

SOME EVOLUTIONS IN THE KINDERGARTEN WORK.*

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A FEW weeks ago I traveled over more than a thousand miles of what once was "the prairies of the West," the home of the buffalo and mustang; but what has been changed, in the past fifty years and by the power, energy and foresight of man, into the granary of the world. As the train sped along, hour after hour, through seemingly never-ending wheat fields, I knew that I was gazing upon the potential food of more than ten million people. And yet, all that I saw was the rich black loam of Texas overlaid with a shimmer of green; the warm brown soil of Kansas stretching from horizon to horizon, with scarce inch-high blades between its newly-turned rows—first signs of the coming harvest of ninety

million or more bushels of corn, the amount that Kansas yearly supplies to the world; the darker brown earth of Missouri and the fields of Illinois. Should the harvest of this vast area fail for one season, multitudes would walk the streets of our cities crying for bread. The mightiness of the miracle of seed-time and harvest overwhelmed and awed me. Paul may plant and Apollos water, but it is *God* who giveth the increase.

The past twenty-five years has been the *seed-time* of kindergarten work in America. We can now see the slow unfolding of the seed-thought into the beginning of the mighty harvests by which millions of souls now hungering and thirsting for some evidence of the Presence of God are to be fed.

After fifty years of heroic, self-

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forgetting struggle for an ideal, Friedrich Froebel said to a friend: "I no longer worry as to the success of my work. If my view of the nature of man is not comprehended for several centuries, it does not matter. In time this will surely come; for it is *God's* message to mankind." He realized that it was a seed-thought which he was planting, and that in good time it must spring up and bear fruit, for had not God implanted the spirit-life in it as he has implanted wheat-life and corn-life in the seed that is sown in the ground?

We therefore must expect that, as time goes on, this kindergarten thought will grow and expand and multiply, and yet not change into something different any more than the wheat-life changes into something different when it multiplies a thousandfold or the corn-life when it springs anew from the ground. Let the thoughtful educator's word, therefore, be Evolution not Revolution.

Shall we examine briefly some of the evolutions that have taken place, first, with regard to the Mother Play Book; second, with regard to the play of the kindergarten; third, with regard to the kindergarten Occupations, and, fourth, with regard to the Gifts.

I. Frau Schrader once told me that soon after the printing of the Mother Play Book she went to Blankenburg to visit Frau Middendorf. Shortly after her arrival, Frau Middendorf produced a copy of the book, saying: "Well, here is Froebel's new book. It cost such a *lot* of money!" And she added, shaking her head sadly: "It will never in the world pay

for itself! Never, never! But Froebel would have it printed!" Here we see the resolute seed planting amid clouds of doubt and cold winds of criticism. What has already been the harvest?

Not only has the book been translated into Russian, French, and English and used by those nations. It has crossed the Atlantic and thousands upon thousands of mothers and kindergartners in America have studied it and gained inspiration from it as from few other sources. It has passed on to far Japan, and the art spirit of that nation has begun the transformation of its external form.

But it has done more than this. Book after book has been written upon it. Some, like Miss Blow's Letters to a Mother, have revealed far-reaching depths in the Mother Play Book that most of us had not dreamed of. Others, like Dr. Snider's Commentary, have shown how it included the germ of all organized institutional life, for which many of our sociologists are still blindly groping. Still other books on the Mother Play have leaped the boundary line of native language and been translated into four or five foreign tongues. And this is but the beginning of a long list of books that will be begotten by it, so pregnant is it with vital thought.

But the seed-thought in the Mother Play Book has done more than start a line of commentaries. It has awakened the mother hearts all over our land, and mothers' classes, mothers' clubs, and a national congress of mothers have sprung up, with varying degrees of comprehension of the

thought that each child has a divine nature to be nourished and developed according to a divine law, rationally not capriciously; and that the greatest element in woman's nature is the power to nurture and develop this divine spark within the child. Child-study clubs have sprung up among our pedagogues; and even conservative churches and Sunday schools are beginning to realize their need of scientifically trained as well as earnest teachers for their work with the children.

II. Self-expression through play is as old as the race. Wherever there have been women there has been nurturing; wherever there have been children there has been play. The profound insight of Froebel caused him to take this universal instinct of child-life, this kind of wild cereal (if I may be allowed to continue my simile of the seed-time and harvest), spontaneous in its growth and indigenous to the soil of the human heart, and proclaim that it could be converted into the most nutritious food for the spiritual life of the child, if rightly understood and wisely cultivated.

All close observers of little children know that their free, spontaneous, joyous activity, which we call play, is for one of two purposes: either to give expression to an ever unfolding consciousness of an indwelling force, or to aid them in comprehending the meaning of life outside of themselves. Briefly stated, it is a giving out from the inner world or a taking in from the outer world. Both mean spiritual growth to the child.

The free play with the limbs, such as jumping, hopping, running, etc., are not merely the outcome of "animal instincts," they are the testing by the spirit of its bodily tools. Running against the wind, swinging, climbing trees, jumping off high places, lifting heavy stones, etc., are plays wherein children are trying to see whether or not they can exert more force than the wind, gravitation, adhesion, friction, or other outside power. This tendency of children to exert their bodily strength in seemingly useless efforts is inborn. Through such efforts they learn their own power and the degree of force that they must meet and conquer in mastering the material world. It is this knowledge that has caused machinery to be created by man to aid his body in overcoming these outside forces. Such putting forth of the natural inner force is the first form of the manifestation we call play, and it is an element in education.

But there is another phase of the child's play. Gazing eagerly upon the phenomena of the outside world, he is trying to understand what they mean, and he *imitates* the activities about him in order to search out their meaning. This gives rise to the dramatic or representative games of the kindergarten.

What evolution or growth has taken place in the education of the child through play?

It has not only brought swings, seesaws and ladders into the kindergarten wherever practicable, but the realization that the rhythmic use of the body is the most economic

use of it has caused many charming and varied rhythmic exercises to develop in the kindergarten; and it has demanded that the kindergartner shall have an harmonious, graceful control of her own body. Physical training, therefore, has become an important feature in the kindergarten training schools.

In the dramatic and representative games of the kindergarten there has been evolution but it has been slow. In this field many tares are growing up with the good grain.

What activities shall we select for the child to imitate in his play? Shall they be the fundamental racial activities by means of which the race throughout recorded time has conquered the world of nature—plowing and planting, reaping and threshing, building places of shelter, using weapons against wild beasts and in war, weaving and spinning, bridging of chasms, protecting the weak and helpless, buying and selling, traveling forth and returning, and the like activities of civilization? Shall they be a reproducing of the better kind of activities that occur in the immediate neighborhood of the kindergarten? Shall they be the reproducing of mere traditional rhymes and jingles that have been handed down by thoughtless mothers and grandmothers?

In one case we see a conscientious kindergartner drilling her children in *The Five Knights* because the time has come in the program for the state relationship to be emphasized, regardless of the fact that all the glad outside world is budding with new life and that nature is calling the

child to come out and wonder and worship. Again, an equally conscientious kindergartner will bring out a package of prunes, have her children buy them of an improvised grocer, have the prunes wrapped up and taken to a play home in a corner of the room, have the children elaborately sort and wash them, stew and sweeten them and then gobble them up,—and all because some woman in the neighborhood chooses to feed her family frequently on prunes! A third kindergartner can be found who will spend a good part of a precious morning in having the children reproduce *Hickory, dickory, dock*, or some other Mother Goose rhyme that some child's momentary whim may have called up. All of these are extremes, yet they show tendencies toward fruitlessness, and are not the true product of the kindergarten seed-thought inhering in the kindergarten play circle.

Certain it is that the play should be simple and childlike; certain it is also that it should appeal to some interest of the child; but equally certain is it that play, to be educational, should have some *real content*, the richer and more universal the better, provided it can be made into *real play* for the child.

III. Let us next consider the Occupations of the kindergarten and their evolution.

In her report concerning the Gifts and Occupations made to the International Kindergarten Union three years ago, Miss M. M. Glidden stated that more than *thirty* new Occupations had been added to the "schools

of work" as given by Froebel. This branch of our work needs a most thorough and searching study. Undoubtedly the great advance in the industrial arts, and the large demand for organized hand work for grades beyond the kindergarten, are necessitating many changes and improvements in the kindergarten Occupations.

In color alone what vast possibilities lie! Froebel indicated the psychological importance of it in his six worsted balls of rainbow colors and also in the somewhat crudely colored papers used for weaving, folding, cutting, etc. In these lay the seed-thought that *color appeals to the emotions*. The purer and more harmonious the colors, the higher the kind of emotion. There are colors that shriek at and tear each other; there are others that chill and make dull all other colors that happen to be near them; and there are colors, single and combined, that gladden the eye of every beholder and fill with joy the heart of a child.

This color seed-thought has taken root and grown prodigiously. Our kindergarten walls are tinted in soft greens, pale yellows or other agreeable colors; our curtains and screens are selected with the utmost care that they may harmonize with the walls, and the things made with our Occupations are art products. Every well informed kindergartner now knows how to produce simple harmonies by the use of one dominant color with its tints and shades, or by crossing the color disk and combining complementary colors (not the strong

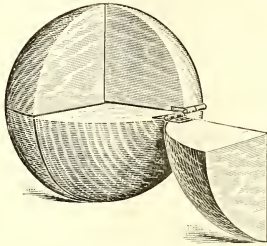
reds and greens, blues and oranges, yellows and purples, but the more subtle and charming yellow-reds and yellow-greens, etc.). She knows that harmonies simple enough to be enjoyed by any child can be produced by combining any of the standard colors with the contrasting neutrals, black, white, silver, gold, gray or brown. Then comes the advance in the use of color, where analogous harmonies are made, and, most beautiful of all, perfected harmonies.

IV. Last of all, let us examine the Gift work and see what can be found there of growth or evolution.

Perhaps because geometry is so mighty a science and because the thought of what Froebel calls *Ahnen* is so subtle and profound, the seed-thought in the Gifts has been slower in growth than that in any other of the kindergarten instrumentalities. In the main, we have confined ourselves to the Gifts as given to us by Froebel, although he himself distinctly stated that he had not completed the full series.

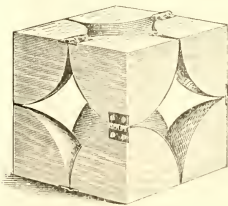
We have all held the Gifts in a kind of awe, feeling if not being fully able to explain that they meant far more than mere geometric forms selected as convenient for building. We have devoutly stated that they corresponded to the child's inner growth and aided it. But psychology has come into existence as a distinct science since Froebel's day and demands a clearing up of our terms. It will not accept our traditions but demands our demonstrations. We say that "the cube is the opposite of the ball," that it is "the inner made

outer," and therefore helps the child to outer or utter what is within him. Our psychological professor then says: "Ah!—excuse me—but just what do you mean by that statement?" and his tone says more than his words. We study our precious symbolic Second Gift and the hinged ball* appears. Then we tell the story



of the child who, having played with a hinged ball for some time, turned to his teacher and said: "I knew that apples had seeds inside of them, but I never knew that *balls had corners* inside of them!" and of the rejoinder of his little friend: "Well, I guess everything has things inside of them!"

The use of this hinged ball tells our professor of psychology better than words can, how the cube is lit-

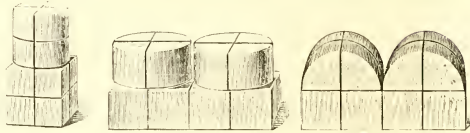


erally the opposite of the sphere, how it is the *inner* of the sphere *outered*.

*Invented by Miss Florence Lawson, Los Angeles, Cal.

and therefore is a counterpart of the child, who is constantly outering or uttering his inner self. Perhaps he will say: "An analogy merely, that proves nothing." Let our reply be: "The invisible things of God, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are above."

Again, the realization that all forms must unfold has produced a number of building Gifts from the much-derided cylinder. These bring curves into the building material as well as straight lines and thereby make possible the child's building in the Roman or Romanesque style of architecture. The symmetrical

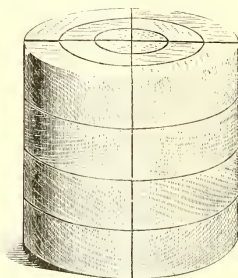


"forms of beauty" are no longer confined to the few examples that Froebel left as illustrations of the fact that wooden blocks could be made to "dance in rhythmic movement," and in an almost unlimited way the child's feeling of the inner "outering" itself and the outer being "innered" is increased. "A vague term, a vague term," says our professor of psychology. But when we show him sixty or more designs made by a class of twenty in less than fifteen minutes, each different from all the others, and yet every one made to illustrate the one idea of radiating from a center out, he begins to see that ours are not the wild statements of enthusiastic but deluded women. The one direc-



tion: "Make a series of forms, one unfolding from another, and all with a distinct center, by gradually enlarging from that center, by gradually enlarging from that center with each new move of the blocks," will produce, when given to children well trained in kindergarten, who have learned to *think in forms* as well as in words, as many beautiful and symmetrical forms as there are children multiplied by the number of steps asked for. Why, then, are we accused of limiting the child's inventive power by having him use organized material, any more than we limit him by teaching him to use organized language when he constructs with words? Does not the criticism come from too limited knowledge of the right use of her

were indicated by Froebel in his *Pedagogics of the Kindergarten* when he divided the cylinder according to its axial planes and when he sug-



gested concentric cylinders, — one within another. This new Gift represents merely the putting together



materials on the part of the kindergarten, rather than the too limited possibilities of the materials themselves?

Finally, let me call your attention to the new curvilinear Gift which has recently been invented by Miss Belle Woodson, although the elements of it

of these two principles of division of form, yet by means of it we are introduced to a whole new world of beauty in architectural constructions and to still more in the rhythmic forms of beauty.

So we see the kindergarten gradually unfolding or evolving in many

ways as the larger meaning of it unfolds to us. And yet it remains ever symmetrical, orderly, beautiful, carrying forward in outer expression the suggestion of the unfolding that is going on within the soul of the child. Let us never forget that the kindergarten thought is an advancing re-

ligious thought, not a mere series of pedagogical devices. It may take patience, courage and faith to stand by so high an ideal, but, after all, high ideals bring with them the needed strength to will and to do, and make life worth living and work worth doing.

