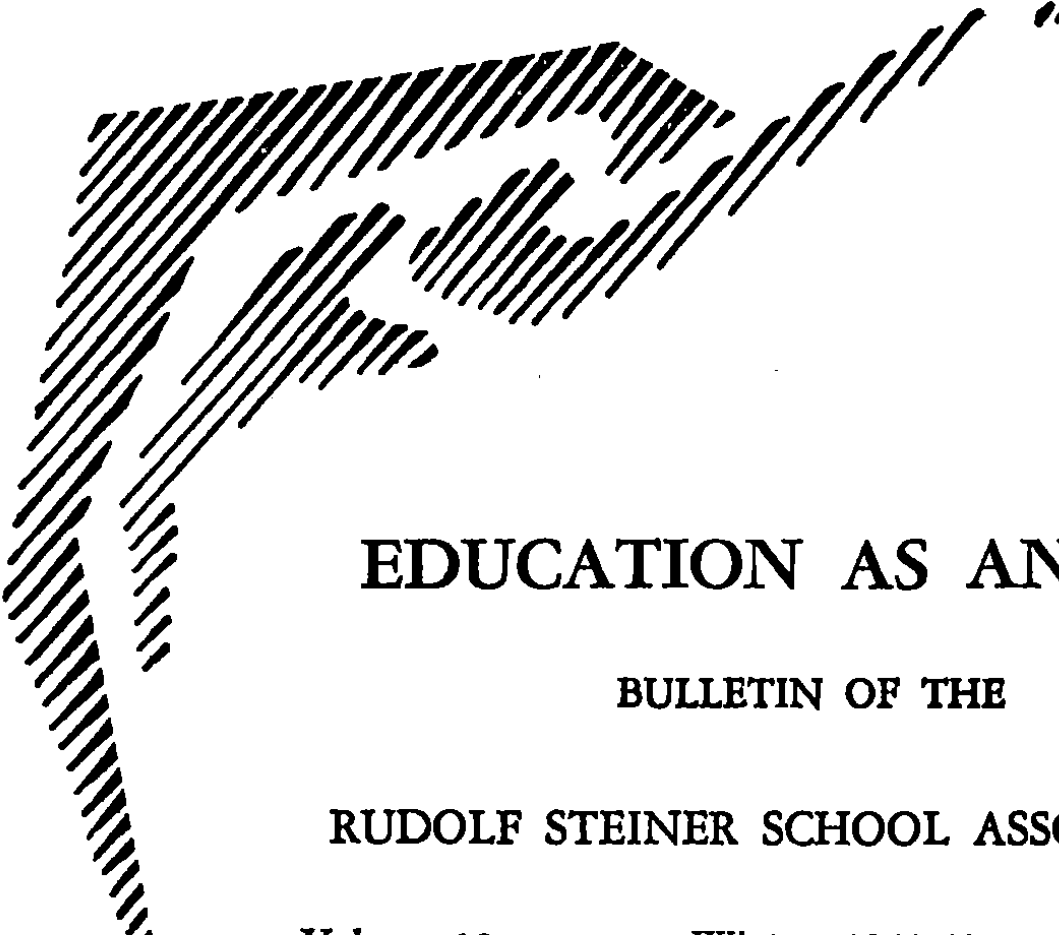




EDUCATION AS AN ART

BULLETIN OF THE

RUDOLF STEINER SCHOOL ASSOCIATION

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Number 4

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*Should we Bring Literature to Children, or Children to Literature? by
Joseph Wood Krutch — Reprinted from the Herald Tribune Book Section.*

CHRISTMAS LULLABY

Hush, my darling,
Joy of the earth;
Thrush nor starling
Sang at thy birth.
All sweet fowl
Were hushed and asleep.
Only the patient
Kine breath deep.
Still in men's hearts
This night, a song
Sings and shall sing
For ages long,
Saying, poor and lowly,
Hungry and cold,
You are made holy
On moor and wold
By the son of God,
By Jesus' birth,
My baby, my darling,
Joy of the earth.

Joan Aucourt

VISIT TO A NORWEGIAN SCHOOL

A Letter from a Former Teacher

Calhe Babcock came to us from Sarah Lawrence and was first grade play group and assistant handwork teacher before her marriage to a Norwegian diplomat. She is now living in Iceland but wrote us this vivid letter on a visit to Norway.

Oslo, Norway
October 14, 1951.

Dear Friends:

A few days ago I visited the Rudolf Steiner School at Smestad, a few minutes trolley ride from Oslo. The school, originally an abandoned German soldiers' barracks, is beautifully located in a surrounding of trees and hills, with a lake not far from it. It is a small school in comparison to the New York School, although not so small as the Bergen School, of which you will, undoubtedly, hear from Kari Lunde, who is now teaching Eurythmy with you.

I thought you might be interested in what I saw in the pleasant few hours I spent there. The Oslo school consists of several brown wooden buildings with blue shutters and rust-colored doors painted by the teachers. The faculty consider themselves fortunate indeed to have these buildings, for there is an acute housing shortage in Oslo. There is a large playground beside the school buildings. I was interested to see that the children's play was not (that day) supervised. It gave a breathing spell for the teachers in which they conversed and drank tea. Each class teacher rounded up his own group and led them in orderly lines back to the classroom after recess.

The teachers themselves had painted the classrooms and made curtains for the windows. Otherwise these places of learning would have been quite primitive! During their summer vacation the teachers had built an assembly hall, constructing, laying the floor, polishing, doing everything themselves! It was a fine room—simple in design but beautifully made.

I met many teachers and saw many notebooks. Crayon, perhaps for economical reasons, was used in more quantity than I recall seeing it used in the New York Steiner School. The paintings were bolder, more exuberant in color, yet they retained a softness—the edges melting into the whole picture. They were less delicate than the watercolors I remember seeing in the New York School. I don't believe the watercolors were diluted before they were placed on wet paper. It was amusing to see that Norwegian Steiner school children begin earlier with sagas of dragons and bold heroes. It's part of their native heritage! (Icelandic children begin with the sages and never leave off. Icelanders quote the ancient sagas in everyday life!)

I attended Eva Lunde's (Kari's sister) eurythmy class. Throughout, the children (fourth graders) were attentive and responsive. First they performed eurythmy gestures which I remembered from the New York school. Then they were given slender iron rods which they used with considerable skill—stamping and making bold gestures for Siegfried, gestures like wings for a bird, then dipping, undulating movements for the huge dragon! In the end, they walked quietly, balancing the rods on their heads. Only three times were rods dropped!

Next we visited a handwork class. The third graders were making imaginative dolls out of scraps of cloth. There were fantastic results! One little boy showed me, proudly, a strange creature with green yarn hair, bead eyes, brilliant colored legs and arms. Each child's work was different. There were

thirty in the class, only two teachers assisting, and the children were permitted to chat in low tones for it was a two hour class. The children moved around freely showing each other what they were sewing. Not one child was behind! I saw small baskets with handles and lids woven of raffia which the third graders had made previously. The seventh grader's weaving was really lovely! Scarfs, table mats, cloths, etc. However, I wasn't surprised that Norwegian children's handwork was exceptionally good because all Norwegian homes are filled with knitted sweaters (containing the loveliest colors and patterns) woven mats, embroidered table-cloths and pillows, etc., etc. One seldom sees a Norwegian lady without handwork occupying her busy fingers.

We paid a brief visit to the second grade where thirty children were fluting. Two little girls stood up and sang to us in French. Then the class sang melodies which the music teacher had composed for them in English, German and Norwegian. The children were busy copying notes and letters into their books when we left. It was interesting to see the colored pictures of the up and downness of music the children had made. We also visited the seventh grade boys who were having more difficulties fluting than the third graders!

School was over at one when all the children go home for lunch so we didn't see any more classes.

On the surface the Smestad school was in strong contrast to the spacious and beautiful school on East 79th Street. I could see, however, the same friendly spirit prevailing and the work flowing in the same patterns evolved by Rudolf Steiner.

I send greetings to all of you and wish you the best school year you've ever had! What a misfortune there is no Rudolf Steiner School in Iceland!

Sincerely yours,

Cathe Babcock Amlie

A RHYTHMICAL EXERCISE

The following was written as a rhythmical exercise for a second grade. It was spoken in chorus to the accompaniment of vigorous actions and was repeated with enthusiasm during the first part of the year as one of the opening exercises in the main lesson with which each school day begins.

Left foot forward, right arm raised—and down crashed the hammers on invisible anvils! The busy blacksmiths swung to their tasks with a will! Bel-lows wheezed, sparks flew and the iron glowed white hot. When the horse-shoe was fashioned it was plunged, hissing, into water to cool. At last, shaped and hardened, the imaginary horseshoe was held aloft for all to see. In celebra-tion, the blacksmiths took hands with shouts of joy and danced about the class-room. One day, a boy brought in a real horseshoe which was from then on fashioned anew each day. The climax came when the second grade acted out the poem for the other classes in a school assembly. A sturdy little girl was selected to lead the chorus and to wear a brown paper apron and have her cheeks blackened with burnt cork!

What educational purpose did the exercise serve? First of all it brought the class together in a lively group activity. The vigorous rhythmic actions stimulated sluggish circulation and metabolism, helped to coordinate arms and

legs, developed harmonious rhythmical movement. Reciting the poem as they acted it helped all the children, and especially the timid more nervous ones, to develop a hearty and vigorous speech and to awaken a delight in the imaginative qualities of the sounds of language. Written for a particular group at a particular time, the verse is published here in the hopes that it will stimulate other teachers to create similar exercises for their own classes.

BLACKSMITH'S SONG

Cling, clang!
Ring ting cling, clang!
Hark to the blow of the hammer.
High overhead it is held!
Down, it drives down in the darkness,
Shaping the steel with its spell.
Blow, bellows, blow, down below.
Glow, red coals, glow, hot and slow.
Flash and fly! Sparks on high, gleam and die.
Cold and dark, stiff and stark, lies the iron.
Thrust it in—to the heart of the fire.
Cherry red first it grows,
Then to orange it glows,
Till it burns with the brightest of light.
Pull it out! Beat and pound,
Hammer hard all around.
Ring ting cling, hear the clear anvil's sound.
Mighty smith, bend and twist;
Ne'er a stroke have you missed.
See the horseshoe is fashioned all round.
With your tongs hold it fast;
Into water at last
The horseshoe must plunge to be hardened.
Zish, swish,
Splutter and splish!
The iron cools and is darkened.
With your hands hold it fast
Finished at last!
Hurrah! Hurrah! Our work is done!
Join hands, my friends, let's dance for fun!

Henry Barnes

INTRODUCTION TO A PARENTS' EVENING FOR THE SECOND GRADE

In describing the class I should like to use the analogy of a flower garden. There are so many different plants in this flower garden. None is like any other and that makes it so interesting. There are no two violets and no two sun flowers; each child is a species in itself. There are those that bloom all the time, and those that develop strong vegetation but seldom any blossoms. There are those with drooping leaves and those with a strong stem. There are those which develop their blossoms in hiding and are inconspicuous and shy, and others that are loud in color and aggressive in appearance. There are the ones that smile from within, the ones that giggle, the silent ones, the melancholy, the lazy, passive ones, and the active busy bodies.

There are days of sunshine when it is like a holiday in this flower garden—when every flower sparkles with some of the first clear dewdrops, when there is harmony and happiness hovering in the atmosphere. And then there are the rainy days, the dreary days when the sun is hiding behind some clouds and the flowers can hardly peep out through their eyes. There are even stormy days when the wind howls, the lightning strikes and the thunder clatters.

It is a beautiful garden and it is a pleasure and privilege to have entrance to it.

It is the gardener's task to water the plants, shade them from too much sun, protect them against the cold, to nourish them with wholesome food and transplant them to the most advantageous places. However, the flowers would also grow without the gardener. It is not the gardener who makes them grow. It is the inherent entity, quality, power within the plant which, in relation to the earth and to cosmic forces, brings about its growth. The gardener is a nursemaid. He cannot make a plant bloom in two days when the law within the plant itself is that it should bloom in two months. But he can neglect the plant or purposely prevent it from blooming. Or he can cut it off from the full life of nature and set it in a hot house, feeding it a special diet, and force exposed to the world, it will fade quickly after its first brilliant showing.

Now what has all this to do with teaching a class of children? Are not we, as parents and teachers, in a situation comparable to that of the gardener with his plants?

William Harrer

SHOULD WE BRING LITERATURE TO CHILDREN, OR CHILDREN TO LITERATURE? *

by Joseph Wood Krutch

*Reprinted from the New York Herald Tribune Book Review, July 22, 1951,
with the kind permission of the Editor.*

Fifteen years ago I accepted an invitation to address an association of teachers of English. No such organization has ever invited me since, and there may be some connection between the two events. The announced "theme" of the meeting was something like "How to Bring Literature to Children" and I told the audience that the question was all wrong. What it had already led to was "projects" for the study of Shakespeare which consisted not in discussing the plays but in pasting up notebooks with publicity pictures for the movie version of "A Midsummer Night's Dream." What they should ask, I said, was "How to Bring Children to Literature." Literature should stay right where it was. What they proposed was not education at all but a refusal to educate.

Since that time great strides have been made in the art of bringing literature to children of all ages, from four to fourscore. The great novels and plays reduced to a half an hour on radio or television we take for granted; and somewhat more alarmingly we also take it for granted that soldiers should learn both the art of war and the ideology of democracy out of comic books prepared for their instruction. In Mr. Hutchens' absence I'd like to discuss these phenomena.

With my thesis I imagine that a good many people will disagree, but most of even those who do so will not want to deny the existence of the

*We refer our readers to *The Winged Horse, An Essay on the Art of Reading*, by Henry Barnes in Volume 11, Number 3 of this Bulletin.

tendency which they approve of and I do not. More and more it is taken for granted not that all men, being created equal, have a right to the best but that "the best" is whatever the largest number of people find immediately accessible and pleasing. And therefore, of course, men are best served when we attempt to find out what they like and to give it to them.

Educators used to assume that it was their duty to select the great books of the world and to teach students why they really were great. Even today the Chicago group advocates a somewhat fanatically narrow version of this assumption and has created something of a stir because of a fundamental premise which would once have been thought self-evident. But the tendency of the time is much better illustrated by a group of professors of education who have just recently proposed that the list of "required reading in schools should be based upon a study which they have just sponsored of the tastes of school children.

That the list so compiled contained very few of the supposed classics and was very heavily loaded with books which would seem very trivial indeed to any one whose taste was any more cultivated than that of the children themselves seemed to the "educators" a fact quite irrelevant. The question whether or not this was the proper way to select books for educational purposes was not even raised. But it is certainly and with a vengeance, "bringing literature to children" rather than bringing children to literature. Indeed, it is difficult to see just what we are supposed to be getting in return for all the money spent on schools if school children simply spend their time reading what they would read anyway. It might be argued that the teachers were learning something from the pupils; namely, what the taste of uneducated children is. But the pupils were certainly not learning anything from the teachers and it would seem that the children are the ones who ought to be paid salaries, if any one is to be.

Would any pediatrician base the diet which he prescribed for the young submitted to his care simply on an effort to determine what eatables they remembered with greatest pleasure? If he knew that the vote would run heavily in favor of chocolate sodas, orange pop, hot dogs and bubble gum, would he conclude that these should obviously constitute the fundamental elements in a "modern" child's menu?

Items drawn from the newspapers over a period of only a few weeks show clearly which way the wind is blowing. One college professor proposes that colleges should cease trying to teach college students what he contemptuously calls "literary English" and teach instead only that kind of expression which has been found "acceptable" in the student's own group. Another writes to protest the use of the word "ubiquity" in a newspaper on the ground that many people do not know what it means. A third, going the whole way at once, urges that colleges drop from their courses of study everything which does not contribute to the student's "adjustment to society." The fact is, however, that language "acceptable to the group" is precisely what one gets in communities where there is no formal education whatsoever. The fact is also that if no one ever used any words which everybody did not know, then no one would ever learn any new ones, and the common vocabulary would gradually drop lower and lower until it contained only the three or four hundred words which are said to serve the needs of the most primitive people. As for "adjustment to society," that is something which necessarily goes on. But the purpose of education is, or at least was once assumed to be, the production of knowledge, attitudes, skills and tastes to which, on the other hand, society would adjust itself.

Mr. Alexander Pope, whose works were not on the list of the school child's favorite books, once described the progress of the learner as one in which he is, as he climbs, continuously inspired by the sight of new peaks beyond:

"Hills peep o'er hills and Alps on Alps arise."

In contemporary theory, whether it is in reference to the education of children or adults, nothing is supposed to be more carefully avoided than anything which will suggest a glimpse just beyond the local horizon. Books are carefully graded according to the "age level" to which they are supposed to be appropriate. Vocabulary studies are consulted to make sure there are no words which the child at that "age level" is not supposed to know. But surely the best book for any intelligent child is often the one somewhat beyond his comprehension, and if there are some words he does not know, he may just possibly be inspired to find out what they mean.

I am well aware that the tendency which I have been deploring seems to some people what is meant by the "democratic movement." To me it is exactly the reverse because "democracy" seems to me to be based upon the belief—or at least the hope—that the "common man" does not have to remain common and that, given the opportunity, neither intellectuality nor artistic appreciation is beyond him. To believe the contrary and to conclude from that belief that whatever is the product of practice, cultivation, training, and aspiration should be discredited and discarded is not democratic but nonsensical. Yet a colleague of mine who attended an influential national conference of so-called educators reported that "intellectual" and "intellectualist" were the favorite terms of disparagement and that they seemed, as a matter of fact, to correspond pretty closely with the current Soviet favorites, "formalist" and "formalism." He was told that "doing" and "loving," not "intellectualizing," were the activities to be cultivated in a democracy and he was angrily howled down when he protested that he himself was so boundlessly democratic that he believed even intellectual people had a right to an education.

I cannot think of anything better calculated to produce a rigid two-class society composed of the rulers and the ruled than this assumption that both the education of children and the instruction of the adult population are aims best achieved when a small professional group of educators, publicists, commentators and what-not spends its time deciding what it is appropriate for the average citizen to know or think and what devices of "mass communication" will work best if these bits of information and opinion are to be transmitted without requiring of him the intellectual activities to which he is supposed to be so little given. I am by no means sure that any information which can be communicated via, say, the comic-book technique could possibly be as important to the progress of democracy as the accomplishment of the confessedly more difficult educational feat which consists in teaching people how to read and how to find in the printed word, with all its subtlety and flexibility, a congenial method for receiving communications.

A good deal has been said about the importance of the distinction between "education" on the one hand and "indoctrination" or "propaganda" on the other. Confessedly the line is sometimes hard to draw, but confessedly also the difference between an educated population and an indoctrinated one is precisely the difference between a democratic society and a totalitarian society. The line, then, needs to be drawn, however difficult it may seem to be to draw it, and perhaps there is no better way to make the distinction than this: Whenever an attempt is made to convey knowledge or influence opinion

in such a way that the person addressed becomes, as a result, less merely passive, more capable of criticism and better prepared to make an effort to learn and think for himself than what has been done to him comes under the head of education. Whenever, on the other hand, the attempt to convey knowledge or influence opinion is such as to encourage his indolence and his passivity; whenever it aims to require the least possible effort on his part and confirms him in, rather than frees him from, the existing limitations of his powers of attention and analysis then it is propaganda or indoctrination. And it is my contention that both current educational theory as it applies to school or college students and current methods of mass communication as they are applied to adult education in most of its forms are tending in the direction of propaganda rather than of genuine education.

Those who are now attempting to use radio and television, however good their intentions—and in many cases they are excellent—need to be on guard against the fact that whatever the possibilities may be those media of communication lend themselves most easily to processes which are dubiously educational. Even the most conscientious brief version of a novel or play, even the most conscientious dramatization of a historical event, is something less than the original work of art or than genuine history. And, while we are busy congratulating ourselves that at least it is reaching people who otherwise would not meet either literature or history at all, we forget to ask how many there are who might otherwise have taken to reading if they had not had more or less thrust upon them this lazier substitute. Mr. Fred Allen, whose remarks on television have, to be sure, sometimes been interpreted as the result of an irritation at a disturbing novelty, predicted that the man of the future would have eyes the size of cantaloupes and no brain at all. It may at least be cautiously said that we know what he means.

It has also been said that there is no country in the world where it is so easy to go to school and so difficult to get an education as in the United States. I do not think that that is really true, but I am not sure that it does not threaten to become so, or that we are not in danger of destroying the educational system by our very eagerness to make it easy and efficient. Carlyle maintained that the true university was merely a collection of books. That is certainly a very extreme statement of one point of view. But I am not certain that it is any further from the truth than the popular American assumption that the best school of any kind is the one most dominated by the largest number of professors of education, most responsive to the results of questionnaires, surveys, opinion polls and statistical compilations, most elaborately equipped with slide projectors, phonographs and radio sets. Some day we are going to have to realize that you cannot "give" anybody an education. The best you can do is to make it possible for him to get one.

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