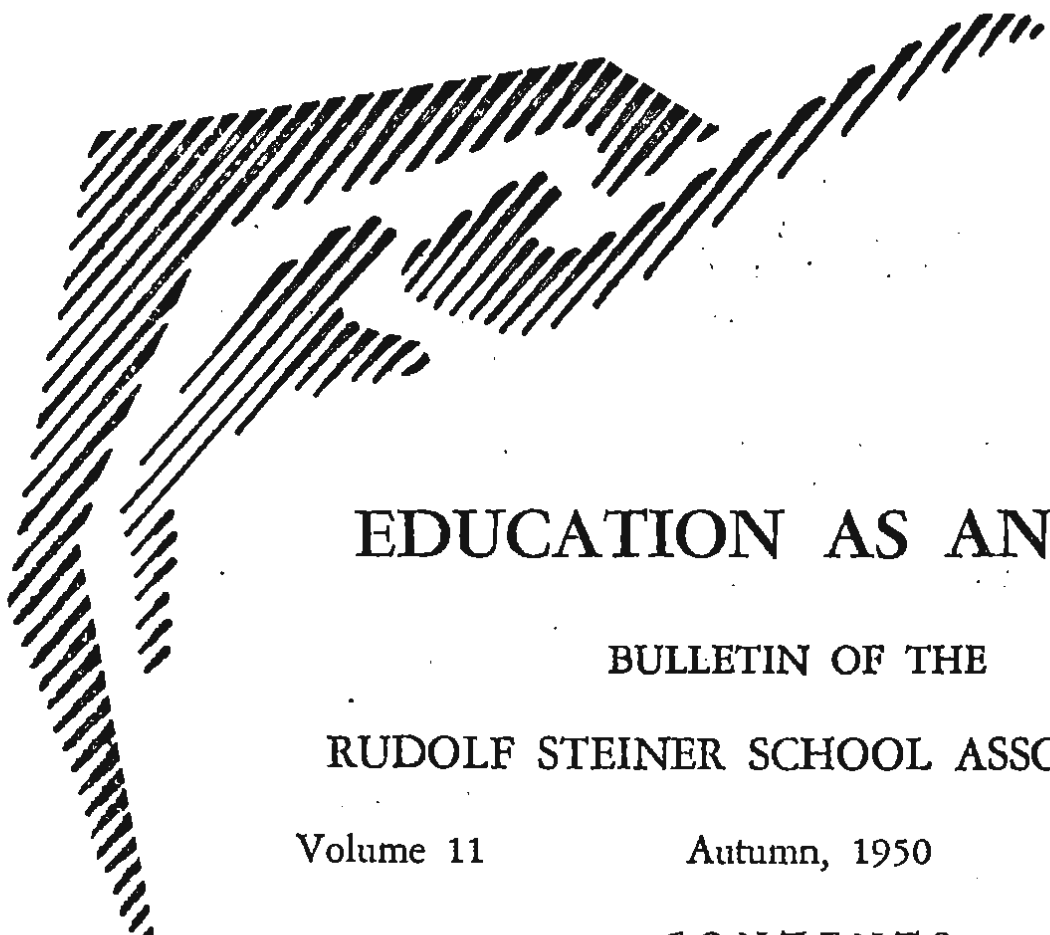




EDUCATION AS AN ART

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THE GOLDEN FOOTPRINTS, A BOOK REVIEW

By Jeanette Eaton*

The Golden Footprints, Adonis Press
211 Madison Ave., New York City. Price: \$2.00

At last a book of fairy tales from a group of educators! The Faculty of the Rudolf Steiner School in New York City have selected, written and translated a collection of legends, stories and poems to create *The Golden Footprints* published by the Adonis Press. And a beautiful little book it is. The painting by Margaret Peckham, educator and artist, used for both frontispiece and jacket, suggests at once the world of dreams. Even the delicate tint of the end papers hints at a mood between waking and sleeping.

All this is news. A few important experts in the field of children's literature—especially the editor of *The Horn Book* and the head of the children's division of the New York Public Library—have ardently acclaimed the value of fairy tales as the real right nourishment for imagination. But these are defiant exceptions.

Not so long ago one New York publisher refused to accept a jacket design for a picture book because the flying fairy wore no clothes. Today story books are apt to follow the general trend of toys, comics, movies and television that mirror the mechanical, battling actualities of life achieved by adults. There seems to be a conspiracy to force the child out of his own rightful world. Manufacturers and salesmen—and all too often publishers—contrive wares to attract grown-up buyers who seek gifts for children. And—alas!—many parents and teachers are too ignorant of what a child really is to combat the onslaught upon him.

* Jeanette Eaton is the author of *Leader by Destiny*; *Young Lafayette*, *Daughter of the Seine* and other children's books.

Members of the Faculty of the Rudolf Steiner School on the contrary, who regard teaching as an art, have been trained to study the special rhythm of a child's unfolding consciousness and to guide the early development of his ego. They know how to recognize temperaments and deal with them in such a way as to cultivate balance in the personality. Something of the approach of these educators to the true nature of childhood is revealed by sympathetic study of the slim volume they have just published.

This reviewer feels as if standing half-way between the devils who can only analyze the child's capacity and the angels who understand his spiritual needs. The writing of a fourth grade text book and varied editorial tasks in the field of children's literature have made me highly aware of the immediate problems involved in the techniques of reading. Yet I know that the most expert attempts to solve these problems directly make no contribution to education comparable to that of Dr. Rudolf Steiner's enunciation of the laws of growth.

For the sake of a discussion which I hope will follow, I should like in all humility to pose a few questions to the makers of *The Golden Footsteps*. For, although I write for children, love them and associate with them all I can, I have never taught them.

It is not obvious to one who picks up this book whether it is to be read aloud or is designed to stimulate a child to read to himself. I find in it such phrases as "bestowed upon him," "eternal reminder," "marvellously surrounded," "stupendous impulse of will,". These seem difficult for a novice in reading skills. Even the concepts seem beyond the understanding of a little child. Of course, a story read aloud can sweep the listener past such bumps and perhaps the meaning of these expressions may slowly come clear. I wish I knew the experience lying behind the use of such language by the translators and writers.

Another question arises, this time about content. *Robin Redbreast* and the poem to the trees by Albert Steffen, so beautifully translated by Arvia MacKaye, have each a reference to the crucifixion of Christ. It startles me to find them in a book for small children. I should not suppose them ready for mention of this mighty cosmic event. Yet the intent here must be deliberately to suggest the sacrificial fate of the Infant for Whom *The Christmas Rose* was born. Perhaps this drop of tragic knowledge is essential to a child's inner nourishment. I don't know. My experience indicates rather that an individual mature enough to be pierced by Christ's death on the Cross would be too mature to appreciate the charm of *The Little Prince and the Sun*.

These are matters profoundly interesting to a writer for the young and doubtless to parents also.

Honest doubt aside, one is grateful for the quality of these tales and poems. They offer relief from external pressures. It is a joy to recapture the magic impossible to find in books presenting only what can be observed by the outer eye.

"A first reader," said an earnest innovator in the public school system of New York City, "should start with something like a fire engine. Every city child has seen one." I can imagine this same man remarking scornfully, "What child has ever known a little prince or thought of the sun as a mother who could rescue a poor orphan from a wicked stepmother?" This is the point of view which recognizes no inner life of the soul. Freedom for the imagination to range from the lamb to the little sylph, from the self-sacrificing cloud to blessed Saint Christopher is the essence of *The Golden Footsteps*.

One walks quietly in these footsteps. They lead away from the blare of radio and the flash of image across a screen. Such tranquil tales cannot be sandwiched in between moments of nervous excitement. They call for time, mental space and peace of spirit. And never did newcomer to this earth so greatly need these conditions for growth as does the child of today.

NOTE

The following essay is, in substance, an answer to the very challenging and important questions which Miss Eaton has raised in the above review.

—The Editor

THE WINGED HORSE

AN ESSAY ON THE ART OF READING

"Yes, there he sat, on the back of the winged horse!

"But what a bound did Pegasus make, when, for the first time, he felt the weight of a mortal man upon his loins! A bound, indeed! Before he had time to draw a breath, Bellerophon found himself five hundred feet aloft, and still shooting upward, while the winged horse snorted and trembled with terror and anger. Upward he went, up, up, up, until he plunged into the cold misty bosom of a cloud, at which, only a little while before, Bellerophon had been gazing, and fancying it a very pleasant spot. Then again, out of the heart of the cloud, Pegasus shot down like a thunderbolt, as if he meant to dash both himself and his rider headlong against a rock. Then he went through about a thousand of the wildest caprioles that had ever been performed either by a bird or a horse."

Grandfather paused in his reading. The young boy let out a long breath and laughed outloud. What a ride! The old man read on and the boy's eyes shone as he soared in imagination on the back of the winged horse. His heart beat in rhythm with the powerful sweep of the language and his eyes followed each change of expression on his grandfather's face. He watched the old man's hands twist and flutter and dive as he illustrated how Pegasus soared and plunged on his wild flight.

The boy was just six years old and he was hearing for the first time Hawthorne's wonderful telling of the story of Pegasus and Bellerophon. He asked for the story many times again and often pored over the picture of the winged steed and his young master on the cover of the book.

At the time when he first heard this story, he had not yet entered the first grade, nor could he write his own name. The black printed marks on the white page were mysterious and enchanted forms to him, meaningless and uninteresting in themselves, but from which the grown-ups freed the magic pictures which captured his imagination. And this hidden art, the grown-ups called READING.

Each time the story was read aloud, the little boy entered into it as though he heard it for the first time. Pegasus became a familiar companion to him. He saw him rearing in the clouds and when the sunlight caught the gleaming silver wing of an airplane far up in the blue sky, he cried: "See, there's Pegasus!"

Four or five years later came the great moment when he again discovered this volume of Hawthorne's *Wonder Book* and curled up to read about his beloved Pegasus for the first time himself! And as he read, he once again waited with Bellerophon at the spring and saw Pegasus descend in gleaming

s from the blue sky and alight on the green grass by the fountain. He does not see the o's and s's and b's which his eyes read, for he was far away on the slopes of Mount Helicon. Nowhere did the long words of Latin origin or difficult Greek names impede his progress for they were already familiar to his ear and he skimmed over them now, tasting their foreign flavor along with the homely clover of the words he knew.

When had this boy first started to learn to read? It was not in his reading lessons, when he first struggled to spell out words, but when he listened to stories which were told and read aloud to him, into which he entered with his whole being. For reading is an art—the art of entering with one's whole self into an experience outside oneself. It is a gleaning of the sunlight hidden in the hard kernel of the word. In its widest meaning, reading is not bound to the printed page, for do we not speak of reading a map? Reading the stars? Reading a man's expression? Reading his mind? It is always an intuitive divining of a meaning which may express itself in as many different ways as there are forms in life: it is always an inner, creative process. The technique of reading the printed word is a specialized branch of the reading process and should no more be confused with it than the technique of raising and lowering the fingers should be confused with the art of a pianist. At a time, when in educational circles the art of reading is so generally identified with its mechanics, it is well to remember that many profound minds have been slow readers, often learning to read very late. Many creative writers are poor spellers and some of the greatest "readers of life" would show up poorly on the current reading tests, designed to show "intelligence"!

A vast amount of research has been done on the technique of reading and there now exists such a literature on "reading" that one who conscientiously tries to master it all is not likely to have either the courage or the time to attempt to teach children to read, or to read anything interesting himself! Much valuable and important knowledge has been gained, but the essence of how we learn to read remains, I believe, a mystery. That is, it is a living process, like learning to swim or to play the violin, which can only be grasped by doing it and can never be fully analyzed intellectually or reduced to merely mechanical principles. Every good swimming teacher knows that the key to success is to let the beginner discover that he can not sink if he tries. Water is buoyant and the first thing is to establish this confidence and let the learner enjoy this friendly element. And so also in learning to read, the key to success is the love and enjoyment of the great stories and poems which are the element in which the reader swims. Before a printed reader is ever opened, we must have done everything in our power to strengthen the inner muscles of the imagination and to awaken a love and enthusiasm for the living literature which the child is to read.

It is for this reason in a Rudolf Steiner School that reading does not begin until the letters have been developed out of pictures and until the child has been steeped in the hearing, retelling and acting out of the stories which he will later read. Toward the end of the first grade, two or three of the favorite stories are condensed into a few short sentences, these are written down and each child has thus made his own first reader! Only then does he meet the same stories again in a printed book.

Learning new words, practicing word families, sounding out the syllables—all of this necessary work belongs in special lessons which parallel the reading lessons, but are not allowed to destroy the germinating, imaginative process of the reading itself.

What then makes a good Reader for young children? Is it the scientifically streamlined text which tells an obvious story in words of one syllable, adding a measured dose of new words in each chapter? Is this the way life chooses? If so, we should speak a "graded speech" in the presence of our young instead of exposing them to the full richness of adult language which is the matrix out of which, by imitation, their individual language grows.—No!

Let us turn again to one of our great American educators, who never taught school, but who wrote some of the living stories which have educated us all. Nathaniel Hawthorne, in 1851, wrote in the introduction to his *Wonder Book and Tanglewood Tales*:

"In performing this pleasant task,—for it has been really a task fit for hot weather, and one of the most agreeable, of a literary kind, which he ever undertook,—the author has not always thought it necessary to write downward in order to meet the comprehension of children. He has generally suffered the theme to soar, whenever such was its tendency, and when he himself was buoyant enough to follow without effort. Children possess an unestimated sensibility to whatever is deep or high, in imagination or feeling, so long as it is simple, likewise. It is only the artificial and the complex that bewilders them."

It is not the poverty-stricken renderings of obvious and ordinary events which we should give children as their first experiences in reading. Let us have the courage to do what our forefathers did when they gave their children the Bible to read, let us give them the truly great stories, fairy tales and poems, told by the masters of language. Let us avoid what is artificial and complex. If the imagination which created the pictures of the fairy tales is deep and pure and if the thought underlying them is clear and true, then, with the right guidance, the difficulties of vocabulary will prove no stumbling block and the beauty of the language will itself prove a most potent educational force. Let us have confidence in the buoyancy of language, as we do in water, for language is one of the great creative powers of the race. And let us not fail to value the educative power of what is half-understood in what the children read. This strange word, often beautiful in its sounds, placed like an emerald in its native rock, stirs the imagination and allows the child's soul to surmise a shadowy world which it will one day understand but which now is veiled in mystery. Isn't this reaching out to grasp what can not yet be fully understood an important part of every growth?

The question may very naturally arise: Should children read and hear stories or poems which tell of tragedy or present some gruesome and fearful incident? Is the death of Christ on the cross or the devouring of Red Riding Hood's grandmother by the wolf fit matter for a child of five, six, seven or eight? Doesn't the answer depend on another question: *How* is the incident told? Is it presented realistically, physically? Or is it presented artistically, that it is a fact grasped by the imagination, like a picture in a dream? Experience usually shows that it is the realistic fact which shocks and frights a child, whereas the same boy or girl may cheerfully digest Red Riding Hood's grandmother, the Six Little Kids and many other delectable morsels when presentation is true to the spirit of the fairy tale. Here again, it is life which should be allowed to speak and life is woven of good and evil—of love and hate—and it is life alone which can educate for life.

A child can not understand the meaning of the Crucifixion, but when he reads, or hears, the quaint old folk legend of Robin Redbreast* which

* *The Golden Footprints and Other Fairy Tales*. Adonis Press. 1949.

how a little bird sat on the edge of its nest, grieving, as it watched the bowed head of Jesus upon the Cross, a picture is planted, like a seed, in his heart which will grow as the child grows. With the little bird, the child says, "No one comes to soothe His pain. So I will try to comfort Him." And whenever he watches a fat robin, plucking at insects in the grass, the child will remember how the legend tells that the little bird flew to the Cross and was able to pull a thorn out of the Saviour's head, and how, at the same time a drop of blood fell upon the bird's breast. And Jesus' words: "As an eternal reminder, dear Bird, thou and thy family shall carry this red spot on your breasts and men shall call thee Robin Redbreast," will echo in his childish heart with a tender joy. Understanding for the event on Golgotha will blossom later, but it will be nourished from the half-remembered soil of this early experience. And a whole lifetime is not too long to understand life's central mysteries.

No writers ever spoke more directly to the hearts of young children than the Brothers Grimm, and their Household Tales must rank among the great educational books of all time. It is interesting to hear what they had to say on this question, in 1819, in their Preface to the Tales:

" . . . Should one nevertheless object that one thing or another causes embarrassment to parents and is objectionable to them, so that they even do not wish to place this book in their children's hands, this anxiety may in single cases be justified, and they may easily make a selection; on the whole, that is for a healthy condition, this is certainly unnecessary. Nothing can defend us better than nature herself, which allowed these blossoms and leaves to grow up in this color and form; for whom they are unacceptable according to his special purposes he can not demand that they should therefore be otherwise colored or cut to shape. One might also say, rain and dew fall as a blessing upon everything which grows on earth; he who does not dare to set out his plants because they are too delicate and might be harmed, and waters them rather with tepid water in his room, will not therefore demand that there should be no rain or dew. Everything can flourish which is natural, and this is what we want to keep in mind. What is more, we know no healthy and vigorous book, which has educated the people, with the Bible in first place, where such reservations do not apply in still greater degree; the right usage does not find evil in them, but rather, as a beautiful proverb says, a testimony of our hearts."

Since the beginnings of a written language, reading has never been the problem which it is considered to be today. It will not cease to be a problem so long as the technique of reading is regarded as an end and not as a means. It is the instrument of a great art, of which the reading of the printed word is a specialized and highly abstract part. Let us have the courage to teach the art and we will find that the nightmare of "reading difficulties" and its attendant train of "remedial reading" practices are not as inevitable and frightening as they appear to be. Our children's bodies will grow strong if we feed them natural, healthy foods. Their souls will grow strong on a diet of the truly great, imaginative literature of the human race.

Phonetics, word associations, sentence structure, and all the techniques of good reading must be taught and drilled, but do not let us confuse these with reading. As teachers, let us learn how to prepare our reading lessons so that they serve to stir and strengthen the wings of the imagination which may help our children to read the reality of life when they enter it as adult human beings.

Henry Barnes

EDUCATIONAL CONFERENCE AT HIGH MOWING

An educational "workshop" was held at High Mowing School, Wilton, N. H. for two weeks this summer. This perennially beautiful setting of mellowed farm buildings with high elms, gardens, and lovely pool, is pervaded by an atmosphere of gracious hospitality. It is Mrs. Robert Emmett, headmistress of the High Mowing School, who quietly and generously encourages this to flourish, and our gratitude is due her and the teachers who organized this stimulating conference.

Teachers from four American Rudolf Steiner Schools came together for the first time: teachers from the Rudolf Steiner School in New York, Kimber-ton School in Phoenixville, Pa., High Mowing School, and the Waldorf School at Adelphi College, Garden City, L. I. The educational substance of the conference was skillfully guided by Mr. Karl Ege and Mr. Henry Barnes. Painting lessons were given by Arvia MacKaye, Speech work by Christy Barnes and Eurythmy by Vera LeRoi. Mr. Harrer spoke on Mathematics, Mrs. Sorge on Rhythms, and Dr. Schaeffer, an outstanding physiologist, spent a day in discussing scientific bases for studies of Dr. Steiner's about sleep and wakefulness, rhythms of respiration and blood circulation, and how teaching can be immensely more effective if it understands and works with these phenomena.

These two weeks of study centered around a course given every morning by Mr. Ege on Dr. Steiner's *Practical Course for Teachers* and this was further developed in afternoon discussions with Henry Barnes. The most minute and practical details were worked over. The first grade's first lesson was studied, as exemplifying the whole attitude and unusual approach of Dr. Steiner's pedagogy. The whole stress lay on morally true, creative teaching in imaginative terms which catches the child's mind and heart where he really lives, as opposed to abstract, indigestible and therefore unlearnable, concepts. The difference between the two was brought out very clearly, and how Dr. Steiner in his writing and work on education answers the question: Where does the child live, how can we reach his deepest understanding in order to guide him to a harmonious development of his whole character? There exists in children a thirst and eagerness to understand the world which we adults, for the most part, have long since lost. They long for wisdom, and in a form they can absorb. They are not intellectually awake as an adult should be, but they grasp imaginatively, unconsciously too, all that is taught in an artistic way.

Story telling—what stories to tell and how to tell them—was a theme dwelt on at great length. The difference between the effects of the musical and plastic elements in school subjects was pointed out. The great difference between writing and reading as subjects to be taught artistically on the one hand, and spelling, as a drill subject, on the other, was stressed. The failure to make this distinction is an important clue to the reading difficulties so prevalent today. Discipline and the natural authority of the teacher, how to deal with the different temperaments of the children in subtle ways, were all subjects which had their turn. The care with which the smallest matters are considered, the courage with which great responsibilities are undertaken, and all the colorful details of personal experiences, constantly increase one's respect for the devotedness and significance of the teacher's life.

There were concerts and a Eurythmy performance, picnics, tea, and even a mountain climbing expedition. Another beguilement was, as Mrs. Emmett said, "watching these ideas of Dr. Steiner's working their way around the lawn in the younger generation." It is in and for the children of the Rudolf Steiner Schools that we feel great hope.

Anne Stockton Goodwin

SUMMER COURSE IN CALIFORNIA

This summer, an eight week pedagogical course was held in California, at Carmel-by-the-Sea. It was through the initiative and untiring effort of Mrs. Elizabeth Graves, with the help of Mrs. Leilani Houtchens and other friends that this conference took place, the first of its kind of such duration and concentrated study on the West Coast.

The theme of the conference was *Education* according to the indications of Rudolf Steiner. The pedagogical study was conducted by Mr. Karl Ege who used as a basis the book, *The Education of the Child* by Rudolf Steiner, and entered later into practical aspects of how such subjects as reading, writing, arithmetic and nature study are taught. He also gave a series of talks on the telling of fairy tales, and evening lectures on Philosophy. In the afternoons this study was supplemented by art classes given by Miss Arvia MacKaye—first a course in painting and later one in modelling from the aspect of teacher training.

The conference was held in a little studio rented for the purpose. Here an exhibit of paintings from European Schools, brought together by the Waldorf Schools Fund, was on display. This was followed by an exhibition of paintings and notebooks by children of the Rudolf Steiner School in New York. These exhibits were open to the public also. About twenty-five people participated in the conference, some for a longer, some for a shorter period. They came from as far as San Diego in the south and Trinity County in the north, and included public school teachers, student teachers and those interested in education. Interest extended even as far as Honolulu, for it was through the efforts and financial help of friends both there and in California that the course was made possible.

Unfortunately Mr. Ege was called away on an emergency visit during a portion of the course, but work continued as scheduled. Pedagogical lectures were read, and Miss MacKaye gave talks on handwork, crafts and other art subjects. After Mr. Ege's return activity was intensified and two or three talks were given daily.

The initiative in planning and carrying through this conference is another important step in the educational work in this country.

A CHRISTMAS GIFT

OF A YEAR'S SUBSCRIPTION TO THE BULLETIN

We would like to suggest as a Christmas gift this year, a year's subscription to *Education as an Art*, this Bulletin of the Rudolf Steiner School Association. A card announcing this Christmas Gift will be sent to you, or direct to the recipient of the gift as you may indicate. You may like to send this to friends, especially those with young children or grandchildren. In this form subscriptions could also be presented to local libraries or educational institutions.

To be ordered from the Secretary of the Association, 15 East 79th Street, New York City. *Gift Subscription*, price: \$1.00.

Membership in the Rudolf Steiner School Association, including the quarterly Bulletin, is \$2.00 per year. Single copies of the Bulletin, 25c. each.

Address Secretary, Rudolf Steiner School Association, 15 East 79th Street, New York City. Editor of the Bulletin: Christy Barnes.
