

HOW THE THIRD GRADE BECAME KNIGHTS

A Unit for Primary Grades on the Study of Chivalry

BELIEVING that good social habits and good working habits are the most important things a child in the elementary grades can learn, the Supervisor of the 3-B grade set about to find a project that would awaken in her class a desire for these habits. The topic "Chivalry" was chosen; first, because it was the most attractive way to present definite training in honesty, helpfulness, punctuality, generosity, kindness, truthfulness, responsibility, and courage; second, because it would give children the opportunity to read stories of true literary value; and third, because a nine-year-old feels the need of hero worship.

The project was introduced by reading the story of King Arthur's birth and boyhood to the class. This aroused much curiosity and enthusiasm. The children at once began to find stories in books in the school library, in books which they brought from home, and in the supplementary material from the college library. Besides this the following back-ground was given them in discussions to explain the setting of the feudal system; Power was invested primarily in the king who divided his kingdom into fiefs which he gave to favorite barons. Transportation was so limited by bad roads and vicious robbers, that he was unable to rule, except by thus parceling out his dominion. The serfs, who belonged to the land which they tilled, gave their labor and allegiance to the local baron in return for homes and protection from outlaws. This explained why there were not towns in the early period of feudalism—only castles and stretches of forest which were infested with robbers and wild beasts. The castle was the inn; the great hall, the theatre, restaur-

rant, and department store; and the whole structure was a fortress.

After the group had read for two days, they decided to construct two castles, one of clay and one of cardboard, to make a great hall, my lady's chamber, the servants' quarters, a forest; to write a book of King Arthur stories, to write poems of knight-hood, and a play. The last three things were to be illustrated by members of the group. These units were worked out simultaneously; while one group built the clay castle, another was writing a story, another illustrating it, another making furnishings for the rooms, and yet another constructing the cardboard castle.

The cream-colored clay castle surmounted with red cardboard roofs was made by copying a picture of a Norman castle. Grey-colored suit boxes lined with black crayon to represent stone were the materials for the other castle which had a thatched roof of moss and leaves. Both castles were built on rock cliffs on opposite ends of a sand-table. Towers were reared and moats and drawbridges made them appear impregnable. Between the two fortresses lay the forest which was inhabited by wild boar, deer, bears, foxes, and dragons; in which knights strode plunging steeds. The last named objects were all of paper, cut free-hand by the group.

The rooms were furnished like the Saxon castle Rotherwood described in *Ivanhoe*. The manor-hall had a fireplace at each end; skins, weapons, and trophies of the chase were hung on the walls; benches were placed near the fireplaces for the more favored of the serfs; giant tapers in crude wooden candle sticks were arranged about the hall to give light. The feast table was made of willow sticks halved to represent hewn logs. The floor was a lime and dirt mixture trodden hard and covered with rushes. A canopied dais for the lord of the castle and his family was opposite the feast table. In my lady's chamber there was a crude at-

tempt at elegance and comfort. A canopied bed was curtained in purple; tapestries were hung on the walls. For these tapestries the children painted and drew with crayons on cloth scenes from the Holy Land or of tournaments. The furnishings of the servants' quarters which resembled a bare cell were only a rough table and a bag of straw with a sheep's skin for covering.

The results of this project were interesting and various. First, the children read widely on the subject. Reading stories of such true literary value affected the children's vocabulary and style, as illustrated in the following group poem.

SIR GALAHAD AND THE HOLY GRAIL

Sir Galahad in silver white
 Prayed in the holy church at night;
 Prayed to see the Holy Grail;
 Prayed to see the crystal cup.
 He rode through storms and thunder
 To see the crystal cup.
 He rode through frightful forests
 To find the Holy Grail.
 He dared the right to wrong,
 He fought the fearful knights.
 He dared to sit in the magic chair
 Where none but the pure could sit.
 He followed the Grail to heaven;
 On a shining steed he rode;
 Red fire flamed from every hoof,
 And a crimson light appeared—
 He saw the Holy Grail
 Clearly, without a veil!
 The others were not pure enough
 To see the Holy Grail!

Second, penmanship and composition were improved when they composed and copied their stories and original poems for their books. A play was also written and its dramatization will give much opportunity for further activities. Third, they learned to master difficult problems in construction and to draw well ten animals. Not only did they learn to master their difficulties in construction, but also in number. They called their subtraction difficulties "dragons" and were more eager to attack them.

Good social and working habits were emphasized as follows: The ideals of chivalry were applied in a definite and practical way to the improvement of habits. A poster

was made which listed these ideals as knightly qualities:

1. I am kind to others.
2. I can control my tongue.
3. I am polite.
4. I am truthful.
5. I am generous.
6. I tell on myself, not others.
7. I do not kick, push, or pinch.
8. I do my own work.
9. I am punctual.

Each child's name was on the poster and opposite the child's name was a small slit. As a child developed these traits he was given a sword or scepter which was placed in this slit. If he fell from grace in one particular he took his trophy away from himself until he improved again. They wished to keep their swords so badly that they would voluntarily tell on themselves. One child said, "I have something to tell you. I cheated in arithmetic this morning." As that child kept two precepts and disobeyed one he was praised for his moral courage in admitting his error. Gaining mastery of these habits was a slow process, but after they had been worked on for four weeks there were a few children ready to be knighted.

The ceremony of knighting consisted of this: The group was asked which child they thought had all the qualifications of a knight. These qualifications were read again after the child's name was mentioned and the group discussed whether or not he had all of them. If they decided he was eligible, he came to the front of the room and stood by the poster. First he reread the requirements as listed on the poster, next he told the group in which habits he was weakest, and last he took this oath, "I will try to do these things." After this the teacher touched him on the head and said, "James Westover, I dub thee knight." His sword was placed opposite his name on the poster and he was called Sir James until he failed to keep his vows.

All the children's names were brought up for discussion. Each child in this way dis-

covered his weaknesses. After eight or nine weeks of real work every child in the room had been knighted. This did not mean that all had these habits to perfection, but when a talkative child could control his tongue three times better than he did at first his growth in control merited reward. In all discussion the criticisms were given in a spirit of helpfulness and were accepted without anger.

This unit gave a well adjusted balance between the real and ideal and showed how the necessary habits may be instrumental in solving the children's immediate problems. It also proved that chivalry is not dead, but merely lies dormant waiting the awakening touch.

HAZEL BROWN WELSH

LA MAISON FRANCAISE

A Unit for a Beginners' French Class

AT THE beginning of their first year in the study of the French language pupils usually have trouble in memorizing long columns of French words and expressions which they must necessarily use frequently in order to obtain a speaking acquaintance with this language. In order to vitalize French and to overcome the above-mentioned difficulty, the following "unit" should prove helpful.

I. What the Children Will Do

- A. They will decide to make a scrap-book containing pictures of "La Maison Française," giving both exterior and interior views.
- B. They will study French books to get an idea of a French house and its surroundings.
 1. They will look for French gardens, flowers, etc.
 2. They will get a definite idea as to the exterior part of the house.
 3. They will decide what rooms they will want to put in their house and what furniture they wish to place in each room.
4. They will list the words they will have to use in 1, 2, and 3 above.
- C. They will carry on class discussions, using French nouns as frequently as they can.
- D. They will collect for their scrap-books pictures from books and magazines.
 1. They will select pictures good in composition, in color, and in placing.
 2. They will find pictures which are typically French.
- E. They will make their scrap-books.
 1. They will design attractive covers for them.
 2. They will plan and arrange the material in their books and paste it in.
 3. They will label each article placed in the scrap-book, using the French name.
- F. They will criticize constructively each others' books, and will suggest any improvements they can.
- G. They will play a game in which they use the words learned in making their books.
 1. They will select two leaders from the class.
 2. They will choose sides, the members of each side having their scrap-books.
 3. They will, carefully covering the names but showing the pictures, each in turn ask a member of the opposite side what a certain article is.
 4. They will ask and answer all questions in French, using complete sentences.
 5. They will give a point to the side which succeeds in asking the opposite side a question which they can not answer.
 6. They will declare winner that side which has the greatest number of points at the end of the game.
- H. They will sometimes exchange scrap-books with another French class of another school, or will sometimes donate them to a French class in a different community.