

MUSEUM EDUCATION IN WARTIME

IN spite of a fifty per cent reduction in the available docent service hitherto provided by the Museum, the Educational Section has from last October to mid-April received 312 classes, totaling 10,439, for more or less formal instruction in the Museum.

Between and after classes the members of the department have gone out to talk at High School assemblies, the Junto, club meetings, and at Temple University night school. They prepared a prospectus for, and cooperated in, the service of Institutional Membership in the Museum, organized and conducted a special Christmas sale of educational material for children, arranged special exhibits of musical instruments for the Curtis Institute concerts held in the Museum, took charge of the care and rental of films in the Johnson Film Library and of loans from our lantern slide collections, assisted the registrar in photographing specimens for the catalogues. They have supplied information, visual aids and other assistance to individuals, teachers, manufacturers, designers, and various educational organizations, both at the Museum and by correspondence. Now they are additionally engaged in covering our central windows, barricaded to provide the Museum's air raid shelter, with murals of Aztec and Lenape Indian design which, both gay and instructive, make a virtue of necessity.

The most extensive and pivotal occupation of the department's varied but related activities is, however, the instruction and guidance, without charge, to classes or to individuals, of all ages, who request such service from the Museum. While about 14 per cent of these comprise high school and college classes, adult study, or teachers' observation groups, the great majority of them are elementary school classes, ranging from seven to fourteen years of age, brought by their teachers to one or another of the Museum lessons which have, through past years of constant cooperation with the schools, been brought to the closest possible correlation of the Museum's collections with the school curricula and the children's daily experience in learning.

In order further to integrate the Museum visit with the children's school work, a preparatory lesson sheet is sent each teacher some days before the scheduled visit to the Museum, and upon return to school the synthesis of group experience comes through oral and written compositions, dramatizations, art work, and reproduction of the costumes,

tools or other industries which have interested the children at the Museum. During the one and a half to two and a half hours the children spend in the Museum every known pedagogical and visual aid is brought into service to help the children absorb the maximum yet avoid "mental indigestion." Pupil participation is the keynote, and with the special collections assigned by the curators or purchased for the purpose, the children approach real understanding of the peoples they are studying through all five senses: they handle and use their tools and utensils, dress in their costumes, taste their foods and hear their music, speak their words and dance their dances.

That the methods and content of the lessons have convinced educators of the usefulness of the Museum is illustrated by the fact that several schools unable to secure school buses hired their own, or where possible sent the classes on foot, and that 47 teachers, unable to secure appointments for a docent, brought and conducted their classes, a total of 1,288, themselves.

Wartime economy and wartime psychology have already, and will increasingly, put a heavy responsibility of wise cooperation, sane planning and sound foresight on all educational institutions, so that an honest evaluation of the Museum's potential services in wartime is our present major concern. Since all who are occupied with children's welfare agree that both for psychological and for practical reasons their usual routine should be disrupted as little as possible, the Museums of the city and the school authorities have agreed to continue the programs of Museum visits as long as possible. Nevertheless, the unequivocal value of such extracurricular activity must clearly be demonstrated if the Museum's increasing usefulness to the community is not to suffer serious interruption, even retrogression. Gone are the concepts which still held during the last war, when Museums could advertise as havens of refuge for mental and emotional relief from the stress and strain of the times; in these days of all-out effort, of emphasis on production, efficiency and speed, we must contribute constructively, or admit our unfitness for participation in community life. The adjustment of the Museum's educational program to present conditions, however, necessitates no dislocation or revision of our tried and proven system, but rather an increased emphasis on those of its features which are most valuable in equipping children to meet present conditions. For these elementary school children, who now come to us by the thousands, are the ones



Air Raid Shelter—Aztec designs behind sales desk illustrate the lesson as well as disguise blocked windows.

PLATE VII

Instruction Still Goes On—Abbé Legrain describes to a class the continuity of civilization, showing them jewelry used by the ancient people of Greece and Rome.





Learning How Indians Live—A class led by one of its members reproduces a Pueblo ceremonial.

PLATE VIII

Lesson on Primitive Music—The children imitate African rhythms on original instruments.



who will shortly, while doubtless escaping the destruction of war, inevitably face the no less arduous, if less violent, task of building a new and perhaps better world order. For them the qualities of self-reliance, resourcefulness, ingenuity and constructive thinking become more than ever of utmost importance, and towards the development of these the Museum can make a unique and effective contribution.

The children of third grade, for example (about nine years of age), coming for one of the Industrial Arts lessons on Indians, Eskimo or Tropic Islanders, see how the primitive child, unhampered by the complex dependencies of an industrialized society, learns to construct with his own hands and brain a comfortable existence from such materials as nature provides, and are encouraged to imitate primitive man's resourcefulness and ingenuity to increase their own independence in their own environment.

By sixth grade (twelve years) the children are developing a realization often surprisingly mature, of the complexity, both economic and intellectual, of the world today. They are profoundly conscious of, and disturbed by, the reverberations of mental and physical insecurity, confusion and conflict all about them, which they can even less than their elders comprehend, accept or surmount. They need, and must be helped to, an individual sense of purposeful direction, of reasonable confidence and achievable security that cannot be shaken because it is sound. And here, when their studies include the whole history of western civilization, what better service can we give them than to help them understand, analyze and weigh man's past achievements and failures, to follow backwards from the chaotic present to the clear source among the Greeks, those ideals of true democracy, of scientific inquiry, of cool and dispassionate reasoning upon which the foundations of our civilization were laid? These they comprehend and love, and then, seeing themselves not as born unreasonably into a meaningless chaos from which there is no escape, but as potent, active factors in the dynamic progress of history, they will succeed in building wisely for the future because they know and understand the past.

CORNELIA DAM.