HOLIDAYS,

By C. D. Lawe.

The derivation of the word "Holidays" is on the surface, and points to the fact that, in the days when religious observances had a greater influence on national life, the festivals and Holy Days of the Church were the days of relaxation and amusement for every one. Especially was this the case with children, for what teaching and education there was, was in the hands of the religious communities of the country. The first part of these holidays would be devoted to religion and the latter to all kinds of amusements. From a literary point of view we owe much to these holidays. Many charming songs, masques and madrigals have come down to us and we can, through them, catch the spirit of the dancing and jollity as:

> "On the Eve of good Saint John
> With music and dancing keep we holiday,"

or enter into the awesome rites of some "All Hallow's Eve."

Some of these holidays lived through the stormy days of the Reformation and on into the days of Good Queen Bess; holidays which are reflected in "A Midsummer Night's Dream," and then with the old morality plays and games, are interwoven the imagery and poetry of the Classical learning that had taken the world by storm, at the time of the Renaissance. But the rigours of the Civil War and Puritan Revolution in England, banished these holidays, and the light-hearted fun and revelry passed from our towns and villages—a passing that drew a protest from the great Puritan poet when he wrote his "Comus," to show how even to the straightest-laced a certain amount of dignified pleasure might be granted!

We dropped the merry-making in England but kept the word;
[p 679]
but it does not convey to us now what it did in former days, though our chief festivals of Christmas and Easter are still holidays.

The word as it stands now can bring several different ideas to our mind. The month of the business man or woman, the bank-holidays with a rush of work beforehand, and then perhaps a pouring wet day, and then the holidays we are considering to-day—the children's school-holidays, that glorious three months free from all restraint, so lovely in anticipation, but whose sweetness, like the Apple of Sodom, has a way of leaving a bitter taste behind. It is the object of this paper to try and find out what we wish the holidays really should do for the children and how to prevent them from being the unsatisfactory thing to the children and the wearing thing to their parents that they often are.

There are surely some mistakes both in our way of treating work-time and holiday-time that may account for this. I think the first question that comes to our minds on this point is: "Are the school-holidays, as they exist in this country at present, of suitable length and at suitable times?" We work for three months strenuously from a given curriculum. We have at the most 13 weeks to get through a good deal of work with an examination at the end of term, which parents, children, and teachers all wish shall be satisfactorily passed. Then come the holidays—a month at Christmas and Easter and often two months in the Summer.

Our system of terms and holidays is, of course, dependent upon boarding-schools. Some thirty or forty years ago, when railway fares were dearer, and travelling facilities were fewer, the holidays came only twice a year, at Christmas and in the Summer, but very naturally with the improvement of the railways, people wanted to see more of their children, and so the third holiday was added and the one or two days at Easter was extended to two weeks, then to three, and now in many cases to four weeks. Personally—(and I offer my opinion with an apology)—where day-schools are concerned, I believe it would be better if we only had one holiday in the year—the ordinary Summer holidays of six to eight weeks, taking a week at Easter and Christmas. I think we could then make Education the ideal thing that we wish it to be. An extended term would mean a much freer term, the amount of book-work achieved would be the same, with this possibility added, that knowledge might become the normal food of the child's mind, assimilated and digested, as material food is by the body, instead of being administered in strong doses for a time and then omitted altogether. It would make all the difference if we could sometimes
[p 680]
take an extra holiday on a lovely fine day, but as things exist, we dare not. The term is so short, and the amount of reading set must be got through if we are to acquit ourselves well at the end. There would be less strain to the children in term-time and consequently less of relief when lessons were over for the holidays—an attitude inclined to make them dislike their books and feel hostile to their studies.

But that is only a suggestion, and we want to consider the holidays as they are, and not as they might be. I expect that the three things that come first with parents, and all who have care of children in their holidays, are, health, freedom, and happiness; but the steps taken to ensure these are not always successful, and often by the end of the holiday the children seem fretful and exacting—the older ones "difficult" and the parents left with the feeling—"It will be a good thing when school begins again."

When boarding-school children come home they are naturally made much of,—all kinds of indulgences are allowed,—late hours kept, and the children who have become used to a life of routine are left suddenly to their own direction. They are very happy at first, but soon become querelous [sic] and exacting. One indulgence and spoiling leads them to expect others, and, like the camel in the fable, having obtained one licence, they do not rest satisfied till they have got more.

Day-school and home-taught children, for obvious reasons, get less in the way of extra petting, but expect all kinds of home rules to be suspended, and often seem to think that the one important thing for the holidays is that they shall have all that they desire, that it is especially *their* time and that the convenience of those around them is of secondary importance.

The home children's holidays are, in a way, more difficult to cater for than those of boarding-school children. The latter are happy to get back to their pets and books and toys—in a word, to their own "environment," and are contented with just that; but the children who are at home always present a greater problem. We wish to make them happy without indulging them, promote health without starving their minds, and give them liberty without licence.

The answer is found, I believe, in the standard set up by the motto of the P.N.E.U.—"Education is an Atmosphere—a Discipline—a Life." The root of our difficulties surely lies in the

fact, that both teachers and parents think of lessons and holidays as two distinct and opposite things. Lesson-hours for learning,
[p 681]
holidays for forgetting, school-time for discipline, the holidays for laxity, term-time for appointed tasks and holidays for self-pleasing.

This sharply defined division in their lives cannot be helpful to children's mental growth or moral development. They very soon get into the way of looking at things as we do; like the little boy of seven, who had been very naughty at home, and when he was scolded for what he had done, he explained, that, "he was being good at school and so he really could not manage to be good at home too!" Holidays should surely be the complement of school-days not their antidote; if only we could regard them both as equally important parts of Education we might more quickly arrive at our goal of all true Education, and that is, formation of character. What we understand by a good character is mainly determined by the leading spirit of the age in which we live. Miss Mason picks out, as the three dominant notes of our age:—

(1). Reverence for the person.

(2). The Solidarity of the Race—or the brotherhood of all people of all times.

(3). The Science of Evolution.

And impresses on all parents and teachers the necessity for keeping in touch with these ideas in order to sympathise with the rising generation and to assist in guiding it. She says: "If parents take no heed of the great thoughts which move their age they cannot expect to retain influence over the minds of their children. If they fear and distrust the revelations of science, they introduce an element of distrust and discord into their children's lives." Sympathy, then, in term-time and holidays must be one of the component parts of the *atmosphere* which is to educate the children and next to sympathy I think comes obedience to *authority*.

By Education is an Atmosphere is meant: "That the child develops best in his own natural surroundings," and that in these surroundings—I quote Miss Mason again—"The principles of authority on the one hand and obedience on the other are natural, necessary and fundamental."

Miss Mason proves that the modern idea that in order to "express his own individuality" a child must be left without any natural authority is a false one, and one which imposes on the child a burden which he is not strong enough to bear. She shows how the habit of obedience to lawful authority first, is the only way by which the individual can be trained to obey the authority of Will and Reason in later life. She says: "It is startling and shocking that there are many children of thoughtful parents whose lives are spent
[p 682]
in day-long efforts of decision upon matters which it is their parents' business to settle for them." If we accept this theory we shall, for the sake of the children, impose that lawful authority, and exact the docility of which she writes.

Herbart, the most ethical of the older psychologists, says: "To the child the family should be the symbol of the order of the world, from the parents one should derive by idealisation the characteristics of the Deity."

The atmosphere of the home, then, need not be disturbed because it is holidays; the things that mattered before are just as important in holiday time, if anything the holidays should augment and not hinder the discipline of the home, for the outside factor of school

influence is, for the time, removed.

To these two elements of sympathy and upheld authority, let us add the spirit of co-operation. I think grown-up people wrong children when they shelter them entirely from the things that worry them, and a normal child is very often trained in thoughtfulness and unselfishness by feeling she is in her mother's confidence about some little difficulty or worry. The holidays are naturally the time for this sort of companionship, and the response made by the child in trying to be useful is a great help in cementing the home bonds which are the chief and natural agents in educating the child.

If we look back upon our own school days, the holidays which retain the most pleasing hold on our memories, are probably those when, for some reason, we felt we were being useful and were very much "wanted." All children, and especially girls, do so love to be "useful." In these days, when it is in the air for everyone to do some service, it should be an easy thing to foster this desire for usefulness. There is no home that has not lost gardeners or servants, or where some active work cannot be found for boys and girls to do, and "war work" can be a wise way of introducing the idea that some useful undertaking is expected of all boys and girls in their holidays. I would suggest a family committee, with the father and mother in the chair, to settle exactly what shall be the special holiday work for each child, and to discuss when it shall be done—it would, at any rate, give them the impulse at the beginning, which is such a help. Some little tasks like this, willingly undertaken, and done each day, will not hinder the enjoyment of the day but rather enhance it. I am sure that this is more acceptable than the old idea of "holiday tasks" set at school, the very sound of which is repellant to those who undertake them. If

[p 683]

the work chosen—and, as far as possible, give children a choice of work—be badly done, let it be done again; but a great deal can, however, be done by "expecting" it to be carried out well, and all real efforts can be encouraged.

Discipline is written on the second side of the Educational triangle. The attitude of parents here will be, "That certainly is for the term-time; we like to see the children having a good time in the holidays, and if they have plenty of discipline in the school-room, we can let them down easy at home." An examination into the nature of true "discipline" will show that such a premise is hasty and false. This is how it is explained at the beginning of the "Home Education" series:—

"By Education is a Discipline, is meant—the discipline of habits formed definitely and thoughtfully, whether habits of mind or body."

To my mind it seems unfair to train children in certain habits for three months, then allow them to abandon those habits for a time, and expect them to adopt the same habits easily after the holidays are over. Take, for instance, the habit of getting up at a certain time. Most children have some fixed rule for getting up, which is enforced during term-time. To many children it is a rule that is not easy to keep. In the holidays there may not be the same need to rise so early, but what happens? The child feels it does not matter much, and will become lazy—lying in bed indefinitely, probably arriving down after a scramble, late for breakfast, with an unmistakable air of having "got out of bed the wrong side." Would it not leave the holiday feeling unspoiled, give extra rest if needed, and at the same time preserve the carefully acquired habit of rising at a given time, if a later hour were definitely fixed for getting up, and

the child expected to be as conscientious in keeping the late hour as the earlier one? I give that only as an example. I have no right, in a meeting like this, to speak of children's physical habits, you will all know much more about that question than I could; but of the mental habits, which are apt to be overlooked, may I say a few things?

The mental habits which we aim most at forming at school are attention, concentration, criticism, and reflection. All these and many others can be acquired, and indeed are as necessary in holiday pursuits as in school-room tasks. Whatever is undertaken should be carried through if possible. Any game played or amusement embarked upon should be done with the whole will. An out-of-door life is very helpful in fostering the habit of reflection;
[p 684]
we all have noticed how some of the most thoughtless children become engrossed when they are out in the country. The carrying out of some Nature Study will foster observation and criticism. In connection with habits, may I, as a teacher, emphasise the importance of systematic rest in the holidays? The greater freedom the child has, the more is taken out of him, and often holiday employments are more physically and mentally tiring than the school routine.

In the saying that "Education is a Life," the need of intellectual and moral, as well as of physical sustenance is implied. The mind feeds on ideas, and therefore children should have a generous curriculum; and again, another doctrine of the P.N.E.U.: "Education is the Science of Relations." From these two statements we can build some constructive ideas which may be useful in making plans for the holidays. Children, as persons, have relations with everything to which man is heir, in the world of Books and Things. We often, I think, mix up the acquiring of knowledge with knowledge itself in speaking of Education. All children want to have knowledge, but they differ in their readiness to acquire it, not because they do not want to know, but because they do not like the trouble of the acquiring process or find it a great difficulty.

Disciplinary subjects have no object in themselves, excepting as they help the mind in acquiring that which is food for it. Here holidays have a great advantage over the term-time, for the kind of knowledge that children can then best get, and that they are getting, is mostly concerned with "Things."

An open-air life is generally procured for them in the Easter and Summer holidays. Here is a good opportunity for freedom for what a child wants to do out of doors will depend on his or her other individuality. If certain relations with Natural Science have already been established either at home or in school, it should not be difficult to foster the pursuit of some hobby to do with Nature.

One schoolmaster, writing about holidays, seemed to think that if you gave a boy a chisel and hammer and a simple text-book on Geology he could be turned out and would want nothing more than these tools and Mother Earth to keep him happy for weeks. That seems a little limited, but most children will be interested in something of the sort. Birds, stones, trees, shells, mosses, ferns, and flowers will provide them plenty of interest by collecting and observing. Some children, too, will love exploring, and if they are encouraged to make rough maps of their "discoveries" can
[p 685]
gain a good deal of knowledge and strengthen the geographical sense.

Walking, too, for its own sake, is among the simpler pleasures the War has restored to

us. The excitement of cheap railway-trips and motor-drives is no longer attainable, and we are thrown back on walking or bicycling. During term-time real long walks cannot often be managed, but in the holidays the three ideals of health, freedom, and happiness can be easily realised by country walks and rides. If an object can be supplied, like finding and picking of flowers, or visiting some place of interest in the neighbourhood, so much the better; and the larger the party to undertake these excursions, the greater the spirit of festivity.

Then for the house and wet days there are always books. I would like to recommend a very good paper, by Miss Elizabeth Lee, on children's reading. It was read at a London Branch meeting, and published in the February "Parents' Review." One or two good books, chosen especially for the holidays and read aloud in the evenings, are a great source of enjoyment; and interest is much increased if it is shared by the parents. Music too, can be a great source of joy. Most school children of all ages love singing, even if they are not fond of learning to play the piano or practising.

In his "Traetate on Education," Milton says that in their holidays children "May both with profit and delight be taken up in recreating and composing their travailed spirits with the solemn and divine harmonies of Musick heard or learnt." Though children now-a-days are not likely to have the "travailed spirit" that the poet must have had as a boy, for they are not allowed to sit up studying all night, yet a great deal of enjoyment can be given to most children by giving them the chance of hearing and enjoying good music.

Getting up entertainments, plays, concerts, discussions, give a lot of fun and bring out latent powers of management and originality. For younger children, round games are very popular. But with all these things, I am perfectly sure that the pleasure lies mostly in the fact that their grown-ups are doing the matter in hand with them. Among the days they will remember will probably be the one when their Mother and Father, or both, went some picnic with them, possibly a very simple affair, but children do live in memory these days over again, and these are the memories that bring happiness in later years, the kind of happiness expressed in Wordsworth's "Daffodils," he says:—
[p 686]

> "They flash upon that inward eye
> Which is the bliss of solitude,
> And then my heart with pleasure fills
> And dances with the daffodils."

The kind of enjoyments that go to build up these lasting joys, which are really possessions, are surely more to be encouraged than the questionable joys of frequent visits to the cinematograph.

The ideal holiday I have tried to sketch is one, then, that shall provide plenty of amusements and freedom without neglecting usefulness and those habits that go to form a good character, and it can be given in better words than I can use, by quoting from Professor Welton. He sums up what he thinks Education, in and out of school, should do for children, in these words:—

"Everything which strengthens self-respect and develops strength of purpose, which increases knowledge pertinent to life, and cultivates critical thought, which broadens the social

outlook and deepens charity, has an influence in developing individual capacity, and through that development, in reducing the faults and strengthening the virtues of that soul of the people on which alone the destinies of our country depend."

And with such an ideal before us we can attempt to make the children's leisure days real holi-days in the literal sense of the word—days which shall fit them for their life in a world that we trust will have grown better than ours, and which shall eventually prepare them for their great Holy Day in the Celestial City, where the prophetic vision rested on the "Boys and girls playing in the streets thereof."