

Special Articles.

THE KINDERGARTEN.*

A Kindergarten is a training school for children, usually between the ages of three and seven years; the children do not stop at this age because they have gone through, or could go through, the system in that time, but because, at the age of seven, they are supposed to have matured sufficiently, physically and mentally, to begin to learn from books—so to the age of seven Kindergarten children are not taught to read or write. After the children attain the age of seven they spend a short time each day in learning to read and write, not in the Kindergarten however, for we have no books in the Kindergarten, except those the children make themselves.

They are sent out to another department, at first for half an hour each day, then the time is increased to an hour, an hour and a half, two hours, until they are out of the Kindergarten entirely, which should be about the age of ten.

But the benefits of the Kindergarten training do not stop here, but will follow them through life. Their minds have been trained to think logically, their physical nature so trained that the body is in perfect health and symmetry, and the moral nature trained in such a way that the child can lay hold on knowledge with an unprejudiced mind and will be able to distinguish to a great extent between right and wrong.

The Kindergarten recognizes the fact that a child is composed of three essential elements—body, soul, and mind; that each of these require special training, not separately, but all three together. In the true Kindergarten everything is arranged for the proper cultivation of this three-sided nature.

Before proceeding further I desire to set your minds at rest on this subject of reading, for I find that most persons are so anxious to know how, when, and where, reading and writing are taught in the Kindergarten, and when they find out the system does not include these two things they take no interest whatever in it, concluding in their haste that it is a useless waste of time, energy, and money.

The almost universal opinion seems to be that to learn to read and write are all that children require to learn in this world, that the earlier they are acquired the better, and that having accomplished these two things at least half the battle of life is won.

Says a prominent educator and great advocate of this system:—"Reading is the rock on which most schools and methods founder. Learning to read, to get the names of things which they have never seen, does more to develop stupidity in children than any other single cause."

In the Kindergarten they are taught the alphabet of things before they learn the alphabet of literature.

The name Kindergarten is from two German words—*Kind*, child—*Garten*, garden,—a place where children are trained in a natural way, as we train plants in a garden.

That the child's soul, body, and mind are like the virgin soil, and to bring forth good, pleasant, and beautiful flowers and fruit only require the proper culture, which should not be forced like hothouse plants, but their moral, physical, and mental nature cultivated in a natural way.

"If we look at a well-kept garden we shall see how thoroughly every plant is supplied with the proper temperature, light, soil, and moisture, while everything, even to the smallest pebble, that may prevent growth and development is removed. Here we see how

all the necessary conditions for the growth and development of the plants are considered and carried out.

"From the garden we too may learn a lesson worthy of imitation in our dealings with children, as we think of how much greater value is the nurture of a human being than the growth of a plant."

To carry on a Kindergarten successfully three things are necessary. First and most important is a well-qualified and thoroughly trained Kindergarten teacher or teacher, a well-lighted, thoroughly ventilated, sunny room properly furnished, and all the material and appliance for the children to work with.

The furniture consists of low chairs, so that the children can rest their feet on the floor and thus sit in a natural position; the chairs are far enough apart so that the children will not crowd one another.

There are no desks but tables, the tops of which are marked in squares of one inch, forming a net-work over the whole surface, for the purpose of measuring the work, keeping it straight, and teaching the children to work on the square; the tables are of the proper height so that the children can sit and work with ease and comfort without straining the body.

The work of the Kindergarten is of two kinds, called Gifts and Occupations. The Gifts are mostly of wood, and the work with them can be taken apart and put together again; this material is left in the Kindergarten and given to the children from day to day, and neatly placed in the boxes by the children when they have done with it. The Occupations of the Kindergarten are of various kinds of material, but are mostly made of different kinds of colored paper; these forms are permanent, and all that the children make are their own to dispose of as they please.

Besides the Gifts and Occupations, a part of each day is devoted to calisthenic exercises of a very simple kind suited to the age of the children, the Kindergarten games, singing, story-telling, a short oral lesson in French or German, and drawing.

The time devoted to the Kindergarten is three hours in the morning, the time in which children are most active; they are not kept very long at one thing, as a frequent change of position and occupation is considered best for their physical and mental growth.

Froebel's idea was that instruction should be given in the most agreeable way possible, that learning should never be a task but a pleasure to the youngest child, that as soon as the physical and intellectual nature of the child are put forth he wants to learn and takes pleasure in learning. That the senses first awakened are sight and touch, and through these channels should the education begin, by learning color, form, and number—qualities that belong to all things in the universe—that children should learn the alphabet of things before they learn the alphabet of literature; the ABC of things consisting in their common properties of form, color, size, number, weight, sound, etc. So he studied children and their occupations, taking special care to note what they preferred to occupy themselves with, and wrought these things into an education, beginning with the primary form, the sphere or ball, which he called the First Gift. It consists of six soft balls made of wool. Three are of the primary colors, red, blue, and yellow. Three are of the secondary class, green, purple, and orange. By these he receives his first lessons in color, form, size, weight, and density. Being soft, without corners or edges, it is well adapted to be handled by the little hands in playing the games with one ball at a time, and the others are added one at a time as he is able to manipulate them.

The games are accompanied by a song in which all are expected to join; the ball is passed from one child to another, each making a nest of his hands to receive it, or it is held by the string and moved up and down, right and left, front and back, round and round—each movement has a song of its own; the ball is compared

* Read before the Lennox and Addington Teachers Association, by Miss Emma Robertson, Kindergarten teacher.