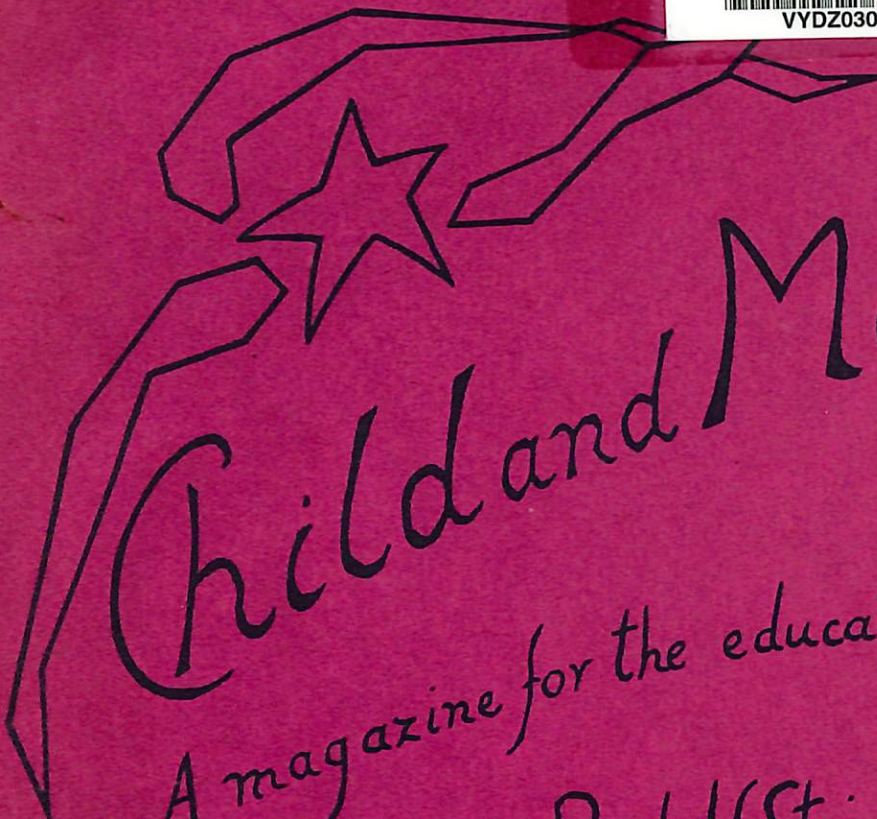


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Editorial

THIS number is devoted to some account of the way in which children in a Rudolf Steiner School experience and enjoy the seasons of the year. For most people—and for many children—the change of the seasons brings merely an external change in the habits of life. There are different games, different clothes, different activities and social customs. We have, for the most part, become so externalized in our thoughts and habits that we do not attend to much finer changes which take place—or try to take place—within us. But in the moments when we intimately recollect the experience of our childhood we can remember clearly how entirely different we felt, how altogether different we were, at the different seasons of the year. The expectation of Christmas, when we come home from school with the stars already shining above us, or when we pushed up the window to listen to some carol singers dimly heard from our bed, was the expectation of some tremendous event, as majestic as the starry heavens themselves, as magical as the patterns of frost on the morning windowpanes. It did not surprise us that the angels

sang from the heavens because they were already singing so clearly in our hearts. Or, in the summer, the beauty and heat of the day filled us with a dreamy amazement which made clear conscious thinking—attention to lessons in especial—something which was intolerably out of keeping with the season's mood and the shining sky.

Even in themselves these experiences were valuable; they enriched the whole texture of our lives. But they had not as a rule much content; they were subjective and therefore in danger of becoming sentimental. But if this experience of the seasons is given a content which brings together the life of the year with the deepest secrets of the life of man on the earth, there can be nothing of greater value for the human soul; nothing more truly educational.

It is because Rudolf Steiner has re-created for them as adults the real mysteries of the seasons that the teachers in his schools desire to interpret their meaning in a more child-like way to the children themselves. For this the Festivals of the Seasons give wonderful opportunity; and of all festivals Christmas is the one which is dearest to the hearts of children. But even little children will enjoy and understand Christmas better if they have, for instance, enjoyed and understood the festival of St. John at midsummer. It has become something of a tradition at Michael Hall that at midsummer—the time of beautiful dreaming—the children give a play for the adults, and that at the more conscious tide of Christmas the teachers play for the children the Paradise and Nativity Plays, which contain in simple pictures the secret of human destiny on the earth.

The rhythm of the year is only one of the many rhythms which Rudolf Steiner wished the children to experience in their education. There is the rhythm of the day—the time for work with the head, the time for singing and movement, the time for skill with the hands. There is the rhythm of joy and sorrow, the natural instinct of children to enjoy laughter and tears, to play at weddings and to play at funerals. There is the rhythm of remembering and forgetting, that most important forgetting in which what we have consciously learned sinks into deeper regions of the soul's life and becomes talent and capacity. And all these and many other rhythms are, in fact, reflected in the experience of the seasons of the year.

There are many clever people to-day, and not a few forceful personalities; but very rare are the people who have a real richness of soul, whose mere presence is blessing, whose word is consolation. We need not, however, lose as adults that richness and variety of feeling which was ours as children. We must educate it and let it grow. It is a great thing in such an education to follow the course of the year with all the powers of thought and feeling and will.

Rhythm in the Life of Children and the Christmas Festival Plays

LIFE in a Rudolf Steiner school has a rhythmical course. Every day throughout many years many of the most important things in the school life are repeated in the same way. Every morning, for instance, at the opening of our lessons we repeat the same words in the same earnest and intimate way. And although the subject of our teaching proceeds from lesson to lesson, each lesson in itself is, or at least ought to be, a sort of musical, rhythmical whole, repeating itself every day in the same way—and this not out of a merely personal predilection for rhythm, but through an insight into the true nature of the human organism, especially into the child's growing organism. We perceive that everywhere living nature is working rhythmically. In the world of plants we observe how the germinating, sprouting, and unfolding of plants is proceeding according to certain numerical rhythmical laws. In the human (organic) life we are compelled to follow the rhythm. We have to eat, to sleep, and so on, regularly; and though man as an adult is able to emancipate himself from some of the rhythmical necessities of his organic life and, for instance, to sleep in daytime and to be awake during the night, in the course of time such an unrhythmical life will certainly not contribute to health and happiness.

Children especially, whose organic life still permeates the life of the soul, in such a way that their soul-life is *not* able to emancipate itself from their bodily necessities, want a thoroughly rhythmical life. It would be of the greatest importance for a wholesome education, as much in the home as in the school, if all educators could really *see* this fact and pay

attention to its consequences. Children cannot be happy or healthy if their family and school life does not proceed daily in the same rhythmical way. Generally—though unhappily not always—parents pay attention to a rhythmical order of life in relation to sleep and meals, but they do *not* consider that their children's souls also want rhythmical care and nourishment. Very often parents complain to the teachers that their children have no sense of duty, that they cannot be brought to fulfil their little tasks or to do their house-work without being admonished to do so. If parents would only make up their minds to fix a certain time for every occurrence of daily life, they would be greatly astonished to perceive its wholesome effect. The children would lose their opposition, their naughtiness, their nervousness, in a wonderful degree; they would be thankful to feel the help of a reasonably regulated daily life. It is a pity that the necessities of modern social life so very often prevent the rhythmical ordering of the family's day.

Perhaps one does not consider often enough what an immense benefit—from this point of view—the year's festivals mean. What a marvellous gift is Sunday, repeating itself throughout life after the six working-days as the day of recreation, of concentration; the day which is so helpful even through this fact alone that it gives us an experience of things quite different from that of the other six days of the week. A child is very ready to feel the beauty and loveliness of Sunday, and parents ought to give to this day a certain colour; for the memory in later years of the peaceful Sundays of childhood not only is a joy but adds a strength to life. It is not merely a question of giving to the Sundays a certain *religious* note; if there is the possibility there ought to be some good house-music (not gramophone or radio playing), some singing (not only religious songs), listening to beautiful poetry, a walk into nature—though, of course, in a big town this may be far from restful and therefore not always the right way of celebrating Sunday! The essential thing is, that the adults cultivate their feeling for the *inner* beauty of this day of peace and rest and let it shine into their children's hearts.

Our organic life depends on the flowing in and the streaming forth of our breathing. Our soul's life is dependent on the year's seasons. We breathe out in springtime and summer;

we breathe in during autumn and winter. Every year we meet again with the joyful summer festival of midsummer, where we seem to pour forth mind and soul into outer nature. Every year in winter we gather our whole being into the concentrated experience of our own inner strength and mind, of our soul's inner light. In the time of nature's death and darkness we celebrate the birth of a spiritual being into the earth's coldness and gloom.

It would not do to make the children too conscious of what they experience in their naïve and natural way, to draw, for instance, their attention to the different qualities of the seasons in a dogmatic and abstract way. Children want to live in imaginative conceptions, not in abstract thoughts. They are not ready to understand the deep underlying meaning of the year's festivals if it is taught to them in a philosophical way. But they are more than ready to feel the power and beauty of true religious rites and images.

It is possible and important to give to each festival its own note, for instance, through the symbols and the music one chooses to celebrate it. And it is good for a child's development if year after year he meets with nearly the same symbols, the same music, the same way to celebrate Christmas, Easter, Whitsuntide, Midsummer, St. Michael's Day, etc. A healthy effect on the hidden creative forces of the organism—soul and body—can only be brought about if the working activities repeat themselves again and again. Though it cannot be said that in all cases tradition is a good thing, traditions about the way, even to the smallest details, of celebrating Christmas, for instance, in a family or in school, are certainly helpful and remain deeply rooted in the memories of all the members of the family, or in those of a school's pupils, till far into their old age.

It has become a tradition in most of the schools which follow the educational ideas given to them by Rudolf Steiner to celebrate Christmas through the performance of the Christmas plays. The teachers of these schools perform the plays for their pupils as a Christmas gift.

In the Middle Ages, when the Church language was Latin, and could not be understood by the layman, and when the Bible was still esoteric and read only by learned priests, the Christ-mystery could only enter the mind of the uninitiated

people if it was given to them in works of art, in paintings, or in plays. The plays representing the holy event of Christmas night were in those times acted in the churches, and the actors were the priests themselves. In very ancient times this was done in a very simple way; there was a cradle, and two priests, representing St. Mary and St. Joseph, rocked the cradle, which was supposed to be the Christ Child's little bed, to and fro. Every worshipper who approached the cradle was allowed to give it a push and so to help the Holy Parents nurse their Child. These simple actions were enlarged in the course of time; and it was especially the holy story, according to St. Matthew, which supplied the motives for the Christmas play acted in church. This grew more and more solemn and magnificent. In beautiful vestments the Angel and the three Holy Kings moved around the pillars, and the Holy Family received their adoration and their gifts in a side chapel, where candles burned on the altar, the incense filling it with its mysterious scent. When the Holy Kings bent their knees before Mary, who was also represented by a priest, then men, women, and children fell on their knees to adore with them, while the organ accompanied the scene with its solemn music. The throne of the vicious king was erected before a pillar, and the devil carried him off into the dark backgrounds of the church, from whence the pair afterwards emerged to participate in the concluding worshipping song.

But the laymen wanted sometimes to take a more active part in the Christmas event. They were eager to perform it themselves. But in their simple minds they chose a more homely form, whose story they took from St. Luke. In this even some funny scenes could be included, for the village spectators loved to laugh. In some of the very old village Christmas plays we find that Joseph was conceived as a funny, imbecile old man. When he stumbled on the scene—the play was perhaps acted in a barn or on the floor of a farm-house—he was greeted with shouts of laughter. The shepherds, too, when they quarrelled or jested with each other in their rough, good-natured way, gave occasion for jokes and enjoyment. The way in which they exchanged their views about the Government, about taxation, about poverty and misery, about their religious views and mystical hopes, could be understood and greatly appreciated by their listeners. Shepherds have

always passed for especially wise and hearty people, and so it was only natural that the Heavenly Host should appear to shepherds, and that they should be the first to receive the announcement of the great joy and light that had come to the poor dark earth, which they knew so well. Mary, represented by a young peasant, was very shy and listened to the Angel of the Annunciation, also a peasant lad, with eyes cast down and arms closely folded over her heart. Sorrow and joy, fear and hope, jest and solemn peace passed through the villagers' souls, not to be forgotten till the next year, when with ice and snow Christmas came back to them, and the play was repeated. These plays formed an essential part of their lives. They moulded their religious conceptions, they gave the right impulses to their will, they stimulated ever anew their feelings of devotion and love. So life in the Middle Ages cannot be understood without considering these rhythmically repeated artistic and religious influences. Religion and art were at that time much more united than they are to-day, and this union explains their deep effect. Our intellectual conceptions do not need any repetition, once they have been thoroughly understood. But this is not so with our feeling and willing, they do want to be cultivated again and again, just as our body wants food and care again and again.

Children, from the point of view of their soul development, in a way resemble in their state of mind the men of the Middle Ages. They are nearer to imaginative conceptions than to intellectual ones. Religious education especially has to pay attention to this fact. Therefore the Christmas plays do not only mean pleasure and emotion for a few hours, they are an essential part of the religious education.

In their deep feeling for the world's realities our ancestors have devoted the day before Christmas, the 24th of December, to the remembrance of Adam and Eve. The first human beings, by their attitude towards evil, have laid down the way of pre-Christian evolution, and through the mystery of Golgatha, the death and resurrection of the Christ, which was looked upon as the turning-point of the World History, another direction was given to mankind. When the Angel Gabriel came to the Virgin he greeted her with the words: "Ave Maria, gratia plena." The thoughtful minds of earlier Christians felt this celestial greeting as the reversion of the

fact that the same Angel Gabriel had driven our first parents out of Paradise as the result of Eve's disobedience. "Ave" ("Be saluted"), they said, was the inversion of our first mother's name, "Eva."

On this day, the 24th of December, the *first* of the three Christmas plays was performed, the play of Adam and Eve, of Paradise Lost. Though these plays ought not to be compared, because each has its own originality and beauty, it may perhaps be said that the first one has the most artistic qualities. It is in its primitive way a perfect tragedy. The picture of man in paradise (that is, in undisturbed harmony with God and His creation), the way in which the Evil Power enters the Garden of God and induces Eve to act against God's only command, the immediate despair of Adam, when he has followed his wife's seductive words and has bitten into the apple, God's appearance to punish the first crime, the Angel expelling Adam and Eve out of Paradise all this is wonderfully exciting and touching, both the first time one sees it and when one looks at it for the twentieth time.

One feels that one is seeing the story of one's own intimate destiny, that one is thoroughly concerned as spectator in the whole tragedy. That the whole audience is one with what is going on manifests itself also in the fact that the spectators do not remain separated from the actors, but the latter walk several times through their midst, singing their old songs.

The children, in their more unconscious way, are deeply touched, when before their eyes the tragic history of man's estrangement from his heavenly origin develops itself in symbolic pictures, which are the more impressive, because they are so very primitive. The older children may even, in a more conscious way, feel that what they are seeing is their own individual history as members of mankind and that they, too, at their age, are losing paradise, the childlike state of unity with all created things and alienating themselves from their own heavenly origin, repeating in their own life the "fall of man." In the meaning of this significant play, to have sinned against God's command and lost paradise is at the same time a tragic and a glorious fact: Adam feels his independence as an enrichment of his soul, he is walking the way of freedom to find his own inner self, he is going to work and to transform the earth. God is not a wrathful God, but through His

Angel is comforting Eve and telling her and her husband that gradually they may find their way back to His Paradise. His wrath is only flaming up against the devil, who appears before Him as accuser of the sinners and wants them to lose themselves in the anxiety of repentance and regret. The play is by no means dogmatic or intolerant. The story of man's fall is not only acted but is partly transmitted to the listeners in songs, which always end with the same refrain. In these songs the strong tension is relaxed, the children can take breath, calm themselves in the peaceful tunes, and gather new strength to listen.

These songs are not easily forgotten, long after Christmas children are heard singing them. For a long time after the festival the Christmas plays form a large part of the children's play and paintings; they like to imitate parts of the performances. With some children the devil especially is a great favourite. Small children are sometimes afraid of him, but this fear is only human, and is more a sort of agreeable shudder. They overcome the fear in bravely pulling the devil's tail while he limps past them with the company of players moving through the hall.

Of all the three plays that of Christ's Nativity according to St. Luke is the quietest and the most restful. No devil, no wrathful King Herod disturbs its heavenly peace. Even the smallest children—not, of course, under three or four years of age—can understand and love it. The evil in the world is represented by the hard-hearted landlords, who shut their hearts and houses against the touching prayers of the Virgin. (If small children attend the play, it is not necessary to accentuate their abuse!) As a contrast to them, there is the good landlord, who allows the Holy Pair to enter his stable. The children sit in quiet awe when the gentle Angel approaches the stable, bends his staff with the star over it, indicating the advent of the Child. When it is born its mother softly lays it into the crib and is the first to adore it.

It is a wonderful means, generally not considered enough by educators, of planting into the children's minds pure and noble conceptions and feelings about what is connected with the mystery of birth if they are allowed to experience these facts—which so very often are treated either in an impure or cynical or in an abstract scientific way—in the golden light

of incomparable purity, beauty, and simplicity, in which they appear in the Nativity Play according to the gospel of St. Luke.

The peace and quietness of the moment of birth, in the sound way of these old plays, is relieved by the arrival of the shepherds on the scene, with all their fun and good-hearted roughness. The children laugh and shout and greet the shepherds every year anew as their good friends. They know all their simple songs and their homely and hearty way of adoring the Child and presenting it with their poor gifts, which correspond to the devotion a child is able to feel and to utter. When at last all the players gather round the singer with the star, and wish good-night to the children and the children gladly answer them, actors and children are one happy community.

If the Nativity Play is full of love and devotion, the last play of the Three Holy Kings (which was performed on January 6th, the day devoted to them) is full of wisdom. The children—and this is not a play for small children who do not yet go to school—experience how in olden times there existed a far-reaching knowledge of the ways and influences of the stars. A mathematical but spiritual astronomy is leading the kings and is represented in the Angel bearing the Star, in which the Virgin with the Child is to be seen. These spiritual influences cause the kings to meet each other and together to seek the Child. This play is permeated by a terrible and tenacious combat between the forces of light, wisdom, and goodness and the powers of darkness, passion, and despotism. The gentle Child of St. Luke has no adversary, but the Child of Matthew, who is sought and worshipped by the kings, *has* an adversary, a king also, hungering after might and autocracy. We see the play develop itself in dramatic scenes: the Holy Kings meet the tyrant, who cunningly assures them that he also wants to discover the abode of the child in order to adore it. The devil whispers into the tyrant's ear the awful plan to kill all small children of two years old and younger. The Holy Kings worship the Child and bring their sacrifices of gold, incense, and myrrh. The Angel addresses them in their dream and asks them not to return to Herod, but to take another way home. Up to this moment the antithesis is between the Holy Kings and the evil king; from this moment one feels the antithesis between the love and purity of the

Holy Mother and the cruelty of the king, the murderer of small children. In a vision he sees her passing him, pleading the cause of all afflicted mothers and asking him earnestly to abandon his devilish plan. The children experience imaginatively in these majestic and awful events the dark backgrounds of World History. They will have to take a part in this fight between evil and good, where their own souls will be the arena and their own soul-forces the combatants.

The Angel has induced Joseph to fly to Egypt with the Virgin and her Son; we see them leaving their home at night in obedience to the Angel's command, full of sorrow, but confiding in God's help. The tyrant is no more free in his actions, he has given himself into the possession of the black powers. The massacre takes place; but the captain has to report to the king that though thousands of little children have been killed, the Child, whose death he seeks, has not been found! The awful murder has been in vain, the Holy Child has escaped the hands of His persecutors. The dark king has not reached his aim. He is as full of fears as he was before and feels trembling the fateful consequences of his deeds. When the Angel takes from him his earthly crown and puts the hellish one on his head, when the devil, horribly jesting, comes to bear him to the place where the consequences of evil-doings fall back on their executors, a moment of greatest dramatic force is reached. And it is one of the fine features of the play that at last the tyrant comes to know himself—and through this he manifests himself as a human being, in contrast to the devil—and to comprehend that he has lost his eternal Self, because he let himself be confused by the earthly temporal things. The combat between the Light and the Dark is an earnest, hard, and very real struggle, and children can anticipate this if the presentiment is awakened in them through imaginative conceptions. The king's ride to hell forms the end of this play. The actors rise from their bench, from where they have taken part in the last action with an inner active sympathy. The king is alive again, and he and the devil humbly join the actors and listen to the concluding words of the Angel, who addresses the spectators, asking their forbearance and wishing them good-night. So in a primitive, but impressive way, the bad ones unite themselves with the good and holy ones, and all at last are one in worshipping the

Heavenly Power, who came to earth to be the helper and comforter of each striving soul. The children have experienced a whole evolution through the progress of the three plays. And as they experience this year after year through their whole school life, it cannot but help them in their own development.

Such plays were acted in many countries in Europe in the Middle Ages, they were lost to the consciousness of civilized mankind in later centuries. But there were lonely villages, where the tradition was not lost, and where every year, when winter began, the one who possessed the tradition, perhaps the schoolmaster, assembled the village lads and studied with them their parts for the Christmas play. The plays we refer to in this article have long been acted in a certain part of Hungary in a German idiom; for the people had migrated there from Germany in the Middle Ages and had preserved their dialect and their plays. In the last moment before the dying tradition had quite disappeared, a philologist, Karl Julius Schroer, Rudolf Steiner's teacher, discovered the plays and wrote them down most carefully. These "Oberuferer Plays" are of a special beauty. Rudolf Steiner loved them and inaugurated a new tradition concerning them. He himself rehearsed the plays, completed them in some parts and had them played every year at the Goetheanum at Dornach, Switzerland. From there the new tradition came to the schools which follow his educational methods. They have to thank him for the stimulus to act these plays, because they now form an essential part of their life. Neither the teachers nor the parents, still less the children, could imagine Christmas-time in school without the joyful experience of the Christmas festival plays.

CAROLINE VON HEYDEBRAND.

Christmas, the Crown of the Year

EACH year, with its changing seasons, is alive and gives life to the soul of man. The human being, and especially the child, reflects the change from winter to high summer, and again through the autumn to winter, in the mirror of his own soul. The great rhythmic procession of the seasons is a changing scene against which the human being can play

his part. The cosmic ordering of the universe is the background for the life of man.

High summer is a time of activity in nature and in man's life as well. The sun rises early and passes high overhead, flooding the world with light and warmth, and only disappears late in the evening after having called to life all the colours of the heavens and the earth as a salute to the majesty of his departure. The sun of the early spring has called the earth to life again and the summer sun has drawn the green plants upwards to himself and has wakened the colours latent in the green. The animals have thrown off the dullness of cold winter and are stimulated by the sun's warmth to new life and activity. Nests are built, the young are born, and life for the birds is an exuberance of song; and of running, splashing, digging, building, swimming for the animals of field and wood and stream.

But hidden within the fullness of summer is already the seed of autumn and of winter's contraction and cold. Within the luxuriant flower the hard, tight seed, the centre for new life, is ripening, and the animals are gathering stores for winter and building shelters against the cold. Growth for the year has reached its fullest extent; the leaves have lost their spring delicacy and are coarse and big and no new life can come until the power of expanding growth is withdrawn and the old leaves wither and fall.

Thus man also, when he rejoices around the St. John's fire at midsummer, on the evening of the day of the sun's longest dominion in the heavens, prepares yearly to enter the autumn and winter which belong to his own inner life. It is, therefore, a most wonderful providence that the festival of midsummer in nature is also the festival of the birth of St. John the Baptist—St. John, who prepared the way for the recognition of the Christ, and who said to the people of Him whom he had baptized: "A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ but that I am sent before him. . . . He must increase, but I must decrease."

John the Baptist stood before Christ as the representative of the civilization which was coming to an end and was to be renewed through the power of the Christ, and he made the supreme human sacrifice—that of his personal selfhood before the being of the divine spirit of the world.

And so the fullness of the sun's light pours down at midsummer and kindles the flames of the bonfire which man lights upon the earth as a kind of signal answer to the cosmic gift of sunlight. And the light of the fire kindled at midsummer must shine into the coming darkness, and man must carry the light which nature has given in abundance into the inner life of his soul, and this light becomes the food which strengthens the inner, spiritual being of man whose festival is celebrated in midwinter, at Christmas-time.

If, during the few precious weeks of summer allotted to man in which to refresh himself for the coming year's work, he has merely abandoned the soul to the physical enjoyment of the sunshine and has, perhaps, chiefly valued the warmth to give him a flattering tan, or has enjoyed the natural beauty of the country merely as a momentary stimulation and sensational pleasure, then the holidays will have no truly recreative effect and he will bring no new light, no fresh strength, into the new year's life; he will have failed to understand the meaning of the festival of St. John. For if one is to mature and grow as a spiritual human being, then one must realize that for the seed to be produced within the flower the fullness of blossom must sacrifice its colour and beauty. The expansive growth and physical enjoyment of summer must sacrifice itself to allow the seed of new spiritual growth to develop. The luxuriant enjoyment of the individual personality in the physical world must give place to the strenuous awakening of the individual spirit of man. This is the meaning of the words of St. John which belong to the midsummer festival—"He must increase, but I must decrease."

As the human being stands within the full radiance of the summer world, his soul is drawn out into nature. His senses are active; his body is drinking in fresh life and his soul is dreaming. Unfortunately for most of us, our jobs do not allow us to dream, we must concentrate and be intellectually just as active in summer as in winter; but, whatever our job, we should practice again what is quite natural to the animal and the child—that is, to learn to listen and to see and to enjoy all the sights and sounds of nature. And this we cannot do when our minds are tense with intellectual concentration.

But from within the dreaming soul the spirit speaks and calls upon the soul to remember the experiences of summer

and to carry them forward as memory and thought into the coming winter-time.

How does the changing year pass over into winter, and how does this outer transformation reflect itself within the soul of man?

The late summer sun seems to call forth an extra brilliance from the earth. The heavens are swept clean by the autumn winds and the stars are radiant crystals in the cold sky. The gold and russet-brown and red of the autumn flowers are a challenge to the dying year, and as the life withdraws within the trees, first from the leaf's edge, then from its heart, and at last disappears within the sturdy, earthy armour of the trunk, the colours which the sun has enchanted within the green leaves are released and return to the cosmos as light.

This is the time of the meteors and falling stars, when iron in its purest form is hurled from the heavens to the earth. This is the time of the festival of Michael in his struggle with the dragon, whom he does not slay but subdues, driving him down into the sphere where he belongs.

This is, within man, the time when the iron-bearing, red blood corpuscles within the blood must be awakened to fresh activity to purify the body after all the diverse assimilation during the summer months. And within the soul of man it is the time when the cleansing sword of creative thought must drive the drowsy slumber of summer enjoyment below the threshold of consciousness.

Thus man prepares himself to withdraw again into his own inner life of thought at the autumn-time when all plant and animal life is also withdrawing into the depths of the earth.

And now, after Michaelmas, all men, and especially all children and those grown-ups who have not put the child within themselves permanently to sleep, turn their thoughts and feelings towards Christmas.

Christmas is the festival of the birth of a child, and all children have a birthday and long to share in this greatest of all birthdays. But from all sides to-day the Christmas festival is being commercialized and the inner experience of it is being cheapened and externalized until only the name is left.

For six weeks before Christmas every shop and manufacturer in the land is trying to make you buy something to give to somebody else. If you have no relatives to whom you

can give ash-trays and inkstands and umbrellas and neckties, they invent them for you. The post-office tells you to celebrate by telegraph and puts a stereotyped greeting into your hand to save you the trouble of thinking. The florist says: "Say it with flowers," the confectioner suggests a chocolate Christmas. The spirit of Christmas is made ridiculous in the shape of a big man in a long red coat disguised behind a long beard, whose sole purpose in life is to appear at the right moment simultaneously in all the shops as a lure for eager children and accompanying mothers who might buy things.

How can we in the midst of all this rescue the real Spirit of Christmas and create the festival which is really *His* and which is a magic moment in each year of childhood?

First of all let us discover who this spirit is. Is he the being in the red coat and beard whom we call Father Christmas or Santa Claus? Santa Claus has only been known for a comparatively short time in England. Originally he came from the Continent, where his name was Sankt 'Klaus or Sankt Nikolaus. There he is greatly honoured, and a special day, December 6th, was kept sacred for him in the calendar. He comes in a sleigh driven by six reindeer and is accompanied by Ruprecht, his jolly servant. Ruprecht carries a bundle of birch switches with which he menaces the younger generation, particularly the unruly element, and also a great bag full of apples and nuts and toys and sweets for the deserving. His master, however, is a person of great dignity, often appearing in his full purple and red episcopal robes and golden mitre with the staff in his hand; and he carries the great book in which the deeds of all the year are written—one page in letters of shining gold, and the next in hues of blackest pitch. Thus is our poor Santa Claus received with honour in other parts of the world, whereas here he has no day of his own, and must take his orders from the sales manager. We should learn to welcome St. Nicholas again, however, and learn to understand his true significance.

The deeds of men do not disappear from the world, even when they bear no apparent fruit. They live on as a directing force in the destiny of man. Some arise out of sympathy and are positive actions; some out of negative antipathy. Most of them, even in the adult, are not consciously directed, and certainly not so in the child. But one does not want to enter

into the magic circle around the Christ Child with all the accumulated, unclear deeds left untransformed within the soul. The hearts of the shepherds are free as they come to Bethlehem, purified by devotion—and the kings have transformed all their heritage of past deeds in the light of wise understanding. And so, for us, too, Saint Nicholas stands as the great guardian at the threshold of the Christmas-time, and helps us to recall the deeds of the past year, and to weigh them in judgment so that we may freely enter into the Christmas-time.

A great wisdom lies in the ordering of the religious calendar, which has been lost sight of by most people to-day, but which can again have meaning for us when we learn to understand it anew, whatever our particular creed or freedom from traditional creed may be. This wisdom is wonderfully shown in the preparation for Christmas through the four weeks of Advent.

The four Sundays of Advent preceding Christmas lead us in four steps to the central event of the year. In the countries of Central Europe this is better understood than in this country, and there the first Advent is celebrated by the winding of the green wreath, into which are set four candles, which is then hung in the living-room of the house or in the classroom at school, and each Sunday another candle is lit until Christmas is reached. The whole family participate in this event. The children are sent out to gather the greenery, and many old "wreathing" songs are still sung as the branches are bound into the Advent circle. Another traditional custom for the first Advent is for the youngest member of the household to rise up early in the morning and bring a rosy apple bearing a lighted candle into each room of the house. Or, in other parts, the apples are brought alight to the waiting crib, which is to be the Christ Child's home. For the children it is a wonderful experience to bear their little light steadily down a long winding path of green which leads to the crib, there to add their light to all those already brought, and for the grown-up who is watching the child there can be great beauty in understanding the meaning of such an Advent Festival.

If one recalls the story of Adam and of Eve and of their temptation through the eating of the apple of the tree of good

and evil, and if one thinks how all of the darkness and misery which was contained within the apple for Adam and Eve and all mankind, one can appreciate the true beauty of the picture of the lighted candle borne within the apple. The apple is like the earth itself and for Adam and Eve it was the experience of the earth which they sought in the tasting of the apple in paradise. And now as an answer to the fall of man God sends His own light, His own Son, into the earth that men may again find their way back to Him. And again the calendar reminds us of the connection between Adam and Eve with the Christmas event which is the answer to their fall and suffering, because the 24th of December is dedicated to Adam and Eve, is Adam and Eve's Day.

Thus through the procession of the four weeks of Advent, the Coming of the Child, and through the intervention of Saint Nicholas we are prepared for the true celebration of Christmas.

One could write volumes on the true celebration of this festival, but time allows only that we speak of a few important points. And first of all we must see how the background of nature has been set for this event.

All life has withdrawn into the earth; the plants are dormant within the seed, and the animals drowsing in their caves. But man is not asleep, although he is withdrawn into the warmth of his own house. There he is awake to his own thoughts and can digest in thought the experiences of summer. The sun is withdrawn from the earth and the stars seem especially active in the clear winter sky, and man must create his own light and warmth at home if he too is to avoid the necessity of hibernation. Christmas is the festival of candlelight; midsummer that of the bonfire.

For the child within the house when the fourth candle has been lit on the wreath and one has at last entered into the Christmas week itself, life is entirely absorbed in anticipation of the coming event. But this anticipation can become nervousness and sheer excitement for the child unless he can really *do* something in preparation. How pathetic for a child to have everything prepared for him! Father decorates the tree, mother bakes the Christmas cakes, Christmas presents have all been bought for him, there remains nothing for the child but to enjoy what others have done for him, and this

is no real joy to any child. If Christmas is to be a true festival for children then they must share in the preparation for it; they must *do* many things towards it. And there is no more beautiful way for a child to enter into the experience of Christmas than through the building of a crib or stable and the modelling of all the figures that belong with it. For a child of any age to model the figures of Mary and Joseph is to experience the mood of the mother bearing the Child or of the father leaning upon his staff and contemplating the mystery of the Child. And then to surround the Child with ox and ass and perhaps beasts of every kind is a real delight. Then, too, the shepherds and the kings must not be forgotten, and as the child makes these figures or draws them he realizes something of the meaning of the coming of the simple shepherds and the wise kings as representatives of all humanity. Thus every child can recreate the Christmas story out of his own imagination and activity and through doing it come also to love and understand it. And the grown-up who leads the child to do things for itself in this way and shares the child's interest and enthusiasm with understanding is helping to create a foundation for later religious experience which goes far deeper than any moral stories or adult explanations can ever do.

If Christmas can be prepared for in this spirit then there arises a wonderful sense of community within the family and the children learn to love their home as the magic centre for all this activity and experience. Without a real celebration of the festivals the family loses one of the strongest ties which can preserve it intact against the many influences which tend to scatter and destroy it to-day.

Thus the procession of the seasons of the year unrolls as the background for all human life, and each season is reflected in its own festivals. If children can once again come to the true experience and enjoyment of the festivals, led by grown-ups who understand and love them also, then once again the soul-life of the child, which mirrors the changing moods of the year, can become mobile and rich in variety and the child as he grows into manhood or womanhood will not need to fear the poverty and boredom of soul which haunts the lives of so many to-day, killing their love of the world and its great mysteries.

The Seasons

When hollyhocks line cottage walls,
And lanes are leafy bowers,
When broken-voiced the cuckoo calls, ✓
And thunder brings the showers,
Can I recall the silent snow
That hardens 'neath the heel,
Or think the frosty stars aglow,
Can I their clearness feel?

When mists like lakes in valleys lie,
When birds in bushes freeze,
When gulls on inland furrows cry,
And cows face down the breeze, ✓
Can musing thick the hedge with leaf,
Or fire the quivering haze,
Can the desirous heart conceive,
And bring the sun to blaze?

O thou who eatest still thy bread,
When frozen creatures pine,
Feel then in every crumb and shred
The golden sun to shine,
So shalt thou fend the frosty power,
That brings the rose to thorn,
And in thy thought, pure winter flower,
The Lily of Christ be born.

A. C. HARWOOD.

