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A FREE KINDERGARTEN.

“THERE'S no royal road to learning' the beauties of this garden,” complain I to Musia, as threading our way down Forty-fourth Street, past stables, groceries, factories, and tenement-houses, we arrive at the long low building where the “Free Kindergarten” hangs out its sign of invitation.

“Nor is the entrance very prepossessing,” sighs she, peering through the great doorway by which we enter a long hall, and thence, guided by the sound of children's voices, reach a dark upper passage.

“Nevertheless, within you will find charming subjects for your pencil,” say I, ushering Musia into a spacious room, through whose many windows the golden light of an autumn morning is streaming. “This is the garden, and these my little city flowers. Do not let us interrupt them,” I whisper; “come, sit on the other side of the room.” We are at once the cynosure of the bright gaze of scores of little folks.

My little friends—for so I have learned to call them—are moving in couples to the sound of a lively air played on a piano by the principal of the school; several assistant teachers, walking before, instruct the “little men and women” in the figures of the marching exercise, two hundred tiny feet keeping time with vigorous tread, two hundred chubby hands clapping in unison, and all their baby voices piping merrily:

“Let us march without a blunder;
Right and left we part asunder,
Till we meet in pairs again,
Following our leading men.”

Up and down the long room, now in single, now in double file, passes the mimic procession, till, halting before their respective tables, the music ceases, and the little companies seat themselves with a merry babble of speech and laughter that, for the time, converts the room into a very Babel of silvery sound. Presently this subsides into a low murmur of expectation, the Kindergartners are seen approaching with their “gifts,” some bringing boxes of colored balls for the tiniest scholars; others boxes of blocks, steel rings, piles of colored papers, worsteds, card-board, strips of wood, and slates; receiving which, the little ones fall to work.

And here I fancy the reader exclaiming, “Nonsense! this is but play.” Perhaps so; but play with an underlying motive, a fixed purpose—not a motion of the colored balls, not a position of the steel rings, or an arrangement of the blocks being made without reference to some mathematical or artistic law. The Kindergarten system, but recently transplanted to our country, was at first prohibited in Germany, under the impression that its principles were inimical to the state, but its inventor lived to see it firmly established there, and gaining ground throughout Europe. It is now high in favor in France, Belgium, Holland, Switzerland, England, and Russia; Austria incorporates it with her public schools, and Italy makes it a part of her national school sys-

tem. The first Kindergarten was founded at Blankenburg, Thuringia, in the year 1837, by its inventor, Frederick Froebel; the Duke of Meiningen, becoming his patron, gave to Froebel the use of his mansion at Marienthal, near Liebenstein, for the establishment of a normal school for the training of young women as Kindergartners. On the death of Froebel, in 1852, the Baroness Marenholtz-Bülow took up his work, laboring earnestly for the extension of the system, and in a few years succeeded in interesting all the civilized nations of Europe. We are indebted to Miss Eliza Peabody, of Boston, who has written much and intelligently on the subject, for its first permanent impression in the United States, many of these schools being scattered especially in the West, where the German element largely prevails. New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and other cities throughout the Union have their private Kindergartens and training schools, but the expense of tuition is so great as to confine their advantages chiefly to the children and daughters of the wealthier classes.

The Twenty-second Ward "Free Kindergarten," the subject of our sketch, is intended for the poor only, and owes its support mainly to the contributions of the children of the "Religious School" and members of the "Society of Ethical Culture." It was formally opened by Professor Felix Adler on the second day of the present year, with a view to reaching and benefiting the children of the extremely poor, and more especially those of the workmen in the Forty-second Street gas factory, in whose neighborhood it was purposely planted. A large, well-kept, well-ventilated room is devoted to the purposes of the school, which, under the intelligent management of its founder and principal, has attained an attendance of one hundred scholars. To the right stands a moderately good grand piano, a fine upright blackboard, and a long table on which are arranged a few books and piles of Froebel's "gifts;" to the left a cupboard for lunches, towels, etc., and six long, low tables of polished wood, with comfortable settees on either side. Rows of pegs, just high enough for little hands to reach, dot the wall at one end of the room, and gayly colored prints of birds, animals, and plants hang above for the instruction and amusement of the children. Potted plants fill the ledges and flourish in the sunshine that finds free entrance through the spacious windows, while luxuriant vines clambering around the casements give the nearest approach to the garden which Froebel considered indispensable in his institutions. Connected with the "Free Kindergarten" is also a free training class for young women, in which they learn the profession that elsewhere could not be attained under an expense of two hundred dollars. The members of this class volun-

teer their services as assistants in the children's school.

In regard to the uses and advantages of the system over others, come with me to one of the ordinary "infant schools," and you will see that for the early acquisition of the rudiments of reading, writing, and arithmetic, and for the preservation of order and discipline, every method is taken to subdue the child's will and natural activity of body; the little ones bending wearily over their tasks of senseless lines and figures, or the monotonous d-o-g dog, or e-a-t cat, either look pale, sullen, and stupid, or feverishly and unnaturally bright. Now come with me and listen to the merry uproar of childhood unrestrained, as the little ones in the "Free Kindergarten" prepare for the charming game of "Birds in the Forest." See, all but half a dozen or so are standing in a circle with uplifted arms, and fingers moving in imitation of branches and fluttering leaves. The remainder run in and out like flying birds, to the sound of cheery music from the piano, singing:

"Birdies in the forest sing so sweet and clear:
Sing of all the sunshine and the flowers here."

Two and two then join hands, forming a nest, inside of which sit the other two, singing:

"Birdies in the forest build their little nest:
Never do disturb them, in their place of rest."

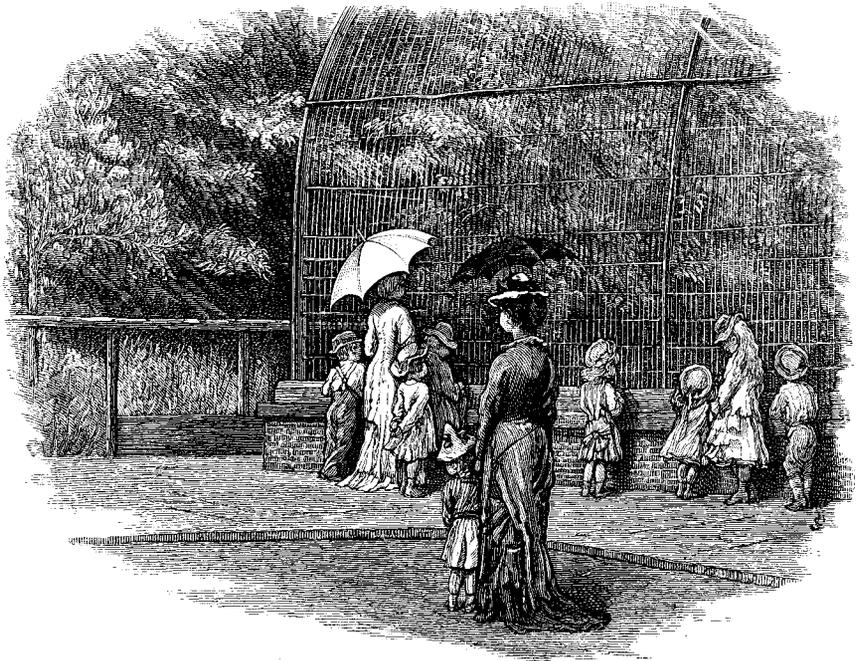
Then, kneeling down in couples, each child leans its head against the other's breast, feigning sleep, while the music dies away to the faintest lullaby, the teachers singing softly:

"Birdies in the forest sing themselves to sleep,
Fearless, like good children, whom the angels keep."

"Do you really think they understand what blue skies and green forests mean, cooped up as they are in those dreadful tenement-houses where they never catch a glimpse of either?" questioned Musia.

"They gain some knowledge of nature's beauty," return I, "by their weekly trips to Central Park. I was conversing with that little child yonder just before you came up to me, and she told me, with sparkling eyes, of the beautiful flowers and birds and the shining fountains the teachers showed them yesterday at the Park, and, 'Oh!' said the little one, in conclusion, 'it was so lovely, and we had such a good time: they let us walk all over the grass.' Miss Schwedler, the principal, tells me they take great pains to encourage and answer the little ones' questions, teaching them the names of the trees and various plants, birds, or animals, so that really I think you will find them more intelligent on such subjects than the majority of the children we meet in daily life. Why, they know more about trees and flowers than many grown persons who live in the country."

Truly until this moment I've thought the



A VISIT TO CENTRAL PARK.

average "little boy" far from perfect, but at this table a dozen or more are deep in the mystery of cutting forms of beauty, and they really are well-behaved, industrious little fellows, and quite as tidy as the little girls, in their jackets and gingham aprons. I am sure there must be something unusually attractive in the system, for some of them look capable of a deal of mischief.

"I've always thought boys rather more difficult to manage than girls," say I to a passing teacher, "but these seem altogether milder and more than ordinarily gentle—almost as much so as the girls."

"Shall I tell you the secret of their good behavior? We give their minds and bodies simultaneous employment, every one of our games and occupations requiring action as well as thought; we constantly change from one game or exercise to another, so that the little ones are engaged in no one thing long enough to weary of it. This constant activity, change, and variety, coupled with song, leaves no minute of time for idleness or mischief."

"Do you not have an occasional refractory scholar? and what do you do in such a case?"

"We frequently have small children come to us already hardened in vice, and prepared to meet the most gentle teachings with stubbornness and violence. We endeavor to show such that we mean to govern them by love and kindness; they become interested

in their various occupations; their ideas are diverted into purer channels; their hands and hearts and heads are under training; soon the hardened expression vanishes, and they take on the smiling, innocent countenance befitting childhood. Watch the boys' faces when we play the 'Farmer'; it's their favorite game," exclaims the young teacher, consulting her watch and moving away toward the piano, while boys and girls at a signal gather up their material in neat piles, and hand them in order to their respective Kindergartners.

The piano gives forth its notes of invitation, another circle forms, and we hear the little voices asking:

"Shall we tell you how the farmer, shall we tell you how the farmer,
Shall we tell you how the farmer sows his barley and wheat?
See, 'tis so so that the farmer, see, 'tis so so that the farmer,
See, 'tis so so that the farmer sows his barley and wheat."

Sniting the action to the words, the little girls lift their aprons and imitate the sower casting seed into the ground.

"Shall we show you how the farmer
Threshes barley and wheat?
See, 'tis so so that the farmer
Threshes barley and wheat."

Here the boys imitate the action of the thresher with his flail. Then all sing:

"Shall we show you how the farmer
Rests when labor is done?"

Each child, kneeling with one knee, and its elbow on the other, sings:

"See, 'tis so so that the farmer
Rests when labor is done."

In this little game the songs and the action, as well as the teacher's explanations, introduce the child to the farmer's life; for

semicircles of steel. Working with a will,
they all sing:

"Within these walls is love abounding,
With happiness each one surrounding;
And while we thus our thoughts employ,
We find in life a constant joy."

As they finish, the little clock on the shelf strikes twelve; slates and rings and blocks



"WEAVING."

the time being, so strong is imagination with them, they are out in the sunshine in the wheat fields or among the ricks of barley.

Once more the little companies are seated, all eyes turned to the blackboard, on which one of the teachers is drawing figures within a net-work of horizontal and perpendicular lines, while another distributes material for copying them. One class builds a church with steeple of steel rings; another a barn or pigeon-coop with blocks; the little girls form chairs, tables, and bureaus in outline with strips of wood; while here and there a boy or girl shows decided talent for design in the symmetrical arrangement of rings and

are neatly piled and put away; hats and shawls and coats come down from the pegs, the teachers helping the tinier scholars. Here I notice the loving watchfulness exercised by the elder children over their younger brothers or sisters; the tender care often exhibited by one little five-year-old fellow to his three-year-old sister is really touching.

"How did you bring together so many little ones in so short a time?" I ask, as Musia and I sit at luncheon with two of the young assistants.

"We have gone around wherever we could see children, and asked their parents to send them, and in many cases supplied clothes,



"BIRDS IN THE FOREST."

the poor little things not having any thing decent to appear in. We have often been met coldly or sullenly, but have not been discouraged by that. Sometimes we have furnished work to the parents, and quite often it has been necessary to furnish food also."

A new game opens the afternoon, the children entering into it with the most exuberant spirits. All but eight form a ring, joining hands; these are the waves. The eight children represent a ship, three on each side, one in front, and one behind. The children at the sides imitate the motion of oars with their hands, and move forward with a waltz-like step, singing:

"Our vessel forward calmly sails;
The tunes like waves us animate;
The shore is fading from our sight;
The waves arise—how grand! how great!—
Beautiful sea!"

"The winds and waves together play;
We feel as free as in the air;
We soon shall see our native bay;
We nearer come—at last we're there!—
Land! land! land! land!"

At the word "land" the children in the ring drop hands, and a new game supersedes the

"Vessel," called the "Windmill." The children divide into companies of eight, cross right hands, and go round; then left hands, turning in an opposite direction, singing:





"THE WINDMILL,"

"See the windmill turning round,
With a hoarse and creaking sound;
With the wind its sail does fill,
Never idly standing still."

Musia, watching the game, remarks to me:
"How the teachers enter into the spirit of
the thing! They seem to be big children
themselves—and so gentle and patient.
They must love children."

"Yes," I respond, "only those who love
children ever are or can be Kindergartners.
The woman's nature in simplicity, tender-

ness, and purity is more nearly allied to the
child nature than is man's. They seem to be
divinely fitted to rear up and train the young."

"Beautiful garden," I say to myself as we
ride down the avenue—"beautiful garden, in
which all the bright and sweet traits of the
child nature are encouraged to bud and
bloom, your flowers are the lilies of purity,
the roses of health and happiness, your sun-
shine the light of kindly words and kindly
deeds, your music the bird-like voices of
glad infancy!"