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Kindergartens in West Central Africa.

(By Mrs. Wm. E. Fay, in 'Life and Light'.)

Could you visit our kindergartens in Africa, I fear you would think them a rather wild sort of garden; but what more can you expect in 'the wilds of Africa?' The model kindergarten of civilized lands is almost, if not quite, as far removed from the present possibilities here as is a high state of civilization from their crude and simple mode of life. We have here not only the embryonic state of the child, but of the race. All the possibilities exist, though lying dormant. Neither can we look for help in their development in the home life or the mother's guiding hand, which, according to Froebel's plan, was to be the source and mainspring in first guiding the child. In adapting the system to the needs of these little wild Africans, we have had to be content to have high ideals without seeing them realized. Imagine a room full of these small, wild Africans dressed with a string or a rag of cloth a yard wide, or perhaps not dressed at all. A fat worm or locust or a small rat may be tightly squeezed in the chubby hand, which, perhaps, has been caught on the way to kindergarten, and is awaiting a favorable opportunity to be roasted and eaten. The hair may have been combed a month ago, but is kept smooth by frequent applications of oil. Some may never have had a bath at all, though clean hands and faces are insisted upon. They are as light and free as air, as frisky as colts, and as hard to tame.

The room has at least the attraction of bright pictures, though the floor is but hardened earth, and the rickety benches, which are constantly nibbled at by the white ants, often send a seat full of unsuspecting children tipping backward with arms and legs squirming in the air. Old tins cans must be used to hold the work of the children, because there is nothing better. O kindergartner, who may scan these pages, how can 'the good, the true, the beautiful' come out of anything so crude? How about those high ideals that must be carried out? Where is the dainty, delicate work that must be done with dainty fingers? and if by chance it should be done, how can it be appreciated in a dingy hut with not light enough even to see it?

But take courage, as we have, for sunshine and gladness prevail, and our kindergarten is a practical success even if crude. The work is adapted to the needs of the people, and our aim is that of the true kindergartner everywhere,—to fit the child for future usefulness and true living. The occupations are taken up in the most simple way. The children love to string beads, and sometimes corn or beans are used, which have first been soaked. These are afterwards cooked and used as a treat, for the hungry tots have but one square meal a day, and are glad enough for an extra morsel when it is

to be had. They also string small pieces of cloth about an inch square, which are finally wound in a pad and sewed together; and this the child carries home to the mother with the greatest delight, for it serves as a rest for her heavy basket, which is always carried on the head. Weaving and clay modeling form good subjects for a future industrial department, leading at length to the making of baskets, hats, floor mats, and the modeling of the indispensable cooking pots. Picture books open up to them the wonders of the civilized world, and are a

The songs and games here as everywhere have been highly appreciated by the children. At first, because of the length of the words, it seemed almost a hopeless task to translate the songs so that an idea could be squeezed into small enough space to fit the music. If we sang about a star it must be olumbungululu; if flowers, oloneneho; if a butterfly, acimbiambinlu; if birds, olonjila, and if to form a ring, ocindongombela. After many attempts, the first successful song came like an inspiration. It was the simple one, 'Would you know how



RAW MATERIAL.

never-failing source of delight. The same old books that have been looked at over and over again become 'old friends,' one of the favorites being the 'Army and Navy Catalogue,' from which we order our supplies. One little girl refused to look at any other until at last we concluded it would be better to teach her to be satisfied with the book that fell to her lot; and the same little girl for a long time would take hold of no one's hands but a white person's. Gradually, however, through patient effort on the part of the teachers, she was induced to hold the hands of the other children, though sometimes it was only done with the tips of her fingers or by wrapping her cloth about them first, and once a child was gingerly held by the upper part of the arm.

does the farmer sow his barley and wheat?' The women are the farmers in Africa, and this describes how they plant the corn, cultivate it, carry it to the village in baskets, pound it on the rocks, sift it by shaking on a grass plat, make mush of the meal, and, finally, how the children eat it; and they end up by thanking their mother for it. The delight with which this was received by the children gave courage, and other songs and games are being constantly added by different members of the mission. Thus Froebel's idea of winning and developing the child through play, which it loves, is one of our greatest aids in attracting these children. Now, if you would ask what special benefit these children have derived from the kindergarten, I would ask you just to look at the accompany-