

Fröebel as an Educator.

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I. Introduction.

II. The influence of his early life on later work.

III. His work as an educator.

1. His writings
2. The kindergarten.

IV. His relation to other educators.

V. Conclusion.

Many men are able to achieve a notoriety in their own day; but in order that their work may be truly great and enduring, it must contain an element of universality and of true worth as considered by its effect on mankind. This universality will depend upon the degree to which the work conforms to man's elemental nature. Among those who have been able to become great in this, those have done the noblest work, who have labored for the true education of mankind. To become a great educator, a person must have a knowledge of man's nature, a conception of the object of education, and be able to formulate a system of principles by which education may best proceed. First among such educators, we may place those who, appreciating the impressionability of the child's nature, have recognized the importance of, and

labored for the improvement of methods of early education. He who had foresight and knowledge of child nature sufficient to found the kindergarten system must be one of these. Friedrich Froebel, whose singularly pure and childlike life has won so many admirers, must ever rank among the world's greatest educators.

His early life, though seemingly by bare and commonplace, did much towards determining the character of his later teachings. While quite young he lost his mother, and his father, a busy pastor, left him largely to the careless oversight of servants. Through its absence, he came to realize the necessity of mother love to the child. His most happy times were when allowed to roam among the wood and fields that surrounded his home. In this way he became an ardent lover of nature and learned how susceptible we are in childhood to its influence.

He tells us that he first discovered the building instinct in the child, through his own intense desire to imitate some workmen who were repairing a church near his home.

He did not attend school until ten years of age, but the first day seems to have left a lasting impression on his mind. The master opened the school with a little talk on the verse, "Seek ye first the kingdom of heaven and its righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." This seems to have awakened the spiritual being within him. He had known that there were laws for plants and flowers by which they grew into harmony and beauty; but never that human beings, by conforming to the wise provisions of a loving God, might attain this harmony and beauty in their own souls. Never afterwards did he lose his simple trust in God, and love for all his creatures. Besides these early impressions, he brought to his task a wide experience

in various occupations in which he had gained much knowledge of human nature, a good education, and an intimate acquaintance with the principles and practice of Pestalozzi.

Roebel's fame as an educator rests upon his writings, and the institution of the kindergarten which he established. His two most important works are "Songs for Mother and the Nursery" and "Education of Man". The former contains short talks with the mother in which he helps her to interpret her instincts, and gives her hints in aiding her child's development. In connection with this it contains a large number of suitable lullabies and nursery songs.

His "Education of Man" contains his philosophy of education. His principles are based upon observations of the child's natural development. He reached the foundations of human life, and on that built his theory of education. He was the first to recognize the divine spark in the nature of each child, and to for-

mutate a system of education in accordance with natural laws. His most important principles may be stated as follows,

1. The task of education is to assist natural development.

2. Early education is the most important, as the child is then in the formative plastic period.

3. Physical and spiritual development proceed together.

4. Early education must deal with the physical development and influence the spiritual self through the senses.

5. Education must find its methods in the child's nature.

Above and through these principles ran one great principle of which he never lost sight. It is the principle of unity. He believed that man should grow into a harmony with nature and a unity with God. This unity he sought,

1. By an all-sided development and activity. He believed that man should find expression for his thoughts in acts as well as words.

2. By cultivation of the emotions which he considered as nearest the spiritual being.

3. By development of the social instinct through contact with children while under the wise oversight of some experienced person. Although many of these principles are not new, Froebel was the first to classify and properly interpret them.

One element of Froebel's greatness was his ability to actualize his principles in well-guided practice. The idea of the kindergarten seems to have come to him as the flower of half a century's labor. In it, his principles find a perfect and harmonious expression. Its aim is best stated in his own words when he says its purpose is "to take the oversight of children before they are ready for school life; to exert an influence over their whole being in correspondence with its nature; to strengthen their bodily powers; to exercise their senses; to employ the awakening mind; to make

them thoughtfully acquainted with the world of nature and of man; to guide their heart and soul in the right direction, and to lead them to the Origin of all life and to unison with Him". Its nature is largely implied in its name. It is a real garden of children, whose nature is to be sympathetically studied in order that their needs may be learned; and then with the proper conditions supplied, the aim is to give such wise and kindly care that all may be favorable for natural growth.

This growth he endeavored to stimulate and guide through the use of gifts and occupations. The gifts include such things as bright worsted balls, solids - round, cubical, and triangular - and sticks or splints. These are to give the child a knowledge of form and color and to teach him to be observant. They involve the principles of symbolism and contrast. The occupations consist of motion songs, plays, weaving, braiding, and building. They aim to employ the building in -

stinct, and to develop and direct their self activity. He believed that this self activity, if properly developed, would not only enable them to interpret the external world, but also to express their inner nature. Froebel's conception of this self activity, and of the relation of impression to expression gives him predominance over other educators.

The work of Froebel does not stand out entirely distinct and separate from that of other educators. It is unique only in the harmony which existed between its theory and practice. Before him, many had been able to see the need of better early instruction, but none could formulate a system that would satisfactorily supply it. Some of his principles have been foreshadowed since the time of Plato, and many were expressed by Comenius, Rousseau, and Pestalozzi. Plato recognized the utility of play as a means of instruction.

Froebel agrees with Rousseau in that individuality must not be re-

pressed, and that education must be natural. He also accepts most of the Pestalozzian principles. The most important ones to which he assents are that education is a harmonious development of the human faculties; that the principles of education are to be found in human nature; that development depends upon the self-activity of the learner; and that all true education must be a leading out of the inner nature.

While agreeing on these points, he supplements them with others. Believing in the education of the individual, he also saw the necessity of his education with reference to society. While appreciating the value of the education of the child by its mother, he differs from Pestalozzi in seeing its impracticability. He realized that formerly too little importance had been put on self-activity and unity, and so gave them their proper place. He was the first to recognize the value of woman as an educator, and to call her to

the work. We must grant Froebel this power to accept and reject the principles of other educators because of his long and intimate observations of the child's natural development.

One great characteristic of Froebel was his loving disposition. He loved beast and man and God. This gave him that broad sympathy which enabled him to interpret the child's nature and analyze its wants. He was as a child with children, and still not childish. He seemed to be able to enter their very nature, enjoy their sports, and still be above them - a wise, gentle, firm companion and guide. Although we may disagree with him on some points, and consider many of his acts injudicious, we must admire the man - and his earnest, loving study of childhood, the effects of which have been felt in every civilized country. His principles cannot but be enduring, since he built them on the child's nature itself. Others may come who will add to them and im-

prove the objects used in instruction,
but Froebel will ever hold his place
as the first to see the true value and
proper relation of the principles,
as he to whom all later ones must
turn for guidance and inspiration.