

# WIGGIN KATE SMITH

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS: A  
BOOK OF NURSERY LOGIC

Kate Wiggin

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# Kate Douglas Wiggin, Nora Smith Children's Rights: A Book of Nursery Logic

## PREFATORY NOTE

I am indebted to the Editors of Scribner's Magazine, the Cosmopolitan, and Babyhood, for permission to reprint the three essays which have appeared in their pages. The others are published for the first time.

It may be well to ward off the full seriousness of my title "Nursery Logic" by saying that a certain informality in all of these papers arises from the fact that they were originally talks given before members of societies interested in the training of children.

Three of them—"Children's Stories," "How Shall we Govern our Children," and "The Magic of Together"—have been written for this book by my sister, Miss Nora Smith.

**K.D.W.**

NEW YORK, *August*, 1892.

## THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

"Give me liberty, or give me death!"

The subject of Children's Rights does not provoke much sentimentalism in this country, where, as somebody says, the present problem of the children is the painless extinction of their elders. I interviewed the man who washes my windows, the other morning, with the purpose of getting at the level of his mind in the matter.

"Dennis," I said, as he was polishing the glass, "I am writing an article on the 'Rights of Children.' What do you think about it?" Dennis carried his forefinger to his head in search of an idea, for he is not accustomed to having his intelligence so violently assaulted, and after a moment's puzzled thought he said, "What do I think about it, mum? Why, I think we'd ought to give 'em to 'em. But Lor', mum, if we don't, they *take* 'em, so what's the odds?" And as he left the room I thought he looked pained that I should spin words and squander ink on such a topic.

The French dressmaker was my next victim. As she fitted the collar of an effete civilization on my nineteenth century neck, I put the same question I had given to Dennis.

"The rights of the child, madame?" she asked, her scissors poised in air.

"Yes, the rights of the child."

"Is it of the American child, madame?"

"Yes," said I nervously, "of the American child."

"Mon Dieu! he has them!"

This may well lead us to consider rights as opposed to privileges. A multitude of privileges, or rather indulgences, can exist with a total disregard of the child's rights. You remember the man who said he could do without necessities if you would give him luxuries enough. The child might say, "I will forego all my privileges, if you will only give me my rights: a little less sentiment, please,—more justice!" There are women who live in perfect puddles of maternal love, who yet seem incapable of justice; generous to a fault, perhaps, but seldom just.

*Who owns the child?* If the parent owns him,—mind, body, and soul, we must adopt one line of argument; if, as a human being, he owns himself, we must adopt another. In my thought the parent is simply a divinely appointed guardian, who acts for his child until he attains what we call the age of discretion,—that highly uncertain period which arrives very late in life with some persons, and not at all with others.

The rights of the parent being almost unlimited, it is a very delicate matter to decide just when and where they infringe upon the rights of the child. There is no standard; the child is the creature of circumstances.

The mother can clothe him in Jaeger wool from head to foot, or keep him in low neck, short sleeves and low stockings, because she thinks it pretty; she can feed him exclusively on raw beef, or on vegetables, or on cereals; she can give him milk to drink, or let him sip his father's beer and wine; put him to bed at sundown, or keep him up till midnight; teach him the catechism and the thirty-nine articles, or tell him there is no God; she can cram him with facts before he has any appetite or power of assimilation, or she can make a fool of him. She can dose him with old-school remedies, with new-school remedies, or she can let him die without remedies because she doesn't believe in the reality of disease. She is quite willing to legislate for his stomach, his mind, his soul, her teachableness, it goes without saying, being generally in inverse proportion to her knowledge; for the arrogance of science is humility compared with the pride of ignorance.

In these matters the child has no rights. The only safeguard is the fact that if parents are absolutely brutal, society steps in, removes the untrustworthy guardian, and appoints another. But society does nothing, can do nothing, with the parent who injures the child's soul, breaks his will, makes him grow up a liar or a coward, or murders his faith. It is not very long since we decided

that when a parent brutally abused his child, it could be taken from him and made the ward of the state; the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children is of later date than the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. At a distance of a century and a half we can hardly estimate how powerful a blow Rousseau struck for the rights of the child in his educational romance, "Emile." It was a sort of gospel in its day. Rousseau once arrested and exiled, his book burned by the executioner (a few years before he would have been burned with it), his ideas naturally became a craze. Many of the reforms for which he passionately pleaded are so much a part of our modern thought that we do not realize the fact that in those days of routine, pedantry and slavish worship of authority, they were the daring dreams of an enthusiast, the seeming impossible prophecy of a new era. Aristocratic mothers were converts to his theories, and began nursing their children as he commanded them. Great lords began to learn handicrafts; physical exercise came into vogue; everything that Emile did, other people wanted to do.

With all Rousseau's vagaries, oddities, misconceptions, posings, he rescued the individuality of the child and made a tremendous plea for a more natural, a more human education. He succeeded in making people listen where Rabelais and Montaigne had failed; and he inspired other teachers, notably Pestalozzi and Froebel, who knit up his ragged seams of theory, and translated his dreams into possibilities.

Rousseau vindicated to man the right of "Being." Pestalozzi said "Grow!" Froebel, the greatest of the three, cried "Live! you give bread to men, but I give men to themselves!"

The parent whose sole answer to criticism or remonstrance is "I have a right to do what I like with my own child!" is the only impossible parent. His moral integument is too thick to be pierced with any shaft however keen. To him we can only say as Jacques did to Orlando, "God be with you; let's meet as little as we can."

But most of us dare not take this ground. We may not philosophize or formulate, we may not live up to our theories, but we feel in greater or less degree the responsibility of calling a human being hither, and the necessity of guarding and guiding, in one way or another, that which owes its being to us.

We should all agree, if put to the vote, that a child has a right to be well born. That was a trenchant speech of Henry Ward Beecher's on the subject of being "born again;" that if he could be born right the first time he'd take his chances on the second. "Hereditary rank," says Washington Irving, "may be a snare and a delusion, but hereditary virtue is a patent of innate nobility which far outshines the blazonry of heraldry."

Over the unborn our power is almost that of God, and our responsibility, like His toward us; as we acquit ourselves toward them, so let Him deal with us.

Why should we be astonished at the warped, cold, unhappy, suspicious natures we see about us, when we reflect upon the number of unwished-for, unwelcomed children in the world;—children who at best were never loved until they were seen and known, and were often grudged their being from the moment they began to be. I wonder if sometimes a starved, crippled, agonized human body and soul does not cry out, "Why, O man, O woman—why, being what I am, have you suffered me to be?"

Physiologists and psychologists agree that the influences affecting the child begin before birth. At what hour they begin, how far they can be controlled, how far directed and modified, modern science is not assured; but I imagine those months of preparation were given for other reasons than that the cradle and the basket and the wardrobe might be ready;—those long months of supreme patience, when the life-germ is growing from unconscious to conscious being, and when a host of mysterious influences and impulses are being carried silently from mother to child. And if "beauty born of murmuring sound shall pass into" its "face," how much more subtly shall the grave strength of peace, the sunshine of hope and sweet content, thrill the delicate chords of being, and warm the tender seedling into richer life.

Mrs. Stoddard speaks of that sacred passion, maternal love, that "like an orange-tree, buds and blossoms and bears at once." When a true woman puts her finger for the first time into the tiny hand of her baby, and feels that helpless clutch which tightens her very heart-strings, she is born again with the new-born child.

A mother has a sacred claim on the world; even if that claim rest solely on the fact of her motherhood, and not, alas, on any other. Her life may be a cipher, but when the child comes, God writes a figure before it, and gives it value.

Once the child is born, one of his inalienable rights, which we too often deny him, is the right to his childhood.

If we could only keep from untwisting the morning-glory, only be willing to let the sunshine do it! Dickens said real children went out with powder and top-boots; and yet the children of Dickens's time were simple buds compared with the full-blown miracles of conventionality and erudition we raise nowadays.

There is no substitute for a genuine, free, serene, healthy, bread-and-butter childhood. A fine manhood or womanhood can be built on no other foundation; and yet our American homes are so often filled with hurry and worry, our manner of living is so keyed to concert pitch, our plan of existence so complicated, that we drag the babies along in our wake, and force them to our artificial standards, forgetting that "sweet flowers are slow, and weeds make haste."

If we must, or fancy that we must, lead this false, too feverish life, let us at least spare them! By keeping them forever on tiptoe we are in danger of producing an army of conventional little prigs, who know much more than they should about matters which are profitless even to their elders.

In the matter of clothing, we sacrifice children continually to the "Moloch of maternal vanity," as if the demon of dress did not demand our attention, sap our energy, and thwart our activities soon enough at best.

And the right kind of children, before they are spoiled by fine feathers, do detest being "dressed up" beyond a certain point.

A tiny maid of my acquaintance has an elaborate Parisian gown, which is fastened on the side from top to bottom in some mysterious fashion, by a multitude of tiny buttons and cords. It fits the dear little mouse like a glove, and terminates in a collar which is an instrument of torture to a person whose patience has not been developed from year to year by similar trials. The getting of it on is anguish, and as to the getting of it off, I heard her moan to her nurse the other night, as she wriggled her curly head through the too-small exit, "Oh I only God knows how I hate gettin' peeled out o' this dress!"

The spectacle of a small boy whom I meet sometimes in the horse-cars, under the wing of his predestinate idiot of a mother, wrings my very soul. Silk hat, ruffled shirt, silver-buckled shoes, kid gloves, cane, velvet suit, with one two-inch pocket which is an insult to his sex,—how I pity the pathetic little caricature! Not a spot has he to locate a top, or a marble, or a nail, or a string, or a knife, or a cooky, or a nut; but as a bloodless substitute for these necessities of existence, he has a toy watch (that will not go) and an embroidered handkerchief with cologne on it.

As to keeping children too clean for any mortal use, I suppose nothing is more disastrous. The divine right to be gloriously dirty a large portion of the time, when dirt is a necessary consequence of direct, useful, friendly contact with all sorts of interesting, helpful things, is too clear to be denied.

The children who have to think of their clothes before playing with the dogs, digging in the sand, helping the stableman, working in the shed, building a bridge, or weeding the garden, never get half their legitimate enjoyment out of life. And unhappy fate, do not many of us have to bring up children without a vestige of a dog, or a sand heap, or a stable, or a shed, or a brook, or a garden! Conceive, if you can, a more difficult problem than giving a child his rights in a city flat. You may say that neither do we get ours: but bad as we are, we are always good enough to wish for our children the joys we miss ourselves.

Thrice happy is the country child, or the one who can spend a part of his young life among living things, near to Nature's heart How blessed is the little toddling thing who can lie flat in the sunshine and drink in the beauty of the "green things growing," who can live among the other little animals, his brothers and sisters in feathers and fur; who can put his hand in that of dear mother Nature, and learn his first baby lessons without any meddling middleman; who is cradled in sweet sounds "from early morn to dewy eve," lulled to his morning nap by hum of crickets and bees, and to his night's slumber by the sighing of the wind, the splash of waves, or the ripple of a river. He is a part of the "shining web of creation," learning to spell out the universe letter by letter as he grows sweetly, serenely, into a knowledge of its laws.

I have a good deal of sympathy for the little people during their first eight or ten years, when they are just beginning to learn life's lessons, and when the laws which govern them must often seem so strange and unjust. It is not an occasion for a big burning sympathy, perhaps, but for a tender little one, with a half smile in it, as we think of what we were, and "what in young clothes we hoped to be, and of how many things have come across;" for childhood is an eternal promise which no man ever keeps.

The child has a right to a place of his own, to things of his own, to surroundings which have some relation to his size, his desires, and his capabilities.

How should we like to live, half the time, in a place where the piano was twelve feet tall, the door knobs at an impossible height, and the mantel shelf in the sky; where every mortal thing was out of reach except a collection of highly interesting objects on dressing-tables and bureaus, guarded, however, by giants and giantesses, three times as large and powerful as ourselves, forever saying, "mustn't touch;" and if we did touch we should be spanked, and have no other method of revenge save to spank back symbolically on the inoffensive persons of our dolls?

Things in general are so disproportionate to the child's stature, so far from his organs of prehension, so much above his horizontal line of vision, so much ampler than his immediate surroundings, that there is, between him and all these big things, a gap to be filled only by a microcosm of playthings which give him his first object-lessons. In proof of which let him see a lady richly dressed, he hardly notices her; let him see a doll in similar attire, he will be ravished with ecstasy. As if to show that it was the disproportion of the sizes which unfitted him to notice the lady, the larger he grows the bigger he wants his toys, till, when his wish reaches to life-sizes, good-by to the trumpery, and onward with realities.<sup>1</sup>

My little nephew was prowling about my sitting-room during the absence of his nurse. I was busy writing, and when he took up a delicate pearl opera-glass, I stopped his investigations with the time-honored, "No, no, dear, that's for grown-up people."

"Hasn't it got any little-boy end?" he asked wistfully.

That "little-boy end" to things is sometimes just what we fail to give, even when we think we are straining every nerve to surround the child with pleasures. For children really want to do the very same things that we want to do, and yet have constantly to be thwarted for their own good. They would like to share all our pleasures; keep the same hours, eat the same food; but they are met on every side with the seemingly impertinent piece of dogmatism, "It isn't good for little boys," or "It isn't nice for little girls."

Robert Louis Stevenson shows, in his "Child's Garden of Verses," that he is one of the very few people who remember and appreciate this phase of childhood. Could anything be more deliciously real than these verses?

"In winter I get up at night,  
And dress by yellow candle light:

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<sup>1</sup> E. Seguin.

In summer, quite the other way,  
I have to go to bed by day;  
I have to go to bed and see  
The birds still hopping on the tree,  
And hear the grown-up people's feet  
Still going past me on the street.  
And does it not seem hard to you,  
That when the sky is clear and blue,  
And I should like so much to play,  
I have to go to bed by day?"

Mr. Hopkinson Smith has written a witty little monograph on this relation of parents and children. I am glad to say, too, that it is addressed to fathers,—that "left wing" of the family guard, which generally manages to retreat during any active engagement, leaving the command to the inferior officer. This "left wing" is imposing on all full-dress parades, but when there is any fighting to be done it retires rapidly to the rear, and only wheels into line when the smoke of the conflict has passed out of the atmosphere.

"Open your heart and your arms wide for your daughters," he says, "and keep them wide open; don't leave all that to their mothers. An intimacy will grow with the years which will fit them for another man's arms and heart when they exchange yours for his. Make a chum of your boy,—hail-fellow-well-met, a comrade. Get down to the level of his boyhood, and bring him gradually up to the level of your manhood. Don't look at him from the second story window of your fatherly superiority and example. Go into the front yard and play ball with him. When he gets into scrapes, don't thrash him as your father did you. Put your arm around his neck, and say you know it is pretty bad, but that he can count on you to help him out, and that you will, every single time, and that if he had let you know earlier, it would have been all the easier."

Again, the child has a right to more justice in his discipline than we are generally wise and patient enough to give him. He is by and by to come in contact with a world where cause and effect follow each other inexorably. He has a right to be taught, and to be governed by the laws under which he must afterwards live; but in too many cases parents interfere so mischievously and unnecessarily between causes and effects that the child's mind does not, cannot, perceive the logic of things as it should. We might write a pathetic remonstrance against the Decline and Fall of Domestic Authority. There is food for thought, and perhaps for fear, in the subject; but the facts are obvious, and their inevitableness must strike any thoughtful observer of the times. "The old educational regime was akin to the social systems with which it was contemporaneous; and similarly, in the reverse of these characteristics, our modern modes of culture correspond to our more liberal religious and political institutions."

It is the age of independent criticism. The child problem is merely one phase of the universal problem that confronts society. It seems likely that the rod of reason will have to replace the rod of birch. Parental authority never used to be called into question; neither was the catechism, nor the Bible, nor the minister. How should parents hope to escape the universal interrogation point leveled at everything else? In these days of free speech it is hopeless to suppose that even infants can be muzzled. We revel in our republican virtues; let us accept the vices of those virtues as philosophically as possible.

A lady has been advertising in a New York paper for a German governess "to mind a little girl three years old." The lady's English is doubtless defective, but the fate of the governess is thereby indicated with much greater candor than is usual.

The mother who is most apt to infringe on the rights of her child (of course with the best intentions) is the "firm" person, afflicted with the "lust of dominion." There is no elasticity in her

firmness to prevent it from degenerating into obstinacy. It is not the firmness of the tree that bends without breaking, but the firmness of a certain long-eared animal whose force of character has impressed itself on the common mind and become proverbial.

Jean Paul says if "*Pas trop gouverner*" is the best rule in politics, it is equally true of discipline.

But if the child is unhappy who has none of his rights respected, equally wretched is the little despot who has more than his own rights, who has never been taught to respect the rights of others, and whose only conception of the universe is that of an absolute monarchy in which he is sole ruler.

"Children rarely love those who spoil them, and never trust them. Their keen young sense detects the false note in the character and draws its own conclusions, which are generally very just."

The very best theoretical statement of a wise disciplinary method that I know is Herbert Spencer's. "Let the history of your domestic rule typify, in little, the history of our political rule; at the outset, autocratic control, where control is really needful; by and by an incipient constitutionalism, in which the liberty of the subject gains some express recognition; successive extensions of this liberty of the subject; gradually ending in parental abdication."

We must not expect children to be too good; not any better than we ourselves, for example; no, nor even as good. Beware of hothouse virtue. "Already most people recognize the detrimental results of intellectual precocity; but there remains to be recognized the truth that there is a moral precocity which is also detrimental. Our higher moral faculties, like our higher intellectual ones, are comparatively complex. By consequence, they are both comparatively late in their evolution. And with the one as with the other, a very early activity produced by stimulation will be at the expense of the future character."

In these matters the child has a right to expect examples. He lives in the senses; he can only learn through object lessons, can only pass from the concrete example of goodness to a vision of abstract perfection.

"O'er wayward childhood wouldst thou hold firm rule.  
And sun thee in the light of happy faces?  
Love, Hope and Patience, these must be thy graces,  
And in thine own heart let them first keep school."

Yes, "in thine own heart let them first keep school!" I cannot see why Max O'Rell should have exclaimed with such unction that if he were to be born over again he would choose to be an American woman. He has never tried being one. He does not realize that she not only has in hand the emancipation of the American woman, but the reformation of the American man and the education of the American child. If that triangular mission in life does not keep her out of mischief and make her the angel of the twentieth century, she is a hopeless case.

Spencer says, "It is a truth yet remaining to be recognized that the last stage in the mental development of each man and woman is to be reached only through the proper discharge of the parental duties. And when this truth is recognized, it will be seen how admirable is the ordination in virtue of which human beings are led by their strongest affections to subject themselves to a discipline which they would else elude."

Women have been fighting many battles for the higher education these last few years; and they have nearly gained the day. When at last complete victory shall perch upon their banners, let them make one more struggle, and that for the highest education, which shall include a specific training for parenthood, a subject thus far quite omitted from the curriculum.

The mistaken idea that instinct is a sufficient guide in so delicate and sacred and vital a matter, the comfortable superstition that babies bring their own directions with them,—these fictions have existed long enough. If a girl asks me why, since the function of parenthood is so uncertain, she should make the sacrifices necessary to such training, sacrifices entailed by this highest education of

body, mind, and spirit, I can only say that it is better to be ready, even if one is not called for, than to be called for and found wanting.

## CHILDREN'S PLAYS

"The plays of the age are the heart-leaves of the whole future life, for the whole man is visible in them in his finest capacities and his innermost being."

Mr. W.W. Newell, in his admirable book on "Children's Games," traces to their proper source all the familiar plays which in one form or another have been handed down from generation to generation, and are still played wherever and whenever children come together in any numbers. The result of his sympathetic and scholarly investigations is most interesting to the student of childhood, and as valuable philologically as historically. In speaking of the old rounds and rhymed formulas which have preserved their vitality under the effacing hand of Time, he says,—

"It will be obvious that many of these well-known game-rhymes were not composed by children. They were formerly played, as in many countries they are still played, by young persons of marriageable age, or even by mature men and women.... The truth is, that in past centuries all the world, judged by our present standard, seems to have been a little childish. The maids of honor of Queen Elizabeth's day, if we may credit the poets, were devoted to the game of tag, with which even Diana and her nymphs were supposed to amuse themselves....

"We need not, however, go to remote times or lands for illustration which is supplied by New England country towns of a generation ago. Dancing, under that name, was little practiced; the amusement of young people at their gatherings was "playing games." These games generally resulted in forfeits, to be redeemed by kissing, in every possible variety of position and method. Many of these games were rounds; but as they were not called dances, and as man-kind pays more attention to words than things, the religious conscience of the community, which objected to dancing, took no alarm.... Such were the pleasures of young men and women from sixteen to twenty-five years of age. Nor were the participants mere rustics; many of them could boast as good blood, as careful breeding, and as much intelligence, as any in the land. Neither was the morality or sensitiveness of the young women of that day in any respect inferior to what it is at present.

"Now that our country towns are become mere outlying suburbs of cities, these remarks may be read with a smile at the rude simplicity of old-fashioned American life. But the laugh should be directed, not at our own country, but at the bygone age. It must be remembered that in mediaeval Europe, and in England till the end of the seventeenth century, a kiss was the usual salutation of a lady to a gentleman whom she wished to honor.... The Portuguese ladies who came to England with the Infanta in 1662 were not used to the custom; but, as Pepys says, in ten days they had 'learnt to kiss and look freely up and down.' Kissing in games was, therefore, a matter of course, in all ranks....

"In respectable and cultivated French society, at the time of which we speak, the amusements, not merely of young people but of their elders as well, were every whit as crude.

"Madame Celnart, a recognized authority on etiquette, compiled in 1830 a very curious complete manual of society games recommending them as recreation for *business men*.... 'Their varying movement,' she says, 'their diversity, the gracious and gay ideas which these games inspire, the decorous caresses which they permit, all this combines to give real amusement. These caresses can alarm neither modesty nor prudence, since a kiss in honor given and taken before numerous witnesses is often an act of propriety.'"

The old ballads and nursery rhymes doubtless had much of innocence and freshness in them, but they only come to us nowadays tainted by the odors of city streets. The pleasure and poetry of the original essence are gone, and vulgarity reigns triumphant. If you listen to the words of the games which children play in school yards, on sidewalks, and in the streets on pleasant evenings, you will find that most of them, to say the least, border closely on vulgarity; that they are utterly unsuitable to childhood, notwithstanding that they are played with great glee; that they are, in fine, common, rude, silly, and boorish. One can never watch a circle of children going through the vulgar inanities

of "Jenny O'Jones," "Say, daughter, will you get up?" "Green Gravel," or "Here come two ducks a-roving," without unspeakable shrinking and moral disgust. These plays are dying out; let them die, for there is a hint of happier things abroad in the air.

The wisest mind of wise antiquity told the riddle of the Sphinx, if having ears to hear we would hear. "Our youth should be educated in a stricter rule from the first, for if education becomes lawless and the youths themselves become lawless, they can never grow up into well-conducted or meritorious citizens; and *the education must begin with their plays.*"

We talk a great deal about the strength of early impressions. I wonder if we mean all we say; we do not live up to it, at all events. "In childish play deep meaning lies." "The hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world." "Give me the first six years of a child's life, and I care not who has the rest." "The child of six years has learned already far more than a student learns in his entire university course." "The first six years are as full of advancement as the six days of creation," and so on. If we did believe these things fully, we should begin education with conscious intelligence at the cradle, if not earlier. The great German dramatic critic, Schlegel, once sneered at the brothers Jacob and William Grimm, for what he styled their "meditation on the insignificant." These two brothers, says a wiser student, an historian of German literature, were animated by a "pathetic optimism, and possessed that sober imagination which delights in small things and narrow interests, lingering over them with strong affection." They explored villages and hamlets for obscure legends and folk tales, for nursery songs, even; and bringing to bear on such things at once a human affection and a wise scholarship, their meditation on the insignificant became the basis of their scientific greatness and the source of their popularity. Every child has read some of Grimm's household tales, "The Frog Prince," "Hans in Luck," or the "Two Brothers;" but comparatively few people realize, perhaps, that this collection of stories is the foundation of the modern science of folk-lore, and a by-play in researches of philology and history which place the name of Grimm among the benefactors of our race. I refer to these brothers because they expressed one of the leading theories of the new education.

"My principle," said Jacob Grimm, "has been to undervalue nothing, but to utilize the small for the illustration of the great." When Friedrich Froebel, the founder of the kindergarten, in the course of his researches began to watch the plays of children and to study their unconscious actions, his "meditation on the insignificant" became the basis of scientific greatness, and of an influence still in its infancy, but destined, perhaps, to revolutionize the whole educational method of society.

It was while he was looking on with delight at the plays of little children, their happy, busy plans and make-believes, their intense interest in outward nature, and in putting things together or taking them apart, that Froebel said to himself: "What if we could give the child that which is called education through his voluntary activities, and have him always as eager as he is at play?"

How well I remember, years ago, the first time I ever joined in a kindergarten game. I was beckoned to the charming circle, and not only one, but a dozen openings were made for me, and immediately, though I was a stranger, a little hand on either side was put into mine, with such friendly, trusting pressure that I felt quite at home. Then we began to sing of the spring-time, and I found myself a green tree waving its branches in the wind. I was frightened and self-conscious, but I did it, and nobody seemed to notice me; then I was a flower opening its petals in the sunshine, and presently, a swallow gathering straws for nest-building; then, carried away by the spirit of the kindergartner and her children, I fluttered my clumsy apologies for wings, and forgetting self, flew about with all the others, as happy as a bird. Soon I found that I, the stranger, had been chosen for the "mother swallow." It was to me, the girl of eighteen, like mounting a throne and being crowned. Four cunning curly heads cuddled under my wings for protection and slumber, and I saw that I was expected to stoop and brood them, which I did, with a feeling of tenderness and responsibility that I had never experienced in my life before. Then, when I followed my baby swallows back to their seats, I saw that the play had broken down every barrier between us, and that they clustered about me as confidently as if we

were old friends. I think I never before felt my own limitations so keenly, or desired so strongly to be fully worthy of a child's trust and love.

Kindergarten play takes the children where they love to be, into the world of "make-believe." In this lovely world the children are blacksmiths, carpenters, wheelwrights; birds, bees, butterflies; trees, flowers, sunbeams, rainbows; frogs, lambs, ponies,—anything they like. The play is so characteristic, so poetic, so profoundly touching in its simplicity and purity, so full of meaning, that it would inspire us with admiration and respect were it the only salient point of Froebel's educational idea. It endeavors to express the same idea in poetic words, harmonious melody and fitting motion, appealing thus to the thought, feeling, and activity of the child.

Physical impressions are at the beginning of life the only possible medium for awakening the child's sensibility. These impressions should therefore be regulated as systematically as possible, and not left to chance.

Froebel supplies the means for bringing about the result in a simple system of symbolic songs and games, appealing to the child's activities and sensibilities. These he argues, ought to contain the germ of all later instruction and thought; for physical and sensuous perceptions are the points of departure of all knowledge.

When the child imitates, he begins to understand. Let him imitate the airy flight of the bird, and he enters partially into bird life. Let the little girl personate the hen with her feathery brood of chickens, and her own maternal instinct is quickened, as she guards and guides the wayward motion of the little flock. Let the child play the carpenter, the wheelwright, the wood-sawyer, the farmer, and his intelligence is immediately awakened; he will see the force, the meaning, the power, and the need of labor. In short, let him mirror in his play all the different aspects of universal life, and his thought will begin to grasp their significance.

Thus kindergarten play may be defined as a "systematized sequence of experiences through which the child grows into self-knowledge, clear observation, and conscious perception of the whole circle of relationships," and the symbols of his play become at length the truth itself, bound fast and deep in heart knowledge, which is deeper and rarer than head knowledge, after all.

To the class occupied exclusively with material things, this phase of Froebel's idea may perhaps seem mystical. There is nothing mystical to children, however; all is real, for their visions have not been dispelled.

"Turn wheresoe'er I may,  
By night or day,  
The things which I have seen, I now can see no more."

As soon as the child begins to be conscious of his own activities and his power of regulating them, he desires to imitate the actions of his future life.

Nothing so delights the little girl as to play at housekeeping in her tiny mansion, sacred to the use of dolls. See her whimsical attention to dust and dirt, her tremendous wisdom in dispensing the work and ordering the duties of the household, her careful attention to the morals and manners of her rag-babies.

The boy, too, tries to share in the life of a man, to play at his father's work, to be a miniature carpenter, salesman, or what not. He rides his father's cane and calls it a horse, in the same way that the little girl wraps a shawl about a towel, and showers upon it the tenderest tokens of maternal affection. All these examples go to show that every conscious intellectual phase of the mind has a previous phase in which it was unconscious or merely symbolic.

To get at the spirit and inspiration of symbolic representation in song and game, it is necessary first of all to study Froebel's "Mutter und Kose-Lieder," perhaps the most strikingly original, instructive, serviceable book in the whole history of the practice of education. The significant remark

quoted in Froebel's "Reminiscences" is this: "He who understands what I mean by these songs knows my inmost secret." You will find people who say the music in the book is poor, which is largely true, and that the versification is weak, which is often, not always, true, and is sometimes to be attributed to faulty translation; but the idea, the spirit, the continuity of the plan, are matchless, and critics who call it trifling or silly are those who have not the seeing eye nor the understanding heart. Froebel's wife said of it,—

"A superficial mind does not grasp it,  
A gentle mind does not hate it,  
A coarse mind makes fun of it,  
A thoughtful mind alone tries to get at it."

"Froebel<sup>2</sup> considers it his duty to picture the home as it ought to be, not by writing a book of theories and of rules which are easily forgotten, but by accompanying a mother in her daily rounds through house, garden, and field, and by following her to workshop, market, and church. He does not represent a woman of fashion, but prefers one of humbler station, whom he clothes in the old German housewife style. It may be a small sphere she occupies, but there she is the centre, and she completely fills her place. She rejoices in the dignity of her position as educator of a human being whom she has to bring into harmony with God, nature, and man. She thinks nothing too trifling that concerns her child. She watches, clothes, feeds, and trains it in good habits, and when her darling is asleep, her prayers finish the day. She may not have read much about education, but her sympathy with the child suggests means of doing her duty. Love has made her inventive; she discovers means of amusement, for play; she talks and sings, sometimes in poetry and sometimes in prose. From mothers in his circle of relations and friends, Froebel has learned what a mother can do, and although he had no children of his own, his heart vibrated instinctively with the feelings of a mother's joy, hope, and fear. He did not care about the scorn of others, when he felt he must speak with an almost womanly heart to a mother. His own loss of a mother's tender care made him the more appreciate the importance of a mother's love in early infancy. The mother in his book makes use of all the impressions, influences, and agencies with which the child comes in contact: she protects from evil; she stimulates for good; she places the child in direct communication with nature, because she herself admires its beauties. She has a right feeling towards her neighbors, and to all those on whom she depends. A movement of arms and feet teaches her that the child feels its strength and wants to use it. She helps, she lifts, she teaches; and while playing with her baby's hands and feet she is never at a loss for a song or story.

"The mother also knows that it is necessary to train the senses, because they are the active organs which convey food to the intellect. The ear must hear language, music, the gentle accents and warning voices of father and mother. It must distinguish the sounds of the wind, of the water, and of pet animals.

"The eyesight is directed to objects far and near, as the pigeons flying, the hare running, the light flickering on the wall, the calm beauty of the moon, and the twinkling stars in the dark blue sky."

Of the effect of Froebel's symbolic songs and games, with melodious music and appropriate gesture, kindergartners all speak enthusiastically. They know that—

First: The words suggest thought to the child.

Second: The thought suggests gesture.

Third: The gesture aids in producing the proper feeling.

We all believe thoroughly in the influence of mind on body, the inward working outward, but we are not as ready to see the influence of body on mind. Yet if mind or soul acts upon the body, the external gesture and attitude just as truly react upon the inward feeling. "The soul speaks through

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<sup>2</sup> Eleonore Heerwart.

the body, and the body in return gives command to the soul." All attitudes mean something, and they all influence the state of mind.

Fourth: The melody begets spiritual impressions.

Fifth: The gestures, feeling, and melody unite in giving a sweet and gentle intercourse, in developing love for labor, home, country, associates, and dumb animals, and in unconsciously directing the intellectual powers.

Learning to sing well is the best possible means of learning to speak well, and the exquisite precision which music gives to kindergarten play destroys all rudeness, and does not in the least rob it of its fun or merriment.

"We cannot tell how early the pleasing sense of musical cadence affects a child. In some children it is blended with the earliest, haziest recollection of life at all, as though they had been literally 'cradled in sweet song;' and we may be sure that the hearing of musical sounds and singing in association with others are for the child, as for the adult, powerful influences in awakening sympathetic emotion, and pleasure in associated action."

Who can see the kindergarten games, led by a teacher who has grown into their spirit, and ever forget the joy of the spectacle? It brings tears to the eyes of any woman who has ever been called mother, or ever hopes to be; and I have seen more than one man retire surreptitiously to wipe away his tears. Is it "that touch of nature which makes the whole world kin"? Is it the perfect self-forgetfulness of the children? Is it a touch of self-pity that the radiant visions of our childhood days have been dispelled, and the years have brought the "inevitable yoke"? Or is it the touching sight of so much happiness contrasted with what we know the home life to be?

Sydney Smith says: "If you make children happy now, you will make them happy twenty years hence by the memory of it;" and we know that virtue kindles at the touch of this joy. "Selfishness, rudeness, and similar weedy growths of school-life or of street-independence cannot grow in such an atmosphere. For joy is as foreign to tumult and destruction, to harshness and selfish disregard of others, as the serene, vernal sky with its refreshing breezes is foreign to the uproar and terrors of the hurricane."

For this kind of ideal play we are indebted to Friedrich Froebel, and if he had left no other legacy to childhood, we should exalt him for it.

If you are skeptical, let me beseech you to join the children in a Free Kindergarten, and play with them. You will be convinced, not through your head, perhaps, but through your heart. I remember converting such a grim female once! You know Henry James says, "Some women are unmarried by choice, and others by chance, but Olive Chancellor was unmarried by every implication of her being." Now, this predestinate spinster acquaintance of mine, well nigh spoiled by years of school-teaching in the wrong spirit, was determined to think kindergarten play simply a piece of nauseating frivolity. She tried her best, but, kept in the circle with the children five successive days, she relaxed so completely that it was with the utmost difficulty that she kept herself from being a butterfly or a bird. It is always so; no one can resist the unconscious happiness of children.

As for the good that comes to grown people from playing with children in this joyous freedom and with this deep earnestness of purpose, it is beyond all imagination. If I had a daughter who was frivolous, or worldly, or selfish, or cold, or unthoughtful,—who regarded life as a pleasantry, or fell into the still more stupid mistake of thinking it not worth living,—I should not (at first) make her read the Bible, or teach in the Sunday-school, or call on the minister, or request the prayers of the congregation, but I should put her in a good Kindergarten Training School. No normal young woman can resist the influence of the study of childhood and the daily life among little children, especially the children of the poor: it is irresistible.

Oh, these tiny teachers! If we only learned from them all we might, instead of feeling ourselves over-wise! I never look down into the still, clear pool of a child's innocent, questioning eyes without thinking: "Dear little one, it must be 'give and take' between thee and me. I have gained something

here in all these years, but thou hast come from thence more lately than have I; thou hast a treasure that the years have stolen from me—share it with me!"

Let us endeavor, then, to make the child's life objective to him. Let us unlock to him the significance of family, social, and national relationships, so that he may grow into sympathy with them. He loves the symbol which interprets his nature to himself, and in his eager play, he pictures the life he longs to understand.

If we could make such education continuous, if we could surround the child in his earlier years with such an atmosphere of goodness, beauty, and wisdom, none can doubt that he would unconsciously grow into harmony and union with the All-Good, the All-Beautiful, and the All-Wise.

## CHILDREN'S PLAYTHINGS

"Books cannot teach what toys inculcate."

In the preceding chapter we discussed Froebel's plays, and found that the playful spirit which pervades all the kindergarten exercises must not be regarded as trivial, since it has a philosophic motive and a definite, earnest purpose.

We discussed the meaning of childish play, and deplored the lack of good and worthy national nursery plays. Passing then to Froebel's "Mother-Play," we found that the very heart of his educational idea lies in the book, and that it serves as a guide for mothers whose babies are yet in their arms, as well as for those who have little children of four or five years under their care.

We found that in Froebel's plays the mirror is held up to universal life; that the child in playing them grows into unconscious sympathy with the natural, the human, the divine; that by "playing at" the life he longs to understand, he grows at last into a conscious realization of its mysteries—its truth, its meaning, its dignity, its purpose.

We found that symbolic play leads the child from the symbol to the truth symbolized.

We discovered that the carefully chosen words of the kindergarten songs and games suggest thought to the child, the thought suggests gesture, the melody begets spiritual feeling.

We discussed the relation of body and mind; the effect of bodily attitudes on feeling and thought, as well as the moulding of the body by the indwelling mind.

Froebel's playthings are as significant as his plays. If you examine the materials he offers children in his "gifts and occupations," you cannot help seeing that they meet the child's natural wants in a truly wonderful manner, and that used in connection with conversations and stories and games they address and develop his love of movement and his love of rhythm; his desire to touch and handle, to play and work (to be busy), and his curiosity to know; his instincts of construction and comparison, his fondness for gardening and digging in the earth; his social impulse, and finally his religious feeling.

Froebel himself says if his educational materials are found useful, it cannot be because of their exterior, which is as simple as possible, and contains nothing new; but their worth is to be found exclusively in their application. If you can work out his principles (or better ones still when we find better ones) by other means, pray do it if you prefer; since the object of the kindergartner is not to make Froebel an *idol*, but an *ideal*. He seems to have found type-forms admirable for awaking the higher senses of the child, and unlike the usual scheme of object lessons, they tell a continued story. When the object-method first burst upon the enraptured sight of the teacher, this list of subjects appeared in a printed catalogue, showing the ground of study in a certain school for six months:—

*"Tea, spiders, apple, hippopotamus, cow, cotton, duck, sugar, rabbits, rice, lighthouse, candle, lead-pencil, pins, tiger, clothing, silver, butter-making, giraffe, onion, soda!"*

Such reckless heterogeneity as this is impossible with Froebel's educational materials, for even if they are given to the child without a single word, they carry something of their own logic with them.

They emphasize the gospel of doing, for Froebel believes in positives in teaching, not negatives; in stimulants, not deterrents. How inexpressibly tiresome is the everlasting "Don't!" in some households. Don't get in the fire, don't play in the water, don't tease the kitty, don't trouble the doggy, don't bother the lady, don't interrupt, don't contradict, don't fidget with your brother, and *don't* worry me now; while perhaps in this whole tirade, not a word has been said of something to do.

Let sleeping faults lie as long as possible while we quietly oust them, little by little, by developing the good qualities. Surely the less we use deterrents the better, since they are often the child's first introduction to what is undesirable or wrong. I am quite sure they have something of that effect on grown people. The telling us not to do, and that we cannot, must not, do a certain thing surrounds it with a momentary fascination. If your enemy suggests that there is a pot of Paris green on the piazza,

but you must not take a spoonful and dissolve it in a cup of honey and give it to your maiden aunt who has made her will in your favor, your innocent mind hovers for an instant over the murderous idea.

Froebel's play-materials come to the child when he has entered upon the war-path of getting "something to do." If legitimate means fail, then "let the portcullis fall;" the child must be busy.

The fly on the window-pane will be crushed, the kettle tied to the dog's tail, the curtains cut into snips, the baby's hair shingled,— anything that his untiring hands may not pause an instant,— anything that his chubby legs may take his restless body over a circuit of a hundred miles or so before he is immured in his crib for the night.

The child of four or five years is still interested in objects, in the concrete. He wants to see and to hear, to examine and to work with his hands. How absurd then for us to make him fold his arms and keep his active fingers still; or strive to stupefy him with such an opiate as the alphabet. If we can possess our souls and primers in patience for a while, and feed his senses; if we will let him take in living facts and await the result; that result will be that when he has learned to perceive, compare, and construct, he will desire to learn words, for they tell him what others have seen, thought, and done. This reading and writing, what is it, after all, but the signs for things and thoughts? Logically we must first know things, then thoughts, then their records. The law of human progress is from physical activity to mental power, from a Hercules to a Shakespeare, and it is as true for each unit of humanity as it is for the race.

Everything in Froebel's playthings trains the child to quick, accurate observation. They help children to a fuller vision, they lead them to see. Did you ever think how many people there are who "having eyes, see not"?

Ruskin says, "Hundreds of people can talk for one who can think, but thousands can think for one who can see. To see clearly is poetry, prophecy, religion, all in one."

A gentleman who is trying to write the biography of a great man complained to me lately, that in consulting a dozen of his friends—men and women who had known him as preacher, orator, reformer, and poet—so few of them had anything characteristic and fine to relate. "What," he said "is the use of trying to write biography with such mummies for witnesses! They would have seen just as much if they had had nothing but glass eyes in their heads."

What is education good for that does not teach the mind to observe accurately and define picturesquely? To get at the essence of an object and clear away the accompanying rubbish, this is the only training that fits men and women to live with any profit to themselves or pleasure to others. What a biographer, for example, or at least what a witness for some other biographer, was latent in the little boy who, when told by his teacher to define a bat, said: "He's a nasty little mouse, with injy-rubber wings and shoe-string tail, and bites like the devil." There was an eye worth having! Agassiz himself could not have hit off better the salient characteristics of the little creature in question. Had that remarkable boy been brought into contact, for five minutes only, with Julius Caesar, who can doubt that the telling description he would have given of him would have come down through all the ages?

I do not mean to urge the adoption of any ultra-utilitarian standpoint in regard to playthings, or advise you rudely to enter the realm of early infancy and interfere with the baby's legitimate desires by any meddling pedagogic reasoning. Choose his toys wisely and then leave him alone with them. Leave him to the throng of emotional impressions they will call into being. Remember that they speak to his feelings when his mind is not yet open to reason. The toy at this period is surrounded with a halo of poetry and mystery, and lays hold of the imagination and the heart without awaking vulgar curiosity. Thrice happy age when one can hug one's white woolly lamb to one's bibbed breast, kiss its pink bead eyes in irrational ecstasy, and manipulate the squeak in its foreground without desire to explore the cause thereof!

At this period the well-beloved toy, the dumb sharer of the child's joys and sorrows, becomes the nucleus of a thousand enterprises, each rendered more fascinating by its presence and sympathy. If the toy be a horse, they take imaginary journeys together, and the road is doubly delightful because

never traveled alone. If it be a house, the child lives therein a different life for every day in the week; for no monarch alive is so all-powerful as he whose throne is the imagination. Little tin soldier, Shem, Ham, and Japhet from the Noah's Ark, the hornless cow, the tailless dog, and the elephant that won't stand up, these play their allotted parts in his innocent comedies, and meanwhile he grows steadily in sympathy and in comprehension of the ever-widening circle of human relationships. "When we have restored playthings to their place in education—a place which assigns them the principal part in the development of human sympathies, we can later on put in the hands of children objects whose impressions will reach their minds more particularly."

Dr. E. Seguin, our Commissioner of Education to the Universal Exhibition at Vienna, philosophizes most charmingly on children's toys in his Report (chapter on the Training of Special Senses). He says the vast array of playthings (separated by nationalities) left at first sight an impression of silly sameness; but that a second look "discovered in them particular characters, as of national idiosyncrasies; and a closer examination showed that these puerilities had sense enough in them, not only to disclose the movements of the mind, but to predict what is to follow."

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