

3. FROEBEL AND THE CHILDREN.

Half a dozen boxes of children's toys, with innumerable pamphlets and fly-sheets descriptive of how to use them, have been placed in our hands by Herr E. Steiger, of New York, a manufacturer of the articles used in the Kindergarten system of instruction. Though by no means a new thing, the system of directing the play of young children so as to minister to their education is uncommon and deserves description in detail. Friedrich Froebel was a German who had been brought up without maternal care, and like most children he found the restraints of early school life very irksome. He devoted a lifetime to perfecting a system of instruction for boys and girls from three to seven years of age, having adopted for his motto the pretty phrase "Kommt latzlatz uns unsern Kindern leben." Judging very rightly that neglect or mistakes in the nursery endanger health and happiness in after-life, he sought to direct the mental and physical energies of children in the right path from the time they were able to receive impressions and classify them. Cramming the memory with indigestible facts was the shoal to be avoided, and children's natural tendency to play was the characteristic to be utilized. Through play the faculties of mind and body are developed, and when properly directed, habits of industry, perseverance, order and regularity are acquired. Amusement and instruction are to be combined in the use of Froebel's "gifts," as he calls the implements of his system. In Germany many Kindergartens are established, and in parts of the United States the system is viewed with favour. It is even proposed to engraft it upon the public school system.

The toys are simple and unexpensive, yet capable of infinite variations. There are little sticks of various lengths, perforating paper, a slate for drawing, paper of various colours cut into lengths for plaiting and weaving, &c. With this, children seated at a table, divided off on the top into squares of one inch, are set to work. Patience and adaptation to the business are necessary for the teacher, who must possess the confidence of the children to be able to direct their movements. Of the effect upon the little pupils, observers say that the Kindergarten develops a capacity for quick and clear perception of form, size, colour and sound: it trains all the senses, gives skill to the fingers, health to the body, cheerfulness to the mind, trains the moral faculties, and is a primary school for design, where the artistic tendencies of the child are cherished and cultivated, so as materially to increase the means for his future usefulness and happiness. None of his faculties are allowed to die out through disuse.

Perhaps an idea of the system can be given better by the account of a visit to a Kindergarten than by seeking to impress what most thinking persons will readily admit—the strength of the impression a child receives at an early age while at play. A visitor narrates that he found the children forming a pretty star-shaped figure upon the tables in front of, being guided by the teacher, who told them where to place each piece. Each was then told to produce figures of his own invention, using all the pieces, the result being some wonderful combinations. We clip a continuation of the description:—

"This is the method with all the occupations; first, the little ones are led, then they are allowed to go alone. Then came some very simple and easy exercises upon slate, marked off in squares like the blackboard, from which they copied their work. They each made such picture as pleased them best. In all their work they had the sympathy and encouragement of Miss Held, praising them when it was done well, and helping on those who needed assistance.

"After this occupation was concluded, folding doors were opened into a room still larger, also sunny and bright, and the children marched in to the music of a pretty song, in which all joined. There for half an hour a series of games were played, uniting singing, simple gymnastics, and sport, to the intense delight of the participants, and the by no means slight enjoyment of the lookers-on. These games have all a meaning and an object, and are arranged with a view to the harmonious and healthy growth of the child's mental, moral and physical nature.

"After a short lunch the occupations were resumed. When they first gathered around the tables, it seemed not unlike the assembling together of quite a number of ladies at a tea party, the conversation was so brisk and sociable, but in three or four minutes each child was intently engaged in sewing in and out with coloured worsteds. It was not like a school, there was no repression, no enforced silence, no fears of the raw hide or the teacher's frown, no books, no punishments; it was rather like a cheerful workshop where each was absorbed in his work, not as a disagreeable task, but rather as a delightful occupation. Strict silence was by no means enjoined, and if after a few minutes of employment a happy thought occurred to any little worker, he was encouraged to speak it out, and when any one was pleased, he was allowed to laugh.

While the rest were at work, it occurred to a bright-eyed little fellow that he would like to recite a verse; leave was granted, and we undoubtedly got the benefit of his last exercise at the Sunday-school. A little girl followed with a verse that was evidently original, and none the less interesting for that; and then one volunteered a song. The charming innocence and unconscious simplicity displayed in their little interludes, were fascinating. There was apparently no thought of showing off, nothing got up beforehand for the occasion, but they were spontaneous outbursts of their happy childish natures, mingled with an evident desire to do something that should meet with the approval of their friend, Miss Held. Still the work went on and the beginning of very pretty designs was wrought out. The children seemed happy but not boisterous, attentive to their play work, but not stunned into stupid apathy. It was order, and such order as seemed the outgrowth of the individual of each child. And yet they had only been two or three months together at longest, and most of them a much less time. How such order could be wrought out of the chaos that must have existed on the first day, is a mystery which one could hope to solve only after frequent and prolonged visits.

"The occupations are varied every day, and we only regret that our stay was too short to permit us to see the 'Building,' 'Weaving,' 'Folding,' 'Peas Work,' 'Moulding in Clay,' and other works which they do."—*London Advertiser*.

VII. Advertisements.

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Minister of Education.

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT,
Toronto, 15th March, 1876.

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(See Page 129 of this Journal.)

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