A Pageant of the Earth

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The final word in this short survey must be emphasis on the progress made during the war: it is a remarkable tribute to the indomitable spirit of Belgium.

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A PAGEANT OF THE EARTH

By CAROLINE W. HOTCHKISS

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It is not necessary in this day of grace to take up the cudgels in defense of a school pageant. The more highly organized, however, a school or community is, the more it needs the social awakening that the working out of such a pageant or festival brings. It is hoped that the following account of a geography pageant which was given a few years ago by the Horace Mann Elementary School will interest teachers in other schools and tempt them to undertake a similar co-operative effort.

This pageant presents the earth in its various aspects, physical, political, and social. The program follows:

PROCESSIONAL
Elementary School

MARCH OF THE MERIDIANS AND PARALLELS
Boys of Grades V and VI

Part I—The Spirit of Nature

SONG—"The Blossom of the Year" (Air, "Gathering Peascods")
Grades IV to VII

MARCH—Darkness, Moon, Clouds, Wind, Water, Ice, Snow,
Rain, Lightning, Thunder, Sun, Summer Clouds, Sun-
beams, and Blossoming Earth
*Girls of Grade VII assisted by Kindergarten and
Grades I, II, and III*

SONG—"Spring" (1740)

Part II—The Spirit of Life

A. Along the Meridians

1. IN THE NORTHLAND: ESKIMO VILLAGE
Song, ice cutting, harpoon throwing, seal fishing, dance
Grade I

2. IN THE TEMPERATE LANDS: INDIAN SYMBOLIC DANCE
Taking place at night after the corn planting
Grade II

3. IN THE HOT COUNTRIES: BEDOUIN DANCE
Boys of Grade VII

4. FOLK SONGS OF THE NATIONS: Russian, French,
Bohemian, American
Elementary School

B. Among the Parallels

1. SCENE ON THE NORWEGIAN COAST
(Spirit of Adventure)
Women on shore engaged in home industries; children
playing games; fishing fleets seen in the distance;
fishermen coming ashore, their return celebrated by
a general merrymaking
Grade V

2. DUTCH DANCE

Open Air Classes

3. JAPANESE CHERRY FESTIVAL

(Spirit of Art)

Adoration of the blossoms, games, tea drinking, song

Grade III

4. AT THE COURT OF SPAIN

(Spirit of Discovery)

Scene i —Columbus pleading before Queen Isabella

Scene ii —Return of Columbus after the voyage

Scene iii—Celebration by the populace

Grade IV

5. SCENE AT RUNNYMEDE

(Spirit of Liberty)

Signing of Magna Charta. Characters: King, Archbishop,

Barons, Squires, Churchmen

Boys of Grade VI

6. THE UNITED STATES

(Spirit of Democracy)

March of the States

Girls of Grade VI

Part III—The World Spirit

TABLEAU

RECITATION—"Hymn of Brotherhood" (Addington Symonds)

SONG—"America"

RECESSIONAL

This pageant represented the co-operative effort of the entire Elementary School and was the outgrowth of regular grade activities. The marches and dances were worked out by the department of physical education; the songs by the music department; and the costumes by the departments of industrial and decorative arts. The decorative work was designed by the pupils under the supervision of the art department. The dialogues were written as class exercises and represent the combined effort of the classes by which they were given.

THE SYMBOLIC IDEA

The many-sided aspects of geography work and the almost inexhaustible variety of the content of the subject offered a wealth of material for vivid picture and stirring action; yet it was realized at an early stage in the preparations that the varied scenes could be made effective parts of a great whole only by keeping close to the symbolic idea. The older pupils, at least, had learned to associate with each nation or race certain qualities and characteristics. First it had to be decided what the chief spiritual characteristic was, then the problem was to represent it. To make certain that this idea was conveyed to the audience, it was decided that figures symbolic of the spirit of each country should stand on a raised central dais and that the action should proceed around it.

THE "MISE-EN-SCÈNE"

The pageant took place in the large gymnasium of Teachers College, the audience being seated around the sides of the room and in the running track above. The children entered marching in costume and passed to places previously assigned to them on the floor just inside the rows of spectators. This left the center of the room free for the action of the various scenes and for the raised platform on which the symbolic figures were to stand.

With scarcely a moment's pause after the school was seated the music changed to a military air, and the Meridians and Parallels filed in headed by the North Pole in a glistening white robe. He took his place on the raised center of the dais while the Arctic Circle, in white robes and skull caps faced with ermine, formed a circle around him. On came the Temperate Zone, a ring of rich green; then followed the red and yellow circle of the Equator. Round and round the Pole these Parallels revolved; then at a signal the rotating body reversed and resolved itself into radiating lines. Shoulder to shoulder the Meridians marched like the spokes of a wheel, then the picture was dissolved and the boys passed to their places.

SCENES OF NATURE

The spring song carried the audience to the quiet contemplation of "The Spirit of Nature."

Soft slow music drew masses of gray clouds to one corner of

the "stage" while the somber figures of Darkness moved toward the center. The Clouds broke up into groups, the young Moon running lightly back and forth among them. A rustle was heard; and Wind, holding wide her floating scarfs of lavender and gray, blew the Clouds back as Moon and Darkness grouped themselves on the dais. Then came a movement like running water. A chain of girls in filmy folds of blue and gray moved across the floor. The

The Japanese Cherry Festival.

River curved and fretted its banks till the music called out the majestic figure of Ice. In obedience to her compelling gesture the River sank at her feet frozen and still. Then by two's and three's there skipped out little snowflakes. The Wind blew them into a swirling dance. The Clouds grew stormy, and with a crash of thunder Lightning hurled herself among them. Soft dropping notes of melody brought out Rain, shadowy creatures in blue and gray. They pelted the River, bringing it to life. Then on the eastern side appeared a dazzling group—a blazing Sun with his attendant Beams. As the Sun took his place in the center of the grouped figures on the dais the Beams beckoned to a group of fairies. They shook their butterfly wings and turned to masses

of spring flowers crouching beside them. Rising at the call, the whole group—Flowers, Fairies, Sunbeams—joined in a mad revel around the forces of Nature while the school burst into the glad song,

*Flocks are bleating, rocks repeating,
Valleys echo back the sound;
Dancing, singing, piping, springing,
Naught but mirth and joy go round.*

SCENES OF HUMAN LIFE

After this four heralds made ready for the first episode of "The Spirit of Life," and immediately a group of little folk took possession of the floor. So completely metamorphosed were they in their gray furry garments that the fondest parent could hardly identify his offspring. Some crawled into the igloos, others cut ice blocks, others tended babies. "Ei-ya, Ei-ya," they called and gathered in a group for a strange little song. Then four Eskimo mothers seated themselves on the dais and with slow swaying movements went through a religious dance.

When this was finished a loud monotonous rhythm called out an imposing group. A young Indian brave followed by six gayly bedecked warriors crossed the floor. Stern in demeanor, with arms folded high across the breast, they stood upon the dais; the tall lithe figure was in the center, two warriors were on each point of the triangular platform, and the band of men and squaws in festal array formed a ring around them to invoke a blessing on the cornfields. How solemnly they drew the furrow and sowed the seed! How fervently they lifted their arms in supplication to the Great Spirit! In the hush that followed one felt the involuntary response of the audience to this dramatic appeal.

This mood, however, was quickly dispelled by stirring music that brought to their feet with a bound forty or more Bedouins of the desert. For a brief moment this striking group in white burnoose, red sash, bare legs, and yellow sandals stood motionless; then with a wild dash they swung into their places. Back and forth in groups of eight they ran, saluting and stamping, ending each round with a haughty tossing aside of the cloak and a vigorous raising of the clenched fist, and the quickened pulses of the audience found vent in a storm of applause.

SPECIAL EPISODES: BEAUTY AND FREEDOM

Because of limited space only two or three of the episodes that followed can be described. Those which seemed the most distinctive are selected.

The Cherry Festival was made ready by placing three large cherry trees in full bloom in the prows of the dais. This became the "shrine of beauty" for Kwannon, the goddess of mercy and protection. She seated herself under the pink boughs, silent and serene, her finger lifted in rapt contemplation, her simple garment by its purity setting her apart from the gay world about her. What a kaleidoscope of color the little Orientals made! Several groups spread down their mats, took teacups from the folds of their kimonos, and went through the ceremony of tea drinking. Others with the shuffling step of the grown-up Japanese strolled about admiring the cherry blossoms and greeting friends. Then there appeared two coolies running before a jinrikisha in which was seated a lady of rank. As the "rickshaw" made its exit, the merry-makers sang their national hymn,

May our Lord's dominion last
Till a thousand years are passed.

A sudden blast from a bugle shifted the attention of the audience to the west door of the gymnasium, and in a moment the present with its familiar surroundings was swept away. There lay the field of Runnymede, and on it gathered fast and furious a throng of grim-visaged Knights armed cap-a-pie in corselet and helmet, shield and sword. Doughty Squires carried brilliant blue banners, and the Archbishop in his scarlet robe was accompanied by Churchmen and Barons. If the determined group struck terror into the heart of King John who faced them in regal state, he did not betray it as he haughtily demanded why he had thus been summoned from the hunt. But as the angry Barons told off the list of his tyrannies and exactions, and as the Archbishop interrupted his protest with, "Peace, your Majesty, the time has come when we must speak and you must hear," the cowardly King trembled and put his seal to the great Charter. Had nothing else in the unfolding of this pageant convinced the sceptic of its educative value, the complete absorption of the actors in the spirit of that historic scene would have set all doubts at rest.

BROTHERHOOD AND DEMOCRACY

The last of the cuirassed Knights and the waving banners left the floor, but the memory of that medieval picture became all the more significant as ringing martial music ushered in the March of the States. A little ahead of the yellow and white procession walked the Spirit of Brotherhood carrying in her hand the beautiful peace flag. Behind her came the Spirit of Democracy, three girls in yellow and white, bearing various United States banners. They took their places on the prows of the dais with Brotherhood high in the center; then around them filed the forty-eight States, a lovely vision of girlish figures carrying branches of goldenrod and still further illustrating *E Pluribus Unum* by the distinctness with which the name of each state was pricked out in the gold band around the head. At the close of the march they divided into two groups, one on either side of the dais, forming the letters U. S. Kneeling for an instant they lifted the goldenrod high in salute and passed from this striking tableau into the form of a hollow square just inside the rows of expectant children.

At a signal the school rose as one body and all races and nations of the earth passed within this encircling wall of Democracy, grouping themselves around the central dominating figures. While all eyes were drawn to the towering peace flag, the symbol of that fraternity which is the hope of the world, there came this ringing prophecy from the Spirit of Brotherhood,

Nation with nation, land with land
Unarmed shall live as comrades free;
In every heart and brain shall throb
The pulse of one fraternity.

Then, moved as by a common impulse, the audience rose and joined the school in "America." Thus was the climax of the pageant reached. Out of the square the children passed to their schoolrooms, the tableau in the center still holding all together, until at length the group descended, first Brotherhood, then Democracy, then the heralds. The earth pageant was over, but the memories and the enthusiasms it created still remain.