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Selection from Estelle Carpenter Papers

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One bright May morning, six years ago, thousands of happy girls and boys with their parents and teachers were crowding on the cars, and were rapidly going to a pleasant spot, called Glen Park. They were going to celebrate Admiral Dewey's glorious victories, for it was May the First, 1900.

The girls were so sweet and pretty in their light dresses and ribbons, and the boys were eagerly discussing the races and games to be held that day. The cars were so crowded that many of the boys looked as if they were falling off, while the girls' frocks were being spoiled in the tremendous crush.

Glen Park is a very beautiful spot in the early Spring time. The tall grasses, and wild flowers form a thick, soft carpet, and the trees, and shrubbery cover the soft rolling hills, that shut in the Park, so it is no effort at all to imagine oneself in the heart of the country. The park was filled with many men, women, and children. Flags were flying, bands were playing, and everyone was so happy.

The Superintendent of Schools, the Board of Education, and the various distinguished guests were on the raised platform, to one side of the Park.

All at once the bugle sounded, the band played a stirring march, and row after row of girls in white linen suits, caps, and leggins and with wands in their hands, stepped forward, and went through an interesting set of exercises. The children looked like a splendid army of soldiers only they were more attractive, because they were our San Francisco girls and boys.

As I stepped upon the platform, every eye was turned upon me and

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ranks were closed at a signal. In a few seconds, closely watching my leading, they were pouring forth their fresh young voices in our beloved "America", which they sang in parts.

After this a second company of one thousand children with white, red, and blue sashes and caps, went through difficult exercises. They swung themselves, they jumped and leaped, until they almost looked like frogs.

These children from a given signal from me, then sang in perfect unison "Columbia the Gem of the Ocean". At each chorus they waved red, white and blue handkerchiefs. What an inspiring sight that was! The children were singing, the handkerchiefs were waving, the band was playing, and the people, cheering!

Still another one thousand children came forward, and after a fine military drill, they sang with splendid enthusiasm "The Star-Spangled Banner", while they waved their flags.

The morning exercises were over and the children were now free to be off for their fun—and such fun! There were wild flowers to pick, donkeys, locomobiles [sic] to ride, grab bags and games to investigate. Then came all kinds of goodies to eat— popcorn, candy, ice-cream, peanuts, and much more.

Two o'clock, there were the exciting races to see. The winners were to receive prizes. There fifty and one hundred yard dashes for girls and boys. There were egg races and sack races and tugs of war.

Those who did not come to see the races, could go to the big theater on the grounds. There were four performances during the afternoon, and most of them were given by our school children.

There was the most beautiful May pole dance, by the sweetest little

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girls and boys, dressed in fancy suits. Oh how pretty it looked to see their steps and dances.

There were many beautiful songs and recitations, choruses by classes of children, and even a band of little boys who played between the numbers.

Then there were flag drills, a doll drill by Second Grade girls, and a Japanese Fan Drill, by the cutest little first grade babies. They were all dressed like little Japanese ladies.

There were many fancy dances, and there was a club drill by Chinese school boys, who were dressed in real Chinese suits, and wore pigtailed, too. Now, do you not wish you could have seen them?

But even with so many interesting things going on in the theater, it was so beautiful [sic] outside—the sky was over-cast, but it was a soft balmy day. The grass was so green, the wild-flowers so bright—buttercups, bluebells, and poppies—oh, those poppies! Such golden, great big poppies! No where in the United States do they grow except in California, and so our children love them more than any other flower.

So all day long, that sweet Spring day, the children played. There were ninety thousand people in the Park, and twenty thousand of them were children. Such happy ones, too. From a distance the white frocks and gay hats of the girls made the place look as if the snow were on the ground in patches, while the stretches of wild-flowers were between. The colors for the day were Blue and gold, for our State University, and Red for the great Stanford University. We wish the children to love these colors, for we wish as many big girls and boys to go to the university as possible.

The booths and stands were gaily decorated with bunting and flowers.

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The games and races were most exciting, the girls not having had much experience in racing, did not take defeat easily, and some of them cried real hard because they had not won. The boys were like men, and whether defeated or not, they entered heartily into the sports. But the funniest and most exciting race of all was when Nelson Giberson, the fattest boy in the Fat Boys' Race, rolled in and easy winner over eight other prancing fat boys, who weighed two hundred pounds each.

After the games were finished, it was time to go home, but dear me! No one wanted to, so not until darkness and compelling mothers and fathers made them, did all happy, tired youngsters leave.

So six years ago these little ones had planned with their teachers in their pleasant school rooms, this good time on May Day, to Commemorate the victories of our great Admiral Dewey, and after all this long bright day they went back to their homes in the heart of the big San Francisco.

From North Beach and Barbary Coast, Telegraph Hill and Pacific Heights, where such grand views of the City, the Bay, and the Golden Gate can be seen, from Market and Kearney [sic] Sts., where so much business was done, from Tar Flat and the Water Front, where the factories went all day, from Noe Valley, under Twin

Peaks, from the Mission, where the famous Mission Dolores is, and from the Protrero [sic], where the Union Iron Works produce our immense warships—from all these places came our children with their parents and teachers.

They all brought their saved-up pennies, to have a good time, and when they went home, so sleepy, yet so happy, they crawled into comfortable beds and dreamed all night of the fun they had had that day.

But on Dewey Day of this year, 1906, the San Francisco School children and their teachers had quite a different picnic from the one in 1900.

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There were no homes or pleasant, comfortable school rooms to start from, there were no cars to go to Glen Park, there were no pretty dresses, ribbons and hats for the girls to wear, or spick and span new suits, caps and leggins for the boys.

No money was spent for theatres, very little for candy or ice-cream, and no one was going to a picnic on that day. May 1, 1906 was a dreary, cold, windy, rainy day. It poured and poured, and the poor children and parents out in the tents in Golden Gate Park and in the Presidio, were very cold and wet. In some of the tents, where there were no wooden floors, there were puddles every-where, and it was very hard to get things to eat, because the stoves were all outside of the tents, and the rain almost put out the fires.

And all of this terrible time was the consequence of the earthquake and fire, that happened in San Francisco, on April 18, 1906.

Everywhere over the City, in the small parks, in the Presidio, in the Golden Gate Park, and in the Potrero, the little ones, with their parents, were living in tents.

Some of them had not even a comfortable bed, dear children, and they have to sleep right on the floor, rolled up in a quilt, and food had to be cooked out-of-doors on old stoves, or on little brick fire-places.

And on this May 1, 1906, all the little children who were not in tents, but were still in the City, had to live in their homes with no fires in them, and it was very windy and chilly, and everyone had to cook in the streets, because the earthquakes had broken down the chimneys. In some houses there was very little water, and it had to be carried from the park, and the houses were lighted with candles as the gas pipes were

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broken. Almost every family that was burned out, had to go into the Bread-line to get food, or to the Relief Station to get clothes. Can you even imagine, dear children, four hundred blocks entirely burned down, and all the houses and stores and business places gone?

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And then, think of all the beautiful stores that were burned; the furniture stores, the shoe stores, the clothing stores, the jewelry stores, the toy stores, and the candy stores. Then the bakeries and restaurants, where so many good things to eat were, almost all gone. Many beautiful churches were destroyed—churches where little girls and boys went to Sunday School, and where men and women went to church. In some of the churches [sic] there used to be boy choirs. Have you ever heard a boys' choir sing? The voices are like angels, so pure and sweet.

Christmas Eve the Boys' Choirs of San Francisco would go from hotel to hotel to sing carols and "Peace on Earth Good Will to Men". How glad the people were to hear them! But now the beautiful hotels are burned down, and most of the boys are selling papers or working in some way to earn money for the help of their families.

And all the theaters are gone, too! How many times our children have been to hear and see "Uncle Tom's Cabin", or "Little Lord Fauntelroy", or other pretty or funny plays. Then, some of them sometimes even went to the Opera at the Tivoli, or at the Grand Opera House. The very week the fire came, some of the greatest opera singers in the world were singing at the Grand Opera House. I wonder if you have ever heard any of them? There were Mme. Emma Eames. Mme. Sembrich, Fremstadt, Caruso, Scotti, Burgstaller, Van Rooy, Dippel, Plancon, Campanari, Bauermeister, Jacoby, and Hamer. I hope you may some day hear these great artists. Their voices are so beautiful, and the music which they sing is so great.

And there were so many school-houses burned. There were thirty-four entirely destroyed, as the fire raged so fiercely, and the walls of others are half standing. Some school-houses were large, having fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, and eighteen class rooms. Others were smaller. But all were well-furnished and comfortable. How sad that so many thousands of children

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will have no place to go to school, unless other little children in the United States help build the schools again.

Some of the schools were on high hills, where one could see such grand views of our beautiful City. From others you could see the Golden Gate and the Bay. Others were on flat land in the heart of the City. In some of these school yards, the boys played hand-ball and foot-ball, and the girls played tag and basket-ball. Often when I visited the schools to give singing lessons, I would have the children sing in the open-air in these yards. In some of the schools, there were cooking rooms and manual training shops, where the girls and boys would come to work and study.

In the Franklin, Jefferson, and Lincoln Schools, there were large halls, where the children would meet to hear lectures and sing.

There was one school, called the "Garfield". It was the oldest school in the City. It was started in 1854, and was a strong stone building, on the side of a steep hill. It had queer little straight stairs, and nice big rooms, and big yards, built against the side of the hill. When I went there, I used to look up at the houses on top of the hill, and wonder if they would ever fall down into the yard.

Many of our well-known California men and women went to this school. The writer, Charles Stoddard, went there. Our City Attorney, Wm. Burke, used to go there, and just think, our own good, Superintendent of Schools, Mr. Alfred Poncovieri, used to play marbles in the yard, and recite his lessons in the class rooms.

When this school was built, it was in the heart of the best part of San Francisco, but when it was burned, it only was on one hill, on one side of the Big San Francisco—the City had grown so very large in fifty years.

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This was the oldest San Francisco school, and because the people loved it, the Principal, Miss Mary Scherer, the teachers, and the children on April 9, 1904, celebrated the Golden Jubilee of this school, and what a fine time everybody had.

Early in the morning, the Superintendent, the Mayor of the City, the President of the Board of Education, spoke to the children and their parents and friends. The exercises were held in the yard and the day was beautiful and sunshiny. A number of children, with white suits, and with wands went through Physical Culture Drills, and every little while the whole school sang patriotic songs.

Then all the dignitaries were given a luncheon party, and poems were read, speeches made, and good wishes were given to the First School of San Francisco. After this the upper grade children sang their beautiful songs in their clear, rich Italian voices. So closed a most memorable and delightful day.

Besides this school, there was a Chinese school, right in the midst of Chinatown. Oh what fun you would have had if you could have visited those bright Chinese boys, and cunning Chinese girls. They wore regulation Chinese suits, and some of them had pitails [sic]. The girls had fancy dresses, with bright-colored embroidery, and their hair rolled over one ear. They all tried so hard to learn their lessons. At first you could not understand what they said, and sometimes, they actually shouted their lessons, they were so excited and delighted to acquire knowledge. But after you were with them, sometimes you could not but be impressed with their earnestness, and you could understand their English easily. They could draw wonderfully, and their story-telling was most interesting. They could sing, too. They were apt to scream at first, but after some explanation, on my part, of the necessity of good, full, deep breaths, they

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could sing very sweetly, and they could tell one all about the signatures of the keys, and the notes on the staff.

They were very fond of the Principal, Mrs. Newhall, and under her, the school grew very large. At noon it was a quaint sight to see the five hundred Chinese children running down the street with their pigtailed and loose sleeves flying in the breeze.

Then there was the Jean Parker school, where there were all girls, and Miss Jean Parker carried on her inspirational work. The other girls' school was the famous old Denman—which was named after Mr. James Denman, who was its first principal, and who was one of the first Superintendents of San Francisco.

In each of these schools the girls loved to sing. Under their teachers, in the Jean Parker, and under Mr. A. L. Mann, the Principal in the Denman, they gained in musical ability, and gave wonderful results. I used to love to go to hear them. They reminded me of the happy birds when they threw up their chests and heads and their beautiful voices sang so sweetly.

There were so many other schools, where the girls and boys cheerily worked and played. The Girls' High School, where our much loved and well known John Swett, was once principal, is very badly damaged by the earthquake, though it was not touched by the fire.

There were so many schools destroyed that I have not space to write about them all. All their desks, and blackboards, and pictures, and maps, the fine libraries and pleasant play-yards, were totally destroyed. How many, many little children now will have no place to go to school. The only public school in session now, is in Golden Gate Park, where the little refugee children go to school in tents. The tents are quite some distance apart, and the Principal, Mr. Armstrong, goes about on horse-back,

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to give his directions to the teachers and children. And when school opens, there will be no schools in the burnt district for the children to attend, for there is no money to build a shelter for the children.

But the little children want to [sic] go to school. When I went across the Bay, the other day, to visit Oakland, so many of my little school boys and girls were there. When they saw me, they rushed up and said, "How do you do, Miss Carpenter? And when can we go to school? We want to come back to San Francisco, but we must go to school here, because our school was burnt down, but Papa says we will go back when the school houses are built." So you see the children wish to go to school, but there are no schools, and even in the Park, where the children are in tents, it is very col [sic], wet, and windy on rainy days. There are but a few desks, only little tiny blackboards, and no maps or pictures, no library books or singing books to use. All over the City, the children tell me they wish the schools to open, but there is no money to build the school-houses, and so, my dear children, when you read this, I want you to try and give a little money to help build the San Francisco school houses. Thus, you each one will help the children here. Then, when the schools are built, the children will be warm and comfortable, they will have books, and play yards, they can learn their lessons, they will draw and sing, and be very happy, indeed.

By having the schools, the children can strive to be educated, and thus they will be able to earn their living when they grow older. By going to school, they will become acquainted with great men of history and literature, they will try to imitate noble characters, and thus grow to be strong and fine men and women.

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Whenever you can, dear children, please send a little money to us away off here in San Francisco, and I am sure our boys and girls will always love you.

ESTELLE CARPENTER.