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THE FUNCTION OF THE FESTIVAL IN SCHOOL LIFE.

THE school festival—if we may use the term loosely—has a recognized place in our public schools. Washington's and Lincoln's birthdays, Arbor Day, Memorial Day, Thanksgiving, are widely commemorated—sometimes with gleams of festal cheer and ceremony, though, as a rule, rather soberly and primly, and often grudgingly by the teachers upon whom the burden of preparation falls. Is the labor, and the disturbance of regular school work which it often involves, worth while? It may be a politic expenditure of energy to provide occasional entertainments for the gaiety of the community; it may please the admiring parent or keep the surly taxpayer in good humor; but what of the cost in time and effort to the school? Are the returns adequate?

The answers to these questions will depend, first of all, upon the value we attach to festivals as institutions which lend desirable charm and significance to life; and, secondly, upon our estimate of their educational value in the hands of children. This is no fitting occasion to argue the first point fully. The writer's conviction is that the valuable part which the festival has played in the education of the race, it may still continue to play; and that, if it is worth while attempting to revive the arts and crafts, as so many are now stubbornly laboring to do, it is still more important to revive the great social and co-operative institution which has in the past quickened and developed these popular arts and crafts, as the festival undoubtedly has done. And surely it is worth while bringing back, through the Maypole, the Harvest Home and the Yule mumming, that childlike overflow of joy in the ceremony and ritual which greeted the days of great memory or the season's turning—seedtime and harvest, summer and winter—and lavished upon them such a wealth of happy inventiveness and creative activity.

If these old rites and ceremonies, and the quaint and lovely lore associated with them—the old round and carol, the old dance and rime, legend and story—are to be revived, it is mainly

through the school that it must be done. The school is more and more becoming the repository of the fading culture of the past as an active agency in the present. This is because its task is that of leading the child up through the salient phases of development by which the race has reached its present outlook and power. Hitherto the emphasis in this task has fallen chiefly on the industrial, that is, the manual and scientific phases of human development; although the singing games, the nursery rhymes, the folklore and customs of childhood, are beginning to find a place in the primary school. On the whole, however, the artistic, and above all the literary heritage has yet to be gleaned and utilized. It is in the endeavor to lay hold upon the child as an artistic and literary personage, by repeating in his education the leading phases in the æsthetic and literary development of man, that the festival will receive its due recognition, and play the very important part which it is fitted to play in stimulating the historic imagination, the human sympathies, and the spontaneous creative energies of the child.

We plead, then, for the incorporation of the festival in the regular activities of the school, first of all on the general ground that it is important to keep alive in the child those feelings of joy and gratitude, of admiration and awe, of which the festival has at all times been the expression. It is important that the child should have an imaginative sense of the great rhythms of life and the mighty presence and potencies of Earth the mother, Earth the sustainer of his life, Earth the august home of his labors. We should preserve in him, if we can, something of the child-man's responsive glow in the presence of the changes of nature—Christmas and New Year, with their returning light and length of days; Candlemas, the old mid-winter feast; Easter, with its fresh glow of life in grass and tree; May Day, with its tribute to Flora; Thanksgiving and Harvest Home, with their grateful load of winter store. It is more important still that the child should recall continually on birthdays and death-days the great heroes and martyrs and sages to whom the race owes its priceless gifts of liberty and humanity; its inventors and voyagers and toilers, its singers and artists; as well as the great historical anni-

versaries and centennials which mark turning-points in man's advance along the centuries. It is by these commemorations as by nothing else that we can feed in the young those emotions of admiration, reverence, and love which are the fundamental forces in education as in life. It is thus that we can develop—unconsciously, of course—that underlying consciousness of kind, of human solidarity, of co-operative unity, which may offset the crude and narrow individualism that everywhere menaces us.

It may seem to be the very perversity of ingenuity which would add one jot or tittle to our school burdens in these days of overcrowded and often fad-ridden curricula. But although the festival may involve new labors, it does not add a new subject to the school program. It should fill the place and serve the purpose of the popular festival in co-ordinating and vitalizing activities already engaged in. This has been its chief value in the artistic and imaginative development of the race. The great popular festival of the past has been a means of co-ordinating, for the purpose of one great ceremonial celebration, the work of the artist and artisan, the actor, the dancer, and the singer, so as to produce an organic and massive unity of effect. By following this clue, we obtain a very genuine and natural correlation of school subjects and activities in the place of the very forced and artificial correlation which is often sought after in our schools.

So regarded and dealt with, the school festival, instead of involving disturbance of the school work, becomes an actual aid by imparting to it reality, meaning, and coherence. But this demands careful organization and planning on the part of the school. For years, the Ethical Culture School has been working at this problem; and its methods and results may be briefly set forth.

At the close of each school year it is decided what festivals are to be celebrated during the coming year; and each one of these is apportioned to a grade or grades according to possibilities of utilizing some part of their regular work in English, history, art, music, physical culture, manual work—in fact, almost every subject studied. Occasionally, some modification of the work is called for; but, as a rule, the festival adapts

itself to the work rather than the converse. For there is no settled type of festival. Rather is variety sought for. The festival—say, Patriots' Day—that is in charge one year of the seventh grade, studying the revolutionary period of American history, may next year be intrusted to the sixth, studying the contest for supremacy between the English and the French;¹ Christmas or May Day may be celebrated, now by the fourth grade, now by the tenth. In one festival the tableau will predominate; in another, the story element; in another, the dramatic or the lyric. Sometimes the "book" is written entirely by the children; sometimes the material or the plan—say of an olden-time May Day or Harvest Home celebration—is supplied; sometimes a classic Play or masque—Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, or *Midsummer Night's Dream*, or Milton's *Comus*, or an adaptation from *Hiawatha* or *Christmas Carol*, or a miscellany of "Mother Goose" dramatizations by the youngest, will serve. The type is determined by a careful regard to the peculiar aptitudes, or the pressing needs, of the grades, a festival being occasionally assigned to a grade because it needs the special training and dis-

¹ Such was the case this year, as the following program shows: *The Ethical Culture School, Patriot's Day Festival: Friday, February 19, 1904, 9 o'clock A. M.*—The festival is in charge of the sixth grade and has been developed as part of the work in English and history. The leading idea of the historical work is the meaning of the contest between New England and New France for supremacy in the New World; and the festival has served to bring to light the growth from the restricted patriotism of the English and French pioneer to the larger American patriotism which has joined together the peoples of all nations in the bonds of freedom and humanity. (1) "The Indian in the American Wilderness;" scene near an Iroquois camp: the sachem tells the story of the origin of the Iroquois Turtle Clan. (2) "The English in New England," illustrating the love of home and the love of mother-country; song, old English Ditty; scene, a Settler's clearing. (3) "The French in New France," in the service of France and the church; scene 1, the top of a ridge between two rivers; Champlain takes possession of New France; song, "Gregorian Chant," Ninety-fifth psalm; scene 2, an opening in the forest: the Jesuits on the way to Quebec to make their reports; scene 3, near a river: the *voyageurs* carry their furs to the trading post; songs, (a) "Canadian Paddling Song;" (b) "Petit Jean;" (c) "V'la l'bon Vent;" scene 4, clearing near a fort: after a battle; the French surrender to the English; the prophecy of future union. (4) "The American of Today;" scene, outside the St. Louis Exposition on the eve of completion: the prophecy fulfilled. Interspersed between the scenes will be patriotic songs by the entire school.

cipline which a selected piece of work will afford. And let it be added here that, more valuable often than any other result achieved, is the discipline in manners, in courtesy, in consideration, and in the recognition of worth, which the "team-work" of the preparation calls for.

Gradually there has been accumulating a fund of commemorative songs and material upon which the school draws for supplies year after year. It is an incalculable advantage, with each returning Christmas or May Day, to revive the old memories, to repeat the old lays, to rehearse the old ceremonies. It is by variety in the selection and arrangement of such time-honored pieces that the festive garland which adorns the special ceremony differs from year to year. Besides, the festival performance is sometimes composite, being contributed by almost every grade in the school. Thus, one Christmas festival had for its thread of connecting interest the story of the celebration of an old English Christmas at Coverley Hall. The high-school students who had been studying the *Sir Roger De Coverley* papers provided the text of the story—weaving in with it material drawn from the *Spectator*, the Christmas data in *Silas Marner*, *Christmas Carol*, *Bracebridge Hall*, and *Lorna Doone*. The illustrative material which realized for the eye the rite and pageant of which the story-tellers had told—the waits, the mummers, the boar's head procession, etc.—was contributed by the other grades, each one of which had made a short study of some one Christmas custom. Sometimes the primary grades co-operate, as was the case in a simple spring festival which was made up of an ingenious grouping of familiar springtide songs and poems so bound together as to constitute a species of masque-opera. The outline of this program will be suggestive of this simplest and yet very charming type of festival:

Prolog: Life Indoors.—The Last of Winter Games; Wishing for Spring; Robin's Song; The Promise of Spring; First Signs—Pussy Willows.

March: Spring Asleep.—The Dance of the Brownies around the Figure of Slumbering Spring; The Spirits of Sleep; The Children's Song of Awakening; Jack Frost Interrupts; Spring Shows Signs of Life.

Out-of-Doors at Last.—The Games of Early Spring; The Wind's Interference.

April: Spring Astir.—The Children's Invitation to Spring; Spring's Response; Easter Carol and Rejoicing.

Garden Days.—Mistress Mary's Flowers; April Showers; Under the Umbrellas.

May: Spring Awake.—Spring Greets the May; May's Summons; The Crowning of May; May-Day Frolic and Dance.

From this simple program—which filled the hall for young and old alike with the sunshine and fragrance of an ideal May morn—we might pass on to others varying in complexity, until we reach the outdoor performance of *As You Like It* by the high school, given last May. The plan for this spring is to make of April a month of Shakespearean remembrances. The Shakespeare work of all the upper grades will focus in the presentation at the weekly assemblies of scenes from the plays studied, culminating in the performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the May festival. This series will mass the Shakespeare work so as to convey for the advanced students a revived impression of all their Shakespearean studies, while it will open up to the intermediate and to the younger high school students a prospect of the Shakespearean world which they are to explore later with closer scrutiny.

Of course, there can be no adequate festival for the school as a whole without the general presence and contagious spread of the festive spirit. This is obtained by smaller, less formal and impromptu observances of the several grades in their class-rooms. But, apart from this, the school as a whole participates in the festival and expresses the festal spirit by means of interludes of song which it contributes, the idea being to catch and re-echo the spirit of each scene in the song which follows upon its conclusion. The Christmas festival, for example, overflows with Yuletide mirth in the carols and rounds and catches which thus punctuate the program.

Mr. Hall has intimated, in his article on "Art for School Festivals,"² the way in which the art element is incorporated, and made to subserve ends in art education which can be served

² ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER, March, 1904.

in no other way. A similar statement might be made as to the way in which the work in music, oral English, calisthenics, and the manual arts (including the costuming) are integrated. But to deal with these and other points involved in the school festival would fill many more pages than are here at our disposal. The field is large, and is almost unoccupied. We are still in the first stages of our attempt to work out our problems. It must suffice to add that the keynote in all our undertakings is simplicity. Simple symbolism rather than detailed realism is employed. Large, simple effects are proper to childhood, and are really the best means of cultivating the imagination both in those who present the festival and those who behold it. But it is difficult to be simple and suggestive; and so easy to yield to the temptations of showiness.

As to the way in which the fundamental ethical ideas which the festivals are intended to embody are brought home to the child, it may be remarked that the didacticism is indirect. The fundamental pieties of the home and the family, the city and the state, the nation and humanity, and that other "natural piety" of which Wordsworth sings, are nourished in the child by the indirect methods of art. The ground for the seeds to be sown in is often prepared, especially in the lower grades, by some preliminary explanations or discussions; but it is by the poetic, emotional appeal through the outward to the inward seeing eye and comprehending ear that the festivals carry their messages of family affection, of patriotism, of humanitarianism, of gratitude, and of joy to the unsuspecting hearts of the children.

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