A LESSON IN THE ASSOCIATION OF WORK AND PLAY: WHAT CHILDREN LEARN FROM SCHOOL FESTIVALS: BY PETER W. DYKEMA

In the life of nations, festivals have played a much more important part than is generally recognized. Patriotism, religious feeling and a sense of social solidarity have been developed by them. In Athens the festivals of Bacchus called forth the great dramas of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides with their stirring civic appeals. Great religious festivals, like the Passion Play at Oberammergeau, have quickened and deepened the religious spirit and feeling of the communities in which the festivals have been held.

The neglect into which some of our national days have fallen, and the noisy and meaningless celebration of others, may not be evidences of the needlessness of these days, but of the lack of satisfactory means of celebrating them. The remedy does not lie in merely bemoaning the situation, nor in endeavoring to revivify outgrown forms, but in the developing of a new type of festival observance. This is no simple problem, and without doubt the solution will be simpler when as a nation we possess a greater sense of leisure and of homogeneity, but in the meantime much can be accomplished. The relaxations and national celebrations of a people exercise too important an influence upon their moral, civic, artistic and patriotic tone to warrant their neglect by educators and public minded citizens generally.

In this movement toward the revivifying of the festival, leadership naturally belongs to the school. As an instrument of education the festival-play is at last being recognized. In many schools this line of work is being given increasing attention, and such is the value of it, and the desire to utilize it, that courses for teachers on the conducting of festivals are now being offered.

In its work as an educational experiment station, the Ethical Culture School of New York City has gone into this problem of festivals perhaps more thoroughly than any other American school. The term “festival,” both as applied to school work and larger outside celebrations, must be understood as having a much broader meaning than its original significance would justify. It must include not only joyous and festive occasions, but periods of serious thought and contemplation. This larger thought is recognized in music when we speak of a Bach of a Wagnerian festival in which the depths of grief and pain may be sounded. Neither must it be restricted to
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mean always an entertainment—if this term implies performers and spectators—for in truth the best of festivals is that in which all are performers. A company of Emerson lovers or Whitman devotees gathered together to read, meditate and discuss the thoughts of the seers, constitutes as true a festival as any grand procession with flying flags and the blare of trumpets. Moreover, no festival has accomplished its object if in it performers and spectators are not all alike filled with the spirit of the occasion. If the onlookers remain mere onlookers and do not at least in spirit become participants, the festival has fulfilled but a part of its mission.

ONE of the chief objects wrought in the school celebration festivals is the focusing of some great topic in a simple, impressive and readily remembered form. It is especially true of children that those events which can be presented in action, in simple dramatic form, are most easily remembered. As a result, many of our festivals assume the shape of modest plays. Pupils, for example, who have been occupied for the larger part of a year in studying the story of the growth of the American nation from the limited area of the original colonies to the vast expanse stretching from ocean to ocean, gather together the various items and form from them a simple play. If it be the French contribution that is being considered, the pupils are in daily contact with Marquette and Joliet. They enter into the lives of these men, hear them discuss their aims, their troubles, their failures. They seize upon incidents previously considered unimportant, but now valuable because they give some clue to the appearance, the motives, the action of the men. Their aim is to construct anew the heroes that actually lived. At the conclusion of such an undertaking the explorers are no longer names in a book, but men in a real world.

The festival does much to bring again into the minds of children the joyousness which one calls to mind in thinking of the rustic sports and ceremonies with which the simple country folk were wont to greet the May, or the romps and frolics which were associated with the Harvest Home. Nothing is more healthful for body and spirit than communion with the great out-of-door world, and every influence is to be welcomed that causes us to appreciate the seed-time, the swelling of the buds and opening of the flowers in early spring; the searing of the leaves and the storing of Nature’s gifts in the autumn. The music, games and simple rustic dance of the English people, much of which has been preserved and is readily accessible,
seems to the children to be a very expression of themselves. One needs but to see the little ones as they troop in with the sound of the trumpets blowing their cheerful bucket to greet the morn of May. The scene is alive with graceful movement. Parties come bearing flowers and green boughs—later arrives the May procession with the queen in fine array—in with a rush come Robin Hood and his band, and the sports and games begin. Through it all there runs a note of hardy ruddy life; of appreciation of the freedom and beauty of the open country that sends all the auditors out with heart and mind open anew to Nature and her treasures.

Another idea underlying the festival is what might be called the psychological conception that the most potent influences in life spring from periods of intense impression; that our conduct is guided by the vision which we obtained from the mountain peaks. Stated in another way, the heights to which we rise indicate our progress, as the crests of the waves tell the story of the movement of the waters. Where there is stagnation there is no movement. If we look back upon our own experience, we find that a few great days or moments stand out as the significant or potent periods in the influencing of our character. The festival is a step toward establishing these red letter days and thus overcoming the modern workaday world tendency of reducing all days to the same mediocre level. But the festival also recognizes the principle that the days on the heights are valuable only as contrasted with those in the valleys, that continual stimulation is as unhygienic as no stimulation, and that the gala days must come sufficiently far apart to allow time for that slow development and growth in the quiet which is the foundation of all power.

Aside from these important values, which to a considerable extent are common to those to whom is intrusted the giving of the larger part of the festival, and those who are principally spectators, there are two important effects which may be said to be the basic ideas of the festival. The one has to do particularly with the school body as audience, the other with those who at any particular festival are the performers. The festival serves as a unifying influence which is felt by every one in the school audience. This results from the fact that although parents are welcomed as visitors, the festival is prepared for the members of the school and is adapted to their needs. The assigning of the various festivals to grades from different sections of the school and treating the contribution of each as that which one
part of the family gives to the whole also adds to this result. Thus, at harvest or Thanksgiving time, the members of the eldest class may present their message to all their younger mates; at Christmas time the entertainers are an intermediate grade; on May-day, the primaries. Then again, as at the Christmas season, each class may join in the grand procession and with gay costumes, rollicking song or simple action contribute its part to the whole. Each gives what it can, and all receiving this in a sympathetic way are thus bound into one large family or social group. The appreciative applause with which the older greet the younger, who in their turn at the proper time repay the compliment, gives rise to a school feeling and pride which is an inspiration and help to all.

Possibly the most important underlying idea is this: For those who are presenting the festival, there are certain advantages that can hardly be secured in any other way. The responsibility for the occasion introduces a peculiarly valuable motive which affects even the most unresponsive members of a class. The problem of learning now has a new aspect, for the question of communication here appears in its best form. To the performers comes a transforming standard: not what we know, but what we can make others know; not what we feel, but what we can make others feel. Very soon arises a consciousness of that first element of effective communication: namely, absolute clearness and definiteness on the part of the one who is to give the message. Pupils become conscious of their own weaknesses as they strive to collect their material. In the desire to help others they find they must prepare themselves. There arises a spirit of self-induced activity which is of the greatest value. Books are read, authorities consulted, pictures studied, that the teacher hardly knows about.

In no other way can one obtain such uniformly vital work in spoken and written English, in history in geography, in music, in art, in costuming, in the use of gesture, action, rhythmic movements, dances, especially the older graceful forms such as the minuet, and in general carriage. In all this work the standard of judgment, the basis of criticism, is the ability to produce in the spectator the thought and emotions which the performers themselves have felt in their previous study. It is this genuine principle of true art which prevents the work from becoming artificial and insincere.

Again, in this connection, the festival serves as the best kind of review or summary. It makes possible a contemplative or retrospec-
From Photographs by Lewis W. Hine.

Rejoicing at the return of spring brings the May-pole dance and song.

The Franklin festival with its stately minuet reflects the social life of colonial days.
From Photographs by Lewis W. Hine.

ROBIN HOOD, MAID MARIAN, FRIAR TUCK AND THE MERRY MEN OF THE FOREST FREE.

ELDER BREWSTER BLESSING THE PILGRIMS AS THEY LEAVE HOLLAND FOR AMERICA.
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tive point of view. It requires a new consideration and weighing of all details. All facts must be evaluated and given their proper proportion. Pupils who are preparing a patriotic festival on Franklin come to see the incidents in his life in the light of some such principle as the significance of the man’s actions as related to the growth of the American nation.

IN THE Ethical Culture School four of the larger festivals are undertaken each year, one for Autumn, Harvest or Thanksgiving; for Christmas; one for Patriot’s Day (in February), and one for Spring or May-Day. Each of these allows of a variety of treatment: The Autumn festival may deal with the old English Harvest Home, with the Pilgrims, with the beautiful Grecian story of Demeter (which has been cast in many forms, none of which is better adapted for children than Miss Menefee’s charming “Ceres and Persephone”), or with the various Thanksgiving celebrations. Throughout each the predominating idea is that of reflection on the fruits of Nature, and the struggles of man which have enabled him to gather not only the fruits of the soil but those greater ones, freedom and progress.

At Christmas time the festive note may be sounded by a dramatization of Dickens’ “Christmas Carol;” by the presentation of some old morality play; by a portrayal of the influence of the various conceptions of Christmas or the day of light, showing how the Christmas conception has gathered about the simple birth in the manger; the rites of many religions—ancient Druid, hardy Northmen, and even to the peoples of the sunny climes; it may be the old English Christmas, or Christmas in various parts of our own country. The spirit of each is well voiced in one of the songs written by some of the High School pupils:

“Long may the Christmas spirit
Of kindness and good-will,
Through joy and pain
With us remain
Our hearts with warmth to fill.”

February, with the birthdays of Lincoln and Washington, is selected as the time for our Patriot’s Festival. Then the aim is by presenting anew the thoughts and deeds of those who in peace and war have struggled for the betterment of men to fire the young impressionable hearts with a desire to better conditions of mankind, in the words of our leader, “to produce reformers,” who shall trans-
form their environment. The means employed may be a dramatization of Edward Everett Hale’s “Man Without a Country;” incidents from the lives of Washington and Lincoln; the story in dramatic form of Lewis’ and Clark’s expeditions, or significant scenes from the life of Benjamin Franklin.

The Spring Festival usually comes on the first of May and puts into action the fresh delight in the beauties of the world of the great out-of-doors. Now it is a simple succession of songs, poems and folk-dances woven into a little story and given by the wee tots; now a pretty pastoral such as Dorothea Gore Browne’s “Sweetbriar,” presented by the fifth or sixth grade; again it is the older students with Shakespeare’s “Midsummer Night’s Dream.”

SO GREAT is the range of choice for each of the festivals that the teachers are enabled to select such subjects and assign them to such groups of pupils as will give the festivals the maximum of educational value. An anniversary of a great man, of some notable exploration or achievement can thus be celebrated at its proper time and by those pupils who, considered from the point of view of their development and from the work which their course of study assigns them, can most naturally flower out into the festival. Thus, the idea of the school is to make the festival not a disturbance of the other work of the pupils and something apart from it, but a vitalizing and culminating influence which gives a clarified and intensified outlook that can be obtained in no other way.

When the conception of the school festival is completely worked out and widely known, a great objection to its general use will have been overcome. At present, most teachers look upon any type of work that is different from the regular routine recitations as so much extra and distracting labor. Introducing festivals seem like laying another burden upon the already overtaxed teachers and pupils. But this need not be. On the contrary, the celebration may become the climax of the regular subjects. It may be a means of unifying the work of a grade, each subject contributing its part in presenting as a vivid whole the large ideas which have determined the year’s study. Then the festival will be welcomed by teacher, pupil and parent as a step in the simplification, through orderly relating of parts, of our complex and at times diffuse curriculum. And as this result is accomplished there will come also a deeper feeling of patriotic, social and religious appreciation through sympathetic knowledge and understanding of the beauties of life, the strength and sacrifices of the world’s great heroes, and the mutual dependence of man upon man.
From Photographs by Lewis W. Hine.

SIR WALTER RALEIGH CASTING HIS CLOAK BEFORE QUEEN ELIZABETH.

A HOME OF EARLY AMERICAN LIFE, WHERE THE CHILDREN WERE TRAINED TO WORK.