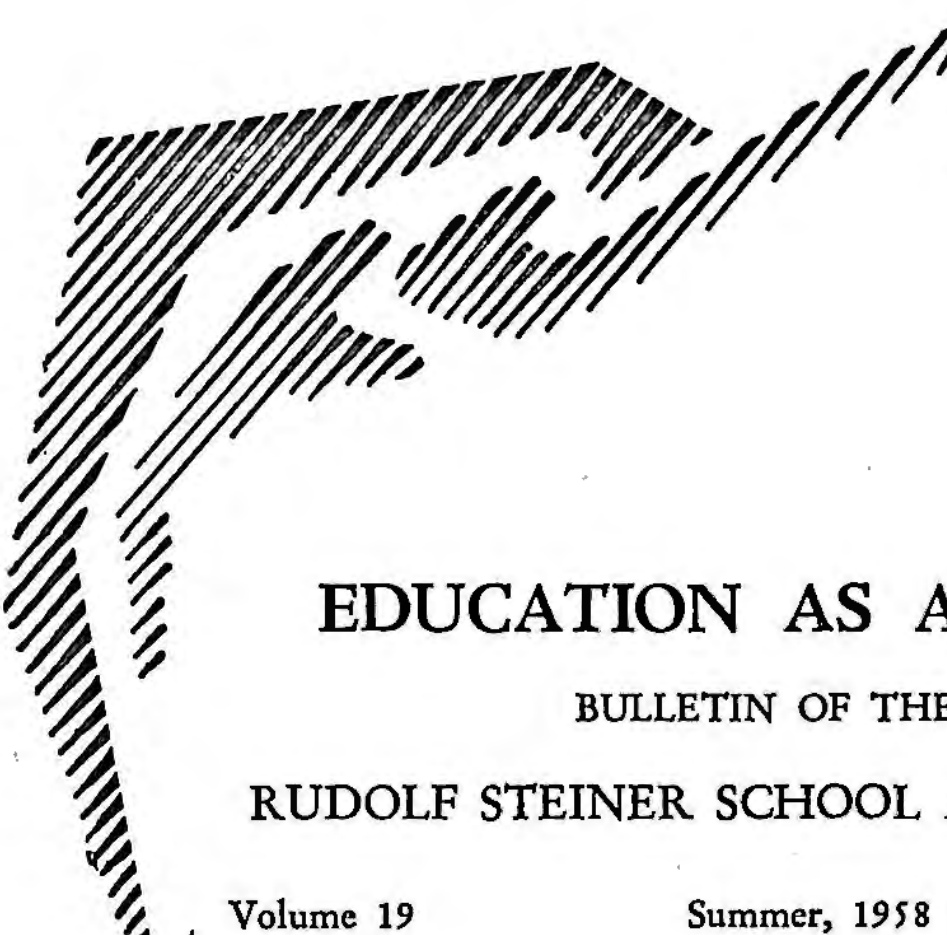




EDUCATION AS AN ART

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THE FIRST RUDOLF STEINER SCHOOL: HISTORICAL EVENTS AND EFFECTS

On a hillside overlooking the beautiful city of Stuttgart in the deep valley of the Neckar there was enacted on March 30, 1938, a scene of great impressiveness which, taken together with its sequel seven years later and its predecessor in 1919, forms a tableau of three scenes of the greatest importance for education in Germany and perhaps throughout the world.

These three scenes in the life of the Free Waldorf School are dramatic examples of the triumph of man's spirit over adversity and the willingness of people to suffer for the sake of an educational idea.

This Spring day of 1938 was one of the fairest imaginable in a beautiful land where freedom no longer dwelt. The Waldorf School, one of the last free institutions under National Socialism, was being closed by government order and the final assembly was made the occasion of a pilgrimage by friends of the school who had cherished and supported it through the dark days and had now come to join with the students and teachers in a pledge of renewal some day and by some means.

They had made the difficult journey across the inhospitable German borders from Switzerland, Holland, England and even from America. They represented others who could not come but who felt that there should be wide representation at the death ceremonies of an institution that must not die.

The great hall of the school atop the hill was packed. At the front near the stage were the small children swirling about their teachers like tiny wavelets lapping at an island. Behind sat the older classes, each with its teacher; and the youths and maidens of the upper grades closed the ranks.

The rows at the back were filled with grown-ups, men and women from many walks of life, parents of present and former pupils, students from the Waldorf Training College and the friends who had come from afar. From the balconies hundreds of former pupils looked down, once more at home for a brief moment in the school they had loved.

Everyone present, even the smallest children who had no understanding of the workings of the political tragedy in which their lives had been caught up, knew what this last assembly meant. How different from the other joyous occasions when they had gathered here!

The ceremony was simple and direct. Each teacher spoke to his or her class, and through his words each child received the message that his beloved school was no more. Then the school orchestra played the Fifth Symphony of Beethoven, which one of the school's founders had called the Symphony of Destiny. Finally, Count Fritz Bothmer, the school's chairman who had conducted the long and painful negotiations with the Nazi authorities, rose.

The building in which they were assembled, Count Bothmer said, had been constructed on the form of a cross and from the spot where he stood, at the junction of the two arms, the founders of the Waldorf School had often spoken to parents and pupils.

"Here," he said, "our most beautiful and impressive festivals have taken place. Here the heart of the Waldorf School has shone forth most luminously. This institution is founded on the form of the Cross and upon the name of Him who died upon the cross but continues to live in those human beings who offer Him a dwelling place in their hearts. Therefore, the heart of this school also continues to live."

At this point Count Bothmer asked the assembly to rise, and continued: "I have now the task of pronouncing that, upon the decree of the Wuerttemberg government, the Waldorf School is closed. Let us then, with the power of love, seal up our school in the deepest recesses of our hearts for the future."

On the following day nearly all the thousand and more present at this ceremony were present at another scene as far removed as is possible to imagine. This one was enacted at the Stuttgart railway station where Adolf Hitler, returning in triumph from the accomplishment of the Anschluss in Austria, stopped off to receive the frenzied Heils of his followers and the homage-by-order of all the others.

Teachers, pupils and friends of the now defunct Waldorf School stood on the fringes of the hysterical crowd, unable to see into the future for themselves or for Germany, unable even to think beyond the day, but knowing in their hearts that the day would come, however long delayed, when dictators were not and education would be free again.

That day came for the Waldorf School in October of 1945 in vastly different physical and spiritual surroundings on the same hillside, when the school was re-opened under what difficulties never will be adequately told. But here was living proof that the words spoken and the pledge taken in 1938 had not been forgotten.

The once lovely city lay in ruins. Its streets were littered with rubble and the houses were burnt-out shells. People lived in cellars and provisional shelters. The children of the town, grown up without fathers, presented a pitiful picture as, ragged, barefoot and hungry, full of restlessness and fear and weakened moral feeling, they played among the twisted beams and piles of rubbish or gathered cigarette ends on the pavement to sell at black market prices.

But there on a fragment of the wall of the wrecked main building of the Waldorf School, painted in large letters by some former student, were the words, "We Will Be Back". These words had stood for seven years against both the vindictiveness of the Nazi Gestapo and the fury of Allied bombings, and still were there as a symbol that the spirit of freedom had not died.

And so, on the very day the occupation troops entered Stuttgart, a little group of people emerged from the chaos to meet in a suburban house and discuss the fate of the children. Some were former teachers at the Waldorf School, some were parents and some, former pupils now grown to manhood and womanhood in a time of destruction when all that remained seemed to be an animal-like need to struggle for survival. All had carried the school in their hearts through seven years of hardship.

This group was addressed by Dr. Eric Schwebsch, a former principal of the school, who told them that the words spoken on the hilltop in 1938 had not been mere phrases and that now was the time to start again even though the difficulties might seem insurmountable. The need to re-open, Dr. Schwebsch said, was urgent, for the hope of Germany lay with these pitiful little human creatures who roamed the rubble and knew not where to turn.

The school had been bombed out, its main building was a burned-out shell and all other buildings were badly damaged. The school yard was a huge mass of wreckage that only the most modern salvage machines seemed likely to clear. But into this mess of destruction Dr. Schwebsch and his little band plunged with hardly more than their hands as tools.

As they worked, their numbers grew. At the original meeting several former pupils, now grown beyond school age, volunteered to bring the word to teachers and friends wherever they could be found. On bicycles they crossed zone lines, searching everywhere, and one by one those teachers who had survived came trickling back.

All that long first summer they worked, these people who in seven years had hardly had a decent meal to eat, and the trickle of those in whom the spirit had been kept alive grew into a stream. They came from wherever they were and by whatever means of travel they could find as soon as the word had been brought to them.

In that summer the rubble was cleared with a few spades and many pairs of hands as the only implements. The damage to minor buildings was repaired and two provisional wooden structures were built. In a time when no building material whatever was to be had these people somehow found it. Their own homes were in ruins but the school came first. They acquired the material actually by a complicated system of barter and exchange in which food, cigarettes and clothing were more valuable than gold. And they had enormous help from the friendly American military authorities.

In October, 1945 the school re-opened with a solemn and touching ceremony that stemmed directly from the closing ceremony of 1938. More than 500 pupils were present on opening day, twelve complete grades were formed, and of these only a little handful in the two upper classes had been pupils seven years earlier.

The difficulties these children and their parents had to overcome in order to attend classes were almost incredible. No family had enough to eat or enough clothes to go around. Some pupils could come only irregularly because the family had only one pair of shoes that was shared. Transportation was so poor that some children from the surrounding country had to leave home at dawn each day and did not get back until long after dark.

Still they came, and from the first day the school had a long waiting list of families eager for their children to attend.

While the rest of the city and the rest of Germany lay wallowing in despair, bemoaning their fate, the Waldorf teachers, pupils and parents began their work, full of faith in the future. An army officer present at the opening said that the school was "like an island of hope in an ocean of despair". Dr. Schwebsch spoke of the "blessing of a second start".

To understand what had taken place here on the hillside it is necessary now to turn to the opening scene of the tableau which was enacted at a time of almost similar chaos in Germany. In 1919 the world had blundered into a peace that was a continuation of war, and the ideas with which men hoped to build a new and better world could not cope with the realities of life.

The thunderstorm of the first World War had not taught men that the outworn conceptions of the 18th and 19th centuries could no longer apply, for men had slept through the storm, emerging from it with the same basic habits of thoughts with which they entered.

There were men in 1919, however, who recognized the true situation and who saw that the ideas with which it was hoped to build a permanent peace were hopelessly outdated and could produce only confusion. Because of the break-down of outer conditions, Germany was open to new impulses as she had never been before and in the midst of these conditions a far-sighted industrialist, Dr. Emil Molt, owner of the Waldorf Astoria cigarette factory in Stuttgart, came to Rudolf Steiner, Austrian philosopher and educator, with the request that he found a school for the children of Molt's 4,250 factory workers.

Emil Molt was a man of wealth and great influence, and he was deeply concerned with the social and economic problems of the times. He recognized that all these problems had their source in the central problem of the human being himself; he wished, in a time of economic breakdown and social revolution, to use his wealth for a lasting human purpose.

He believed that the most effective way to achieve this was to found a school where children would receive a truly human education which would help them to take their places in life no matter what the outer conditions might be. And he turned to Rudolf Steiner as the educator whom he considered best able to create such a school.

Steiner accepted the task on two conditions: that he be free from every political, economic or religious control in following his educational principles, and that children of every social and economic class be admitted. The school was to be "free," he said, as an artist is free to create out of the necessities of his material.

The faculty would be the real leaders of the school and, under no outside influence, would be free to build the school out of its own necessity so that the principles of pedagogy could be developed completely out of the needs of the human beings involved, the students. The school was to receive no funds whatever from state or community and was to be maintained entirely by gift money if that were possible, or by gift money and tuitions if it were not. The ideal would be no tuition fees at all, but this proved impossible because of the already impending terrible inflation in Germany.

This educational idea was in complete contrast to the system then prevailing in Germany, where the *Abitur*, the stiff entrance examination for the universities, was the goal of secondary education. German children went to elementary public schools where tuition was free, from the ages of six to ten. Then the parents decided, chiefly according to the state of their purses, whether the child should go to the Gymnasium for eight more years and become an "intellectual", or stay in the Volksschule and prepare for a manual profession. The child's future was thus determined at the age of ten and the tradition of the German education was to create separate social castes.

Dr. Molt purchased for the new school a building at the top of the hill that had housed a fashionable restaurant, bringing down upon himself at the start the disapproval of the elite of Stuttgart who had dined there for generations. Here, Steiner gathered together the handful of men and women he had selected as teachers and conducted an intensive course in the new pedagogy with daily lectures, seminars and experiments.

On the day the Waldorf School was scheduled to open, nearly 400 children with their future teachers gathered in the courtyard of the former restaurant building and were separated into age groups. And there, on the spot, Steiner assigned the teachers to the grades, declaring that it was necessary to see the teachers in the presence of the children before deciding which should take which group.

The school started under the best of auspices with a ceremony in a large hall in the center of Stuttgart which followed immediately on this initial assembly. The hall was filled to overflowing with more than 2,000 persons, among them the Minister of Education for Wuerttemberg, a Socialist who was favorably disposed toward the new venture.

Within a year of its founding the school had about 800 pupils and at its peak about 1,000; it was limited only by its physical capacities. These pupils included boys and girls of every creed and class and from almost every part of the world. The curriculum and teaching methods attracted educators from many countries who carried them back to their own homes, with the result that schools working with the Waldorf pedagogy grew up in Switzerland, Austria, Holland, Norway, Sweden, England and the United States.

Those who knew the school at this time felt that here was a group, although still small, of young people who could break through national barriers and conventional, routine thinking to a genuine internationalism which would not be satisfied with empty phrases.

And then came 1933 and the rise of Hitler to power. From that day the Waldorf School and the, by now, nine other Steiner Schools in Germany were doomed. By their very nature they could not conform to the Nazi ideas of education.

Immediately the schools were forbidden to take any more children into the first grade and the death process was gradual. Apparently the hope was that the schools would close themselves. But they continued, and then a long process of harassment began. First one class and then another was forbidden, teachers were forced out and finally the closing order came from the government.

The reasons were bluntly stated in the press of the day. The Waldorf Schools developed individuals, whereas the task of education in a National Socialist State was to produce National Socialists. Two such opposed systems of education could not exist in a single state.

But ideas and ideals such as these live all the more intensively and inwardly when outwardly suppressed and, as the third scene in the tableau demonstrates, wherever the spirit lived in Germany unseen through the dark years, there was an ally for the cause of freedom and a sure collaborator in the task of the re-education of Europe.

The American educators who moved into Germany at the end of World War II were quick to recognize in the effort to re-open the Waldorf School something of its true value. For elsewhere these educators found still in operation the old German system of education which shocked their sense of democracy.

In the years that followed, first our Military Government and then the High Commission which replaced it, tried to persuade the Germans to change their system of education or at least to prolong the free school for two more years so that the child's future should not be decided as early as ten when it is difficult, often impossible, to determine his abilities.

These efforts were frustrated by the reluctance of the German States to follow educational patterns of a young country whose culture was considered by Germans inferior to their own. But the purely German effort by Dr. Molt, based on these same democratic ideas, has made and is making enormous progress.

Molt was animated by these ideas at the beginning, at which time Steiner declared "our highest endeavor must be to develop free human beings who are able of themselves to impart purpose and direction to their lives." He said further that all boys and girls, of every class, whether the aim was to become intellectuals or manual workers, should have the opportunity of receiving the same "general education as human beings" which would give them the harmony and belief in themselves as the basis for any activity in life.

Emil Molt and Rudolf Steiner are long since gone from the scene. The school which they founded in 1919 grew and flourished and was suppressed, but not destroyed. In 1945 it was reborn to become a vital factor in contemporary Germany. Within five years of the new start, twenty-three other schools using the Waldorf pedagogy had opened in the western zones of Germany and in the American sector of Berlin. But the school which was opened in Dresden, in the Russian zone, was forced to close in 1949 by the Communist authorities, a regime which, no more than the Nazis, can tolerate the stress laid on the free and individual development of the child.

Today there are some sixty-five schools throughout the western world, numbering perhaps twenty thousand boys and girls among their pupils. Seven schools are established in Britain, several in Holland and Switzerland and there are schools in each of the other European democracies. There are six schools and several kindergartens in the United States.

There is no organization uniting and controlling these many schools. Each is independent and free to work out its own form in accordance with the needs of its particular situation. But wherever they are, the schools have one thing in common — they are testing grounds for democracy in practice. For the responsibility in each case is carried by the faculty of teachers as a group. They select their own chairman and decide on all questions of basic school policy.

Boys and girls of every race, nationality and creed attend these schools. The curriculum of study through the twelve years of school introduces them to each of the basic branches of science and the humanities. There is no narrow specialization. Each subject is taught for what it contributes to a well-rounded human education.

Not only is there a broad balance in the content of what is taught, but there is a fundamental balance between the head and hands and heart. The world has experienced clearly enough the consequences of a one-sidedly intellectual education and attitude toward life. The results are a cleverness and skill capable of splitting the atom, yet incapable of preventing the split of the human personality. Only an education which deals with man as an artist, presenting its material in such a way that it is grasped by the whole human being and not merely by his intellect, can help to bridge the chasm. The Waldorf education has this as its primary goal and for this reason the method underlying the presentation of all subject matter, whether scientific or humanistic or artistic, is artistic in character. Only where the imagination is stirred and feelings and will are aroused, does real education take place.

Skill with the hands and a practical ability in applying knowledge to life are essential if a person is to stand on his own feet in life. Throughout all twelve grades, the Waldorf schools teach handwork, woodcarving, painting, modeling, music, etc. as an integral part of the curriculum.

At a time when the free world is struggling to unite and to find the strength to maintain its freedom, we need to strengthen the roots of freedom in the judgment and the heart of each individual citizen. The work of the Waldorf schools, wherever they may be, is a step in this direction.

Al Laney

Mr. Laney, author of "Paris Herald: the Incredible Newspaper", was night editor of the Herald in Paris, and has been for many years sports writer for the New York Herald Tribune. His series on prep schools is to be published shortly as a book.

ON THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL

For the Sixth Grade

Not so very long ago, many of you were able to run right outdoors into miles of green grass and trees whenever you liked — even before breakfast. If you were very still then, you could watch while a chipmunk hopped about, or hear a snake rustle off among the bushes. Even a wild rabbit might come nibbling some clover quite close to you. Then you would notice the clover leaves looking up at you like little faces. Each of the three leaves, you would see, had the tiniest kind of stem and part of a white triangle painted in the middle of each leaf. Thirty, sixty, hundreds of such leaves there were, each

as neatly made as the last. In the early morning each grass blade was lined by two rows of the tiniest dew drops, so transparent and clear, so perfectly round, that it could catch the sunlight and make it snap and flash like light from a jewel. Between two bushes hung a spider web woven in an exact geometric pattern. Everywhere you looked were the most beautiful shapes and colors. Only the stones lay there grey and lumpish. But if you had had a hammer with you and had smashed one of them open, you might have found that, way inside, the stone had blossomed into many small, six-sided, crystal petals with sharp angles and smooth planes. Then you might have remembered how, in some countries, deep underground, tremendous fires and great pressures, working for long ages, have formed diamonds and rubies in the rock.

Well, now you can no longer run out into the fields whenever you like. Even if you did, all the grass and leaves are beginning to wither. All winter you will be sitting at desks indoors.

But now suppose that there came a special kind of visitor, perhaps one of the old Norse gods, or a Greek god, who walked through the school in the middle of winter. He would have the power to look right down through the tops of your wooden desks, right through the covers of your notebooks. He would be able to see there, like garden paths, the broad straight margins you have made along the pages of your books, letters as beautifully formed as clover leaves, pictures as bright and fresh as roses and fields of buttercups. So for him a walk through the school would be just what it is for you to run into a summer meadow.

Then he would notice, above the desks, some dreamy, rather lumpish forms. No, not stones — but the heads of boys and girls! Luckily, not even Thor would have to take up his hammer and smash them open to see what was inside, for he would be able to see right through to where, inside, some little, clear, exact thought-crystals were forming. He would look down, even deeper into you, to where the fires of your blood work, and where, through long weeks and months, under pressures of hard work and battles against difficulties, you were forming harder and more precious crystals — feelings of generosity and courage like flashing diamonds and blood-red rubies. And he would see still more. He would see that, whether you know it or not, you were each forming your whole self into a particular shape, working away upon it day after day, year after year, making it always clearer, more exactly into a certain image. And that shape and image, into which each of you is making himself is the image of what you most love to imagine.

Christy Barnes

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