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FLOWERS.

A POLISH STUDY BY ANGELICA SCYZ.

Translated by Madam Anna Grudzinska.

The study of children's interest in flowers, by Miss Alice Thayer, published in the *Ped. Sem.*, June, 1905, suggested the present study and the same questionnaire was used, that the data might be compared and the following questions investigated:

Do children of different nationalities present different types?

Are there psychical traits common to children of different nationalities, breeding and education?

Are there points which are universally true for every child, American, English, Polish, etc.?

In order to render comparison easy, the outline of Miss Thayer's paper is followed and only the points mentioned by her are touched upon. The material is the answers of 397 Warsaw girls of ages from nine to thirteen years inclusive.

Flowers known to children. The list contains the names of 132 flowers; an average of 11 flowers for each child. The growth of interest is very visible in the answers of the children, each year showing increase in the number known. Children of nine and ten years name upon an average 9 flowers. Children of eleven years, 10 flowers. Children of twelve years, 13; children of thirteen, 15; children of fourteen, 17; children of fifteen, 16-17.

In comparison with American children, Polish children stand somewhat below in the number of flowers mentioned; in quality, they are almost the same.

The ten flowers most frequently named are the rose, by 95.7% of the children; violet, by 78.5%; cornflower, by 67.1%; lily of the valley, by 66.4%; gillyflower, clove pink and pansy, by 60.7%; lily, by 51.4%; forget-me-not, by 44.2%; tulip, by 43.2%; narcissus, by 40.7%.

By comparison it appears that Polish children, like American, name the rose and violet most frequently, but the pansy, although one of the best known, falls from the third to the seventh place.

Favorite flowers. The flowers best liked are in order of preference, the rose, violet, mayflower, lily, gillyflower, forget-me-not, pansy, corn-flower, narcissus and elder. Many children

do not give reasons for their liking, such expressions occurring as "I like this flower because I like it," or "because it pleases me." The number of such answers diminishes greatly with increase in age, that is, with growing thought and reflection. Answers without reason given, were for children from nine to ten, 8%; for eleven years, 20%; for twelve years, 6%; for thirteen years, 6.3%; for fourteen years, 0%. The fact that the most imperfect answers came from children of eleven years tends to confirm the observations of many scientific workers that the age of eleven brings a mental arrest, due probably to physical growth and development. The children who give reasons for liking, mention oftenest fragrance and beauty (chiefly beauty of color), 81.2% mentioning fragrance as chief factor in liking. Many children who gave beauty of color as a reason for preference, mentioned several flowers of different colors, thus showing that preference was not restricted to any single color. Those children who showed a preference for one color give as estimated by frequency of mention the following order of colors preferred. White, blue and lilac. Yellow and red have the fewest admirers, and flowers mentioned of these colors are of the most showy and brilliant kinds. These results agree with those of Miss Thayer. Polish children, like American, are not fond of *yellow* flowers. There is, however, a difference in regard to wild flowers, Polish children giving them a decided preference and saying that they like them because they are so modest. These girls seem to be peculiarly sensitive to the charm of simplicity.

Beauty of form appeared to make much less impression than fragrance or beauty of color, only rare flowers, like chrysanthemums or orchids, being admired for their shapeliness.

Other reasons for liking were the beautifying effect upon houses, gardens, etc.; their symbolic meaning, for instance; "I like the lily as the flower of innocence," "the forget-me-not as the flower of remembrance," etc.; their early appearance in spring, *e. g.*, "I like the primrose, as it comes earliest;" lasting qualities, as mignonette, which "remains fresh after other flowers have faded;" personal remembrance, as when a girl of fourteen says she is fond of georginum because it grows on her father's grave; usefulness—though this cause was mentioned by only three among 376 children. One said that she loved the flowers of corn and wheat "because they will make flour;" another child, the rose, "because one can make comfits from it," and a third liked the blossoms of pears and apples best.

Polish children love flowers to such a degree that 19.3%, *i. e.*, nearly one-fifth of the whole number answering, say that they love all flowers without exception. Some, when asked what flowers they did not like, mentioned nettles, thistles and darnels; others give individualistic answers. Often the same

flowers are mentioned as liked and disliked, the reason for dislike being a disagreeable odor or the absence of fragrance. The same thing was noticed among American children. Differences in regard to same flower occur, *e. g.*, one girl is fond of heliotrope because of its pleasant odor while another dislikes it "because it smells sickish." Others have acquired a dislike of certain flowers through unpleasant experiences, as nettles or thistles. Some are disliked because of the yellow pollen which sticks to the nose or because they have small flies or bugs on them. A few say that they do not like certain flowers because they are ugly. One girl of thirteen says, "I do not like asters because they look vulgar." Children who mentioned color as a cause of dislike did so only of yellow. Some mentioned the harm done to fields by the dandelion and other weeds, as a cause of dislike, and some spoke of sad associations, as with immortelles.

Animism. The question "do flowers feel" was answered by 36.4% of the children in the affirmative and by 21.7% in the negative, the remaining answers being indefinite as "flowers feel but not as we do." Younger children say that flowers do not feel oftener than older ones, showing that the analogy between animals and flowers which the latter have learned in school influences the replies greatly. To some, the sight of damaged flowers is very depressing. 70.4% of the children questioned regret injured and faded flowers and are indignant at other children who "torment them." 38% are indifferent and 31% want "to put the poor plant in water and revive it." 20% compare the lot of flowers with the lot of men. Some of the answers are very interesting, *e. g.*, "Flowers feel because when autumn comes their leaves turn yellow and their heads hang down as if complaining of their sad lot." A girl of thirteen answered the question, "What impression does a broken and faded flower make upon you?" "It makes the impression of a young Polish boy who is forced to leave his beloved country and dies in exile, lonely and forgotten like this flower." Another girl, of fourteen, answered, "A broken flower makes on me the sad impression of a man full of better endeavors and tendencies, who thought he was strong enough to rock the whole earth to its foundations but who meets with brutal reality and dies in inactivity."

In answer to the question, "Do flowers resemble people," 77.3% gave an affirmative and 14.5% a negative answer. Some gave the answer, "I don't know." As to the kind of resemblance, the larger number (185) answer from a nature study point of view and say that they resemble men because they have an organic life, eat, breathe and grow as we do, *i. e.*, are living creatures. Thirteen girls say that flowers have

their own language and can talk, six say that, even outwardly, flowers resemble men, *e. g.*, the pansy; seven say that there is a symbolic likeness, *e. g.*, "violets which grow amongst grass resemble people who live in shadow and are humble;" "the tulip grows tall and is like haughty people." A girl of thirteen says, "I love flowers and I love people, so they are like one another." She further explains that both are made by God so they must be alike. Thirty-six girls say that flowers resemble people, without giving a reason. Only 167 girls were asked the question, "Would you like to be a flower or like a flower?" 78 answered affirmatively, 60 negatively, 29 left the question unanswered. Three of those who would like to be a flower, give as a reason the happiness of flowers who live in the fresh air. Here is to be noted the longing for freedom and fresh air peculiar to town children. Twelve would like to be flowers because flowers have such a sweet scent; eighteen, because flowers are beautiful. One would like to be a lily because the Virgin Mary loves lilies; two would like to be shy and innocent as flowers; three would like to be loved by people as flowers are; one would be useful like a rose "because one makes good things of her." Some of the answers show a poetical conception. A girl of thirteen writes, "O how I would wish to be a flower, the rays of the dawn would bathe in the dew drops and gild my robes." Another girl of fifteen says, "I remember when often as a child I dreamed of being a flower. I thought that if I were a flower, I should always be happy, free from trouble and pain. I wanted to be a rose, and be as beautiful as she, or to be a red-clover or a forget-me-not, to be loved as they. But all my thoughts and wishes ended in one chief desire, to be a violet. The violet was in my eyes an ideal and I thought everybody ought to be like it, to have great qualities but not to think about them."

The children who gave negative answers do not possess these poetical tendencies but they seem to comprehend life better. As to the reasons for negative answers, twelve say that a flower can be plucked any minute and die; two say that a flower dies quickly; four, that they do not want to think about impossible things, four, that they do not want to be flowers because God has made the human beings; two think that flowers are useless and human beings can be useful. One sees that these children are satisfied with life and have the instinct of self conservation which characterizes the normal child.

Play. In the play life of children, flowers play a great and diverse rôle. 81.6% of our answers show that flowers are worn and used in play, 14.5% do not play with flowers, and 3.9% give unsatisfactory answers. Most frequently, children like to make wreaths and nosegays, the first being mentioned 143 and the

latter 148 times. Other ways of using flowers depend largely upon the education and environment of the children. Older girls love to gather and dry flowers or to draw and paint them. Little girls who like dress and dressing up trim their own heads and frocks and those of their dolls with flowers. Those of a religious tendency adorn altars with them, those of an artistic nature decorate their rooms with them, the sentimental use them in various ways to foretell their future, making use of formulas similar to those in vogue among American children. A girl of thirteen says, "When I was seven I played at mock weddings with the other children; we pinned on veils and dressed in flowers. When I was five, I played that I was going with a company to Aestoktow,¹ and we always took ferns in place of flowers." There seems to be a typical difference between children who do not play with flowers, one class is indifferent to plant life, because their homes and environment are such that they never come in contact with nature, the other is made up of very sensitive children who do not want to play with flowers for fear of harming them. One little girl says that she not only never plays with flowers but that she cannot bear to see them on wires. Many children say that they play with flowers but in such a way as not to harm them.

Superstitions and legends. Many children mention superstitions in connection with flowers; others, legends and traditions.

The commonest superstition is in regard to the mallow which is said to harm the eyes if touched. White flowers, a four-leaved clover and a five-leaved elder bring luck; burned house-leek causes recovery from sickness; smearing a blister with juice of the cactus causes a blister to heal at once; the pollen of the forget-me-not (the peasants call them frogs eyes) falling into the eyes causes one to see all the treasures of the earth; dreaming of a nosegay of flowers is a sign of death in the family.

Legends and tales make strong impressions upon the imaginations of children. They love to tell them and endeavor to explain the origin of flowers, *e. g.*, a girl of eleven, very poor, tells of the dandelion. "There was once a poor orphan, who had no father and mother. She was wandering about in the mountains, praying to God to let her die and be with her parents. God listened to her prayer, made her into a flower and took her soul to heaven." Another legend which comes from the highlanders of the Tatra (the highest Polish mountains)

¹A Polish town, with an image of the Virgin Mary, known as a place of miracles. A sort of Lourdes, Mecca and Medina for Roman Catholics.

relates that when Christ was born, a highlander journeyed to Bethlehem to see him, but because of the great crowd he could not get near enough to actually see the child, so he bent his stick and leaped through the air high above the heads of the crowd. The virgin was delighted with this feat and gave him a piece of the child's swaddling clothes, which she told him to preserve and scatter among the mountains. The highlander did so and everywhere that the white threads fell, white flowers sprung up.

A well known superstition is in regard to ferns, which are said to bloom once a year, on the 23rd of June, St. John's Eve, at midnight. Whoever finds the fern flower will be happy and find treasures.

Lilies are said to have bloomed for the first time on the grave of a poor but very good orphan, and in the crown of each was written "Ave Maria."

Mayflowers are said to have sprung from the tears of a little girl who went to Heaven, and although it was very pleasant there, she longed for her mother, her home cottage and for the fields and valleys of her native village, and began to cry. Wherever a tear fell, there grew a mayflower.

A girl of fourteen relates the legend of the pansies, which she heard from her nurse. There were once two brothers who loved each other dearly. They had a bad stepmother who had two children. The stepmother, out of envy and badness, killed the two brothers, and that is why the two upper petals of pansies are dark; they mean the two murdered brothers; the three lower petals are lighter, and represent the stepmother and her own children.

The story of Narcissus, who was so vain that he spent all his time in gazing at his image in the water, so that the gods turned him into a flower for punishment, is related by two children.

Conclusions. Summarizing the data above collected leads to the following inferences :

1. Flowers arouse great interest among children. This interest increases with each year, together with the broadening of ideas and growth of the intellect and æsthetic sense. The earliest reasons for liking flowers are color and fragrance, and they furnish a means for training in color discrimination; later come reminiscences, associations and symbolism.
2. The greater number of children see living creatures in flowers and feel sympathetically pain and injury inflicted upon them. This fact offers the pedagogical suggestion of using it as a means of inhibiting the tendency of children to destroy, and of arousing their nobler feelings.
3. The question, "Would you like to be a flower," brought

answers which plainly show the children's love for the sun, fresh air and freedom. Some children envy flowers because they can always live in fresh air, sunshine and freedom; others pity them because they cannot run about. These feelings are more strongly accentuated in those children who have spent their early years in the country and have then moved to the city in order to be educated. Gray town buildings and hard school benches oppress them.

4. The interest in flowers which children develop shows their impressionability in regard to nature. In accordance with this, the education of children should take into account the direction of their attention to the beauties of their nearest surroundings. Vacations spent in the country, in woods and fields, even a small garden behind the house, are factors in education which need to be emphasized.