

**OCCUPATION  
THERAPY: A MANUAL  
FOR NURSES**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649660278

Occupation Therapy: A Manual for Nurses by William Rush Dunton

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**WILLIAM RUSH DUNTON**

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# OCCUPATION THERAPY

A MANUAL FOR NURSES

BY

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*"Occupation is the very life  
of life."—Harold Bell Wright*

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W. B. SAUNDERS COMPANY

1918

## CONTENTS

	PAGE
HISTORICAL .....	11
HOBBIES AND THEIR VALUE .....	21
PSYCHOLOGY OF OCCUPATION .....	24
MECHANISM OF RECOVERY BY OCCUPATION .....	27
THE NURSE IN THE HOSPITAL .....	34
PUZZLES, CATCHES, ETC. ....	38
READING .....	42
PHYSICAL EXERCISES .....	51
CARD GAMES .....	55
STRING WORK .....	59
WEAVING .....	101
PAPER WORK .....	110
WOOD WORK .....	119
PICTURE PUZZLES .....	128
BASKETRY .....	131
CHAIR CANING .....	154
BOOKBINDING .....	156
COLLECTING .....	166
GARDENING .....	174
NATURE STUDY .....	178
STENCILING AND BLOCK PRINTING .....	179
PLASTIC WORK .....	185
DRAWING AND PAINTING .....	192
METAL WORK .....	200
PYROGRAPHY .....	210
NEEDLEWORK .....	211
PHOTOGRAPHY .....	222
MUSIC .....	225
CONCLUSION .....	226
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	229
INDEX .....	237



# Occupation Therapy

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## HISTORICAL.

While considerable has been written upon the history of occupation as a therapeutic measure in the care of mental cases, it is impossible to give credit to any physician as having been the first to apply it, or to name the form of occupation so used. Probably its beginning was so gradual, and yet so general, that it is impossible to give any one person credit as discoverer, or dignify any form of occupation as having been first used to restore a mind diseased. Possibly the credit belongs to a number of patients, each one of whom found a tranquillizing influence in work casually undertaken and so continued it in the form originally begun, or in other ways. The physician, if he was intelligent, noted the cause of the improvement which ensued and applied the remedy to other cases. Probably most psychiatrists past middle age have had such experience. Occasionally we have had the big men of psychiatry writing of their experiences and of the value of occupation or work as a therapeutic measure. Notable instances



are Isaac Ray<sup>1</sup> and Lauder Lindsay,<sup>2</sup> but too often such opinions have been buried or dismissed with few words in annual reports where they are inaccessible after a few years.

This is proved by the fact that one of the papers by Dr. Ray originally appeared in his report to the Corporation of Butler Hospital for 1865, and was reprinted in the *Journal of Insanity*. That other men in other hospitals were alive to the importance of occupation is shown by the following note for which I am indebted to Miss Edith Kathleen Jones, Librarian at McLean Hospital: The importance of various forms of diversion, and especially of manual occupation, has been recognized from its (McLean Hospital) very beginning.

In his report for 1822 Dr. Wyman writes, "the amusements provided in the establishment for lunatics, as draughts, chess, backgammon, nine-pins, swinging, sawing wood, gardening, reading, writing, music, etc., divert the attention from unpleasant subjects of thought and afford exercise both of body and mind (and) have a powerful effect in tranquillizing the mind, breaking up wrong associations of ideas and inducing correct habits of thinking as well as acting."

Another Superintendent, Dr. Bell, in 1839, says that

<sup>1</sup> Ray, I. Labor in Principal Hospitals for Insane in Great Britain, France and Germany. *Am. Jour. Ins.*, 1846, II, p. 359. Ray, I. The Labor Question and Hospitals for Incurables. *American Journal of Insanity*, 1866, XXII, p. 439.

<sup>2</sup> Lindsay, W. Lauder. Reprint from the Report of James Murray's Royal Asylum, Perth, Scotland, for 1860-1. *Md. Psychiatric Quarterly*, III, No. 1, July, 1913, p. 10.

"the experiment of mechanical labour was here first introduced, and the safety, expediency and immense utility of putting tools into the hands of the patients entirely and satisfactorily decided." And again, speaking of occupation as a means of cure, "there is probably no other institution in the world where the value of this has been more fully tested than here." Although later, owing to the class of patients received at McLean, mechanical and agricultural labor was abandoned for "some form of busy idleness," yet each superintendent has done his share in developing this method of treatment. For the men, since 1834 there has been a carpenter's shop in which woodcarving and cabinet making have been taught; while the women have had lessons in drawing and painting and have done various forms of fancy-work.

In 1836, according to the report for that year, 50 patients worked in the carpenter's shop 6 hours a day and made 7236 candle boxes which were sold for \$907.06. Later the boxes were not sold, though they continued to be made. In 1836, "100 cords of wood were carted by patients from wharf to house, and 200 cords were sawed, split and piled."

In 1910 two rooms in the women's gymnasium were prepared for industrial occupation of a somewhat different type; a teacher of handicrafts was engaged, and instruction is now given daily in basketry, leather-work, lace-making and weaving.

There are now twelve hand looms. In 1913-14 an addition was built on to the women's gymnasium, pro-

viding space for these looms. It is well lighted by windows and skylight. Under it is the room used for pottery making, and a kiln has been set up in a disused kitchen. An appropriation has just been made for a similiar enlargement of the men's gymnasium, in order to provide additional occupations for them. The women are now taught weaving, basketry (reed and raffia), leather-work (tooling, coloring, making), pottery, modelling, casting, knitting, "rake" knitting, crocheting, embroidery, lace-making (pillow and crochet), sewing, bead work, tatting, stencilling, sawing picture puzzles, painting (portrait, still life, coloring pictures, coloring cards for holidays).

In the very interesting Descriptive Account of the Friends' Asylum for the Insane, 1813-1913, Dr. Robert H. Chase says, "No feature in the treatment of the insane is more highly valued than occupation, systematically applied and judiciously carried out. Work is a law of our nature which demands expression in the insane no less than in the sane. To understand this one has only to reflect upon the depressing effect of inaction, then turn to the satisfaction and strength that result from the agreeable use of one's mental and physical powers. It may be seen that from the beginning Friends' Asylum made intelligent and continuous effort to give the patients the benefit that comes from employment and rational diversion." In the Chronology which is in the same volume are found many events bearing upon the occupation and diversion of patients, all showing that the hospital authorities were imbued with the