

THE BENEFITS OF THE KINDERGARTEN AS A SOCIAL CENTRE.

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The following experiment was once tried in the second grade of a private school. The children were each given a note-book in which the teacher told them to draw a picture of an Indian wigwam. On the opposite page they were to write down how many people they thought would be needed to make the wigwam. At first they thought two or three, but later decided that one Indian could make the wigwam if he took enough time. Then, on the next page, they each drew a picture of an Eskimo's igloo. They again discussed how many people would be needed to make the igloo, and again decided that one Eskimo could do the work if he took the time. On the next page the children then drew a picture of the kind of house they lived in. Then they began to write on the opposite page how many people it would take to build the house we live in. As there were several houses going up in the neighbourhood, the children easily found the number of workmen engaged in the various processes of building. They began by writing on the list so many graders, so many masons, so many carpenters, until they had lists of over a dozen different kinds of workmen employed in building the house, with numbers varying from two or three to over twenty. They then added up their lists. On the following page they began writing the list of how many people it would take to prepare the materials with which the workmen built the house. This brought large guess numbers as, so many men in the iron mine, another large number employed in cutting down the trees, another large number in the saw mill, others making glass, and so on, until the list grew up into the thousands. Then came the transportation, so many men working on the railroads, so many driving horses, so many men on the ships. And then came the list of the people who make the things to furnish our houses. This brought in to the list the people in other countries, until finally one child said, "Well, it looks as if it took all the people in the world to get our houses ready for us to live in." So, as the rest agreed, they all wrote down the following statement: "It takes all the people in the world to get our houses ready for us." Then teacher and children talked about the difference between savage and civilized people, and the

children themselves expressed the difference in these words which all wrote in their books: "Civilized people help one another more." Surely this is the real meaning of civilization, that people have learned to help one another more.

With the advancement of civilization there has come about a corresponding need for education. Through education, that which the race has gained is handed on to the children, who thus profit by the experiences of their ancestors. The deepest experience which has been gained is the experience of the advantages of co-operation.

The school should, therefore, prepare the child to live with others, to enter into the life about him. Indeed, the strongest desire of the child is for just this social life. When he first starts to school he anticipates with far greater interest the playmates he will meet, than the books he will use. The most educative influence is not the first reader but the other children.

Now, it is this social training which forms the most important part of the Kindergarten. The child entering Kindergarten is brought into a little community in which he is given the opportunity to mingle with others, to develop his social nature. If we examine the various instrumentalities which have been planned for use in the Kindergarten, we will find that they all tend towards social development. All help the child to play his way into the life about him.

In the songs and stories the Kindergarten employs a time-honoured means for developing social participation. Music, particularly singing, has always been one of the best means for bringing people into sympathetic relations with one another. Stories tell us about others. Stories of heroes inspire the child, as they always have inspired his ancestors with ideals of helpfulness and self-sacrifice. Even the gifts and occupations have their greatest use, not in the knowledge of form and materials they give, but in the opportunity they offer the child for participating in the work of the world. He is really playing at making the things which some day he may actually make out of larger and more permanent materials. But it is in the games that the Kindergarten uses the most complete form of social life. No one can play a game alone. Games are the child's social world. There is in the game a law which all must obey; one must "play fair." There is no greater training to fairness than the games. This is the very