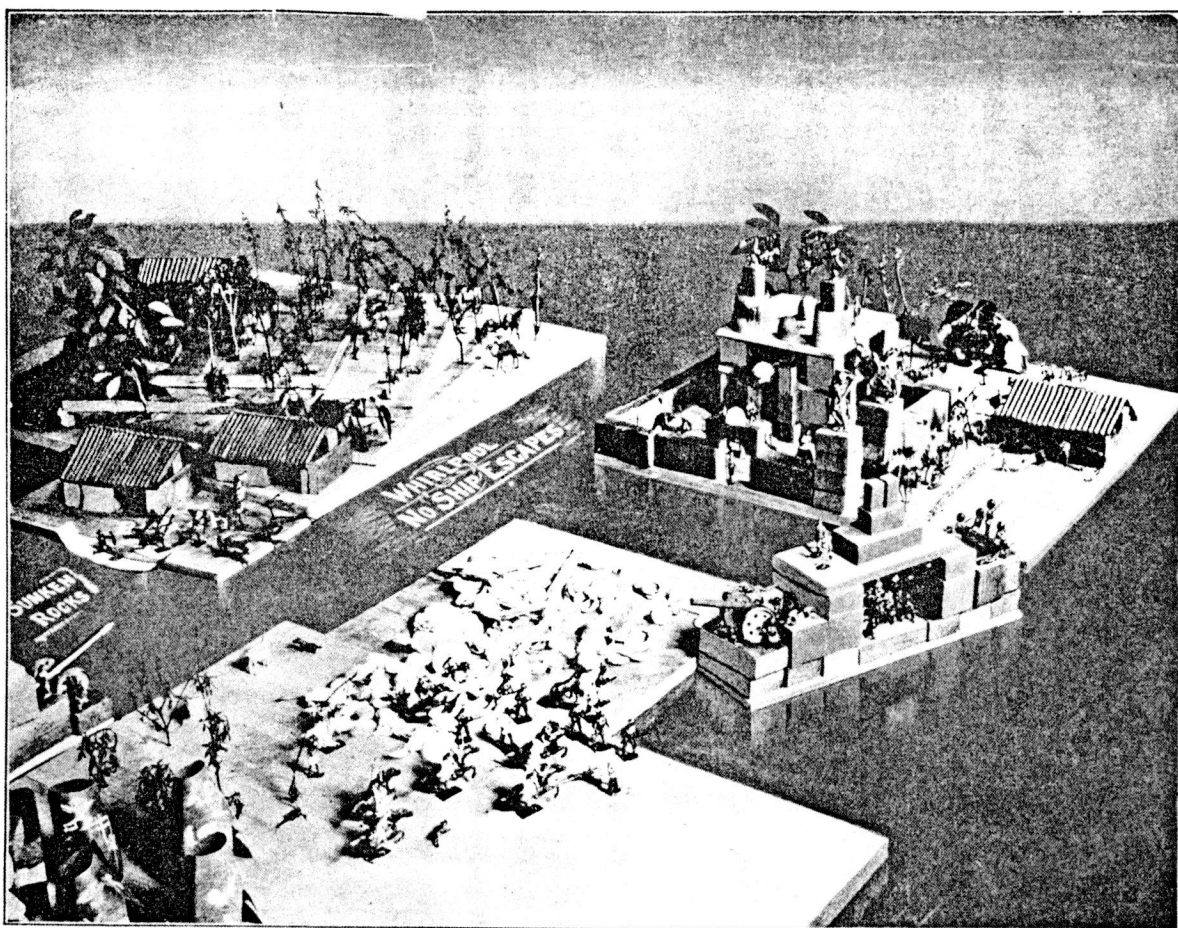
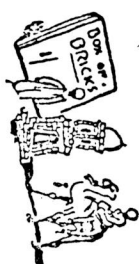
This, again, wasn't a toy-shop acquisition. It came to us by gift from two generous



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 in-

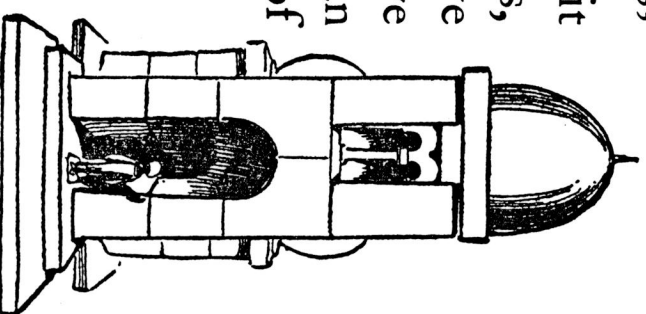


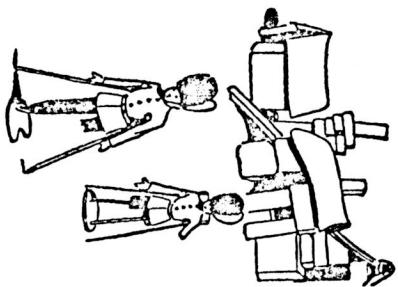
heritance and count the joys it gives us, we have projected half in jest and half in earnest the putting together of a little exemplary book upon the subject of such exceptional men: *Celebrated Uncles*, it should be called; and it should stir up all who read it to some striving at least towards the 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



A view showing the Island of the Temple and the invasion of the Indians' territory by Captain G. P. W.

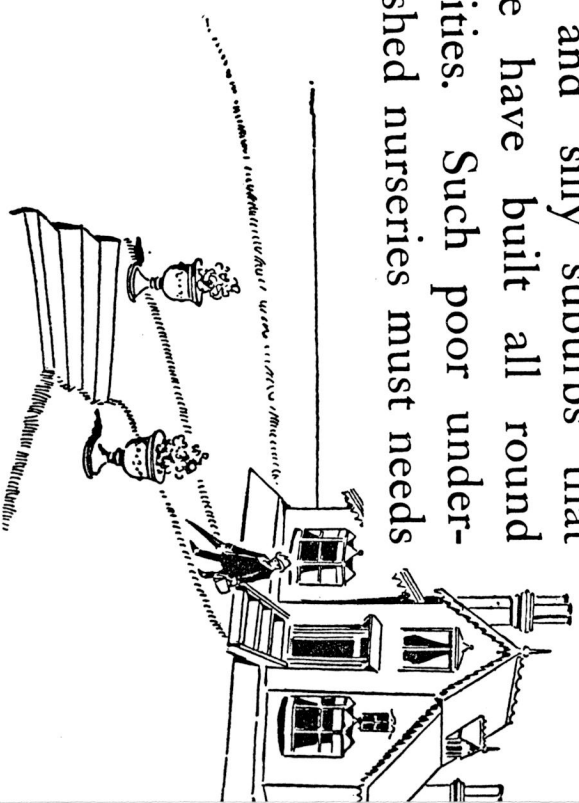
which an appreciative circle of brothers and sisters had blessed him. There are whole bricks $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches \times $2\frac{1}{4}$ \times $1\frac{1}{8}$; there are half bricks $2\frac{1}{4}$ \times $2\frac{1}{4}$ \times $1\frac{1}{8}$; and there are quarters—called by those previous owners (who 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 our 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.





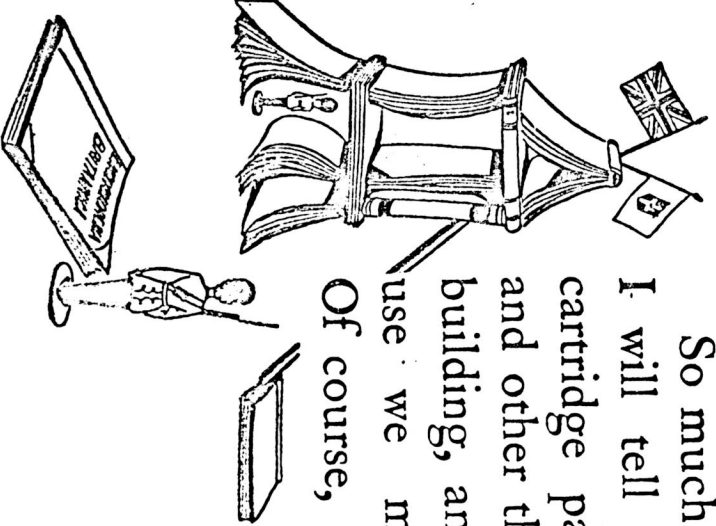
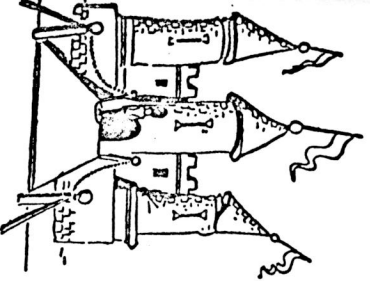
How utterly we despise the silly little bricks of the toyshops! They are too small to make a decent home for even the poorest lead soldiers, even if there were hundreds of them, and there are never enough, never nearly enough; even if you take one at a time and lay it down and say, "This is a house," 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

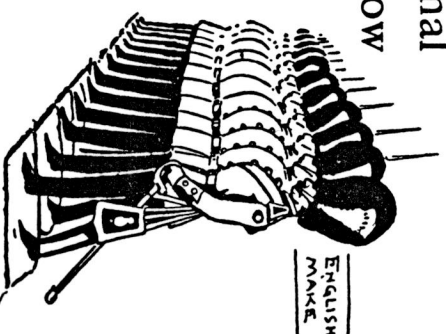
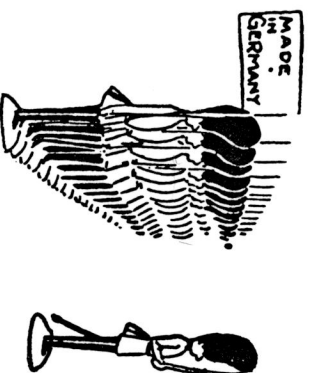


fall back upon the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, and even that is becoming flexible on India paper! But our box of bricks almost satisfies. With our box of bricks we can scheme and build, all three of us, for the best part of the hour, and still have more bricks in the box.

So much now for the bricks. I will tell later how we use cartridge paper and cardboard and other things to help in our building, and of the decorative use we make of plasticine. Of course, it goes without say-



ing 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





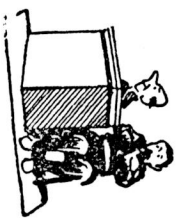
they stand nearly two inches high and look you broadly in the face, and they have the movable arms and alert intelligence of scientifically exercised men. You get five of them mounted or nine afoot in a box for a small price. We three like those of British manufacture best; other makes are of incompatible 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.

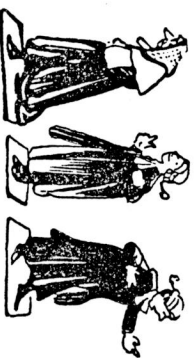
Then we have "beefeaters,"¹ Indians, Zulus, for whom there are special rules. We find we can buy lead dogs, cats, lions, tigers, horses, camels, cattle, and elephants of a reasonably corresponding size, and we have also several boxes of railway porters, and some soldiers we bought in Hesse-Darmstadt that we pass off on an unsuspecting home world as policemen. But we want civilians very badly. We found a box of German

¹ The warders in the Tower of London are called "beefeaters"; the origin of the term is obscure.

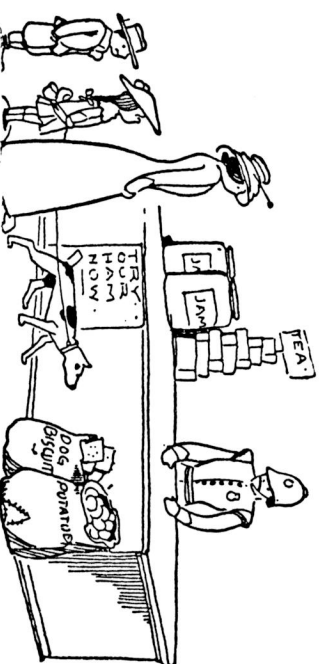


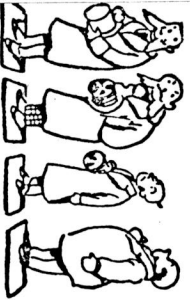
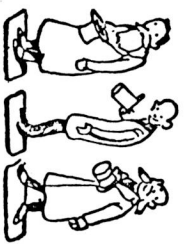


civilians once in a shop, the right size but rather heavy, and running to nearly five cents apiece (which is too dear), gentlemen in tweed suits carrying bags, a top-hatted gentleman, ladies in gray and white, two children, and a dog, and so on, but we have never been able to find any more. They do not seem to be made at all — will toy manufacturers please note? I write now as if I were Consul-General in Toyland, noting new opportunities for trade. Consequent upon this dearth, our little world suffers



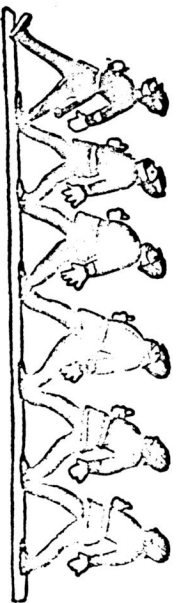
from an exaggerated curse of militarism, and even the grocer wears epaulettes. This might please Lord Roberts and Mr. Leo Maxse, but it certainly does not please us. I wish, indeed, that we could buy boxes of tradesmen: a blue butcher, a white baker with a loaf of standard bread, a merchant or so; boxes 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





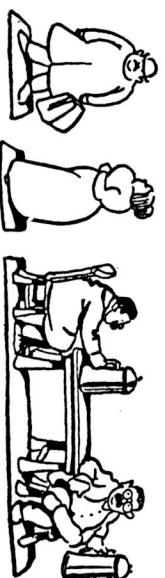
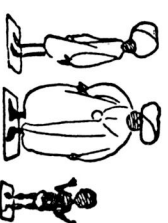
cold to both of these. We have, of course, boy scouts. With such boxes of civilians we could have much more fun than with the running, marching, swashbuckling soldiery that pervades us. They drive us to reviews; and it is only emperors, kings, and very silly small boys who can take an undying interest 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



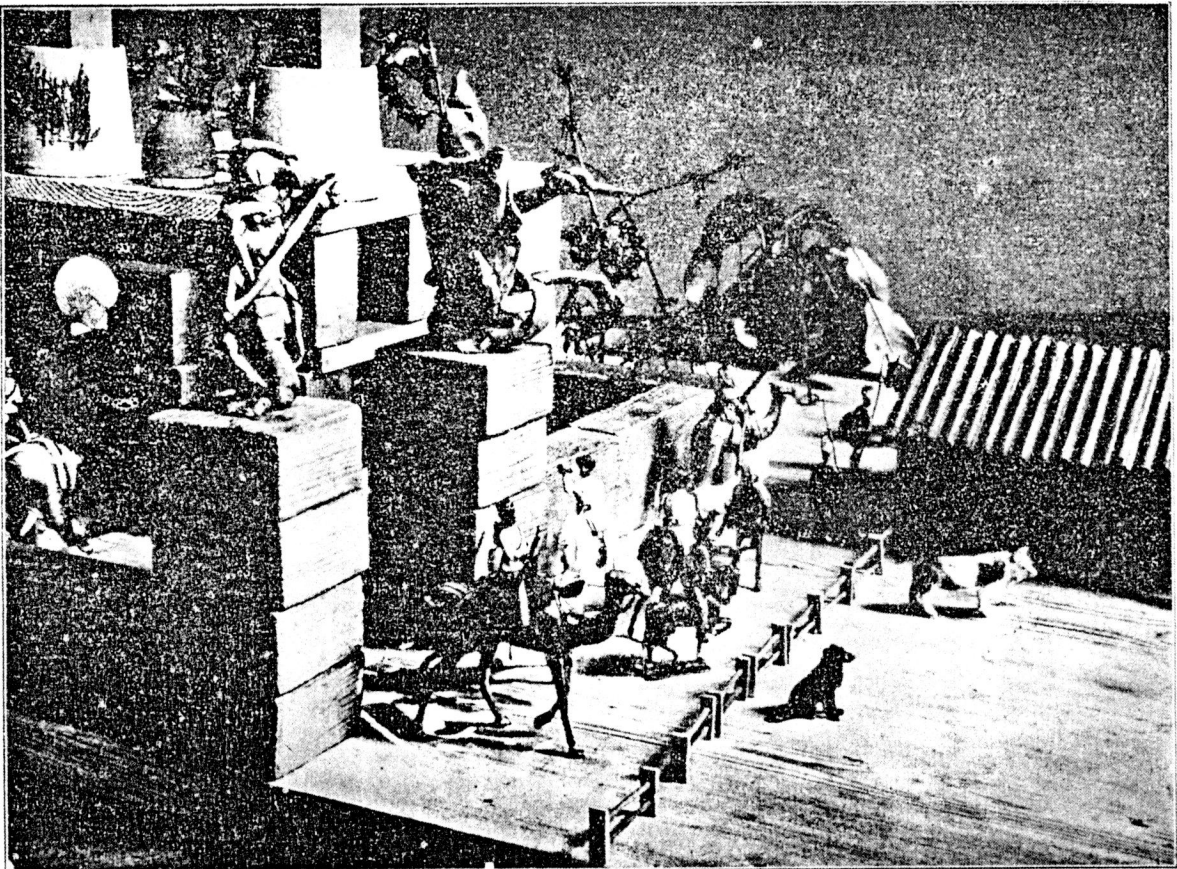
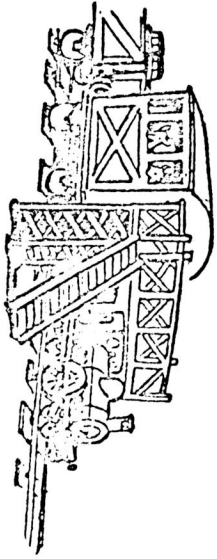
develops our existing railway system. Nothing is more indicative of the wambling sort of parent and a coterie of witless, worthless uncles than a heap of railway toys of different gauges and natures in the children's playroom.

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,



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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 world of memories into which all love-engendering happiness must go. But we have tried our best to set them out again and recall the good points in them here.



A close view of the Temple, whose portals are guarded by grotesque plasticine monsters

THE GAME OF THE WONDERFUL ISLANDS

IN this game the floor is the sea. Half—rather the larger half because of some instinctive right of primogeniture—is assigned to the elder of my two sons (he is, as it were, its Olympian), and the other half goes to his brother. We distribute our boards about the sea in an archipelagic manner. We then dress our islands, objecting strongly to too close a scru-



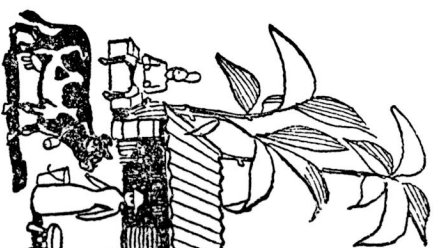
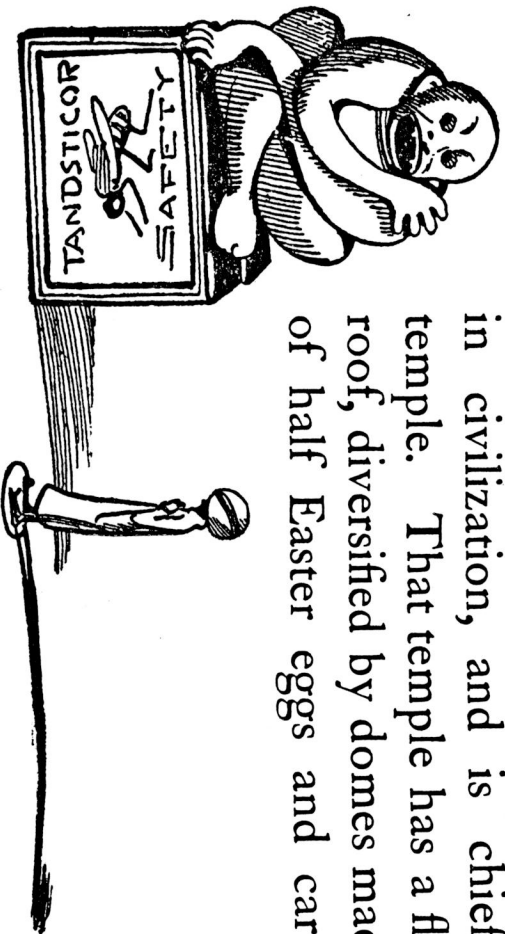
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tiny of our proceedings until we have done. Here, in the illustration, is such an archipelago ready for its explorers, or rather on the verge of exploration. There are altogether four islands, two to the reader's right and two to the left, and the nearer ones are the more northerly; it is as many as we could get into the camera. The northern island to the right is most advanced in civilization, and is chiefly temple. That temple has a flat roof, diversified by domes made of half Easter eggs and card-

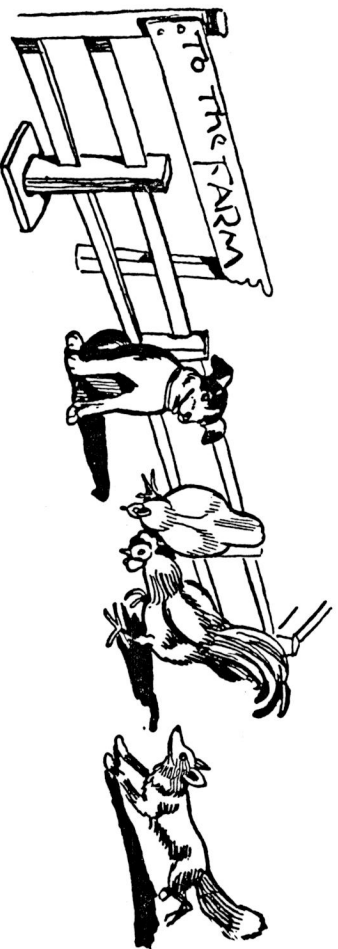
THE WONDERFUL ISLANDS 35

board cones. These are surmounted by decorative work of a flamboyant character in plasticine, designed by G. P. W. An oriental population crowds the courtyard and pours out upon the roadway. Note the grotesque plasticine monsters who guard the portals, also by G. P. W., who had a free hand with the architecture of this remarkable specimen of eastern religiosity. They are nothing, you may be sure, to the gigantic idols inside, out of the reach of the sacrilegious camera. To the right is a tropical thatched



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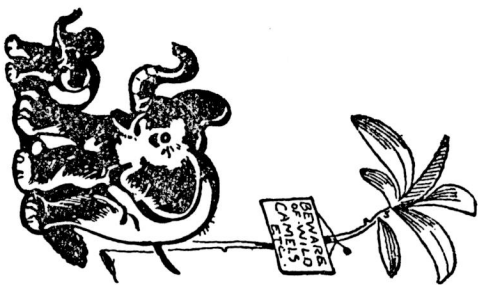
hut. The thatched roof is really that nice ribbed paper that comes round bottles—a priceless boon to these games. All that comes into the house is saved for us. The owner of the hut lounges outside the door. He is a dismounted cavalry-corps man, and he owns one cow. His fence, I may note, belonged to a little wooden farm we bought in Switzerland. Its human inhabitants are scattered; its beasts follow a precarious living as wild guinea-pigs on the islands to the south.



THE WONDERFUL ISLANDS 37

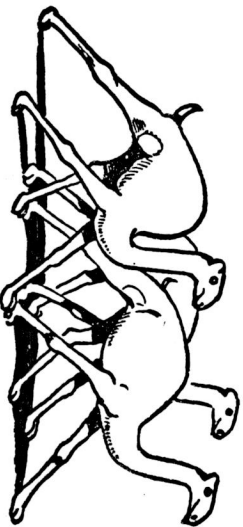
Your attention is particularly directed to the trees about and behind the temple, which thicken to a forest on the further island to the right. These trees we make of twigs taken from trees and bushes in the garden, and stuck into holes in our boards. Formerly we lived in a house with a little wood close by, and our forests were wonderful. Now we are restricted to our garden, and we could get nothing for this set out but jasmine and pear. Both have wilted a little, and are not nearly such spirited





trees as you can make out of fir trees, for instance. It is for these woods chiefly that we have our planks perforated with little holes. No tin trees can ever be so plausible and various and jolly as these. With a good garden to draw upon one can make terrific sombre woods, and then lie down and look through them at lonely horsemen or wandering beasts.

That further island on the right is a less settled country than the island of the temple. Camels, you note, run wild there; there is a sort of dwarf

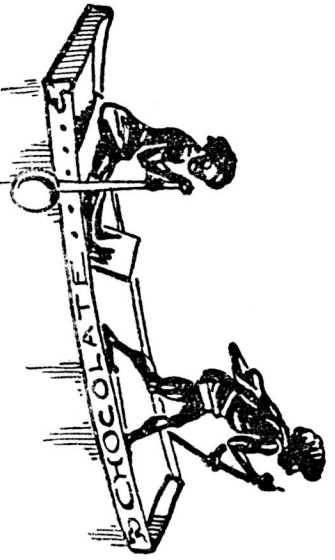


elephant, similar to the now extinct kind of which one finds skeletons in Malta, pigs, a red parrot, and other such creatures, of lead and wood. The pear-trees are fine. It is those which have attracted white settlers (I suppose they are), whose thatched huts are to be seen both upon the beach and inland. By the huts on the beach lie a number of pear-tree logs; but a raid of negroid savages from the adjacent island to the left is in progress, and the only settler clearly visible is the man in a rifleman's uni-

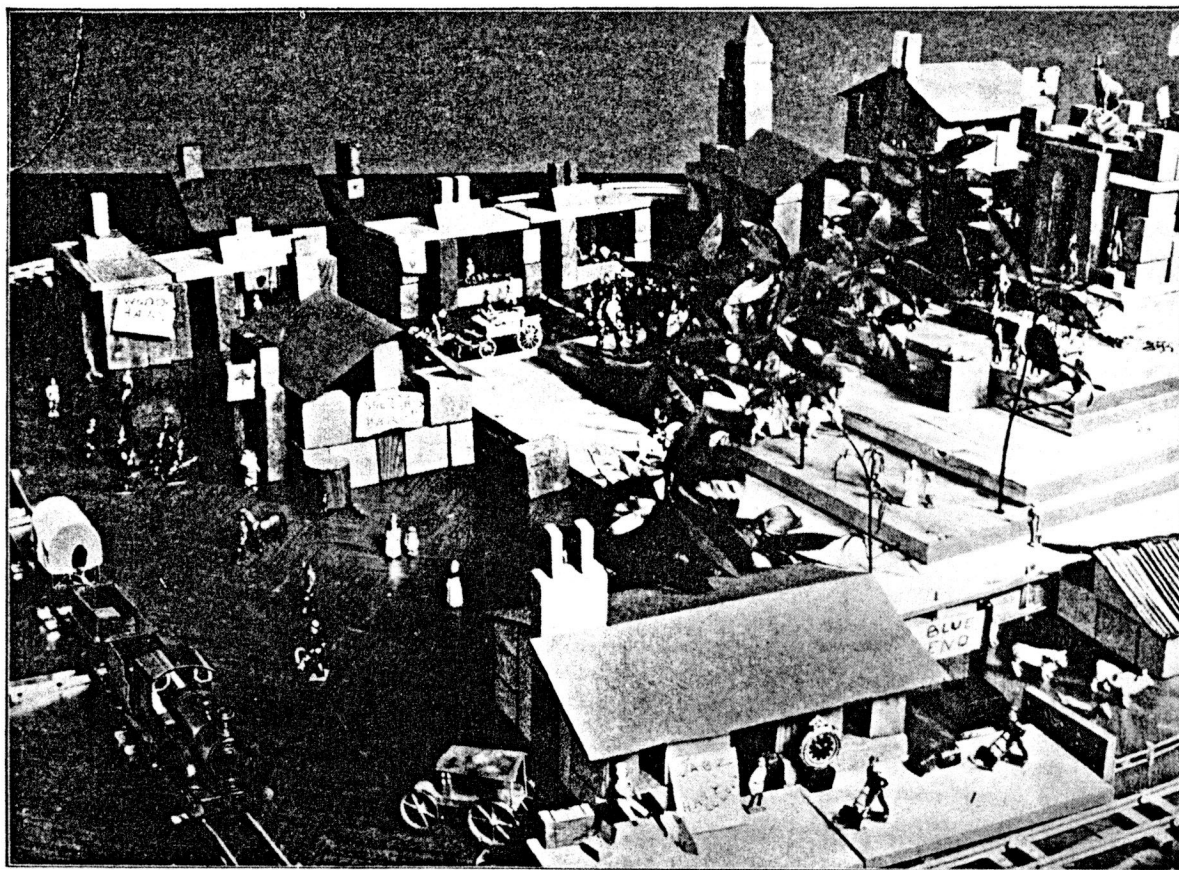


form running inland for help. Beyond, peeping out among the trees, are the supports he seeks.

These same negroid savages are as bold as they are ferocious. They cross arms of the sea upon their rude canoes, made simply of a strip of cardboard. Their own island, the one to the south-left, is a rocky wilderness containing caves. Their chief food is the wild-goat, but in pursuit of these creatures you will also sometimes find the brown bear, who sits — he is small but perceptible to the



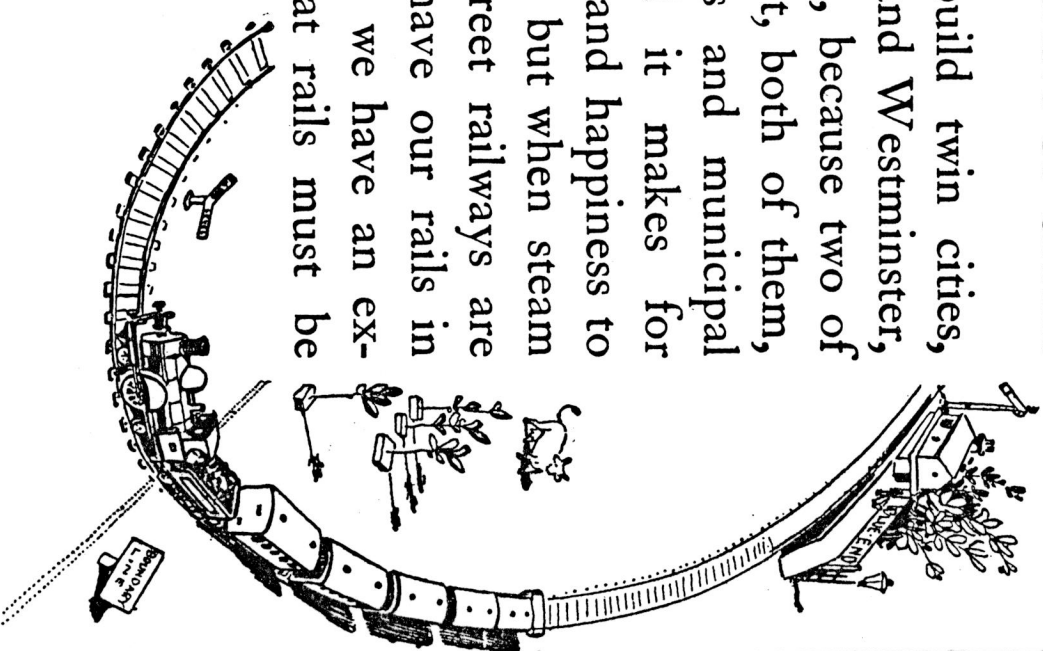
A view showing the raid of the Negroid savages upon the white settlers of Pear Tree Island



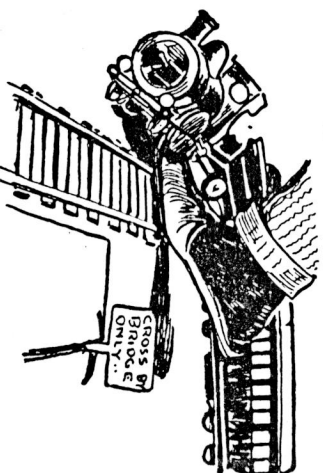
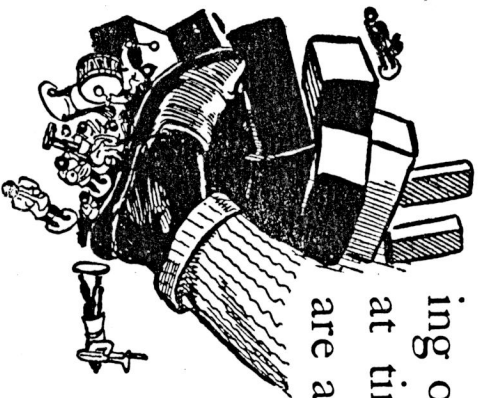
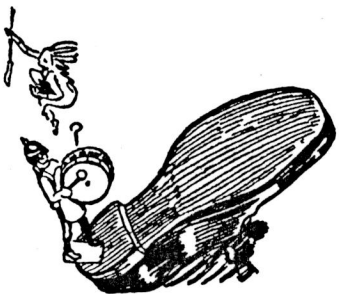
A general view of Chamois City, showing the Cherry Tree Inn and the shopping quarter

OF THE BUILDING OF CITIES

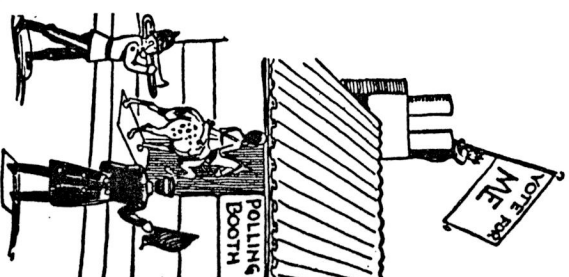
WE always build twin cities, like London and Westminster, or Buda-Pesth, because two of us always want, both of them, to be mayors and municipal councils, and it makes for local freedom and happiness to arrange it so; but when steam railways or street railways are involved we have our rails in common, and we have an excellent law that rails must be

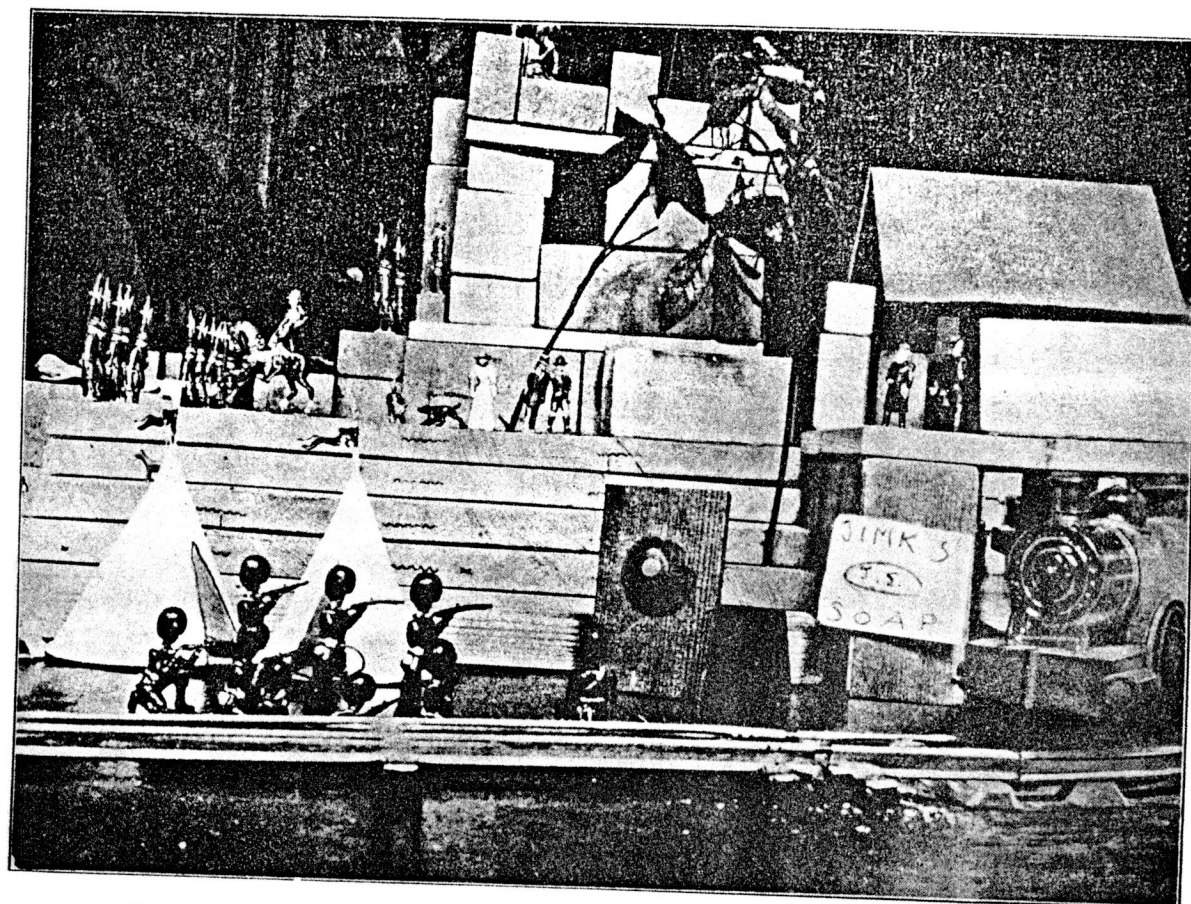


laid down and switches kept open in such a manner that anyone feeling so disposed may send a through train from their own station back to their own station again without needless negotiation or the personal invasion of anybody else's administrative area. It is an undesirable thing to have other people bulging over one's houses, standing in one's open spaces, and, in extreme cases, knocking down and even treading on one's citizens. It leads at times to explanations that are afterwards regretted.



We always have twin cities, or at the utmost stage of coalescence a city with two wards, Red End and Blue End; we mark the boundaries very carefully, and our citizens have so much local patriotism (Mr. Chesterton will learn with pleasure) that they stray but rarely over that thin little streak of white that bounds their municipal allegiance. Sometimes we have an election for mayor; it is like a census but very abusive, and Red always wins. Only citizens with two legs and at least one arm and capable of

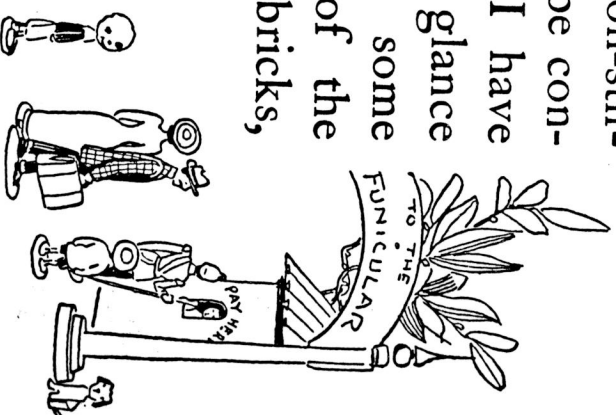




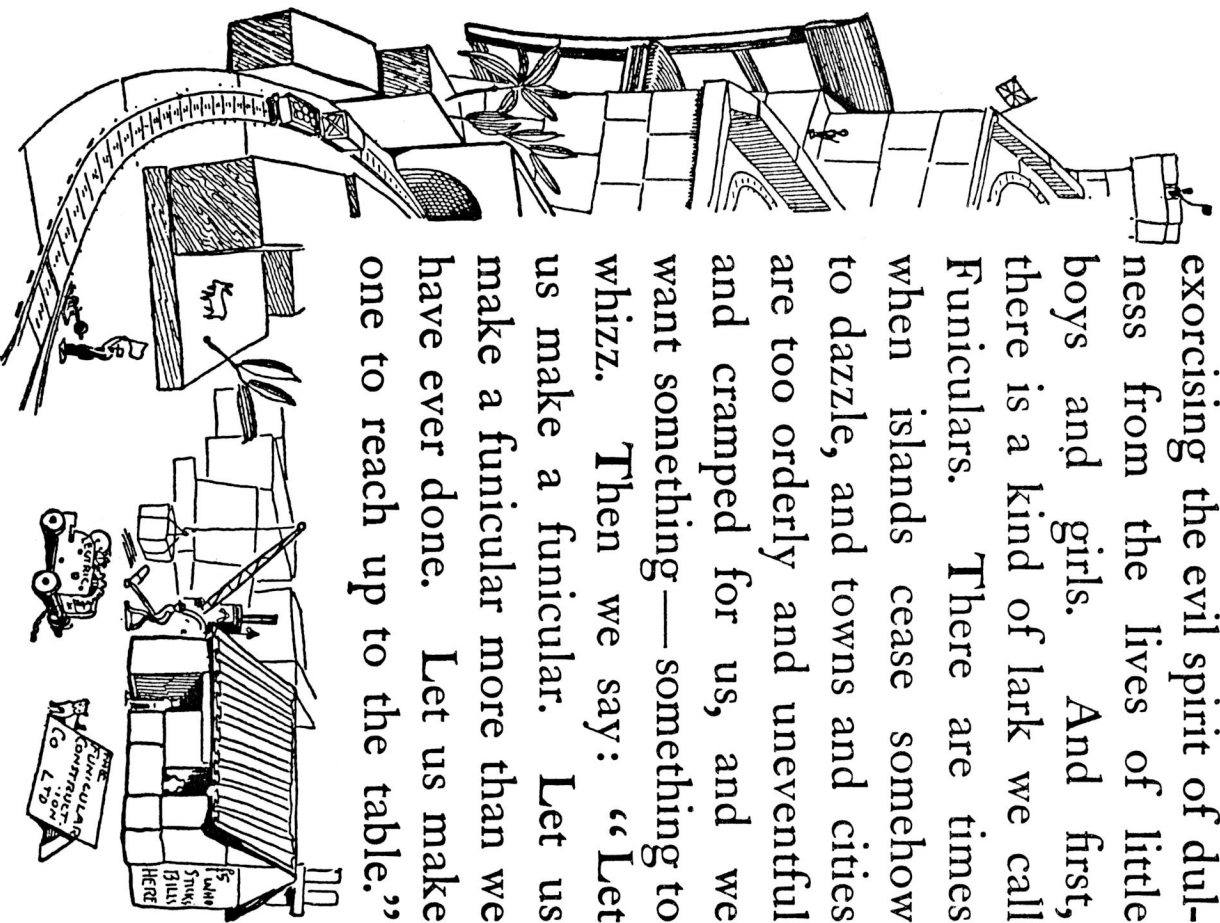
The School of Musketry. On the terrace the town guard parades in honor of the two mayors

FUNICULARS, MARBLE TOW-
ERS, CASTLES AND WAR
GAMES, BUT VERY LITTLE
OF WAR GAMES

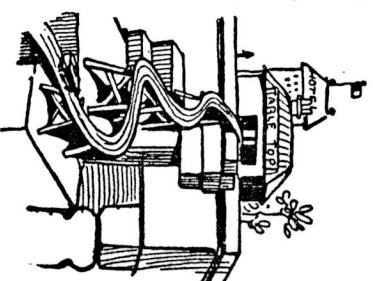
I HAVE now given two general types of floor game; but these are only just two samples of delightful and imagination-stirring variations that can be contrived out of the toys I have described. I will now glance rather more shortly at some other very good uses of the floor, the boards, the bricks,



the soldiers, and the railway system—that pentagram for exorcising the evil spirit of dullness 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.”

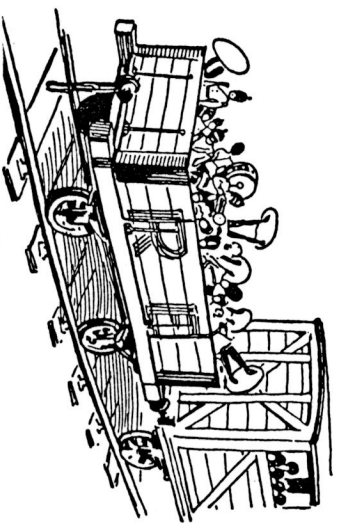


We dispute whether it isn't a mountain railway we are after. The bare name is refreshing; it takes us back to that unforgettable time when we all went to Wengen, winding in and out and up and up the mountain side—from slush, to such snow and sunlight as we had never seen before. And we make a mountain 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.



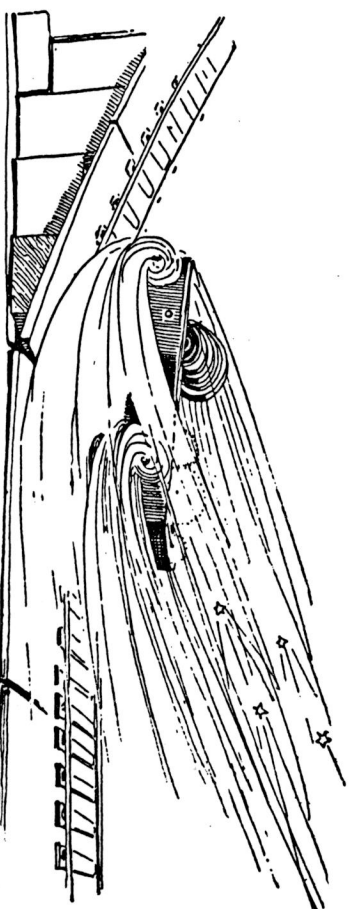
The peculiar joy of the mountain railway is that, if it is properly made, a loaded car—not a toy engine; it is too rough a game for delicate, respectable engines—will career from top to bottom of the system, and go this way and that as your cunningly-arranged switches determine; and afterwards—and this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

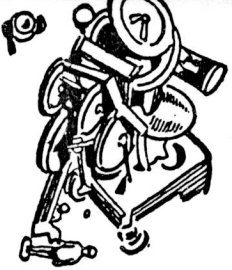
What is a 'lectric? You may well ask. 'LECTrics were invented almost by accident, by one of us, to whom also the



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





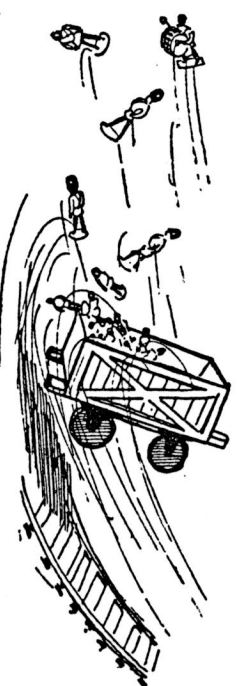
it is merely the outer semblance that is injured—the funnel bent, the body twisted. You remove the things and, behold! you have bare clockwork on wheels, an apparatus of almost malignant energy, soul without body, a kind of metallic rage. This it was that our junior member instantly knew for a 'lectric, 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



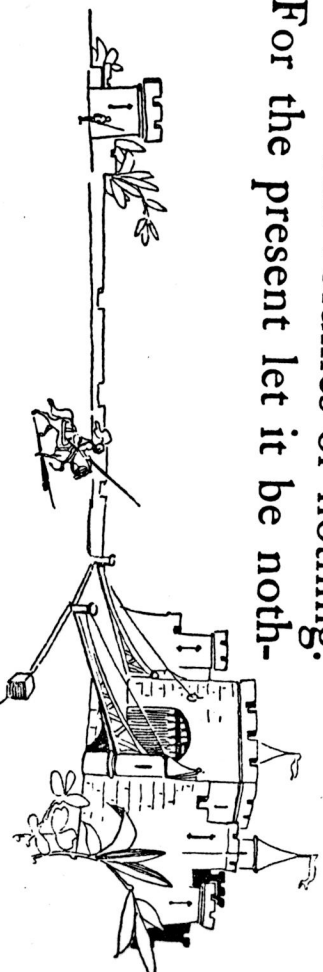


make them have level-crossings, at which collisions are always being just averted; the lines go over and under each other, and in and out of tunnels. . . .

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 draw-bridge 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 noth-



ing. 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.

