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HOW SHALL WE CELEBRATE THE FOURTH OF JULY?

MAYOR GAYNOR of New York has declared himself in favor of what he terms “an old-time Fourth of July,” which he defines as a celebration by the people of a national holiday minus firecrackers and all the noisy and dangerous features that have come to be a part of the celebration of Independence Day in late years, and given over to parades of the militia, the police and the firemen, followed by meetings in the open air with “exercises,” consisting chiefly of patriotic speeches by prominent orators, music by the band and a basket lunch afterward. In intention this is an excellent suggestion, for anything which could deliver our chief patriotic holiday from the accompaniment of noise, misrule and disaster which we accept as a part of it, is a step in the right direction. But is it practicable in this day and time? Conditions have changed very much since a celebration of the type suggested by Mayor Gaynor was an annual event eagerly looked forward to by children and grown people alike. It belonged essentially to the country town, where all the people were friends and neighbors and where patriotism was merely a larger name for local pride and local interests. In such a town the boys of the National Guard and the members of the fire companies were the younger men of the town, and when they turned out in procession everybody watched them with personal pride, each family feeling that it had contributed its share to a very good showing of youthful strength and capability. The “exercises” in a nearby grove were also interesting, because the “orator of the day” was in most cases one of the prominent men of the town, and he talked of things which interested everyone. The picnic that followed was full of wholesome fun that needed no artificial aid to make it attractive,—indeed, the whole day partook of the character of the times.

But is such a celebration possible now even in a large town? We may deplore the fact that we have grown away from the simplicity of life as it was when we were young, but that does not alter the fact that the typical life of the present is city life, and that local interests and simple amusements, such as belonged to the old-time Fourth, are now to be found only in the smaller country towns and villages. Mayor Gaynor’s suggestion is primarily for New York, although he would gladly see it applied to every city and town throughout the country. He proposes it as an alternative to the noisy and tiresome celebrations of recent years, but the question is, does it contain any element of interest or attraction to dwellers in a city like New York? With a population largely made up of aliens; with police and fire departments which are a part of the general civil service system; and which probably hold not one member who joined for the sake of civic pride or desire to render a service to his home city, and with a National Guard recruited from anywhere and everywhere, such a parade as Mayor Gaynor suggests would have in it no element of personal pride or interest, and no special interest in itself that would make up for the lack of the personal element. As for the patriotic speeches, we have grown too used to the wiles of the politician and the professional stump-speaker to thrill under the spell of a Fourth of July oration by anyone of these. So far as the young people are concerned, it is safe to say that youthful appetites accustomed to such highly seasoned entertainments as are provided by Coney Island and similar resorts would find the mild diversions of an old-fashioned Fourth woefully unexciting. When they could use up their surplus energy by doing their part to swell the general fusillade of firecrackers and bombs, they managed to get through the day very well, especially as there was always the added interest of a possible mishap to lend zest to the game; but now that the joys of gunpowder have been ruthlessly cut off by the law, most of them feel that a day given over to parades, speeches and picnics would be pretty slow.

We regret most heartily that this is the case, but our regret does not alter the fact, and, with respect to Mayor Gaynor’s suggestion that a safer and saner Fourth be provided, it would seem that this might better be done by taking a step forward instead of backward and endeavoring to devise some sort of celebration which should belong as essentially to the people as did the old-time Fourth, but which also would be interesting enough of itself to meet the demands of the present day of all classes of people. That it should be patriotic goes without saying, but would it not be better to put the people into a patriotic mood by arousing their interest in things that are and
have been vital to the progress and welfare of the country, rather than to stand up and tell them that they ought to be interested in something in which the greater part of them have had no share and of which they can have no real understanding.

What if we were to consider Independence Day of sufficient importance to be worthy of a great deal of thought and the most careful preparation of a festival that should at once be an entertainment attractive to everyone and an object lesson that could not fail to arouse interest in the history of the country? In Europe they are doing this in a wonderfully effective way through the historic pageant. We have occasionally tried pageants in this country, but they have not been markedly successful because they have for the most part degenerated into gigantic advertisements of commercial enterprises or into the furthering of political ambitions. The people have had no share in them and therefore, so far as the people were concerned, they have been meaningless. But suppose we take a lesson from England, for example, and consider the possibility of getting up a pageant in which thousands of people might take part and which would have the one object of reproducing as vividly and truthfully as possible the most interesting events in the past history of the country, or of the city, as the case might be.

Last summer there were two big pageants held in England, one at York and one at Bath. In both cases the festivals were organized entirely by the people of the town, acting under the direction of artists, sculptors, musicians, historians and a band of organizers who carried out the directions of the Master of the Pageant. Both towns are unusually rich in interesting historical events, and in both towns thousands of people are still living whose ancestors bore a part in the happenings that went to make up the history of the city and of England. After the events to be represented were decided upon, the people who wished to take part were enrolled, the main outlines of the events were sketched out, and the rest was in their hands. Acting under the general direction of the Master of the Pageant and his assistants, they delved through old records and hunted up old pictures which gave an idea of the times and scenes they wished to reproduce, made their own costumes, drilled themselves for the parts they were to take, and in a good many cases had a hand in writing the parts. In Bath over five thousand people took part in the pageant, which was held in a large meadow that forms part of a park just outside the city. Very little scenery was needed, and what there was had to be of the simplest character, but artists who were thoroughly familiar with the subject took charge of that scenery. The spectators gathered in a large stand built at one side of the meadow, and the actors came troop ing in by hundreds from all directions as they were needed. One saw a group of early Britons, wild-haired and skin-clad, at rough play in an open glade, so thoroughly imbued with the spirit of their part that even before they came into the meadow one could have sworn that modern England was all a dream and that time had turned back to the days of Boadicea. Again a troop of cavaliers and ladies of the court would come cantering down the avenue with hawk on wrist and hound in leash, or a body of Puritan soldiers would come up over the brow of a hill, riding in close order with the sun gleaming on helmet and breastplate.

The pageant itself was a well-planned series of events that formed the high lights of the history of Bath. Everything was done with a spirit and an interest that made it vital alike to actors and spectators. The actors included a goodly share of the people of Bath, and the spectators made up the remainder. Neither in the streets of the city nor in the park surrounding the meadow was there a hint of any form of advertisement, or any attempt to push personal interests or to reap a personal harvest. It was a play time pure and simple, and everybody played from the Duke and Duchess of Connaught, sitting high in the central box of the grand stand, down to the working men and women who made holiday as heartily as they worked. All class barriers were down, and the class consciousness that forms a part of all life in the older countries fell into place as a part of the natural order of things, exciting no antagonism and arousing no discontent. Not only was it a festival more picturesque and beautiful than any we have ever seen in this country, but every citizen of Bath was the better because it had been held. The long weeks and months of study and planning had familiarized them with the history of England where it touched Bath as nothing else could have done, and the vivid reproduction of the ancient glories of the sleepy old city wove into
the daily lives of the people a realization of the civic pride which had endured for generations.

Of course, conditions in this country differ immensely from that of an old and settled nation whose life has developed gradually in the natural course of things, and whose land is filled with the records as well as the memories of all that happened during that long development. But is there any reason why we cannot express the same spontaneous spirit of play? We are growing a little out of the hard commercialism which takes only work seriously and regards play as an unnecessary evil. Why, instead of rending the air with explosions of gunpowder or with the equally meaningless explosions of "patriotic oration," could we not take time and trouble to celebrate Independence Day in such a way that it would have some real meaning to the people? We take trouble enough about other things, why is not the birthday of the nation worthy of the expenditure of a little thought and imagination as well as money? Take New York, for example. What could be of more absorbing interest than a pageant really reproducing the history of Manhattan, from the old Indian times and the days of Nieuw Amsterdam, down through British occupation, the Revolutionary War and the main incidents of its growth to the present day? A large portion of its population is made up of aliens. Let these aliens have their share and show in their own way the spirit of the elements that are going into the making of the American nation. Let them contribute their own games and dances, done in national costume; perhaps some of the most stirring incidents of their own history that might have a bearing upon the emigration of the people to a foreign land. Let there be a dramatic representation on a colossal scale and in the open air, of the blending of the peoples, and a forecast of the future nation.

If such an enterprise were set on foot, and handled in the right way, we would have a Fourth of July that would really mean something. Our artists, sculptors and actors would throw their best efforts into the getting up of such a celebration, and, if we would have it beautiful and well adjusted, the artists and sculptors should have absolute authority regarding grouping and costuming, and the actors should see to the bringing out of the dramatic possibilities of each event. The music should be written by American composers,—and more of these are coming into sight each year as the national spirit ripens more and more toward the possibility of artistic expression. But under the authority of these experts the people should be given the fullest opportunity, and taken as completely into partnership as were the people of Bath. The thing should not be done for them but with them, and above all no politics or commercialism should be allowed to enter into it. This is our one day set aside to celebrate the patriotism of a whole people; surely the advertisers and the politicians could be silenced for twenty-four hours.

It is often urged that we have no history; that pageants are possible in older countries because the records of each city and town are rich in events which have gone to make up the story of civilization. But may we not add to that story a chapter that is unlike any other? In the few brief years that lie behind us there is the story of the toils and struggles of brave pioneers; of battles with savage tribes who fought to the death because they saw their doom in the coming of the white men; of the development of natural resources, of wonderful inventions and the growth of industry; of the old-time mining camp,—in fact of everything that has gone into the swift shaping of the nation of today. Such a celebration would teach the aliens who come to us more of our national life and of what citizenship means than all the school lessons in the world, because their interest would be aroused by the part that they would take in the pageant, and they would see in the pictures of the past the promise of the future. Every city and town in the country has some story peculiar to itself that would properly belong in such a pageant. The preparation for it would necessarily involve research which would mean the acquisition of more knowledge of the forces that went into the building up of this country, than could be gained in any other way. The planning of the pageant under the direction of men and women distinguished for achievement in art and music would tend insensibly to create new standards of beauty; in fact, the possibilities of such a form of celebration are limited only by the imaginative capacity and patriotic pride of the people. Even if these were small at first they would grow better under such a stimulus than they would by the attempted revival
under modern conditions, which mean indifference if not actual antagonism, of what is known as the old-time Fourth.

NOTES

MODERN TAPESTRIES AT THE HERTER STUDIOS

People who believe that the weaving of beautiful tapestry is a lost art, belonging only to Mediaeval times, should go to the New York studios of Mr. Albert Herter, where tapestries are being made that equal the best of the old work. They are not imitations or reproductions in any sense, except perhaps in the method of weaving, which is the same. The designs are all original, and the coloring and choice of subject are as expressive of this day and time as were the tapestries of Arras and Bayeux of the life and ideals of their own generation.

The studio proper is a very large room, as high as the roof of the building and long and broad in proportion. A gallery runs part way around the walls, and from this gallery, as well as from every available foot of wall surface, are hung tapestries as beautifully woven as any of the seventeenth century, and yet entirely modern in feeling. In design and coloring they show to a marked degree the influence of the Japanese, most of them being carefully subdued to form a background to the furnishings of the room. Mr. Herter deals in subtle color harmonies of cool leaf brown and smoky gray, or of warm blues and greens shading into one another like the colors seen in tropic seas; in rare old ivory and faded coral tones, and in a peculiar warm, melting fawn color that is made up of the blending of many colored silk threads intermingled with gold. The designs are for the most part either conventional or grotesque, but all are kept under such restraint that they suggest rather than formulate the impression given to the beholder. The decorative idea predominates in every case, and if there is a suggestion of quaint humor in the angular outlines of conventionalized bird or beast, the realization of it comes only after the appreciation of the decorative effect of a spot of precisely the right color in the right place.

A few weeks ago Mr. Herter had an exhibition of his work in the studio, and that exhibition was well worth visiting. A large room was hung with tapestries in very subdued tones, the whole effect being strongly reminiscent of the Japanese. One of his most skilled weavers sat in the middle of the room working quietly at the loom on which new tapestry was being made, so that the curious visitor might stop and learn all he could by observation of the process of weaving. Other and smaller rooms opening from this large central hall were hung in such a way as to show the possibilities of tapestry as a wall covering, door hangings and a covering for furniture. Each room was perfect in itself, and each differed entirely from the others. One, for example, was like a forest glade, with hangings that showed the most luxuriant foliage done in tones of green and brown. The next showed a complete scheme worked out in the varying tones of sea blue. Beyond that would be a room done with hangings and furnishings of ivory and pink, the quaint stiffness of the design showing an eighteenth-century feeling, and still another would show a somewhat rugged and intensely modern effect. Mr. Herter's idea is to study the people for whom the tapestries are intended and the rooms where they are to be hung, and then make the work express in color and design the individuality of the people who are to live with it. His art is not so much the revival of an old art as the building up of a new one by the adaptation to present needs of the old methods of workmanship.

THE CRAFTSMAN EXHIBIT AT MADISON SQUARE GARDEN

At a recent exhibition of houses, home furnishings and domestic appliances held in Madison Square Garden, the Craftsman exhibit, which represented a model library fitted up in the Craftsman style, attracted so much favorable attention that we think it may be of interest to our readers to give a brief description of it.

To many people who visited the exhibition this booth was something of a revelation of the possibilities that lie in the Craftsman style of furnishing, because it was the first public demonstration that has been given in New York of the Craftsman idea as applied to the furnishing of a whole room. As the space at our disposal was long and narrow, it was necessary to make the model room into a recess or den, separated from the main hall by a low paneled partition with square posts at the corners and at either side of the entrance, such as is frequently seen in the division of a recess.