

The Educative Value of Holidays

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There are handicrafts of all kinds for which there is little time at school. There are books without number for reading.

It is imperative that we should understand enough of our children's interests and enthusiasms to help them to make their holidays a success. Holiday time is growing time, the time of educational opportunity for the parent, as term time is the educational opportunity for the teacher.

"It seems to me that this pleasure-mad generation has lost the art of enjoyment. It is the condition of a child who has made the discovery that it likes jam, and has invaded the house-keepers' room to fill itself from the pots on the shelves. Now, a stomach full of raspberry jam is not a happy stomach. In my childhood a treat was a great event; it stood out from a background of, I will not say dullness, but of duties, discipline and general uneventfulness. It was, in consequence, extraordinarily delicious when it came. It stirred the waters of routine. And because one lived in such an atmosphere one was always expecting something marvellous to occur, like Uncle Jehosaphat suddenly descending from the ceiling. But nowadays you hear children comparing cinema with cinema! Yes, indeed. Such a childhood is almost inconceivable to men of our years. It is as if we had compared Father Christmas with Father Christmas." These are the words of G. K. Chesterton, and are wondrous wise words.

At this season, particularly, Mr. Chesterton's words give plenty of food for thought. The stomach full of raspberry jam is *not* a happy stomach, nor is the young mind happy that is satiated with cinemas and pantomimes and toy bazaars. Treats should occur seldom enough to give the child pleasurable little shocks of excitement when they do come.

Again, if the child lives too fast and is allowed to experience too much in the early years of his life, he has not time to sort out his real impressions. The nature of the child is, normally, profoundly serious; he is an excellent little workman, willing to spend time and effort and thought on all he does; he does not crave continual excitement. But if his whole life is planned as a series of treats and thrills, he is forced into the habit of superficial living. He has no chance and no leisure to apprehend the full significance of anything.

When he is older he becomes, of course, the most miserable of creatures—the bored human being.

Thus far, I imagine, all sensible parents will agree with me. But they will not unnaturally enquire: What is Christmas to a child if all treats are taboo? It would seem perfectly possible to give him his full measure of Christmas delights without vitiating his appetite for simple pleasures and without disorganising his daily life. Why not

follow the custom of the continent and plan a season to extend over three or four weeks, instead of condensing all the treats into a hectic few days? In many countries the Christmas festival is inaugurated by the visit of a Santa Claus some time during the early weeks of December, and is closed on the Twelfth Night, when the Christmas tree is taken down with great ceremony, and the nuts and apples and oranges still hanging on its branches are shared out.

During these weeks life may be made specially delightful to the nursery folk. From time to time Christmas dainties may appear on the tea-table—little sponge cakes, iced in various colours, with the Christian name of one particular child written in sugar on each cake; minikins cut out of dough with currants for eyes and mouth; simple biscuits decorated with hundreds-and-thousands. Sometimes little figures of Santa Claus may appear standing before each plate, with a chocolate or two inside each. Occasionally there may be crackers or tinsel decorations.

But the greatest delight of children is to *do* things for themselves. It is a good plan to let them cut their own biscuits out of dough, and then to send them down to the kitchen to be baked; to decorate their own cakes with comforts, and so on. Pretty crackers—without the terrifying "bang-stick"—can be made out of coloured paper, and ornaments for the Christmas Tree can be cut out in the shape of stars and diamonds and crescent moons. Nuts can be wrapped in silver paper to glower among the dark green branches, and paper chains threaded to wind in and out around the trunk. The little girl of seven is quite capable, with help, of dressing a waxen fairy doll to adorn the top of the tree.

Then there is the delight of making presents. There are ever so many articles within the power of the youngest child. Little baskets woven of raffia can be made by five and six-year-olds. Children of seven and eight with stronger fingers can turn out good baskets of cane—wastepaper baskets, workbaskets and the like. The work is not difficult, and the children love it because they can see so quickly a tangible result of their labours. Blotters with leather covers or with covers of strong cardboard and wallpaper or cretonne are easy enough to make. So are lavender bags and sweet bags and stuffed bunnies or rag dolls for baby brothers and sisters.

In this article I have stressed the activities of children at Christmas time. Too often this side of the festival is neglected and children are forced all the time into the position of recipients. This is unfortunate, for nothing bores a child so much as inactivity. At the same time, it is good to show children that we are trying to give them pleasure also.

—MURIEL WRINCH in "Eve."



Gift Helps

To find something out of the common, right away from the ordinary, that is the problem that faces you when you start out on the yearly quest.

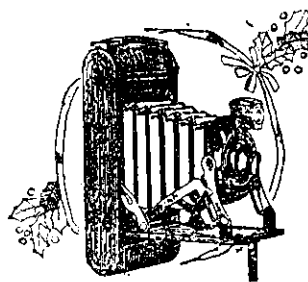
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