

Spirit of Giving in Public Schools

Pictures from Photos Made by a Staff Artist at the Franklin School, Omaha?



ONE CORNER OF THE HALL WHERE THE CHRISTMAS EXHIBIT WAS HELD.



WHAT THE BOYS MADE AND SOME OF THE BOYS.

AT THIS time of the year when the spirit of giving is abroad, when Christmas with all its attendant joys is uppermost in the minds of the children, and of the parents as well, in consequence, those to whom is entrusted the training and directing of these young minds are improving the season to the utmost to impress upon them the lesson that it is more blessed to give than to receive, and supplementing it with that other truth that it is not so much what one gives as the spirit in which he gives it. And in these days of extravagance there is more need of this lesson than is generally realized, and nowhere is it more evident than in the public schools. In districts that embrace families of widely different circumstances, where the children of the rich and the children of the poor mingle daily with that freedom and intimacy that is possible only to childhood, the Christmas season is to many fraught with disappointment, regret and longing even more keen than the joy that marks it as the happiest time of all the year to the children of the more fortunate. The boys and girls accustomed to indulgence, knowing little of denial or discipline are apt to find little attraction in the homely things that are the share of their less fortunate playmates, who are in turn made unhappy and even envious that the beautiful toys are not for them, and so through comparison of material things the real Christmas thought is lost, and in its stead is substituted a seed of discontent and of pride, the fruition of which is a wrong standard for both.

To overcome this, even in a measure, and to lay the foundation for a better understanding seems a great undertaking, and it is, for back of the children in the homes and the parents there is a lesson to be taught and these are not so easily reached, in fact, can only be reached through the children. But with infinite patience and the interest that ever attends an experiment, the teachers work out various plans each year with more or less success. In one large school it has become the custom for each child to bring some little gift. He is not to tell what he brings, nor does he decide to whom it shall be given. He simply marks it for a boy or for a girl and leaves the rest with the teacher who does the distributing. If there are not enough for all, the rest are supplied and when the distribution is made the little things that have been returned to many of the homes in exchange for those that have gone out have carried with them a lesson to many a mother as well as her child.

But of all the schools, Franklin has perhaps offered the most interesting lesson this year. Last fall it was decided to introduce some form of constructive work or manual training as a means of strengthening the interest between the home and the school, and between the parents and the teachers. To find something that all might share in common was a difficult task, but finally the homely old task of sewing carpet rags was decided upon as a starter. Everybody had rags and every child in the school from the primary to the eighth grade, boys as well as girls, commenced a ball. The sewing was all done at home—this to interest the parents, for easy as it seemed, the majority had to be shown how and then the work was brought to school for inspection and comparison. There was no stipulation as to the amount, for the object was to cultivate a desire for this work with the hands rather than to compel it, and as a result there will soon be a sufficient quantity of rags to make a great many yards of carpet. A loom is to be put up in the basement of the school, where the pupils may all see the weaving, and when it is finished the carpet is to be sold, the proceeds to cover the expense of weaving and the rest used for the school.

But the rag sewing was only the begin-

ning, the means of proving to the children how much might be made of a little, and how even the homely things might be turned to account. And, more than that, there was also the lesson of employing the time profitably. With Christmas ahead came the thought of making gifts as well as sewing rags, and soon dainty bits of work began to come in for the teachers' inspection and for comparison with the work of others. The



THE SOFA PILLOW EXHIBIT AND THE GIRLS WHO MADE THEM.

beautiful trick of weaving, learned back in the kindergarten, supplied the idea for many a beautiful sofa cushion in which was combined a little son or daughter's ingenuity and practice with mother's experience, and with most gratifying result. And as the beginner put into practice the combination of colors and ideas of the kindergarten the mothers revived many an idea and pattern that had long been laid

aside or forgotten in the press of other duties and cares, and together they spent hours in producing a material result that, beautiful though it might be, was secondary to that other result, the comradeship that had been established from their work together, and so the cushion or garment or whatever the article, had a double value. The same was true with boys and many a father was drawn into the acquaintance of his son through an evening spent together in the construction of something the boy had chosen to make, and so the parents both came in touch with that great part of their children's life, the school, and with the teachers who, in many cases, they found had gotten closer than they had themselves. And when one thing was finished another was begun until throughout the district there was scarcely a child to be found who was not making something for Christmas. As is ever the case, the things one makes or accomplishes for one's self he appreciates most, and many children came to realize for the first time in their lives the value of effort and its result.

Friday afternoon before the close of the term all of this home work was brought to school to be exhibited that the children might see what the others had been doing. Just outside of each door in the hall it was all arranged on tables and the parents were invited to inspect. It proved one of the largest gatherings of parents that has ever been held at the school. Not only the mothers, but almost as many fathers were present. Business men who had not been inside of a school building for years, many of them never since their children had been in school, found an hour or two to spend there comparing the efforts of their boys and girls and learning something of what the present school system really is.

And as a result of it all many children this year for the first time in their lives gave Christmas gifts that were the work of their own hands, and for the first time also realized and appreciated what they gave and what they received and so derived a new pleasure from it. And the humble gifts had a new value, too, that placed them beyond the trifles and toys that are to be bought, and to parents and child a good part of the gifts this year will have a new meaning.



THE CHRISTMAS TREE FOR THE LITTLEST ONES.