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KINDER GARTEN TRAINING.

A PAPER

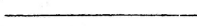
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KINDER GARTEN TRAINING.

IN the last few years the Kinder Garten system of training infants, invented by Fröbel, has been noticed and studied by many who are interested in practical education. Introduced into England more than twenty-five years ago, this method at first attracted little attention; but now Fröbel's idea in its beauty and harmony has taken strong hold of many minds, and the value of his plans, which are so skilfully adapted to children's tendencies, is gradually being more and more recognised. Private Kinder Gartens are springing up in various places; school boards begin to establish them as a preparation for the elementary course; while in Manchester there is already a training school for teachers. In Fröbel's own country, the number of Kinder Gartens has increased to five hundred. Some of his pupils (among them the Baroness Marenholtz-Bülow) have devoted themselves zealously to their establishment; and from Germany teachers have been sent to Italy, where the system has great success. In Belgium, France, and Russia, children are being brought under this influence. In the United States, greatly through the exertions of Miss Peabody, Kinder Gartens are becoming numerous.

Many good Guides too have been published, the result of actual experience in teaching, the best of which are by Wiebe, Köhler, Goldammer, Octavie de Masson and Madame Ronge ; and Miss Peabody edits a little monthly magazine, called the 'Kinder Garten Messenger.'*

But, notwithstanding this progress, we still hear it asked what Kinder Gartens are ; and even those who are familiar with the occupations and games often do not well understand Fröbel's leading ideas. The principle of his system seems still to be too much in the background, whereas it is just *that* which ought to be entered into, if we wish to judge fairly of the merits of his plans. In this paper, then, I shall *first* explain Fröbel's principle, in doing which I shall have to say a little about himself ; and *secondly*, I shall describe the practical system of training which he invented in accordance with that principle.

I. Fröbel's fundamental idea of education was that it consists in securing a gradual and harmonious development of the child's nature. And how is this to be obtained ? His answer is, " Not by a routine course of school lessons, but by the pleasurable, well-directed exercise of its various faculties." He saw that children are growing and learning, even if they are not sent to school. But he did

¹ This magazine can be procured in England by communicating with Miss Snell, 17, Strawberry Bank, Pendleton, Manchester.

not wish them to be left to themselves. He saw also that the help of experienced minds is needed, in order to guide and train all this natural action. The work of teachers, therefore, lies first in observing children's own efforts, and next in directing those efforts to good and sure results. Self-education thus assisted, and thus only, leads to the desired end—the free and full development of the physical, mental, and moral nature. Fröbel was not the first to assert these views about education, and he shared them with Pestalozzi and others of his time; but being deeply impressed with them, he, like Pestalozzi, spent a great part of his life in carrying them into practice. The son of a country pastor in Thüringen, he tried several kinds of employment, till the decided bent of his mind towards teaching induced him to help in a school at Frankfort, and afterwards he collected some village boys not far from his early home, with the desire of training them to lead good and useful lives. He had not then thought of Kinder Gartens, but he conducted his school on the principle that I have stated, viz. that true education is simply the careful guidance of natural growth.

After some years, Fröbel, having fully taken hold of this principle of aided self-development, began to consider whether it could not be acted on before the usual school age. He became convinced that the first few years of a child's life are all-

important, as laying the foundation of health and disease, giving the direction to its mental habits, and moulding its tempers, dispositions, and tastes. In dealing with his boy-pupils, he was led to see that he might have had far more success with them if they had not been comparatively neglected up to seven years old. Like Pestalozzi, he had the highest appreciation of early home-training, and he had no desire to set infants to tasks. But it occurred to him that if the education which they were joyously giving themselves could be gently and kindly guided by a teacher, under suitable conditions, and with the advantage of companionship, mind and body might be brought into a good state of preparation for the studies and the duties of after years. Thus he arrived at the idea of *Kinder Gartens*.

It is easy to see how naturally the name *Kinder Garten* was adopted by Fröbel. In all his thoughts on education the illustration constantly present to his mind was that of the growth of plants. He used to say, "The tree is my teacher;" and he held the work of the gardener to be very similar to that of the educator. In an often-quoted passage he expresses himself thus: "As the farmer and gardener treat their seeds in accordance with Nature, and in harmony with her laws, so we should educate the child and man according to their being, according to the inherent laws of life, in harmony and unity

with Nature and with the Supreme Being, Source of all life." The gardener imparts no force, establishes no laws, but after making himself acquainted with the nature of the plants under his care, secures for them, by his watchful toil, plenty of light, air, water, and space, sure that the leaves, flowers, and fruit will appear in due time. And so, in the case of children, the teacher first acquires a true ideal of what they may become, and afterwards simply gives scope for the quickening and strengthening of their varied capacities. When then Fröbel had planned a training place for infants, he called it a *children's garden*, expressing thus his educational principle, and conveying a beautiful idea of the kind of influences to be exerted there, such influences as may reasonably be compared to the sunshine, rain, and good soil by means of which plants thrive and grow. I may add that no forcing is consistent with his system. Open-air gardening he accepted as a comparison, but not the artificial methods which promote rapid results; for he knew that all healthy development is slow.

But Fröbel would have certainly failed in his practical schemes if he had not thoroughly understood children, and one cannot help being struck with the *wholeness* of his view as to their nature. He seems to leave out no characteristic—to forget no latent power. The child that he already trains in imagination is just the merry, happy, bright,

inventive, active, loving child that everyone delights to see. Himself of an affectionate disposition, he could sympathize with the desires and interests of the youngest minds ; and when he was forming his plans of training, he used to mix much with little children, noticing their ways with one another, and the ways with them of their mothers and nurses. And besides kindness and simplicity of heart, he brought to bear on the subject of education a keen and philosophic mind. He observed not only children, but men and nations too ; and he found that facts in individual growth were confirmed by facts in the more extended growth of communities. He thought deeply on all human relations and duties, seeking everywhere for unity in variety, and for harmony through obedience to Divine laws. Gentle, thoughtful, poetical, and religious-minded, he was well qualified to show how children should be prepared for life, and I think it is rare to meet with anyone who, as fully as he did, realized all their characteristics.

What did he find those characteristics to be? I will shortly enumerate the chief of them. 1. An unceasing bodily activity, which leads children to jump, run, climb, tumble, and scramble about—the natural means of promoting physical growth. 2. An inquisitive faculty of observation, impelling them to investigate the world in which they are come to live, with the untiring energy of African explorers ; and Fröbel saw that they do this in a most practical

manner, mainly by feeling and handling the objects of their attention. 3. Constructiveness; the fondness for *making* things, whether mud-pies, boats, or dolls' clothes. 4. A love of the beautiful, shown in a susceptibility to the influence of harmony in sound, form, and colour, and of all external nature. 5. The social tendency; the delight of having companions, and of being sympathized with in their joys and troubles. 6. A constant playfulness, evinced by the glee and enthusiasm which animate their hourly life. Fröbel dwelt much on this point; for he felt that play (by which, however, he did not mean aimless play) is the congenial atmosphere of a little child. 7. A growing moral nature—passions, affections, and conscience, which need to be controlled, responded to, and cultivated. Here then are seven distinctive characteristics, common in varying degrees to all children, and it was these that Fröbel determined to try to develop.

I have now described the foundation on which Fröbel built his *Kinder Garten* teaching, viz. the principle that true education consists in the judicious guidance of self-education; and I have shown, too, that he desired to apply this principle to the training of very young children, and that his acquaintance with a child's nature was remarkably full and complete.

II. Secondly, I will briefly describe Fröbel's practical plans, which have already been so widely adopted.

1. The Gifts. Impressed with the idea that a little child must begin to learn through the handling of objects, and also through play, he arranged a series of toys which he called *gifts*. These are as different as possible from the dazzling mechanisms that attract children to the windows of toy-shops. Fröbel studiously avoided recommending toys which, being finished off, leave no room for the exercise of fancy. I think he would have sighed over the Christmas and birthday presents that are now showered upon children. But modest as his gifts are in appearance, they have an endless capability for giving enjoyment, and enjoyment of a higher kind than the gay little omnibus, or the talking French doll. Children's eyes glisten with pleasure when they are allowed to play with them, and the teacher, by their use, stimulates the observing and inventive powers, and conveys the rudiments of arithmetic and geometry. There is a regular gradation in the gifts, most carefully thought out by Fröbel, by means of which each dawning faculty is provided for, and the child is led from the most elementary ideas to the more abstract and complicated. The first gift is a coloured worsted ball. Being apparently full of life, a ball is a real companion for an infant. It not only amuses it, and helps to teach command of limbs and muscles, but it supplies the groundwork of first lessons about colour and substance. Very pretty symmetrical games can be played with this gift, to

music or counting ; as, for instance, by placing the children in a circle, and letting them pass the balls from one to another, the arms being raised and lowered alternately. The second gift consists of a plain wooden ball or sphere, a cube, and a cylinder. The child is now led to observe new forms, and becomes familiar with corners, sides, edges, and angles. The third and fourth gifts are again in advance. Each is a cube, divided in the one case into eight smaller cubes, in the other into eight parallelograms. Fröbel planned three modes of use for these blocks and bricks : making forms of daily life, such as a chair, a tower, a column, &c. ; making forms of beauty—flat shapes which in a simple and striking way can be evolved out of one another (in one of the *Kinder Garten Guides* as many as eighty of these are given)—and using them for lessons about number. The fifth and sixth gifts are further subdivided, and are therefore available for more elaborate erections and figures. They also lead to higher arithmetical and mathematical teaching. Sometimes all the sets of bricks are used together, so that bridges, houses, railroads, &c., can be formed. The children are in every way encouraged to exercise their own invention, and the teacher talks to them familiarly about the objects represented.

2. The Occupations. The value of these is proved by the great delight that they afford, the ingenuity that they call forth, and the habits of industry that

they encourage. Everyone who has visited a Kinder Garten when the occupations were going on, must have remarked the zest of the children, and their proud surprise at the results of their own perseverance. I can only name them, without indicating the clever way in which they also lead up to one another. The first is *stick-laying*, that is, making outline forms with tiny sticks; then *drawing*, which begins with the representation of these outlines on a slate, and goes on to the copying of the forms of printed letters and of natural objects. *Pea-work*; uniting the sticks by means of softened peas, so as to make little articles of furniture, as well as mathematical figures. *Paper-folding*, by which a succession of objects are formed out of a sheet of paper. *Paper-cutting*; a few symmetrical cuts when the paper has been folded into a triangle, giving an astonishing variety of results. *Perforating of cardboard*, the designs when finished being worked by the children with worsted. *Mat-making*; the interweaving of coloured strips of paper so as to make little mats. Lastly, *Modelling in clay*. This begins with the simplest forms, but by degrees the children learn to imitate nature, and they often show great skill in these early attempts at sculpture. The occupations not only satisfy the desire to *make* something, but they develop the artistic faculty. As Fröbel looked in the child for the germ of every capacity of the grown man, he did not fail to give scope for the

expression of ideas through creations of fancy. He stands perhaps alone in attempting the cultivation of art-power in very young children. I may mention here that he made a great point of accustoming children to express themselves in clear tones, and in language closely fitted to their thought, and also that reading is taught in Kinder Gartens by a natural method, which avoids the labour of spelling. The power of accurate observation gained by so much familiarity with *form*, makes a child attain the art of reading with singular ease and rapidity.

3. Another part of the training consists in laying the basis of Scientific Knowledge. The child's attention is drawn to objects. He is led to distinguish their likenesses and their differences, according to the Pestalozzian method, and thus he acquires the elements of geography, physics, and natural history. Fröbel would not allow such teaching to be given in a dry manner. He wished a garden to be attached to every one of these schools, that the children might study for themselves the nature of plants, and he liked them to live as much as possible in the open air, and to have the care of flowers and of animals. In the lessons, the teacher chooses subjects connected with the children's daily experience, and has recourse to pictures and anecdotes. Science, while unimpaired as to accuracy, is conveyed through the medium of poetry and affection. For the knowledge is imparted in order to satisfy the child's eager wish to be at

home in nature, and to take his rightful place in relation to the outer world.

4. Music was much relied on by Fröbel, for he had a profound belief in its beneficial influence. He remarked that the youngest children have a tendency to express themselves in singing, and he was aware of the almost magical effect on their moral nature of melodious sounds. He therefore introduced music, with or without words, in every available way into his system. As harmony was his constant end and aim, no wonder that the harmony of sound had a special attraction for him.

5. Again, the Games are very prominent in a Kinder Garten. These are of a dramatic kind, tending to remind children of phases of life and of the ways of animals, and being performed by a large number, and in rhythmic order, their effect is animating and harmonizing. As an example, I will describe the game called "The Pigeon-house." Three-fourths of the children place themselves in a circle round the others, who represent the pigeons. Those outside begin to sing—

"We open the pigeon-house again,
And set the merry flutt'ers free"—

at the same time enlarging the circle, and raising hands and arms, so as to allow the pigeons to escape. The pigeon-children run out, imitating the flapping of birds' wings, and the song continues—

"They fly on the fields and grassy plain,
Delighted with joyous liberty."

After a while, the circle goes on to sing—

“And when they return from their merry flight,
We shut up the house, and bid them ‘good-night.’”

At once the pigeons run back, pass under the raised arms of the circle, and are closed in again. Other plays are “The Peasant,” “The Windmill,” “The Bees,” &c. It is quite inspiring to see the merriment caused by these games. The children’s imagination is pleased; their limbs are healthily and gracefully exercised; they are exhilarated by companionship; and they learn to realize the value of combination for the production of results.

6. There is one more point that I must refer to. It is the moral training that a Kinder Garten supplies. The teacher aims indirectly at placing a moral standard before the children’s minds, by the tone she gives to all the lessons, and through biographies, fables, songs, and stories, illustrative of right and wrong. But, besides this, she watches and guides their conduct. Owing to the freedom of action encouraged, and the social life that the presence of numbers gives, there is plenty of scope for the growth of character; and the teacher, whose approbation, if she is loved by her pupils, is earnestly desired, has it in her power continually to promote unselfishness, and to check cross and angry dispositions. The occupations induce perseverance and correct idleness; in the games the children learn to give up to others; patience, self-control, and a love

of order are imbibed ; it becomes a habit to respect the rights of others ; the affections are drawn out ; and cheerful obedience is accepted as the rule of life. If in a word or two one had to describe the moral effect of a Kinder Garten, one might say that the child learns there the great lesson that it forms a part of a social whole. Each has its little niche in the building—its small, but definite, share of duty, which, if it omits to perform, all the others suffer. Thus, for the sake of its companions, it represses its hasty words and its violent tempers, and tries to help towards the general advantage. It is caught up, as it were, into some degree of understanding of its religious and moral relations, and the aim set before it is not only *not to be naughty*, but to be positively *good*.

In these ways Fröbel adapted his practice to the several characteristics of children which I have already enumerated—to their activity, observingness, constructiveness, love of art, sociability, playfulness, and their moral nature. Other occupations and other methods of teaching may, as experience increases, be added to his, but while there is no reason to follow his plans slavishly, I think it will not be found easy to improve upon them. Of course, it depends mainly on the teacher whether a Kinder Garten accomplishes its true intention, and some of the objections that one occasionally hears raised against the system apply, I believe, to the many

imperfect realizations that unfortunately exist. The important thing is that a teacher should be thoroughly imbued with Fröbel's principle. No doubt she requires special training in the use of the gifts, and in the games and occupations, &c. But she will have studied them to little avail if she treats them as unrelated mechanical arts, instead of as helps to the carrying out of a whole ideal. For Fröbel's system is, after all, *not* a system. It is life acting on life. It is the calling forth of the emotions, the intellect, the physical powers, and the conscience by one in whom all good faculties are already developed. The teacher must keep her principles constantly in view, and must test every portion of her practice by its conformity to that principle. Through a wise and loving influence she must prepare her impressible little pupils for further progress, and if she has trained them as Fröbel meant them to be trained, they will begin their school life with a happy and regulated consciousness of possessing force—physical, intellectual, and moral.

In order to show that these results may be and are actually obtained, I will quote the recent testimony of an elementary schoolmistress, in America, who receives children at the end of their Kinder Garten course. She wrote:—"A child, of no extraordinary gifts, who had been in Miss Kriege's Kinder Garten two years, came to me at seven, and

easily passed through all the three grades of the primary school in *one* year, because all his habits of mind were so well formed, and he had been taught both how to behave and how to learn."

In conclusion, I would express a hope not only that Kinder Gartens will become more and more numerous, but also that Fröbel's principle will be recognised to a greater extent than it is at present, in the later stages of education.

E. A. MANNING.

Since this paper was prepared, I am glad to find that the British and Foreign School Society have engaged the help of an experienced German lady, Miss Heerwart, a pupil of Fröbel's intimate friend and colleague, Middendorff, in order to organize a course of Kinder Garten instruction for the students of Stockwell College. Until the present want of trained English teachers is supplied, it is impossible that the system can make much progress; but as soon as it is introduced, in a thorough manner, into training institutions, we may hope that children of all classes will share those advantages of development which must ever be associated with the name of Friedrich Fröbel.

