

From the Introductory. To anyone not familiar with the astonishingly rapid growth of the child-drama movement in this country the slogan of Every Public School a Community Theater will come as a distinct surprise: yet it is not long since President Emeritus Charles Eliot of Harvard, in speaking of the dramatic instinct, prophetically said: Here is this tremendous power over children... that ought to be utilized for their good. It is true that the dramatic instinct is very general.... So I say that this power... is one that ought to be in at least every school in this country, and, moreover, I believe that it is going to be. On every side it is evident that this prophecy is being fulfilled. The demand for childrens plays was never so great as it is to-day, and coincident with the demand is a wish for a fuller knowledge of how to direct them, since there are few guide-posts on the way. Therefore, the object of this book is to tell in the simplest possible manner what to do, and what not to do in the producing of plays for children. The word children is used to indicate the happy occupants of the years between six and fourteen, and by producing, the general stage-directing, costuming, and setting of a childrens play, so that it will have distinct educational and artistic value. It is for the school-child, not the stage-child, that this book is intended: for the teacher and drama enthusiast rather than the professional producer. It will consider both child-audience and child-player, and the results on both of a logical development of the dramatic instinct. It will discuss plays to fill the special needs of the public school, the social settlement, and the camp. It will also briefly consider the stage-play (i.e., professional play) for child-audiences. And as the whole movement of child-drama is significant from an educational and sociological, as well as a dramatic point of view, a brief history of its vicissitudes will be included in the present chapter "from the days when little Greeks participated in the festivals to Athena, through the time when the Countess de Genlis established in France, in 1776, the first Theater of Education for Children that the world had ever known. From that time to our own is less than a hundred and fifty years, yet what a change has taken place! Instead of a single example of a childrens theater as was that of Mme. de Genlis, we now have child-plays and child-players throughout the country in public schools, social centers, and social settlements, fostered by educational and dramatic leagues, recognized as a power potent for good, and if rightly directed, a means of teaching patriotism, ethics, and art. Strange as it may seem, a childrens play written for the special delight of child-audiences was undreamed of till the eighteenth century preached the rights of the child as well as the rights of man. Like many another modern movement, child-drama seems new, when in reality it is not. It has come gropingly up through the ages. The need of it was dimly felt centuries before it appeared, just as the need for childrens literature and music was felt: but in the filling of these needs child-drama came last. Its development has been tidal, rising here, falling there, seeming to retreat utterly, only to come on in greater strength and fullness.

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