

The Church Guardian

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Special Notice.

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CALENDAR FOR DECEMBER.

Dec. 4th—2nd Sunday in Advent.

" 11th—3rd Sunday in Advent.—[*Notice of Ember Day*].

" 14th—
" 16th—
" 17th—

EMBER DAYS.

" 18th—4th Sunday in Advent.—[*Notice of St. Thomas*].

" 21st—St. Thomas,..... A. & M.

" 25th—CHRISTMAS DAY.—[Pr. Pss. M. 19, 45, 85; L. 89, 110, 112. Athan. Cr. Pr. Pref. in Com. Service till Jan. 1st, included.—*Notice of St. Stephen St. John and Innocents' Days*].

" 26th—St. Stephen—First Martyr.

" 27th—St. John—Apostle.

" 28th—Innocents' Day.

THE CHRISTMAS FESTIVAL.

REVISED BY GEORGE C. THOMAS.

(From *The American Church Sunday-School Magazine* for November.)

The brightness of the Christmas season in every household wakens the question, "What can we do to make the children happy?" In the household of Faith the same question comes, "What can the Church do to make her children glad?" It will not do for us to let Christmas pass without somehow proving to the young that all the innocent happiness of the world at this season has something to do with the birth of the Christ. Yet we feel that in whatever we do, we must guard our children from learning only the selfish side of joy, the expectation of gifts, or the merely pagan side of Christmas in thoughtless merry-making.

One cannot forget, in making suggestions, that there are many-sided wants to be met in the Sunday-school field, wants that are created to no small extent by the way in which different schools are managed. There are too many schools in which the uppermost idea is that the children must always be having "a good time," forgetting that every exercise of the school should, in a measure, yield the fruit of religion. Even in our secular schools, public exercises in some way are subordinated to the cause of education, and the end of the exercises is to exhibit the fruit of the training in school-houses. Much more should religious schools mold all their exercises before the public, so as to make the public festival speak for the benefits of the schooling received by the pupils. A horticultural exhibition shows what the gardeners and florists have been doing to

improve the growth of fruits and blossoms. In much the same way the public exercises of all Sunday-schools should show what culture the young have been receiving. If this principle be kept in view the festival will show fruits that have ripened in the hours of the school.

Let us take the music of the festival as an example. It is usually composed of carols specially learned and practiced. The excellence of the music speaks of the training of the school in this department. As many teachers know to their own loss, this training has occupied undue time, subtracted too often from the lesson period of the session, or has supplanted the Scripture study entirely. Time for practising music can be gained by beginning the session a quarter of an hour earlier and omitting the review of the lesson. Again, the excellence of the school at its festival in singing carols is perhaps exceptional, and the music at the weekly sessions is flat and monotonous. While the carols are appropriate and well selected, the hymns week after week are inappropriate to the lesson, and the tunes either too old or, what is worse, too new. The festival music, it seems to us, should represent only such average excellencies as the common level of the school session maintains. It would be more advantageous to the school at its anniversary to sing well a chant that is a steady feature of the church or school service than to render the Halleluiah Chorus. It must be remembered, of course, that appropriateness in the music for a festival demands carols adapted to the season or day, but interpersed among the carols should be one or more musical efforts which show exactly what the school is doing to train and perfect the young in general worship.

The same principle can be exemplified and applied in bringing the children forward. We hear, now and then, of exercises where some child is put prominently forward to sing or declaim. Fortunately in our church schools this kind of nonsense is a rare exception; but, on the other hand, we give but little opportunity for the children to take any part beside the singing. Now, the one thing that children enjoy is having a part in the exercises themselves. To secure this properly room should be provided for responsive exercises in which the whole school can prove their ready participation with earnest, hearty voices. In responses clearly, but not boisterously, rendered, are an enlivening feature in any religious exercise, and prove the training of the young to take part in regular church worship. There yet remains a higher exhibition of the school's fruitfulness in catechizing. The review of some part of the year's study, the proof by clear, ringing answers that solid instruction has been received, should be a part of the public programme. A public gathering in which meet parents, teachers and children, is an opportunity for marking progress, and challenges all the participants to bring a plentiful harvest of sheaves from the fields of study. The first ripe sheaf was waved before the Lord as an offering by the Jews in their feasts. Now the first ripe sheaf of the Sunday-school is a well prepared answer to a question. It would be well for every school to be put to the proof as to how it has been instructed, and to be required to evince in the answers of its pupils that it has a clear comprehension of the truth or the fact represented by the festival season through which it is passing at the hour of the public celebration.

When the festival is an anniversary the annual report is to be read. There is ample room in such reports for mere boastfulness. The opportunity tempts to a liberal statement of names on the roll. The one thing left out is the average attendance. The comparison between the names on the roll and the average attendance is the only real test of a school's work. The number of children who attend

church as well as Sunday-school, should be stated as a feature of the work. How many scholars have become communicants, how many have been confirmed, and how many are old enough to be confirmed, but neglecting it, should be named in a well digested report. The amount of money given by the school to missions and charities, the amount absorbed in running the school, the amount contributed by the congregation for the support of the school, should appear in the treasurer's exhibit of the finances. This fruit of attendance and giving is a test of the efficiency of the school which should be compared with the work of preceding years, so that progress be marked and retrograde prevented.

An enlivening feature of an anniversary is the judicious use of emblems. There are the simple emblems of twenty years ago, each class presenting a motto and a design with its offering. This experiment has a drawback in the fact that ingenuity fails to discover novelties sufficient to supply the demand, and one such anniversary exhausts the stock of emblems so that the next year the twenty or thirty new designs cannot be found. No such general use of emblems can be adopted oftener than once in four or five years. A more moderate and feasible use of emblems is possible by adopting one large design which can be built up or filled in with bouquets of flowers, so as to develop before the eyes of the audience. The monogram of I. H. S., or the monogram of Christ in Greek letters, can be fashioned out of wood by any carpenter, with holes in the framework for bouquets offered by the classes. Any handbook of Christian art will give cuts of emblems which can be enlarged and used singly or combined; as, for instance, the cross and crown; the cross and an anchor; the shepherd's crook and crown; the star; the triangle; the sceptre; the ladder; the altar; the lantern; the lamp; the shield; the sword; the Book, and many others. The shield may be used as the background for any single emblem as in heraldry, and with a little instruction from a person of taste a good florist can produce at moderate cost an effect which will delight the eye. An unlimited variety of designs can be produced by taking an appropriate text or title of Christ, and having the single letters prepared separately by a florist, allowing each class in the school to offer a letter. A framework on which these letters can be displayed in order can be prepared by any one who can handle a carpenter's tools. Sentences can also be made of gas jets and the letters lighted one by one. The symbolism of colors is interesting in this connection, as the choice of flowers for a design should be managed so that the colour shall harmonize with the thought presented. White is used to represent purity and joy. Red is the emblem of suffering, love and atonement. Red and white combined are significant of love and holiness. Blue is the symbol of heaven and truth. Green expresses hope and victory, the color of spring. Violet is a passion color. Gold is the emblem of glory, and belongs to all symbols of royalty and Divinity.

Christian symbolism in the early ages of the Church was less fantastic than in mediæval art, and it is to the symbolism of the earliest centuries of Christianity that we turn to find the sign language of faith in its purity. Some of the favorite symbols of primitive days were the vine; the lamb; the fish; the lion:—to represent Christ; the emblem of the Spirit of God was the dove, whose white plumage signified holiness, and whose nature suggested gentleness. The olive tree and the palm branch were favorite symbols of peace and victory. Emblems of the Trinity were the triangle, three circles, the three-leaved clover (trefoil). The cross, the crown, and the lamp burning, were much used in the ages of darkness and persecution. In the use of emblems it is to be observed that there has always been a tendency