

THE CHAIRMAN: I think that most of us when we first read of what took place in Chicago a year ago thought of it as something far beyond the reach of the smaller cities. In Springfield, Mass., two weeks ago yesterday, the playground season was brought to a close by a playground festival held in the middle of the city, on a much smaller scale, of course, than anything that was done in Chicago; but it was an experiment. We did not know how it was coming out, but we went at it, and for three hours there was something doing every minute of the time. Boys and girls to the number of one thousand gathered in that enclosure. We had seven per cent. of the total population of 80,000 people around that square to witness the fun.

One of the great problems, perhaps the greatest problem that this country is facing, is the immigration problem—the assimilating of races; and there are those who believe that a long step toward the solution of this problem is right in this playground movement, and in this festival, which should come perhaps not once, but two or three times a year. At the gathering of which I spoke nine nationalities were represented by the children. Their parents were there, and I think it is not overstepping the truth when I say that for the time being we forgot the racial question. We were all one family, citizens of Springfield, out for a good time, and all took hold regardless of nationality or color; and to my mind it is something that is possible for every community to engage in on a larger or smaller scale.

The next speaker, Miss Amalie Hofer, of Chicago, will give us a paper on "National Festivals in Chicago during the Past Year".

Miss Hofer.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RECENT NATIONAL FESTIVALS IN CHICAGO

PAPER OF MISS AMALIE HOFER

The national festival has to do with the heart history of a people, and ever centers about such experiences and events as lift the deeper passions of a race into united, heroic action. Groups thus stirred by some valid human exigent are brought into coherency, which in time assumes the form of picturesque

provincialism, or of invulnerable nationalism. The traditional festival is a recurrent manifesto of these deeper feelings, and promotes group cohesion; in other words, it develops patriotic and national spirit. In the course of time the festival and its ceremonies may recede into the symbol of unitedness, quite apart from the human and historic incident which furnished the original incitement.

The most time-honored festivals, such as the solstice carnivals, are the outcome of folk experience and feeling as old and perennial as life itself. They are tap-rooted by instincts which reach further than historic circumstance, deeper far than religious creed, down into the very sources of being.

The commemorations of different times and different peoples are found to have counterpart features, the same characteristics re-emerging at different periods. This fact indicates a probable substrata of feeling, common to, therefore significant to, all men.

For three hundred years America has been the Bethel for groups that become alien and emigrants because of loyalty to some deeply grained human principle, or to groups that seek to recover a sense of coherency which has been shaken by the altering conditions attending evolution. Twenty or thirty different national groups have been bringing to this harbor their household gods of personal feeling, local custom, historic tradition and national traits. In the new coherency which is bound to be established, what portion of these birthrights is to be allowed to survive, or be eliminated or merged?

The transplanting of an old custom or an older race festival may be attended by as serious dangers as the moving of an aged tree or person. The destiny of some of these foreign ceremonies is a matter of genuine concern to such as believe that the ultimate composite which we designate American may even now be in the making.

It is with some such theories in mind that I have been observing the national festivals as preserved in our country, and have noted the adjustments and transitions occasioned by the new conditions. In proportion to the length and the propitiousness of stay in America have certain groups revived the old-time customs. The newcomers, like those first immigrants, the Puritans, do not immediately set up the old festival landmarks, but self-consciously wait for what is to happen next, sometimes

rigid under the sense of being different, often reminded of this by the ridicule of those longer on the new field—always watching out of the corner of the eye. Only when the present good makes the old wrongs fade into the past, and when the sense of belonging, when the home feeling emerges, and when its roots begin to go down into the new soil, only then are the old stories told again, the old days recalled, and the good of the old times reinstated. Then arise the desire for kinship and homogeneity, the necessity to be once again with those who understand and belong. It is then that groups of their own kind get together, in Turner Hall or lodge or union, forming societies for mutual aid or recreation, or preservation of the national qualities. An open-air place is christened "Waldheim", or "Vogelsang" or "Edelweiss", where men may come together the way one used to come, when there was only one kind, and all of the same custom. Many of these life-saving societies were in the beginning crude and grotesque, even vulgar, in their methods, and were treated merely as Dutch or Irish picnics by the Puritan, who decidedly preferred his own kind. The children of the earlier settlers called the later comers foreigners, and nicknamed them out of all national existence, as Dutch, or Mick, or Dago. But the later comers, in turn have been winning their spurs, also; and to-day the boys and girls of our schools are being taught the stories, songs, games and the poetic merry-making ways which have been preserved in our country by means of these same picturesque festivals of the foreigners. The embers of folk-feeling are being invited to blaze up again, and folk song and folk dance are embraced by professional and amateur alike, to the credit of that democracy indigenous to the American national spirit.

If Thanksgiving had come at some other season of the year, say in the budding time or the time of the harvest moon, who knows what out-of-door characteristics may not have been developed as appropriate to this our greatest national festival. There are signs that point to a warming of our somber, northern social life; for instance, the sober hundreds who are drawn in the winter months to sport on sunny shores, to witness the Mardi Gras frivolities or to participate in the rose battles and flower fiestas of the Pacific Coast. There is no mistaking the return of our younger generation to the delights of color, song, gaiety, even pagan extravagances. During the past season there have been presented to the public in the name of charity many forms

of riotous kirmess, pageantry, fancy dressing and stepping, theatrical posing and beauty competitions, which but yesterday would have been censured by the church-building fathers. The privileges of travel abroad and the unavoidable foreign contacts at home have modified provincialism, until many are turning to revalue the customs and celebrations and recreations of the European-American.

The great Norwegian national day, *Frihedsdag*, is May 17th, and is celebrated wherever Norwegians are settled. Outside of thousand-year-old Norway, the most extensive festival is held in Chicago, and is participated in by the best of 70,000 Norwegian-Americans, who on that day are again descendants of vikings and explorers, as well as immigrants in a foreign country. On that day there has been in Chicago for twenty years singing and dancing and merry-making because Norway secured a constitution and government of her own. This independence day, which has so long been an end in itself on the other side, becomes here the day for reviving Norwegian tradition, and renewing the characteristic folk-nature which made of Norsemen a nation. On this day it is proudly recalled that the first occupants of Ireland were Norwegians, and that the best English blood of to-day is of Norman, Norse, descent, and that Liev Erikson was the first discoverer of America.

At daybreak of May 17th the Norwegian colony of Chicago was awakened by the music of national hymn and choral as the band-wagon carried the musicians from street to street. In the fatherland this same custom prevails; however, with the far more stirring music of the ringing chimes and the *Männerchor* and instruments sounding throughout the realm from the high towers in the early morning.

At once preparations are made for the chief event of *Frihedsdag*—the morning procession of children. Ten thousand Norwegian boys and girls assembled at Humboldt Park, costumed to represent the various provinces of Norway, children from six to youths of seventeen, in this historical procession, each carrying the flag of his choice. In the recent May 17th parade it was found that 80 per cent. chose the Norwegian flag; the rest chose the American flag, or both. This assembling of the youth was witnessed by representative citizens whose care it now is to keep the younger generation from becoming less and less Norwegian. In the Fiordland each school has its banner or pennant, and the

entire younger generation (for education is compulsory) marches school by school, after the respective flag. When the national hymn was sounded by the band, and then sung, "*Ja, vi elsker dette landet*," and the entire assemblage arose, every head was uncovered to the sun. The afternoon was given to patriotic speaking, national games, athletic sports, folk singing and dancing. Three Norse *Männerchöre* assisted the singing, carrying the anthems and folk songs with a timbre and artistic power worthy the fatherland of Grieg. I asked a young Norwegian whether any special proclamation ordered the day to be celebrated. He said with great warmth of feeling: "Every child and even adult looks for this day to come as you do your Fourth of July. It is like the sun coming up,—just so,—like the sun it can never be kept back any more."

There is no American provision that I know of by which this holiday is secured to the Norwegians. Some have questioned whether the foreign-born should be encouraged to keep these days, holding that it is un-American, and may even block the way to Americanization. Others consider that some compromise may be desirable, for purposes picturesque as well as poetic.

One of the oldest festivals of the present time is the midsummer national merry-making of the Swedish people, set for June 24th. Again, no gathering outside the native country on this day is so large as that held in some one of the Chicago parks. Owing to the unavoidable thrift of the hard-working middle class making up our 175,000 Chicago Swedes, St. John's day is celebrated on the Sunday nearest to the 24th. In the old country, where industrial interests are homogeneous, the entire population is set free for whatever day of the week this date may fall upon. In this country no united recognition has as yet been secured for the date, and while Sunday is free, many American and Swedish Methodists withhold their coöperation. Nevertheless the European out-of-door Sunday custom prevails to draw thirty or more thousands to this most completely reproduced of old-world festivals. Family groups are everywhere conspicuous and intoxicants and vulgarities are entirely prohibited.

The fifteenth annual midsummer day celebration for Chicago was held last June 21st, and promptly at one o'clock the customary raising of the majestic May pole took place. The pole, seventy feet high, was bound with garlands and dressed in streamers, great wreaths decorating the upper end.

In the old country each province has a different arrangement of pole decoration, various local emblems and souvenirs being utilized. The Chicago audience, being made up from many different provinces, has adopted a decorative scheme of its own. One great wreath is bound toward the top of the pole, and two others, like the arms of the cross, on either side. These are intertwined with the Swedish and American colors. As the pole was raised into place the "Star Spangled Banner" was played in with the potpourri of Swedish national and folk songs. Then followed a carefully planned program of athletics, singing and dancing by various organizations, occupying different platforms, that the eager thousands might be accommodated. Sixteen folk dances, representing the traditional dances and costumes of the different provinces of Sweden, were a highly applauded feature of the program. Some of the dancers were from the old country, some are now Chicago business men and their wives, notably members of the Philochorus Society, organized fifteen years ago in Chicago for the definite purpose of preserving in full detail the folk games and dances of the old time. There was a wonderful exactness of movement and yet freedom of fine physiques which elicited continuous applause. Many of the dances were pantomime figures, telling of courting, attracting and repelling, winning and losing, and competing against odds and carrying off the bride. In it all there was a clearness of good storytelling and a purity of natural feeling and straightforward exhibition of the old law that the fittest shall be victor. It was on a level with epic poetry and bold saga, and as such was a delight to the lover of the classic, whatever his nationality. The Viking band vied with the Iduna and the North Star.

The choosing and crowning of the *Midsommarbrud* was carried out in all the traditional detail, and proved to be more than a merely pretty affair, one that had a uniquely democratic fair-play purpose. Out of the great assembly six men were named, men of family, each of whom was responsible to nominate two married women, who each selected two of the most beautiful young women present, making twenty-four, probably all strangers to each other, possibly never having met until the afternoon of the festival. (How impossible this in the old country.) These selected from their own number the loveliest of all and proclaimed her the "*Midsommarbrud*." Standing

in all her beauty, tall and calm, surrounded by her generous peers, all wreathed and decorated, she was crowned and garlanded and formally presented with the customary gold medal; this medal, of handsome and elaborate workmanship, having from time immemorial the same design of the Swedish arms,—the Chicago medal having added the stars and stripes. This annual crowning of the queen took place at four o'clock, and thousands in historical as well as modern holiday costume gathered to witness the brilliant spectacle.

There is a coherence in the audience of these national groups, a spirit of fellowship and patriotism which is substantial and solid and staid, almost devout, which differs much from the fire-cracker enthusiasm of young America. Recollections of the old home, regrets for the impulse which broke the old ties, disillusionment, hard, pioneer days and deferred hopes, are all mingled in the revival of the national day on the far western prairie. And it is not unusual that a telegram of greeting is forwarded to the King of the fatherland and an answer returned by His Majesty to the people waiting in the Chicago park.

During the past three years the Hungarian population of Chicago has grown from three thousand to thirty thousand, chiefly drawn from the working class, and added to our day-labor class. These are in solid earnest to acquire the language, the wage, and the rights of American citizenship. The Hungarian's birthright is a demand for political freedom, and every day laborer is more or less of a political agitator for this higher idea—Hungarian national life. March 15th was celebrated in Chicago by thousands of Hungarians, many of them for the first time away from their beautiful home country. This is their national day, which commemorates the high demands of the Committee of '48 for constitutional liberty, and is held in honor with that thousand-year old St. Stephen's day, which marks the anniversary of religious liberty. Two large celebrations were held in Chicago last March by these sturdy patriots, one for the factory hands and the laborers of the outlying districts, and one in the heart of the city. The latter was conducted by the Hungarian Singing and Literary Society, a group of young people who are pledged to preserve and enjoy their mother tongue, national music and literature.

How often it is the singing society of the foreign peoples which carries the ark of their covenant safely through the wilderness!

The Hungarian national spirit has a cumulative intensity unparalleled by that of any other living race. It broke out into ardent applause and continuous cheer as the Hungarian speaker outlined the purposes of the celebration. At the naming of Lois Kossuth, and the American sympathy extended to him in the fifties, patriotism flamed high, the audience shouting and cheering and stamping in one great burst of feeling. One of the leading dramatic members then read "*Talpra Madjar*," the response of the audience reminding one of the excited amens and gesticulations of a revival meeting. Prayer, home-longings and stubborn determination were all expressed in the composition and rendering of the national hymn, a composition which a young Hungarian said is "so sad, you see, because it stands for all the history of our people." Then came folk dancing, the inevitable climax of the genuine folk festival. The Hungarian Czardas, which is so seldom seen in our country, is the wildest and most tornado-like of all folk dances. It well represents the letting loose from resented bondage a once free and irresistibly powerful spirit. The unbridled fury of rhythm and movement are accompanied by violins which pour out in one harmony defiance and tears and heart-touching tenderness as only Hungarian folk-music may do. It is doubtful whether the Czardas may ever be reproduced by imitation folk-dancers. It exhibits a cumulative force of feeling and motor accompaniment scarcely to be acquired in a single generation. There would be as great a difference in power as that which exists between the epic composers and the amateur performers of the great rhapsodies, which we Americans have long since loved. That such a native dance is a matter of deep reality is made plain by the profound reaction upon all who behold. A folk dance is far from a thing to amuse or to entertain, or to make graceful those who crave novelty. A significant instinct keeps those who have the primal gift of the dance sincerely reluctant to come before strange companies. Let the imitation folk dancer try stepping the sod instead of the dancing floor, and discover what a vastly different set of coördinations is required, and then he or she will gain a little notion of the heroic muscling of the renowned morris-dancers, who, without losing step, passed from village to village along the highroad.

Over three thousand Hungarians celebrated Midsummer Day, August 2d, which date is arranged entirely to suit American

climate and conditions, and again there was play and sport, and the old games which combine pantomime with dance. It is a heroic and overwhelming fact that so many thousands, overworked, numbed with livelihood-getting and gnarled with physical and political burdens, still play, or seek the appearance of leisure and recreation—on one or barely two holidays which an American industrialism may not take away from them. Play is indeed freedom from economic pressure—and it is in his play that the soul of the immigrant grows to the more stately purposes of the land of the free, the home of the brave. And during our interviews these groups have with pride each in turn reminded the writer that certain of their national athletes won honors at the London Olympian Games. It is also noteworthy that the so-called American delegation to London alone comprised Anglo-Saxon, Teuton, Slav, Celt, Black Ethiopian and red Indian, while Finnish athletes refused to be classed as Russians and the Irish regretted having to be listed as British, upon an occasion which placed national prowess on record before all the world.

Again August 15th, less than a month ago, the Irish-Americans of Chicago celebrated the three hundredth anniversary of Yellow Ford, when Hugh O'Neill, the Prince of Ulster, routed the English in 1598. Just to hear an older Irishman tell the romantic story of this folk hero stirs to the uttermost one's vascular system. How must they who have inherited the patriotic fire and admiration for a dozen generations feel when they keep this holiday? Hugh O'Neill was held as a captive at the English court, but was raised to high honor and titles by the queen, and counted as a subject. At last his heart answered to his own people, and he returned to his Ulster tribesmen and led them on to victory against the English invaders August 10, 1598. And the following year Ballaghby was won. The commemoration of these two victories, together with Blessed Virgin Lady Day in Harvest, drew the United Irish Societies, the Irish Nationalists and the Clan-na-Gael to the green wood of Brands and other Chicago parks. The speeches were greeted with old Gaelic as well as United States English shouts, and overwhelming enthusiasm streamed from the multitudes,—not because the particular words were so stirring, but because this fervor of patriotism and nationalism had been held back to let forth on this great and appropriate day. One of these gatherings

was presided over by a brother of an Irish Parliament member, another was addressed by Hugh O'Neil, a direct descendant of the Ulster hero. Brands Park was the scene of one of the greatest jig and step-dancing contests ever held in this country. The competitors were James Coleman and John Ryan, masters of old-country step-dancing from Ireland; they held the boards until every drop of Gaelic blood rose up and joined in the rhythm. Now indeed the bed-rock of national sentiment was reached. The fineness of poise, the muscular precision, the purity and deftness of movement of these experts, can scarcely be described. Another program offered the Irish hornpipe, danced by two young girls, where again was to be noted as conspicuous the exactitude and yet abandon of the whole body, the rapid rhythm, and again the accompanying nodding, stepping, and clapping of hundreds throughout the audience. Nor was this enough, but there must be competitions between the dancing teams of St. Louis and Chicago, an athletic sport just being rediscovered by the teachers of men's gymnastics.

And so these unique freedom festivals with their enduring significance to great peoples are being transplanted one by one to American commons, and they continue to be celebrated by the tests of prowess, of physical freedom and the developing emulations of song, oratory, dance, and patriotic loyalty, for these are the credits which admit a people to the great battle royal of all times and tides—the contest for the survival of the fittest.

These are but brief glimpses of the festivals of the larger foreign groups which make up our international American city, merely indicating the historic or nature incident which lies fathoms deep in their group life. If there were time, it would be interesting to witness the crude pageant of the Sicilian colony, when the side-streets and alleys of our congested west side blossom out with lanterns and decorations, the venders of useless and gay novelties making their way through the holiday dressed crowds, all excited to the highest pitch of patois talk and gesture; or to go down Clark Street when the Chinese New Year's celebration is in full and picturesque swing, when every store front may be mistaken for a Joss temple, when all debts are cancelled and everybody's birthday is celebrated in one glorious natal day; or walk the endless labyrinth of the Jewish market into which Passover turns the streets and curbs of the

Ghetto, when every household must be purified and burnished; or the Lithuanian music festival, when a complete opera in the native language and music is rendered, in which hundreds of these high-minded ex-Slavs participate, when forgetting the Polish, Russian, and Prussian reins for a moment, they revive their folk-life in the heart of Chicago; or come out on Scotland's Day in August, when the Chicago Caledonians go with their families to the forests and fill the whole long midsummer day with folk games and dances and cricket, and merry dronings of the old, old bagpipe; or to Elliott's Park with the Svithoid Singing Society, to witness the initial outdoor performance of an historical drama of the period of fifteenth-century Swedish history. Then there are the Welsh folk to be noted, who with Chicago as a center have recently held their first great national *Eistedfod* in our country. These are some of the higher pleasure forms growing out of the once crude and often unseemly picnic.

It is the annual Play Festival of Chicago which brings together on one city green, as it were, into one great concert program all these variously significant national games, dances, sports, physical and athletic accomplishments of her people, without money and without price. The participation is all voluntary and non-competitive, and group after group contributes its event with a democratic zest which bids fair to produce the most cosmopolitan festival (not exhibition) ever held in any time. Like Chicago, our entire nation may never reach homogeneity, but we have to-day the opportunity to preserve some of the finest traits of international life and to develop a higher variety of cosmopolitanism which may be claimed to be America's destiny.

Upon concluding the reading of her paper, Miss Hofer made the following extemporaneous remarks:

May I just say a word about the invitations to take part in these festivals? I have found that unless people are approached on the level that it relates to their national game, and it is presented with dignity, they are reluctant to take part, and I should feel that one of the purposes of my coming to-day would be to bring out rather more the classic quality of the folk dance as given by the individuals from the various countries, than the imitative folk dance as rendered by our American children. We only discovered it in America through friends,

what a wealth of it there is, and found how reluctant the people are to take part unless the dance is given with dignity, unless it is raised to something on the level of poetry and patriotism. You will find that the organized foreign groups, the singing societies, the Turners, will take part in the festival if they are approached on that more dignified and serious plane, rather than on the plane of anything that might seem to be amusing or philanthropic.

THE CHAIRMAN: I am sure that we all feel very much obliged to Miss Hofer for this very vivid picture of what has been done in Chicago. In Springfield, the other day, when we were preparing for this festival, last Fourth of July, having tried to get the foreign people, the adults, to interest themselves in these folk dances, we had some misgiving as to what we would be able to do with the children; but we succeeded in getting the children to take part in the Dutch dance, the Irish lilt, the Scottish reel; and through them next Fourth of July, when we want to call upon the older foreigners to take part, we are sure of their cordial coöperation. There was no mistake about the heart-hunger of these foreign people—foreigners, but now Americans—and we will do well, it seems to me, if we forget not that great heart-hunger which must be satisfied.

MR. WRIGHT: I did not expect to say anything when I came in here. I just strayed in. I did not even know there was such an institution as the Playground Association of America in existence. I thought I was alone some years ago in desiring the things that you are organized for, and it seems as though I met my destiny here. I am not going to talk long, but the talk about race and immigration has aroused within me a responsive chord. My father was born in Ireland; my mother was born in New York of Scotch parents. I married a Swedish girl. I have two children; they are cosmopolitan. I am a member of an organization that assimilates all nationalities within its membership. I do not want to drop a jarring note here, and I hesitate to say the word; but as the sect organized by Jesus of Nazareth in his day was despised, so the organization to which I belong has until recently been despised. It is now, however, gradually being tolerated. It is the national, the socialistic movement. (I see some heads drop.) I am a socialist.

Our fundamental principle is for the uniting of all the work-

ingmen of all countries. We are international; we recognize no sect, no race, no creed. We do not take anybody by the hand. We feel that wherever a child is born, it is not by accident; it had no choice in the matter. The child is not a foreigner to us.

The central thought of this playground association idea is the child. You are doing it all for the child. You are doing it for the child's development. I was a child brought up in that part of New York known as Hell's Kitchen. Those who have been trained under better conditions probably will smile at the idea. I had not the opportunities that most of you have had. When I played in the street, the policeman drove me off the street. I was in mortal fear, with the rest of the boys born in that section of New York. Our constant cry was, "Cheese it, the cop!" when we tried to give vent to that feeling, that desire for play, when we played tag and made just a little more noise than ordinary shouting.

I have heard several times here about opposition on the part of the Board of Education. Why should there be any opposition, opposition for the provision of those things that tend to develop all that is good in the child? Why should there be opposition?