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THE EDUCATIONAL VALUE OF DOLLS

By MRS. LAURA B. STARR

Dr. Boggs asked me to tell you how I came to make a collection of dolls. In the presence of a friend, I admired the dolls in the shops in Japan. It was a week before Christmas. At Christmas time I received a present of a doll dressed like a Samurai's daughter. From that time I have been interested in dolls. I began my collection as an accident with no idea of its educational value, only knowing that a collection of anything is a history of its time.

The oldest dolls are in the British Museum, taken from the graves of the Egyptian children, where they were placed in the expectation that they would serve the same purpose in the next world that they had in this.

The Japanese people perhaps more than any others realize the value of dolls. They have a doll inheritance which is a charming thing. When a girl baby is born there is bought for her two images representing the Emperor and Empress, five musicians, and several courtiers. These she can play with once a year at the annual doll festival. The dolls are then arranged on shelves covered with red, the color of joy. Cups of saki and small sponge cakes are placed before the dolls; and after a certain length of time, the children eat the cake and drink the saki, feeling that the dolls are being well nourished. Every girl possesses this congregation of dolls and takes it to her new home when she is married. She keeps it until her oldest son is married when she gives it to him. Thus there come to be hundreds of dolls in one family. The children believe that in the course of time a doll that has been loved and cuddled acquires a soul; and who of us shall say that it does not?

The boys, too, have an annual festival lasting a week in which they have figures of dolls, but figures always representing famous generals, or people celebrated for their learning, because learning is very much respected in the Orient. They are taught heroism and love of family through these figures. A flag flies from the top of every house in which a boy has been born during the year, having on it the figure of a fish, the tai fish, which swims up-stream, and is the symbol of perseverance.

The dressing is perfect on every doll in my collection. All kinds of occupations are shown by these dolls. When I reached London in my six-years' tour around the world, Queen Victoria's collection was being displayed. Then I began to see the educational value of them. There is an interest from the psychical point of view. One little Japanese girl said to her friend: "I love my doll very much she is so alive." The other said: "She is not alive." The first replied: "Oh, but she is alive and yours will be alive if you love it enough."

I find that boys are interested in dolls and that men are much more interested in my collection of dolls as a rule than women. But I must say the men take a broader view of them. I went to Randall's Island to lecture and I found six hundred boys. I was appalled. It was a reformatory institution. I said: "What shall I say to you about dolls?" One said: "Well, you know boys like dolls as well as girls." I gave them a talk upon Japanese domestic life.

I began to say that history could be taught by means of dolls. At Christmas time the nativity dolls make one study. Then geography can also be taught this way. I am sure I would have known much more about Japan and China before I visited those countries if I had been taught Oriental geography by the use of dolls. The customs of the Orient are absolutely different from those of the Occident. These dolls are an epitome of the people they represent. American dolls for the most part have dolls' faces, while a foreign doll has the face of its type—man, woman, or child, whichever it happens to represent. There is as great a diversity among Oriental dolls, as there is among the people.

The educational value of dolls is beginning to be understood by some of our educators. Aside from geography, manners and customs, exchange of moneys, history, etc., that can be taught by their use, there is the ethnological, sociological, and psychic as well as the moral side to be considered. A collection of dolls should be attached to every institution of learning. G. Stanley Hall, of Clark University, was the first educator to take up work along these lines. His research work is of incalculable value to every teacher.