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CHILD AND MAN

A MAGAZINE FOR THE EDUCATION
FOUNDED BY RUDOLF STEINER

Feb. 1949

VOLUME ONE

New Series

No. 5

Dr. Rupert White

CHILD AND MAN

VOL. I (*New Series*)

February 1949

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Editorial

WE welcome in this number translations of articles from two sister journals abroad, which devote their pages to the consideration of the Rudolf Steiner education. The school movement in Germany, which has grown so rapidly since the oppressive hand of the Hitler government has been lifted from that unhappy country, publishes a bi-monthly journal, *Erziehungskunst*, and it is from this that we have the kind permission to print Dr. Gerbert's important article on the problem of dissimilar abilities in children. Mijneer Laffrée's article on Fairy Tales from the Dutch journal *Vrije Opvoedkunst* answers a familiar question, which arises often in the minds of parents.

The education, or re-education, of children on the continent, whose young lives have been so twisted and tortured by the terrible events of the forties, is still a burning problem, although the war has been over for nearly four years. Thus Rex Raab's account of his experiment in 1945 and 1946 is still very relevant and topical.

Eileen Hutchins teaches at Elmfield School near Stourbridge, Worcestershire, and we are glad to include her article on a subject which was dealt with from another viewpoint in our previous number. I think it is good if we have several contributors dealing with similar subjects in consecutive numbers; in this way a certain continuity and breadth of treatment becomes possible.

A. C. Harwood begins the series of contributions, as usual, with another article of a more general nature, and as editor and a teacher myself, I am most grateful to him for the way he is gradually unfolding a background to the other articles, by his more general studies.

H. L. HETHERINGTON.

Study of Man

WILL—THE UNKNOWN ELEMENT

THE effects of will in life are so evident that few people stop to reflect on the fact that in its own nature will is unknown to ordinary consciousness. It can, indeed, be compared to light which, invisible itself, makes all other things visible. We perceive the effects of will but not its nature; we raise our hand and see that it is raised, but the power which enters into our arm and enables us to do so remains entirely hidden from us. So much is this the case that some modern psychologies deny the existence of will altogether.

To Rudolf Steiner, however, will made, with thinking and feeling, the great Trinity of the human soul. Will, thinking and feeling are the primary colours of the soul; but of these colours the first is invisible, the second is only perceptible in a kind of twilight, while the third alone lives in the full light of day. It is therefore all the more important to study the manifestations of will because only by doing so can we normally grasp something of its real nature. It is not surprising, therefore, that an important section of the book *Study of Man* is devoted to a description—a very unusual description—of various manifestations of the will.

Dr. Steiner's method is to take the principles of man (which have often been described in this magazine) and examine the manifestations of will in each of them. He begins with the physical body. Will, as it appears in the physical body, is instinct. The behaviour of animals, for instance, is chiefly conditioned by their physical form. The beaver must build his dam, the lion must roar, the monkey must climb, the mole must burrow. Man has not a form specialised for some particular function like the animals; he has slowly to learn the possibilities of his body—his characteristic behaviour is not immediately given him by his form. He has to *learn* to walk, to run, to swim, to talk, to direct his eyes, to grasp with his hands. He has his physical instincts, of course, but they do not direct the main tenor of his life as they do with the animals. His physical structure gives him a basis for freedom.

But there is also the etheric or life-body, which man and animal share with the plants. If an organism were only physical (as is the mineral kingdom) no changes in time would take place in it except such as were caused by purely external forces. But it is essential to an organism to have a history of its own. This history is due to the etheric body, in which will manifests itself no longer as *instinct* but as *impulse*. What is the distinction between instinct and impulse?

Let us look at the animal kingdom first of all—say the bird kingdom. The bird flying is fulfilling the demands of its physical structure. So is the bird in its nest. To see a bright-eyed thrush sitting on its nest in a hedge is to realise that nest and bird belong together like the glove and the hand. But go further and look at the migration habits of the birds. What is there in the physical structure of the bird that takes the cuckoo away in August and the swallow in September? Yet the impulse to fly returns to them yearly because it is in their etheric or time body. It is an outstanding example of such an impulse, but wherever we look we see such examples of impulse working in the etheric body. In ordinary phraseology,

of course, migration is said to be an instinct, but we are here using a new terminology to distinguish between the two will activities based on the physical and etheric bodies. The marvellous manner in which creatures of all kinds seek the right environment and associations for a new step in their development, such movements as those of eels and shearwaters—these are not the expression of the physical (or space) body, but relate the etheric (or time) body in the creature to the etheric forces of the earth. Man has few or none of these marvellous impulses. His young will walk into a river and burn themselves at a fire, nor can they find their way home from two streets away, or across a couple of fields. But he has other immensely important impulses, for instance, the impulse to learn to speak, and to imitate in every way the actions of people around him. Man is already being differentiated from the animal by developing something of an inward nature.

The next stage is when we reach the sphere of sentience. Animals, like men, have a sentient or astral body by which the world becomes for them sensation and experience. When will is lifted into this first sphere of consciousness it becomes *desire*. Desire, however, differs from instinct and impulse in that it is entirely inward and is of a more fleeting character. The instinct is dictated by the outer form; it brings about actions which the creature performs without consciousness, in the same way as we blink our eyes if something passes in front of them. Desire is the first manifestation of will in the sphere of consciousness.

With the animal, will can go no further, but with man we reach the individuality or ego, the being who is not only conscious but self-conscious, who feels (often tragically) that his experience is personal to him alone and cuts him off from his fellow men. What is the peculiar manifestation of will in this sphere? With the ego is born the capacity for man to create something like his own sphere of time. The animal's instinct or impulse cause it to perform actions which lead it rightly forward to the next necessary step in its life. But it is not conscious of the future to which it is being led. Man, however, is able to act by the power of *motive*, by which he leads himself to his own personal future. He is essentially man when his actions have the character of motives, when he brings the picture of the future into the sphere of the will. Man's comparative freedom from the domination of instinct and impulse enable him to do this, unless he is overcome from the sphere of desire. One of the tasks of education is to see that the children are led abundantly into the sphere of motive. For it is here that will enters the sphere of self-consciousness, and moral responsibility is born. It is only when a man acts from a fully conscious motive that he can be said to act freely. If we are honest with ourselves very few of our actions are really free. We are dictated to by our temperament, by our tastes, by custom, by public opinion. We follow precedents, and talk the language of the day. To perform an entirely free and individual act is a much rarer thing than we suppose. It is to draw out of the future the act which is peculiarly right for us in our individual situation.

We here approach the very secret of will. In a previous number of *CHILD AND MAN* the polarity of thinking and willing was described, the former drawing its forces from the past and the latter from the future. But now from a somewhat different standpoint we see how the force of will, flowing into man from the future, manifests itself first of all as caught up into a sphere which essentially belongs to

the past, the physical forms born out of past ages of evolution. Here will work in an unconscious manner. Then it rises as desire into consciousness and the experience of the present; and as motive to self-consciousness and a glimmer of futurity. And this leads us to something which is much harder to understand, and could perhaps only have been revealed by such a genius in the mysteries of life as Dr. Steiner. Accompanying every action, he says, the will brings an element from the future which is not yet born into ordinary consciousness, but is something like a faint will, intention, and resolution to do the action better on another occasion. This represents a kind of wisdom which flows into life without man being aware of it. This wisdom for the future has determined many a man's actions, as he may, perhaps, recognise when he looks back on his life and sees the great consequences following upon actions which he undertook he knew not why. It is at this point that Dr. Steiner quotes the well-known psychological story of the lady and the horses. The lady was so frightened by a runaway carriage that she could not step to the side of the street, but ran directly in front of the horses until she reached a bridge; over the parapet of the bridge she jumped into the river. Now the psychoanalyst, who sees life in terms of complexes and inhibitions arising from childhood might, perhaps, have hazarded (and perhaps even found) that the lady had been frightened of horses as a child, and so was unable to get out of their way. But Dr. Steiner points to something else. The lady had her private reason for wanting to go back to the house she had just left. She was in love with the man who lived there. And her will (without her being aware of it) arranged her personal future in such a way that she was pulled out of the river and carried back to the house she desired to return to. Nothing from the past could have arranged such a sequence of events. The prophetic will ordered the affair. But modern psychology does not recognise the entry of the future into the present.

I think that Dr. Steiner quotes this example not because it is of a very high order, but because it has so often been cited and misinterpreted. It can at least call our attention to the fact that a shaping force from the future enters our lives. For modern man the will here drops down again into almost complete unconsciousness. The artist is perhaps aware of the wish to do better every time he has created a work of art. He does not linger lovingly over what he has made, but is irresistibly driven on to something new. And everyone can try to make himself a little conscious of the way in which his own future is speaking to him through the will. It is further to enhance that sphere of conscious personal action which is the mark and glory of man.

A. C. HARWOOD.

Children's Talents, Selective Education and Social Community

(Reprinted by kind permission, from *Erziehungskunst*, May-June 1948)

SHOULD schools be differentiated according to the capacity of the pupils? Should children be selected according to their gifts and placed in a number of different schools? How long can all children be educated together? Such problems must be faced by anyone who considers the organisation of an educational system. In the following article an attempt will be made to throw light on these questions out of the knowledge which is at the basis of a Rudolf Steiner education and out of the experience gained by many years of work in Rudolf Steiner schools.

When the teacher receives the six to seven year olds on their first schoolday, he is faced by the difference in their external appearance and their temperaments. There are the sanguines, fidgety yet affectionate, quick to show their feelings; next to them the shy, often tall melancholics with their soft, low voices; then there are the phlegmatics, solid and dreamy, eager to consume their mid-morning snack at the earliest opportunity; and lastly the choleric, whose urge for action is shown by their firm tread and their readiness to use fists rather than words. After some time, however, another differentiation also becomes apparent in the lessons: it is the difference in the ability of the children.

We usually call those children gifted, who take in easily what is brought to them as sense perceptions or thoughts, who can easily commit it to memory, who learn rapidly and whose interest in their surroundings is active and awake. But there are children (often called subnormal in a school where the main emphasis is put on learning) whose gifts lie in a different direction. These children find it difficult to absorb what is brought to them from outside, because their inner life is so active in pictures and dreams. When it comes to reciting, to acting, to painting, drawing or modelling, or work in the handwork lesson, they will be found to work out of a fountain of inner experience which the more intellectual children often lack. They do not ask, like the latter, "What shall I do?" they do not suffer from self-criticism, they are never bored and never at a loss to invent a new game. In a third category are those children who are slow also in their artistic work, who speak hesitatingly, but who set to work quietly and with a will when there is a job to be done. In such children great will-power is often dormant. They are to the teacher like the acorn, which, even when the beech seedlings are already showing two sturdy leaves, can hardly burst the fetters of its husk and sends up but a weak shoot. Its powerful growth, however, can outlast a millennium. He would do well to talk to the class about the oak and to such a child give a verse, which will remind it of such a picture and thus strengthen its self-confidence. Apart from these three types of children with different gifts, there are those who do really lack ability, who are ill or sub-normal. They cannot follow the work at school and must be cared for in homes for children in need of special attention. About their place in society more will be said later.

How can these children with different gifts develop at school? Because of

growing competition for places at the university, the selection of children to fill them is being made further and further down until it now begins to take place in school. This causes ever-increasing intellectual strain in the early years. What effect has this on the child who is not intellectually gifted?

For children whose gifts lie in their fantasy or will-power, the road through a school, where intellectual achievements alone are prized, is often a path of sorrow. They reach the required standard only after a painful struggle, helped by their parents and their own sturdy will-power, but slowly they lose their originality and freshness. Their particular gifts are not developed, and a fund of new impulses and creative power is lost to our ageing civilisation, which is in such need of them. The simple-mindedness which protected Parival's youth is counted only as stupidity in our age. We know, however, that many great men awakened late intellectually. Novalis, for instance, was regarded as quite below average in his ninth year. For our time it may perhaps be more impressive to point out the lives of renowned technicians, as they are, for instance, told in Conrad Matschoss' book *Great Engineers*. There we learn that James Watt was a delicate, shy child, whose greatest pleasure it was to invent fairy tales. When he was an old man of eighty-one his gift of telling stories delighted Sir Walter Scott. He was no lover of Greek and Latin, but he was good at mathematics. Stephenson, the founder of the British railway system, grew up without any schooling at all. He started as a shepherd boy and slowly worked his way up to be a stoker and finally an engineer. Edison was thought to be quite ungifted: "The child was distinguished by his large head, which did not give his father much hope for a great intellectual future for his child. This opinion was shared by the teachers, but his mother had quite different ideas. She soon recognised the exceptional gifts of her son, despite the fact that at school, which he visited for only three months, he made no progress at all." These facts, as presented by history, draw the author's attention to an educational problem. He says: "Fantasy is not the prerogative of poets and artists only. It may be worth while to consider what role fantasy plays in engineering, it bestows the faculty of looking into the future, of sensing the possible developments, and out of that the courage to overcome difficulties is born."

The question now arises: If there really are gifts apart from intellectual ability, which are not developed by mere learning, would it not be best to differentiate schools as early as possible, so that children gifted in any direction may find a proper opportunity of development? Before we can find an answer to this question, we must, however, consider what effects the one-sided development of the intellect has, even on the so-called able children.

If one observes life more intimately, one often notices that capable children, although eager to learn and doing good work, yet gradually lose their freshness. The child reads instead of playing, it may soon have to wear glasses, it becomes irritable, inhibitions appear, when it comes to meet other people. An important crisis takes place at puberty when the individual soul strives to express itself. The strongly developed intellectual powers are used to criticise the home, the school, civilisation in general; a maladjustment to the environment appears. It is just the really gifted children who feel their powers stifled by merely traditional knowledge, they are natures like Dr. Faustus, striving towards the fountain and origin

of life. Many youth movements are the result. In hiking clubs the problems of cognition are diverted into the sphere of feeling and, in political and pre-military youth organisations, into the sphere of the will, the experience of power. Many of the errors and tragedies of youth, known to us from our surroundings and painted for us in literature, are further results. There are, of course, also many children who go along the conventional groove and pass their examinations without trouble, but they do not usually give new creative impulses to cultural life.

A very interesting novel was published in *Mercur de France* (December 1947, January, February and March 1948) called "L'homme qui marchait devant moi," by André Chamson. A man faints, walking along a street in Paris in front of the narrator. The author catches him, helps him into a café and there the stranger makes a moving confession. His experiences in life have brought him to the realisation which fills him with sorrow and fear, that men no longer seemed to mature when they grow old, instead they decay slowly and appear to disintegrate in soul and spirit, they are living corpses—"des morts vivants." Round this recognition the narrative of the novel is woven, and to make it clear to his new acquaintance he tells the story of a friend of his childhood days. This boy was by far the most brilliant in his class in the secondary school, everyone regarded him as a genius and expected great things of him in later life. Now after twenty-five years he met him again, not a failure indeed, outwardly. He had studied law and is a barrister, he is in a good position, is well, has a wife and three children and yet he seems to have a dead soul in a living body. "Il ne s'intéressait plus à rien, à rien du tout, mais à un point inimaginable." Apart from his own well-being and his own health, he has no interests, and this loss of interest for his surroundings and for other people seems to the narrator to be the death of the spirit. His hearer now remembers one of his own acquaintances, who seemed destined for a brilliant future by the gifts he displayed in childhood, and whom he had just met at the races as a dipsomaniac and a bookmaker. The author then calls to mind three men: an old gardener, his grandfather on his small farm, and an old doctor—all people who, in their old age, had grown to love their fellow men and to earn their reverence. This makes him pose the fearful question: how can we preserve that readiness to serve, which lies in the hearts of the young, so that this blossom does not wither too soon; nor the fruit rot before it is ripe?

This is the question for the educator: How can the forces and the gifts, which a child brings with it, be developed so that, always metamorphosing and adapting themselves, they last beyond the middle years of life, where in our age the death of the soul is an ever-present danger? Before we can answer this question, however, we must ask ourselves: what does it mean to be gifted?

We are led thus to consider the origin of the human soul and its destiny. For many centuries the theological view obtained that God created a new soul for every new body.

In some way, therefore, faculties and gifts were divinely predestined for each soul. Over against this view teaching concerning heredity gained more and more ground in the nineteenth century. For the biologist the soul had no life of its own, but was the result of a number of different inherited characteristics. A gifted person, according to this view, has to thank that good fortune which gave him a

collection of favourable hereditary factors. Goethe, however, had already ended his *Von Vater hab ich die Statur* . . . (a poem dealing with his heredity) slightly ironically with the following sentence: "Sind nun die Elemente nicht aus dem Komplex zu kennen, was ist denn an dem ganzen Wicht original zu nennen?" (If one cannot separate the elements from the whole complex, what can be called original in the fellow?) We have to thank Dr. Rudolf Steiner's research in spiritual science and the work of Dr. Poppelbaum and Dr. Kipp, based on Dr. Steiner's indications, for the fact that the one-sided teaching of heredity could be corrected by a proper conception of the original, the individual part of the man. By thorough, clear and unprejudiced thinking one can come towards an understanding of these deepest riddles of life. One then learns to know that it is not heredity which builds the human individual, but that it is the eternal personality of man, passing from one life on earth to another, which collects around itself those hereditary factors, which it can use to live out its destiny in the earth-life it is about to start. In our inborn capacities we have the fruits of previous lives on earth. Our faculties are the gifts of the past.

The knowledge of man given by Rudolf Steiner makes it possible for us to follow the process of incarnation. The details cannot be given in a short article, but can be found in Dr. Steiner's works on education. In the little child, the forces of soul and spirit are engaged in building up the body. This development ends in the main with the change of teeth and then some of these forces, freed from this work on the body, become forces of thought and imagination. To begin with, these freed forces are still penetrated by a vigorous life, and are fired by feeling, but gradually die as man bases his thoughts and ideas on the ever-dying nervous system.

Imaginatively expressed: the Tree of Life changes into the dry and withered Tree of Knowledge. No man, however, can be spared this path, for he would otherwise not develop freedom, wakefulness and responsibility.

A picture from nature serves to make these facts clearer. Those who live in towns may think that the buds on trees and bushes are formed in the autumn, when the old leaves are shed. They will be surprised to learn that the buds are formed in spring before midsummer, together with the young leaves and shoots. The spring blossom of a tree is a gift from the past. The length of this year's shoots is largely dependent on last year's weather. What has formed in the previous summer comes to expression in the following spring, hindered or helped by the present meteorological conditions. What our intellect grasps only with difficulty is the fact that in the growing and sprouting of one spring the beginnings are formed for the blossoms of the following year.

We can see in the life of man how the stream from the past is continuously dying into the present, but at the same time something new arises, which lays the foundation for a future blossoming. This future-forming element in man's life can be found like a seedling in the working of the will, in the blood process, all that which gives rise in us to metabolism and movement. The will cannot, however, be fully grasped by our consciousness. Mediating between the unconscious life processes in the will and the conscious chains of ideas in the nerves are the feelings, which are closely connected with the rhythmic processes of the heart and lungs.

If we look at the children's gifts from this point of view, we see in them the lighting up of the past. The educator has a grave responsibility towards them.

There can hardly have been a more gifted child than Mozart who, when six years old, was a virtuoso on the piano and played the violin in his father's quartet without having had any violin lessons. When he was nine years old he had written three volumes of piano sonatas, and at eleven had composed the charming operette *Bastian and Bastienne*. But it is sad to see how he always remained small, thin and ailing, and how he died at the age of thirty-five. Pascal, who rediscovered Euclid's geometry when he was twelve, and worked out a famous mathematical theorem at the age of sixteen, died at thirty-nine after a life in which he had continuously suffered from ill health. One has the feeling that such early intellectual activity drew away the life forces from the bodies of these children, those forces which are needed to build up the physique. As a contrast let us consider Anton Bruckner's life. He grew up quietly in a small town undiscovered and unaware of his own genius. Slowly practising his art, like an artisan his trade, he matured, and only at forty-two did he write the first of his magnificent symphonies which point mankind to the future.

Such examples, which show on a large scale what different possibilities of development lie in children, are very instructive for the educator. He must not only develop the gifts from the past, but must lead the child, by compensating and adjusting one-sided tendencies, to complete manhood.

If we appreciate the full force of this thought we realise what damage can be done by a too early specialisation before maturity is reached.

Animals develop their faculties surprisingly early. They specialise immediately according to their inherited characteristics, according to the instincts which are bound to their bodies. They remain, however, entirely fettered to the past, to their species. The child develops slowly, and in the first two seven-year periods it also lives mainly out of its past. If we now decide the child's career before puberty, allowing ourselves to be guided only by what has appeared up to that moment, we bind the child to its past. But we must preserve for the child its formative powers until after puberty (the time when development ceases in the animal). The individuality of the child can then become active and transform the fruits of the past, so that they can be fitly led into the present.

But how is such a generally human education possible when all types of children are gathered together in one school? Is it not doing an injustice to the intellectually gifted, if they are educated together with those with other gifts, or those not gifted at all? This criticism would be justified in a school, where importance is attached to intellectual development only. If one realises the danger which lies in a one-sided development of the thinking capacity, even for those who show promise in that direction, one wishes them to go to a school where they are prevented from developing their intellects prematurely, the training of which must necessarily be accompanied by certain death forces. They need the artistic and will-forming activities as a very important balancing influence. The various gifts of the children meet and compensate each other in the artistic activity which enlivens and penetrates all the teaching in a Rudolf Steiner school. In the language lessons, for example, the class recites in chorus, and thus becomes a unity, in which all differences are equalled

out. In spelling and grammar the abilities are very different. But when the teacher tells a story, again all the children are absorbed with equal intensity in accordance with their own soul-powers, and even less gifted children sometimes write good compositions, when their feelings have been stirred.

If a child who is good at mathematics and French watches how another child decorates his notebook with lovely drawings, or how it develops special skill in handwork, this will be an impulse for it to develop its own faculties in that direction and will save it from valuing its own gifts in a one-sided way. Excessive ambition and inferiority complexes can be avoided, if a child is in a class where many different gifts come to expression.

In this way we educate children for living in society. Is not the breaking of our society due to the exaggerated value attached to intellectual achievement and to the fact that we do not regard manual work sufficiently highly? The reply of the working class to this standard of values is the branding of all spiritual life as "bourgeois ideology." He, who realises how the cognitional and will life in a man balance each other out and how they are raised to a truly human level in the spirit of Schiller's *Letters on Aesthetics* by art and religion, will also appreciate how the blending of all kinds of gifts and faculties must be achieved in the life of society. A teacher will create a true social consciousness in the children if his feeling is really penetrated by this recognition, and if he harmonises the various forces in the children. This harmony will be a source of strength for the children when they enter life, in which specialisation into different professions is unavoidable. This specialisation and mechanisation of most professions is a dire necessity of our times. This has been pointed out by Rudolf Steiner in all seriousness; Goethe has foreshadowed it in the conversation between Wilhelm and Jarno in the "Pädagogische Provinz" in *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*. Only very rarely will it be possible for anyone to be personally satisfied by his work in his profession. What is it, then, that can save men from stagnation who work in this way? What can unite them? Only a spiritual life connected with the true foundation of the world can do that, a spiritual life in which all share, which is not the prerogative of a small intellectual class, and which penetrates the social order with the light of knowledge and also with artistic and moral impulses. Why do so many people want to go to the university? Is it not because young people are not given enough at school? Experience shows that he who has enjoyed an education for twelve years which has satisfied all his spiritual needs, is often drawn to one of the trades, to an artistic occupation, or to agriculture. He knows that his profession need not exclude him from spiritual life, because in his life at school he has met the starting points for many occupations, which he can now follow up according to his inclinations. Adult education classes can then be a supplement to this.

The social impulses which can arise from a truly human education must reunite mankind, which is now split into many factions. We must, however, not forget those who, owing to a special destiny, cannot grow up inside the community of a school. If one opts for a selective system, whereby children are sent to different types of schools, according to their various abilities, one must have the courage to think this through to its logical conclusion. The biological conception of "natural selection" has, through the idea of "the struggle for existence" been led to its

logical conclusion in the doctrine of "the elimination of the unfit." We have seen that idea become a reality in Central Europe in the last decade. What have we to bring to meet this idea out of our terrible experiences of recent years? Rudolf Steiner has often pointed out how a life, which is apparently a failure, can be of great importance for the individuality who goes from one life to another. In his drama *Der Ruf am Abgrund* the Swiss poet Albert Steffen puts before us a situation in which the life of a boy is threatened by his father's views on those "unfit to live." We are shown how the love of a young teacher, who cares for the backward children in a small village in the Swiss mountains, and those children themselves, call the boy back to life. Mankind owes many of its best capacities to these children. Anyone who has had the privilege of observing in a home for children in need of special care, how Rudolf Steiner's teaching can prompt an understanding for these poor offsprings of humanity, will bear out these conclusions. A gospel saying is here exemplified: Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones: for I say unto you: That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven (Matthew xviii. 10). This saying will live in the thoughts of all future educators, for they will see the gifts and faculties of children in the light of the ever-evolving, ever-changing individuality, as it goes from one earth-life to another. In all humility as they labour, they will feel themselves responsible to the divine powers who watch over the destiny of every child.

HILDEGART GERBERT.

The Teaching of Writing

TEACHING the first letters to children of six or seven years old is a happy experience. Even those who already know their alphabet are delighted to follow the curve of the W in the flow of the wave and the rearing form of the snake in the S. It is not hard for them to remember letters that are taught through pictures, and they enjoy expressing them in vivid colours in their books. The real difficulty comes later, when the step has to be taken from letters to words, and when the forms and pictures have to be associated with particular sounds. At this stage it is worth while for the teacher to ponder upon the development of writing through the course of the ages; for a deeper understanding of the history that lies behind these apparently arbitrary marks called letters guides us in building the bridge from the learning of the alphabet to the comprehension of words and sentences.

In teaching writing we should concern ourselves not so much with the shapes of the individual letters as with the powers of understanding and movement that are called forth. We need to consider what happens in the soul life of the child when it is shown a number of meaningless signs and is told that these stand for well-known words. Or again, what happens in the bodily development when pages have to be filled with niggly black marks.

Long ago mankind had not acquired the capacities for writing and reading. Whatever forces we use to-day for these attainments could be directed to other ends, and thus the powers of picture thinking and of the spoken word were much more vivid. Only those who had gone through the strictest training so that the living quality of thought and feeling should not be lost in the abstract signs, were allowed to write. The teachers of old would have been horrified if the art of writing had been used as it is to-day for utterly trivial ends. Only that which was most lofty and sacred was worthy of being expressed, and a scribe could even be put to death if a mistake were made in transcribing the holy texts. Children when they learn to write to-day should also be given the impression that wonderful meanings are hidden in letters and words and that these should be written with beauty and devotion.

Speech and thought precede the written word and different qualities of thought or speech find different degrees of expression in the various alphabets. Some reveal most strongly the picture quality of thought like the Egyptian hieroglyphics. Others are more concerned with its force and movement. For instance, in the cuneiform writing of the Chaldean epoch there is no picture quality. The wedge-shaped letters remind us of little arrows that shoot straight to the mark. The Chaldeans felt the will-element of speech that pierced the hearer with the power to hurt or heal. In the Greek alphabet we find that the growing forming power of sound is represented. There is something plastic in the Greek letters, and we can often feel their connections with the movements of Eurhythm.

There is one ancient script that seems to have no connection with picture or sound; and this is the Ogham alphabet of the Celts. It was divorced from symbol and form, not because it was purely abstract and empty of content, but because the wisdom expressed was so sacred that none who were uninitiated must guess its meaning. The series of cuts or notches could give no hint of the mysteries they had to impart. The study of the Ogham letters is very illuminating for the teacher who would like to penetrate the processes that lie behind the forming of an alphabet. The first five letters of this script are formed by a series of scratches, one, two, three, four or five, below and at right angles to a line; the next five by a similar series above a line; the next set are drawn across a line at an acute angle, and so on. No ancient alphabet appears so lifeless; yet all the letters had names, and the one who knew these knew something of their significance. Robert Graves in his book *The White Goddess* has tried to penetrate the mysteries of the Ogham letters. They all had the names of trees, and he concludes that they express what he calls a "seasonal tree magic." The first letter is named "birch," the second "rowan," the third "ash" and so on. There are thirteen important consonants, and he relates these to the thirteen lunar months in the solar year, while the five vowels are more connected with trees related to the planets. The Druids preferred to express their alphabet by a kind of deaf and dumb language upon the fingers and only transferred movements to notches on stone or wood when they had to communicate with those who were not present. Each finger was felt to have its special quality. The thumb was the most able to sense love, the first finger knowledge, the middle finger was able to foretell the weather, the fourth finger diagnosed illness, and the fifth finger was able to divine death or make a corpse to speak. We need not

accept all Robert Graves' conclusions as valid, but he has understood that the living qualities of the trees and the seasons of the year in which they attain their strongest forces are related to the qualities of the sounds to which they give their names. We also know through Eurhythm that each consonant has its special quality in connection with the passage of the sun through the twelve groups of stars. And through the nature of their sounds, consonants can work in an enlivening or a soothing way upon the soul life of the child. We learn through Eurhythm also that each sound has its right and necessary form.

Picture, movement and sound—all these lie behind the letters which have now become conventional signs, and children should feel the presence of these powers when they learn to write.

Most teachers find that children differ very much in their abilities to grasp what they learn. Some more readily relate themselves to the picture element, while others are more aware of the sound. A few can form their letters very beautifully without waking to any consciousness of either picture or sound. In my own first class I had several outstanding examples.

One little boy had a marvellous sense of colour and drew the most beautifully formed letters; but if I asked him for a word beginning with the sound "t," he would as likely as not reply "goat" or "pig." For a long time he could not relate words beginning with the same sound. On the other hand, there was a little girl who loved the story and the pictures of the snake and the fish; but when she came to draw them her snake was a series of nervous jerks and her fish was more like a sausage exploding in a pan. She had no ability to control the form of what she really understood quite well. She was, however, very musical, and had no difficulty in providing a string of words beginning with any sound she was given. A third child who came from a farm could copy his letters with lovely curves and tender colours, but he lived in a dream and never remembered what any of them meant.

We should bear all these types in mind, and in the teaching of the letters, pictures, movement and sound must all play their part so that the different children become harmonised.

As far as the pictures are concerned, every teacher should make his own, but it is better, I think, to give those which imply movement than those that are static. The snake, the fish and the wave are all good from this point of view. For "H" the picture of a horse is more alive than that of a house, although it is very tempting to draw a pretty little cottage with two high chimneys. For "G" a goose looking back over its tail is more comical and appealing than an open gate leading into a garden.

While the children are busy developing their letters a good deal of attention should be paid to form for its own sake. In many round games and exercises they can run straight and curved lines, and it is a good practice to let them draw or write these on a large scale, perhaps with a wet mop on the floor or a rake in the sand pit. Nearly every main lesson I used to allow some of the children in my own first class to come in turn to draw on the blackboard. They could choose their own colours to make strong straight lines or bold curves, and soon they gained confidence and could draw with strength and certainty.

As children learn to know their letters, copying of writing should go hand in hand with words or verses which they already know by heart. Then gradually the

writing takes on meaning for them. Nursery rhymes are very helpful in the first writing lessons, for children suddenly recognise with the great joy of discovery the familiar words emerging from a whole series of jumbled letters. It is inadvisable to make special sentences of very simple words so that writing may be easy for them, for this is really boring and gives them the feeling that writing has not anything very important to say. They should keep best books, and their work in these should be a very serious and solemn affair. At the same time, as soon as children begin to recognise words I think it is helpful to give them dictations of tiny phrases which they know by heart, where the letters follow the sounds fairly closely. Thus they have continual practice in listening. Children readily accept the inconsistency in spelling. The teacher can explain that every word is like a family; and just as most families have babies or old grannies who do not do any work, so most words have letters that do not make any sound. Also just as their fathers sometimes like a change from the office and choose to dig in the garden, some letters like to change their work. "C" will sometimes do the work of the king "K," but sometimes it prefers to make the sound of the snake. English spelling is certainly a handicap to quick progress in writing and reading; but perhaps it is a saving grace for the English who so love to take life easily and judge from the standpoint of common sense, that in their spelling they cannot for a single moment feel secure. Perhaps they also owe to their spelling and their involved tables of measure and weight that they are very rarely pedantic.

The chief aid to the grasp of the sound in letters should be Eurhythm. It is best if a class teacher can work closely with a Eurhythmist so that as the children learn to write they can also experience how movement and form are created in accordance with sound, and how poetry which paints word pictures for the eye of the soul can also be expressed in movement which calls to the spirit to dance.

It is a strenuous task for the teacher to help his class to unfold all the powers which lie behind the forming of the letters; but it is wonderfully worth while. Perhaps the greatest reward comes when a child whose faculties seemed to lie dormant suddenly begins to awake. The writing which was so crippled and ugly grows in beauty and strength; and the eyes which looked puzzled and fearful shine with a new light. May all of us who teach writing and reading take it as seriously as those masters of olden times.

EILEEN HUTCHINS.

Creatively Onward

AT the present moment widespread attention is being directed to the youth of Germany. For certain reasons it is expected of these young people that they justify their existence in a marked way. Advice and directives are being offered them from various sides. On this account some observations and experiences gain through close contact with a number of these young people over a period of a year since the cessation of hostilities may prove of value to the public in coming to a correct estimation of the hopes that can be placed in German youth.

THE SCENE

During the war there was a nation-wide scheme for sending children from the heavily attacked areas of Germany and Austria into the country (Kinderland-verschickung). The period originally envisaged was six months, but this came to be extended through force of circumstances, and contact with parents became more and more difficult. The armistice consequently caught many children of German origin on Austrian territory and vice versa. They could not be repatriated immediately. Thus it came about that many remained away from home for as long as three years. And during most of 1945 they were in ignorance as to whether they had a home or parents at all.

The region of Austria occupied by the British was at first limited to Carinthia, but children's camps from Styria and Northern Yugoslavia had also found their way into that region. The disorganisation of these camps was completed by a number of factors: one, that the original administration had ordered a complete destruction of all records; two, that equipment and clothing were depleted in the confusion; three, that the military in many cases had to requisition the hotels in which the school camps were housed, the alternative accommodation proving to be ex-labour camps often in poor condition and quite unsuited to protracted school use; four, that all formal instruction was forbidden for the time being by the Military Government; and five, that a certain proportion of the existing staff was liable to dismissal on political grounds.

The civilian war relief organisation of the British Red Cross found these camps in this disorganised state, and a Youth Camps Reorganisation Officer of the Friends' Ambulance Unit was appointed, who undertook an initial tour of some forty camps scattered over a wide area and embracing more than two thousand children. His duties extended to a multitude of tasks from passing on the "no teaching" order to securing cooking pots. This contact with the camps impressed him with the desirability of resuming education if for no other reason than to check discontent and disintegration. Some of the more adventurous had already shouldered rucksacks soldier-fashion and made for home; and some of these have not yet reached home. Apart from holding the camps together until an orderly repatriation could be effected, the Reorganisation Officer felt that here was an ideal opportunity for work with youth in the new spirit demanded by the times. Official permission was obtained for members of the Friends' Ambulance Unit to act as Educational Supervisors. The Viennese and Rhenish children having been able to return home in the course of 1945, the supervisors were mainly concerned with the 650 Berlin children varying from eleven to seventeen years of age who remained in Karnten until the end of June 1946, and who were gathered into five centres.

In the first camp to come under such supervision education was resumed as early as July 1945. It is this camp which forms the principal subject of the present account. It consisted of wooden huts situated on exceptionally beautiful mountain slopes overlooking a lake. Originally built to accommodate sixty persons, it was found by the supervisor with a population of one hundred and fifty, which was eventually reduced to eighty boys and girls from Berlin primary and secondary schools, together with a small staff.

Although the ultimate aims of the supervisor were educational, his first tasks

proved to be overwhelmingly those of a welfare officer. Practical difficulties in some cases at first precluded any question of regular teaching and combating them formed a necessary preliminary to spiritual progress. A few illustrations will make this clear.

Often the nearest shops would be anything up to ten kilometres from the camps. Provisions for, say, a hundred people had to be fetched on foot. The wear and tear on boots would have been great at the best of times. In 1945 there had been little or no shoe mending since March.

The milk, say at the rate of a gill a day (twenty-two pints a day for a hundred children) often had to wait for days before being fetched and consumed in the form of curds because the smallest cans available were too heavy to be carried and other means of transport was rarely to hand.

In the summer months half a camp would be out gathering berries most of the day in order to supplement the meagre rations.

Other major material problems were the securing of fuel, school supplies and the means of effecting repairs, etc., to say nothing of the constant threat of sudden removals or repatriation. In the far larger refugee camps (up to five thousand inhabitants) centralisation and transport facilities lightened many of these burdens, though in other respects conditions were less favourable for school purposes.

Those children who had been working temporarily with farmers for their board and lodging had benefited in health and acquired a perhaps premature sense of independence, but the close of the harvesting season coincided with the resumption of lessons and many were glad to return to a life with their fellows in the camps. A number of the boys had been employed in army cookhouses and a genuine comradeship grew up between the British and these German lads, not alone to be explained by the sound culinary basis!

In the course of time most of the shortages were made good by careful economy and much journeying hither and thither. A journey was even undertaken to Geneva, the town of Henri Dunant, and relief supplies secured from the International Red Cross. The day during Easter week that the boots and shoes arrived from Switzerland was itself a festival in the camps. Spring was not only in the air but also seemed to be on the feet of the children, like the winged heels of Mercury! They jumped for joy, and were especially glad if they took a size larger than they had supposed. Many laid these much-needed possessions by their pillows before going to sleep.

Thus a spirit of mutual aid was induced by the circumstance that each child as well as each adult had to make his practical and indispensable contribution to the life of the camp. Of itself it made those under the care of the supervisor more readily prepared to make the best of a situation which continued to keep them from their homes. But it did more. It made it easier for him in his real task.

THE TASK

What was this real task? Might it not be considered sufficient in these days of material values to have made good a material want? Practice alone could supply the answer to these questions. For the supervisor was not there primarily for welfare purposes but precisely for educational. It was his first duty to see that

certain practices and notions which had held sway hitherto were no longer cultivated. These practices may be summed up in the slogan with which it was sought to dominate education, "Jugend muss durch Jugend erzogen werden" (Youth must be educated by youth). Goethe's prose aphorism, "Die Jugend bildet sich wieder an der Jugend" (The young learn in their turn also from the young) was mischievously called up in support of it! In the "Kinderlandverschickung" this meant that Camp Leaders, youths or girls over fifteen years of age, were appointed to take drills and parades, give instruction in gymnastics, sport, politics, target practice (for boys over fourteen), handwork and singing, and to organise such games as the "Geländespiel," a sophisticated kind of "Cowboys and Indians" popular among boys and girls alike. In the case of the boys handwork meant compulsory model airplane-building. These youthful leaders tended to drive a wedge between teacher ("Wandelnder Kalkberg"—calcified, but still moving, was the epithet applied to teachers!) and pupil, a process made the easier since the most attractive subjects fell to their lot.

It was, indeed, the conviction of the present writer that these practices were based on a misapprehension; but as much his conviction that *merely* to forbid them would indicate a secret inability to put anything better in their place. He was further convinced that it would have been wiser not to have attempted the task at all had he not been acquainted with a "something better."

A healthy plant can best be expected to grow up in its native soil. Only this soil must be kept free from injurious influences and the plant exposed to beneficial sunlight, air and rain. The supervisor saw equivalent favourable influences for the growing child in the educational impulses originating with Dr. Rudolf Steiner. Since such impulses can alone thrive in freedom he could not do more than express the hope that this attitude would find a response among the other members of the staff. And as to his first impression of the children, he vowed to himself that he would either be a witness to more signs of reverence and true happiness in their faces before parting from them or for ever have cause to reproach himself!

A sufficient picture of the setting having been given, it may be asked how this work with children and staff developed. In full consciousness of the drawbacks and shortcomings under which it laboured, the following sketch may be ventured.

Among the staff it was sought to grasp the actual tasks of the educator through the basic understanding of the unfolding human being which Rudolf Steiner has made possible. This of itself threw light on the problems which were moving their minds. Youth had for two generations been seeking "führende Lehrer oder lehrende Führer" (teachers that are leaders or leaders that are teachers), as Dr. Steiner expressed it in 1922. But it did not find them and proposed to go its own way. The way it eventually found was a conventional training of the will. Yet this had no innate life or spiritual content, but merely stereotype notions. It could not satisfy for long. If, therefore, the half-conscious demand, "Youth must be educated by youth" were to be translated into terms of consciousness, it might read, "Youth must be educated by a rejuvenated knowledge"! And that would be fully justified. Then the older generation is restored to the picture and the teacher's task lies clearly before him: To rejuvenate his own thinking. Youth refused the corpse of the world embalmed by natural science and sought life in the will-region alone.

There it became martialled into marching columns that also inevitably led to death. Spiritual science can show the way back to life again. And this way, in terms of education, is the path of artistic experience. "The artistic element works particularly upon the *will nature* of man," Rudolf Steiner shows us. "We advance thereby to something which is bound up with the *whole* human being, whereas what is associated with the conventional merely has to do with the head."

Is it not also indicative of the needs of the adolescent that demands from the children to hear something about those ideas which rumour said the staff were studying became ever more insistent?

THE FESTIVAL

As regards the children, however, it was sought to bring these ideas to them not as "ideas" but as experience. It was already no bad thing that the teachers were thrown on to their own resources through a dearth of school books. Thereby pupils might develop a new interest in teacher and subject alike. But the very uncertainty of the general situation itself led to a stress on artistic expression.

Unfortunately the locality yielded no clay suitable for modelling. But there was plenty of wood about. A boy who had lost his left hand in a band-saw was the best wood-carver. He is now qualifying as a joiner in Berlin.

Fortunately it was possible to secure materials for drawing and painting from England. The colours had to be rationed like butter and sugar: so much blue for to-day and no more! But the children discovered the creative world of colour for the first time in their lives. And the boys found that shapes need not only arise aerodynamically, as in the streamlining of their model airplanes, but should rather assume an inner life which can only be imparted by man.

Singing was the soul of the camp. There was a song at breakfast. There was an evening song. Many were the occasions made gay by numberless German and English songs. And as there was no possibility for instrumental music, singing had to play its part on solemn occasions too. Yes, singing was the soul of the camp. But the soul is capable of development! And so the former war-songs and often unmusical, staccato way of singing (foreign to the German soul, when you think of it!) gave place to folk songs, to carols, to one or two hymns, and eventually to ambitious choral part-songs. When the camp foregathered on the last evening of its existence, the children, unprompted, chose only their most beautiful part-songs, ending with one of Mozart's which they had just learned—

"Brüder reicht die Hand zum Bunde,
Diese schöne Feierstunde
Führ uns hin zu lichten Höhn . . ."

The highest word of praise with which the children could describe an occasion was "feierlich" (which means at once festive and solemn). But this quality demands conscious participation, and so it was not permitted to exhaust every occasion in the not-fully-conscious realm of song alone. Thus at the threshold of each day the classes recited a saying framed to relate the pupil healthily to outer and inner

* "Brothers, give your hands in greeting,
May this festive hour of meeting
Lead us to the light on high. . ."

world; and the former song at midday was replaced by a grace. Words of Dr. Steiner's own (these verses were not chosen out of any slavish spirit, but because they spring from truth rather than the phrase) lead away from convention to living experience, and hence can only with difficulty become routine.

The long winter evenings provided almost daily occasions for reading aloud (furthered also by the poor lighting). Children and adults alike contributed. Karl May was avoided and even ridiculed, though the supervisor reflected with a sense of shame on the literature for the young current in his own country! But anything from Captain Scott's *Diary at the South Pole* to Schiller's *Ballads* was chosen. Primary schoolboys of eleven heard Goethe's *Hermann und Dorothea* with interest. This vivid poem was the more comprehensible to the children through its obvious points in common with the post-war world they knew. In this way the children finally laid aside their uniforms and clad themselves in the vesture of true European culture. For we must remember that behind the apparently uniform quite un-European hearts can beat. A group of the older girls who were now making the most prominent artistic contribution to the life of the camp had, only a year or so before, been little Red Indians. Their dormitory had been transformed into a wigwam; tomahawks, scalps, peace-pipes and feather headdresses filled the inner and outer life of thirteen-year-old girls! Let us refer for a moment to a book which was appearing in Switzerland just at that time (unknown to the supervisor). "To-day," we read, "the phrase prevails not only in politics but also in spiritual life. Consider, for example, the concept of a European. It has become a lie. And indeed almost from the moment a child can read. Boys buy themselves adventure stories, swap them, live day and night more or less in the Wild West. Karl May was the favourite author of National Socialism. But whole generations had already devoured him. I knew the lawyer who had proved in his time that the creator of *Winnetou* had never been to America before writing his portly volumes, but only went there later to be acclaimed. Nevertheless Karl May had the soul of a Red Indian. And precisely his case demonstrates what Rudolf Steiner described from the standpoint of exact knowledge, that a large number of people in Western Europe, even across Germany into Russia, bear souls within them which belonged to the native populations at the time of the conquest of America." This passage occurs in Albert Steffen's *Vorhut des Geistes* ("Vanguard of the Spirit," 1945, still untranslated). Experience of the actuality of this book also belonged to the experiences in Kärnten. It is not surprising therefore that the English supervisor turned to it as a guidebook to the Central European scene, nay, to the world scene.

Through this concord of the arts there was often a festive air in the camp. But at no time more than at the festivals of the seasons. The warmth of Christmas gained in light through being protracted until Twelfth Night. Selma Lagertöf's *Christ Legends* were read aloud by candlelight during this time. Plays were performed at Easter in the open air. Boys enacted the famous scene from Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell*; girls a dramatic poem depicting the death of Baldur, the god of light. The note of freedom struck by Tell was echoed in the concluding recitation drawn from the Easter Day scene in Goethe's *Faust*: "Hier bin ich Mensch, hier darf ich's sein." Scenes from Shakespeare were also played in the original. But it

is at Whitsun, shortly before the long-awaited repatriation to Berlin, that a certain climax was reached.

There was the great privilege of a concert by Karl von Baltz, the Austrian violinist. And then there were Eurythmy performances. Everyone in the camp without exception had practised the new art of movement daily for a period. Song and poetry became a visible and corporeal experience in significant gesture. The traces of a mechanical march-step engraved deep in the dispositions of the children could be erased by the rhythmic stepping out of poetic metres. During an interval in a performance teachers remarked that they had never seen such radiant happiness expressed on children's faces; one sprang up and exclaimed to the present writer, "When one sees the change in the children, one cannot despair for the future of Europe!" With inner thankfulness the supervisor recollected his silent vow of eleven months before. When members of the staff in conclusion demonstrated the EVOE—that greeting in which a deep reverence is paid to the earth, to the community and to the individual fellow man—the children pronounced it to be "feierlich."

THE HARVEST

Soon after this they joined their comrades from the other camps, and all seven hundred went back to Berlin. The train journey lasted three days. Shortly after arrival a camp meeting was arranged in the battered east end of the city. The children sang to the parents, and the songs gained through reverberation in the large hall. A mother contrasted the present state of their city with the beauties of Kärnten, and was thankful that the children had been able to remain there so long. The teachers felt it would be of value to hold the little community together. Eurythmy and singing lessons continue, though this is not easy. Perhaps the children themselves can express best of all what it is like in Berlin.

A girl writes: "In our dwelling it still looks pretty much of a wilderness. A whole wall is lacking from my room, including the door. We only have windows in the kitchen and in my room . . . etc." Another writes (in English): "The cherries, plums and apples from our garden make me not hunger. . . . This week we get holidays, but I have no holiday this year. I shall work at a holiday playground. These are playgrounds where the children from the centre of Berlin can play every day in the holidays. Some girls of our school shall help there, and so shall I. We have learned already some songs we can play with the children. We shall also eat on the playgrounds because the Americans have sent some food to Germany for them."

A boy writes: "I am doing well. I don't go to school any more, but am starting to learn instrument making. I am already very glad. Dieter is going to be a cobbler and Hans a telegraphist." And another boy: "Father still isn't home. But I hope that he will soon turn up. Now we are going to write to the Red Cross in Moscow. Perhaps we'll hear something that way. One can but hope. . . . I don't still know if I can leave school. If so I want to work at ——. That is a big firm where I can learn everything in electrical engineering, from the tiniest spark to the strongest high tension. . . . And I will exert myself as much as I possibly can in order to get on. . . ."

And another girl (one of the "ex-Red Indians"): "Here there are no green woods, no high mountains, nothing but noise and restlessness. . . . Lessons at school here are for the most part very uninteresting. We don't make any progress, and I go to school, after all, because I want to learn something. The Eurythmy and singing lessons are for me the most beautiful thing in the whole week. It is like a bit of the camp when we meet; and it gets better still through the work in common."

And lastly (in English): "In school we are learning Russian, and I have to repeat all the lessons the other girls had. . . . Here the school is not so good as in our camp. In English we are learning the English History, but our teacher doesn't tell us anything about it, he only writes the dates on the blackboard and then we also have to write them. And this is not interesting; it could be but it isn't. This Friday we drive to a Eurythmy teacher. I am glad and hope that this day comes quickly. I hope we soon learn 'Evoe,' it was so beautiful when you made it in the camp. Of such things nobody here knows anything."

* * *

A seven-year old girl was given a banana brought from Switzerland. She was asked what it might be and answered, "A gherkin!" That is not so serious. When thinking is brought to new observations it eventually leads to the formation of the correct concept.

Many of the children in the camp above described saw a bonfire for the first time at the age of fourteen. It is already more serious when city life and wartime can altogether remove the possibility of making an observation of such a telling symbol of the spirit as fire is.

But it is impossible to overestimate the seriousness of the matter when we read that there are still many who know nothing "of such things," i.e. an experience of a full humanity in the community of the arts. For this means that not only is the opportunity for making important observations removed, but also that the possibility of developing a vital thinking is denied. And that means an attack on the spirit of man more virulent than air raids. Against this Rudolf Steiner set the science of the spirit, and out of it he gave to youth a suitable motto, "Creatively onward" ("Schöpferisch nach vorne"). This should fire youth and age the world over.

REX RAAB.

Fairy Tales

(Reprinted with kind permission from *Vrije Opvoedkunst*, December 1946)

MANY parents and teachers have grave doubts as to whether it is important, or even necessary, to tell fairy stories to little children. They ask themselves such questions as these: "Are not fairy stories only fantastic tales made up of impossible happenings and situations, that often contain gruesome details which we should never tell children? Do not fairy tales describe a very

unreal world, so unreal and so different from the life around us that we should do everything to prevent children from hearing them?" Such questions and arguments may at first sight seem justified and to reveal a true sense for the realities of life. But such objections are only valid if one acknowledges the world perceived by the senses as the only reality. As soon as one realises that the child lives in a different world from that of the grown-up, a world lost to most adults, one must consider the question whether the world of fairy tales is not exactly that realm from which the soul of the child may draw nourishment and strength. Hardly anybody can say he does not treasure the memory of fairy tales told him in his childhood. He is lucky who can look back on the hours, in which the world was revealed to him as a living, ever-changing reality, one in which a word spoken at the right moment could break an unhappy spell. Nothing was dead or dumb, everything was alive, obeying its own laws. A toad, sitting on the edge of a well, was not a toad, for in a moment it could be changed into a beautiful prince.

A swan, white as snow, soars up into the sky, but it is not a swan, for in a short while it will become a powerful brother, who helps the captured princess. We hear the story of the seemingly stupid youngest son, who is a useless fellow, neither practical nor clever, but after many adventures he is the one who wins the sceptre and the crown.

What glorious hours they were in which we hear our favourite stories over and over again, so that we came to know them by heart! What beautiful hours in which we, as grown-ups, tell the stories again to our children. They listen, full of attention, their eyes beaming, experiencing themselves in everything they hear. They know the stories just as well as we used to know them, and woe betide the teller who departs from tradition! Not a word must be altered. The telling of fairy tales in this way becomes almost a ritual, for it contains all its essential elements.

The element of transformation plays a great part in fairy tales. One form changes into another, nothing is static, everything lives in a state of development, of unexpected, new appearances. This is not so in any way in our own everyday life. A toad remains a toad, a swan a swan. For a child, however, everything is possible. A child wants to change the nature of things. A chair becomes a castle, a train, a house or a barrel-organ. A stump of wood becomes a doll, a bear or a car, and an old stuffed stocking the dearest baby doll. How does this happen? Certainly not because adults suggest such things or because they are inherent in the outer form of the objects. The child metamorphoses everything through his creative fantasy. Probably not a parent or a teacher exists who would want to stop this activity. Nobody would say to a child playing with a chair and calling it a stage-coach: "Don't call that a stage-coach. Can't you see it's a chair?"

Through creative fantasy, the world is changed and enriched. Fairy tales combine fantasy and wisdom. The images are not arbitrary. When we tell the children fairy tales we lead them into realms, natural to them, where they can feel profoundly with their whole being. This does not hold good, however, for all stories, that pretend to be fairy tales. There are stories full of fantastic details which contain no real images. They have often been "thought out" and contain abstract symbolism. It seems to be very difficult indeed for modern man to write real fairy tales, for in the genuine fairy tale those primal images come to expression, which

express the fundamentals of life. The forest, the witch, the prince, the princess, the swan are such primal images. The deep, dark forest with its gnarled trees, its profound silence, is an image of the world in which man can wander and be lost. A big lake, or better still the sea with its endless spaces and the great dreamlike rhythms of its waves, forever appearing and disappearing again, is the image of the world of unborn souls. The witch, with magic power, she who attracts and enchants those who enter her realm unprepared, is the image of the material world in which man may become imprisoned. The prince and the princess, who never stop searching for one another and who can only fulfil their task when united, are the images of the human being, forever striving, to find his own higher self. The swan with its soaring flight, its feathers, white as snow, is an image of a messenger from the supersensible realm bringing news of deep secrets. Often the fairy tale contains descriptions of beings we do not see in ordinary life—gnomes, trolls, mermaids and fairies. All these beings live in a world of motion and change, a world penetrated by forces that cause continual transformations. That is how a normal young child experiences the world. Nothing is fixed or static yet. One can learn this from the way children use their fantasy when playing.

It is possible to tell certain tales in order to awake specific qualities or virtues in certain children or to conquer vices. A child who has the tendency to lie, for example, should not be moralised to, warned, or even punished. A better course would be to tell him Grimm's fairy tale "The Woodcutter's Child" several times, and this may well have a healing effect. In this fairy tale a picture is presented which reveals the consequences of untruthfulness. Bringing this picture before the child again and again without explanation, without moralising, has great healing power. What is the explanation? Through fairy tales, we bring children into contact with the realities of life in an artistic and a living way. The important things are expressed through images and comparisons. It is impossible to say to a child: "Many dangers surround us in life; we may fall victim to evil powers; the good forces of our souls may dry up, if we do not strive to keep them alive through good impulses." But one can present these thoughts in the picture of a witch who menaces everything that approaches her, brings it under her spell and tries to destroy it. One cannot say to a child: "Man, living on earth is so constituted, that he can work with only one part of his being, trying to unite himself with his better, his higher self, through endless struggles and thus achieve the goal of life." But in the fairy tales this thought may be expressed by the story of the prince, who finds the princess, the bride of the soul, the higher self. Who could bring this abstract philosophic thought to a child: "He who is untrue hurts himself"? But in "The Woodcutter's Child" this truth is expressed in picture form. The child can understand this, take it in, digest it and be nourished by it. Fairy tales give us answers in pictures, not in thoughts. He who knows stories from the great treasure house of fairy tales, that has been collected since the nineteenth century, will notice that he can find answers there to almost all the spoken or unspoken questions a child can ask. In this way the beginning of man's life on earth may be surrounded by images that express a deep knowledge of the world and of the human soul. In later life they can mature and become conscious wisdom. But we should be careful in the choice of fairy tales, for stories are offered to us in this guise, that have very

little to do with real fairy tales. American cartoons are seen all too often in our nurseries. This is cultural poison. Young children are affected by it, and one can perceive clearly when they grow older whether they have been poisoned by this diet or whether they were influenced by images, full of the wisdom of real fairy tales.

But what about the "gruesome" in fairy stories? The witch is burned, the little boy slaughtered, the grandmother eaten by the wolf and the wolf cut open—a whole series of events takes place which in everyday life would seem terrifying to children. But they are not terrifying when seen in their right perspective.

Mr. Max Stibbe has written in his book on fairy tales:* "The pictures of such battles against wolves and giants are essential for healthy children and help them in their moral development. That one is swallowed by the wolf (as in the story "Little Red Riding Hood" and "The Wolf and the Seven Little Kids") can be understood, when one sees him as the picture of desires and passions which can absolutely overcome the human being. But man can fight against these and conquer them in the end. There is the huntsman who cuts open the wolf's belly and liberates Red Riding Hood. The morally active higher ego frees the personality."

When you learn to "read" fairy tales, to interpret their meaning, you see that all of them have a main theme. They describe the human being, his body, his soul and his spirit in the struggle towards a higher self—towards the development of the real man. Put in other words: they describe his inner development on earth. We call this nowadays the development of character, in a more limited sense perhaps, but it is essentially the same. It is development of character that concerns the teacher; not the accumulation of knowledge or facts, but the giving of such wisdom, through which the human soul can grow and develop. In fairy tales we can give the little child real strength for his soul. In this way we can prepare him for life. We, however, who tell the fairy tales must also believe in them. And we can, if we try to gain an understanding of how to interpret them, because then we can see how they express deep wisdom in picture form. Then we also understand how in the history of mankind the highest wisdom was given in images: in the parables of the Gospels. We can understand the language of fairy tales, which is the language of pictures. The whole of human life, of a single human being, of the history of mankind, of nature, expresses itself in fairy tales, myths and sagas. Our minds can understand the great wisdom in such stories, and our hearts can be moved by them. But our will, the half sleeping stupid brother of the fairy stories, awakens when the path is shown to him, and his heart begins to stir for something greater. He then wins what the other brothers could not win: the king's daughter.

Let us tell our children fairy stories, so that they may become true human beings!

M. B. A. LAFFRÉE.

* Max Stibbe: *Gezonde Kinder-voeding: Sprookjes* (van Stockum. Den Haag, 1937).

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