

Devotees of the theory that in the "old days" summers were always long and hot, will find pleasant confirmation of their notion in the entry for July, 1928, recording yet another liberating innovation wrought about this time. "During the very hot afternoons I have held school under the trees at Arundells Farm".

When we look at general reports during these years it is noteworthy that detailed discussion of teaching method is often included. We see the school continuing to move gradually towards individual thought and self-expression in the children's work. The 1930's are a sort of half-way house between the days of The-Three-R's-And-Nothing-But-The-Three-R's, and today's more inclusive aims. On the one hand we have "the children are individual in that they are used to thinking and speaking for themselves" (1937). "The infants teacher has developed individual work methods and has introduced attractive apparatus for the purpose". This produced "happy, natural and responsive infants" we are told, (so we need not place too much emphasis on the plaintive criticism that they were "a bit too ready with their hands" - surely a perennial cri-de-coeur where infants are concerned?) "The older juniors held a debate" (1938). On the other hand the emphasis sometimes falls unduly on the mechanical. In P.T., "the children responded with promptness to the words of command" (mentioned as the sole aim of P.T., not a contributory part), and this calls to mind one definition of the function of our original elementary education system as being "to produce a disciplined labour force for the factories and fields". In history "the spelling of historical names" is cited as being of importance. As in the P.T. lesson, this surely is but a part of what the whole is all about.

A criticism of the juniors' arithmetic in 1931 is that it is "too mechanical in type". Hence we see the use of counters being advocated, and the notion that tables for infants be cut down to the 2 and 3 times tables only. But Mr. Kingdon did not work on without meeting opposition. For instance, one of the school managers, whose child was in the school, called in 1927 to "criticise the whole teaching of the school, and to express strong views on the teaching of anything but reading, writing and arithmetic".

On the whole, however, he won approval for his methods. After his first Armistice Day Celebration, when



"the whole village assembled round the memorial" and "a massive cross made of flowers brought by the children was laid on the memorial by children whose fathers were killed in the war ..." Miss Dunning .. (who had seen the ways of the school since 1873, we must remember) "expressed her appreciation of the beauty of the service and the exquisite singing and reverence of the children". Without irony, Mr. Kingdon continues "the occasion was unique in the history of Creech".

Occasions of patriotic fervour were a recurring event throughout the first half of the century; notably, successive Empire Days; and later, Armistice Days too. An interesting graph could be made to show the length of time spent on Empire Day celebrations; it could curve gracefully upwards to a peak in 1916 and 1918, then tail away slowly after 1925. It would show how, in 1909, the school contented itself with a simple rendering of "God Save the King" after prayers, and a brief talk on the duties of subjects of the Empire. In 1916 "patriotic songs were sung at intervals" throughout the morning, "and also patriotic recitations were rendered". In 1918 a crescendo was reached when Mr. Hurrell "occupied the whole morning on giving lessons on "Empire", interspersed with patriotic songs". The 'swan-song' may perhaps be said to have been the novel introduction of a gramophone recording of the King's Speech in 1923.



Unfortunately neighbouring log book entries sometimes produce an effect contrary to the spirit in which they were made. The 1924 Armistice Day "was observed by singing 'Oh God our help in ages past' ... Nurse Owens visited this morning and examined the heads of the children in regard to cleanliness". In passing, let the fastidiousness of the nurse be set on record, for she examined the hair with two sticks! The above entry leads us into two avenues of exploration - the health and welfare of children throughout these middle years of our school, and the nature of their high-days and holidays.

Before embarking on the children's health, we could be tempted were we of 'Emergency Ward 10' mentality, to catalogue the varying illnesses and ailments of staff, a fascinating





catalogue in itself, but hardly as demonstrative of social history as the children's. With but a sympathetic acknowledgement of one poor lady's absence "owing to weakness", we will content ourselves with a glance at an unfortunate week in February 1912, when in the middle of a chicken pox epidemic Mr. Harold Hurrell, pupil-teacher son of the headmaster, met with a bicycle accident". Next day "during the Scripture lesson, Miss Groves" (also pupil-teacher) "fainted and fell to the floor". She was carried into school house until she had "sufficiently survived". Mr. Hurrell then advised that she should have the remainder of the week off to rest. He adds in brackets "it being a short week".

The vast umbrella of our welfare state is constantly in our minds as a comparison, as we read through the log books. Today we can say almost all are sheltered, provision made for all kinds of need - monetary and medicinal, mental and physical disability. Yet in the first quarter of a century of our school children were excluded - and thus, we may assume, debarred from any further education - for reasons such as weak eyesight, fits, or "diseased" legs. A commentary on our vastly improved health services can be gleaned from the fact that in the first 20 years six children died; one, it is recorded, from measles, and one, a little four year old girl who began school in September, was dead by Christmas.

We have evidence of the provision made for the poor in the 1880's, at a time when responsibility for such care was a local matter rather than a national one. "On Friday afternoons several of the children absent themselves to go to receive people's pay at the relieving office" ... "Several of the elder children are away to take the parish relief money for several old people, the relieving officer coming to the village during the afternoon and arriving at no fixed time". And perhaps we may deduce from the following entry that the Vicar ran a kind of Savings Club for Clothing? "Owing to the absence of the Rev. J. Bownes from the village, I took the village Clothing Club money at the Vicarage from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m." (We are grateful to learn "All went well during my absence"). At the same period the School Board paid the fees of certain children whose parents were unable to do so. Mr. Barrett "sent a boy



home for school-fees; he did not return, and was absent in the afternoon also". He came next day "but as he brought no fees, and his mother expresses herself as unable to pay any, I sent him home again, in order that the case may be presented to the Board, and relief allowed for the lad's schooling". There is kindness and something almost like affection in the wording of that last phrase, and yet "the lad" was not allowed the protection of anonymity, twice sent home so publicly.

Others, more fortunate because their parents apparently were in a position to exercise some choice, were sent home about the same time for a different reason - as a precaution against the spread of smallpox. A month later "several children" (they were all from Bull Street) "who had been sent home on account of fear of smallpox have left school, their parents taking offence". This particular outbreak of smallpox in 1880 lasted from February into May, when "several children were away owing to the swelling of their arms". That would be in the days when a red ribbon was tied around the vaccinated arm as a warning not to knock against it. The quarantine and the vaccination were arranged by a medical officer of the local Board of Health, the same body who in 1875 forbade the re-opening of the school after the summer holiday "till some alterations were made in the offices". That functionary euphemistically referred to as "the office-cleaner" of these early days (and not-so-early days, for the Creech sewage system is comparatively recent), had a job no-one would covet. The Sanitary Inspector's 1901 injunctions "that the lavatories be emptied every two days and ashes placed on them every day", give some hint of what was entailed. The buckets were emptied on an ash heap in Curvalion Road (continuing a village tradition maybe, for it was formerly Pig Barrel Lane), and this deposit was later sold by the barrel load! Perhaps the task was partly minimised when steps were taken to prevent passing villagers from sharing the school facilities, a practice which roused the righteous indignation of one visiting H.M.I. And who knows, perhaps to the children the "offices" (always known as closets) were a place of restful conversation and cosy confidences, furnished as they were as two-seaters, a big seat and a little one. Originally of course there were no wash basins in school, and enamel bowls were used instead.

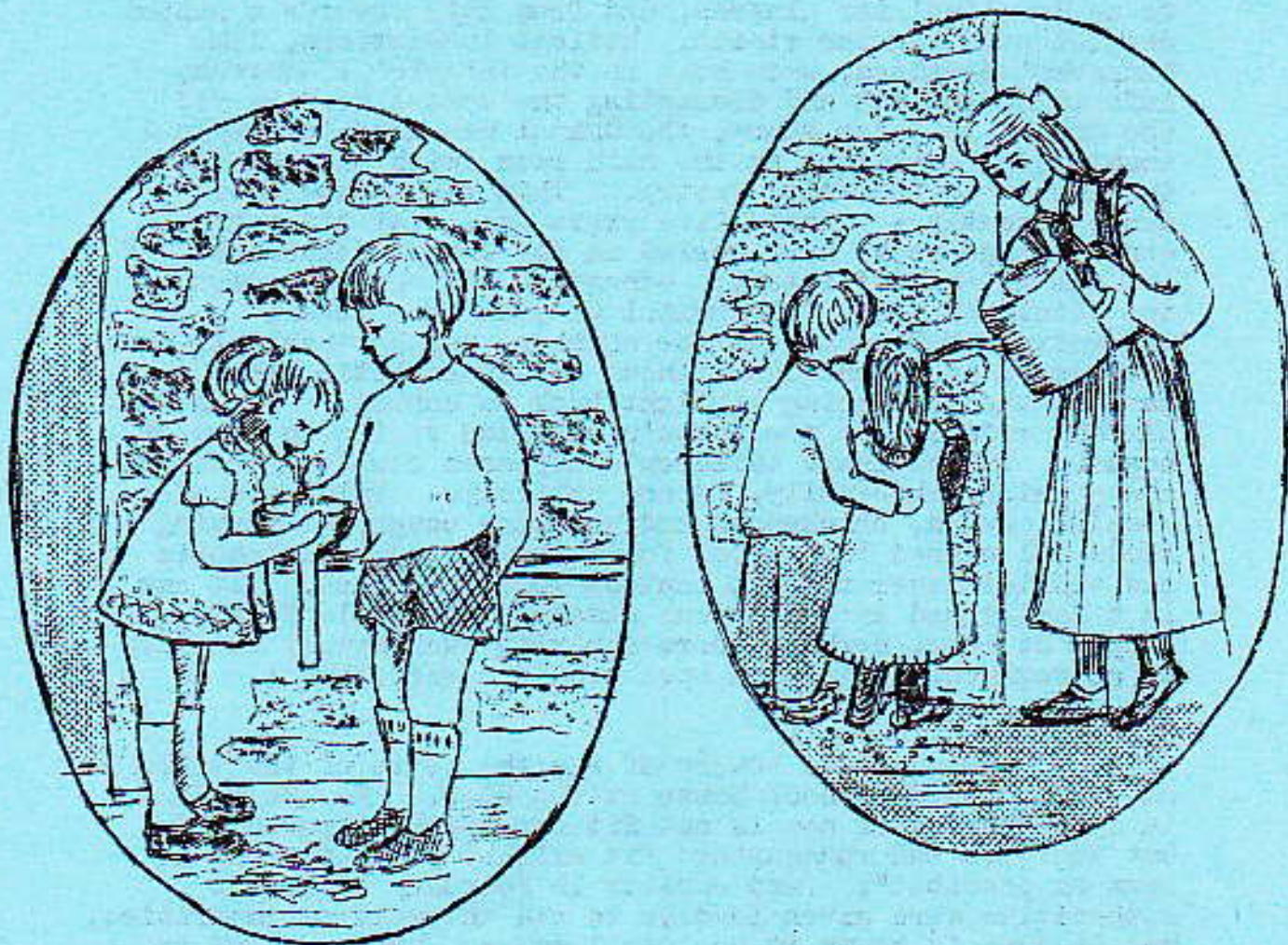


Medical Inspections began in 1908, at first for first year infants and children over 12. Two years later they also included 7 & 8 year olds. Children could be sent to an 'oculist' for glasses, and from 1913 onwards a school dentist paid regular visits. Medical Inspections, like Managers' Meetings, were held in the infants' classroom, infants moving out and disrupting the school routine for the day. In later years, the Chapel was used for medical inspections - waiting in the main room, with the actual inspection in the small vestry. This took place until quite recently - perhaps five years ago. At times the dentist appears to have worked in the Chapel schoolroom, if the demand was sufficient; otherwise the children went to the Clinic in town. The Dental Caravan is a recent innovation at Creech, one for which we may be thankful, on hearing of an extraction without any anaesthetic, the patient then returning straight back to school. We have already referred to the nurse's surprise visits to inspect heads. The ordinary children's diseases could run riot in a way which, thankfully, is now unlikely. Epidemics of measles, mumps, chickenpox and whooping cough, at varying times all closed the school for weeks on end; diphtheria and scarlet fever receive mention more than once. If one in a family had an infectious disease, the whole family stayed at home, perhaps there applying such homely remedies as goosegrease and a warm sock around a sore throat.

A hazard to beware of was the state of the well, situated outside school house at the back. We are told in 1912 "the water now is not fit for drinking purposes", but there is the reassurance "it will be put efficient as soon as possible"; and earlier in February 1901, the authorities were given 10 days to rid the well of impurities, but in June it seems it was still impure. However, as the purest of water that came from it was drunk by all the children from the one spout of the school watering can, too much anxiety about its aseptic quality seems superfluous.



Before the refinement of a tin cup was introduced, the first to drink from the full can got a drenching as well.



The children's mid-day sandwiches, for those who lived too far away to go home, were eaten in the playground on fine days; when wet, and throughout the winter, they were eaten in that shed which still exists as a P.E. Store. There, on the seats affixed in those days, sat the children, munching their bread and jam, bread and dripping, or even, strange fare to modern stomachs, bread and lard.



In 1909 a sad occurrence left its mark in the memory of all those who were in the school at the time. Of the three boys who attended Huish Grammar School for the Entrance Scholarship Examination that year, only one passed. Shortly afterwards he "fell while playing just before opening school in the afternoon. The gash was so severe", writes Mr. Hurrell, "that I sent him home and told him that the doctor should see to it". One week later we read the sad entry "Evelyn Knight died this morning from Tetanus arising from a wound received while playing, as recorded". A half-holiday was given to enable children to attend his funeral, while "the fellow-members of his class walked in procession". An entry a few months later strikes us as strangely quaint, but it was no doubt occasioned by the memory of this tragedy. Another boy "through having a hole in the bottom of his boot, cut his foot badly on his way to school. He was sent home in a wheel-barrow, under the charge of two First Class boys".

