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The Art of Education inaugurated by Rudolf Steiner
By Walter Johannes Stein

IN the year 1918, when the revolution in Germany brought about a change of regime, it was soon apparent that this was not merely a political-change but marked a turning-point in the inner life of the German people. Emil Molt, the Director of the Waldorf-Astoria Cigarette Factory at Stuttgart, was one of those who realised this change most keenly. His insight told him that until a bond of union between the classes could be created by means of a common education, no co-operation with the world of labour would henceforward be possible. And so, as the outcome of conversations with his employees, Emil Molt conceived the idea of a school in connection with his factory, where the children of the workers could receive the same education as his own son.

It was natural that in such circumstances Emil Molt should turn to Rudolf Steiner, for he knew that from his youth Steiner had been closely connected with education. And so Emil Molt asked Rudolf Steiner if he would be willing to organise a school on the lines he had in mind, if he would indicate what the programme of study should be and come to an arrangement with the Education Authorities. Rudolf Steiner agreed, on condition that he should be left absolutely free from interference on the part of those who supplied the funds. They were to

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have no voice in the inner organisation of the school, the conduct of which was to rest entirely in the hands of the staff of teachers.

Emil Molt was generous enough to accept these conditions at once, and Rudolf Steiner thus became the Director of the Waldorf School. Thereupon the project ceased to be merely that of a school created to meet the needs of the children of workers in a factory. Side by side with the *social* idea there arose the idea of the *fundamental principles of education*.

Rudolf Steiner's aim was not merely to establish a school for a small circle but to give a new impulse to the whole of education. This was apparent before the School was actually opened, when he gave to the staff of teachers guiding-lines for all their future activities.

Rudolf Steiner's education is a development of the fundamental principles which had been laid down by Aristotle and were adopted in the age when Scholasticism had reached its prime. There we find, for example, the idea that education must reckon with the change which takes place in the human being every seven years. Each of these periods calls for different methods of teaching. With Rudolf Steiner, however, it was not a matter of bringing education back again into line with ancient traditions, but rather of imbuing it with the free creative power that can only unfold in direct contact with the concrete realities of life.

Knowledge of the being of man is the basis of the art of education inaugurated by Rudolf Steiner. And so, in his first course of lectures to those who were to be teachers at the Waldorf School, it was natural that he should give a picture of the different stages of development of the human being. In our modern age man is by no means the same as he was in ancient Greece or the Middle

Ages. Taken as a whole, of course, there are many points of resemblance and that is why methods of education through all the periods of civilisation have some features in common. But a true science or art of education must understand the human being as he lives within the concrete realities of his own particular age.

Waldorf School education is based throughout upon the actual needs of human nature, but it must not be forgotten that Stuttgart is situated in Wurtemberg and that it was necessary to come to an understanding with the Authorities and also in some measure to adapt the teaching to the regulations laid down by the State. Rudolf Steiner got over this difficulty by accepting a compromise with the Authorities. If he had agreed to adhere strictly to the official programmes for schools, he would not have been able to bring about what, according to his view, is demanded by the being of man. On the other hand, the children were to pass the State examinations, without which it would be difficult for them to fill official positions or posts in practical life. And so it was arranged that every three years the Waldorf children should reach the same standard of work as those in the State schools. The organisation of the teaching in the intervening period was to be left entirely free, the actual examinations to take place every three years. instead of every year.

The Education Authorities were broadminded enough to agree to this, and it was thus possible to bring about a reform in education without being under the direct control of the State. Within this framework the teaching was organised in such a way as to meet the real needs of the growing human being.

In every country where a school is founded on the lines of the Waldorf School, the principle adopted is the

same : all such schools adapt themselves to the conditions of their own national life.

In order to explain how the teaching can meet the needs of the human being during the normal phases of his development, I shall speak of the way in which we teach' history, and how we adapt it to the different ages of childhood. But before doing so, let me give certain details connected with the practical running of the Waldorf School.

As I have already said, the children of parents without means receive the same education as those of the well-to do. The costs of the School, divided among the number of children (1,060 at the time of writing) works out approximately at the figure of 40 marks a month for each child. Associations having been formed in many countries to receive free donations from people who attach importance to an institution like the Waldorf School. This money helps to pay, partially or entirely, for the education of children whose parents cannot afford the expense.

It can really be said that in the Waldorf School a centre has been created which will be the starting-point of a great educational movement. At the time of writing it consists of 1,060 pupils, 62 teachers and 27 classes. Boys and girls are taught together over a period of twelve years, beginning with a Kindergarten. Those who are preparing for the final examination laid down for all State schools can enter a thirteenth school year. A continuation course is provided for children who are obliged by financial circumstances to earn their living at the age of fourteen. Schools founded on Waldorf principles have for some time been established in London, The Hague, Basle, Zurich, Oslo, Berlin, Hamburg, Essen, Christiania, Vienna, Budapest, Hanover and Dresden.

And now let us speak of the programme of teaching which may, of course, be modified in accordance with the needs of each nation.

The growing human being does not, from birth, take full possession of his bodily organism. He only does so by degrees. This slow process can readily be observed. The ancients knew and spoke of it here and there in their literature. But in olden days it did not work in quite the same way and that is why education in our modern age has many new problems to face.

Rudolf Steiner spoke of this process as the descent, or rather the 'incorporation' of the soul-and-spirit into the physical being of man. Beginning in the head, that is to say in the senses and nervous system, it spreads into the organs of respiration" and circulation and reaches a culminating point at the age of puberty. From then onwards, the soul-and-spirit, as well as the child's life of feeling, are intimately bound up with the *metabolic* processes.

This slow and gradual penetration of the being of soul-and-spirit into the bodily organisation takes place in stages of seven years' duration. From the moment of birth to the seventh year, the human being is 'incarnating' in the head, in other words is learning to use the sense-organs and nervous system. The coming of the second teeth marks the end of this first stage. Up to that moment, considered as a whole, the child is one great sense-organ. He is related to and reflects his environment like an eye or an ear. He is pre-eminently an *imitative* being.

After the second dentition, the being of soul-and spirit begins to control the processes of respiration and circulation. The teaching of writing, drawing and painting, indeed of all the subjects, must now be imbued

with rhythm, with the element of music, as it were, in order to harmonize with the processes of respiration and circulation. During the period of the second dentition the teaching must still be pictorial and plastic.

And then the teacher must begin to use the formative, plastic forces which are set free with the coming of the second teeth, by letting the child write and draw in *living* forms. At the Waldorf School writing is taught to the children less quickly than at other schools. We do this deliberately and in accordance with Rudolf Steiner's principles, because we realise that to teach writing too quickly tends not only to enclose the being of soul-and spirit too soon in the bodily organism but to make the child an automaton. A rational method of teaching writing, on the other hand, enables the individuality of the child to develop in full freedom.

The body must not become the prison of the soul but its willing servant and that is why we lead on to writing from colour-drawing. The human race itself has followed the same course. The abstract alphabetical signs in use to-day are derived from the pictorial hieroglyphics used by the ancients. Each letter of our modern alphabet is, in itself, an abstract image of part of the human form, of the human skeleton. Imagine a man walking along and moving his arms to clear away some obstacle. In profile, this picture is like an instantaneous photograph of the capital letter R. First we show this to the child in a drawing and then let him draw it himself :

This is one example of the way in which writing can be developed out of living form. A movement of the body gives rise to a picture which suggests the abstract form of the letter. By teaching writing in this way we call upon a certain plastic energy which the body produces freely, once the second dentition is over. For the same force which has produced the second teeth must be used to create the forms of the letters while the child is being taught to write.

After the second dentition the child learns everything through rhythm. By making him to clap his hands and walk in rhythm we can teach him how to calculate, and he will find the greatest delight in the rhythms of recited poems.

Not until the age of puberty does the human being become really conscious of his body and his skeleton. This is indicated by the changes in gait and in bearing which manifest during the period of on-coming adolescence. The hitherto graceful movements of a child become angular, stiff, and in certain cases clumsy and heavy. In a girl, this change works in a rather different way, for the female organism differs from that of the male. Woman, as she comes down into the bodily organisation, stops her descent at the blood-circulation, whereas man goes a stage lower and takes possession of the bony skeleton. This fact, said Rudolf Steiner, can help us to understand the difference between the psychology of the male and female.

The intellectual faculty which is natural to man as the outcome of modern technical culture, awakens as he takes possession of his skeleton. In the time of ancient Greece, however, even the male did not descend to this stage. The Greek came no further than the muscles and out of this consciousness he created his marvelous

statues. The world of machines was unknown to him.

It was not until the approach of the fifteenth century that the soul-and-spirit began to descend lower than this stage. If, therefore, we base our education on the real needs of man's being, we shall begin to teach the child the history of the fifteenth and subsequent centuries together with physics and chemistry, *after* he has reached the age of puberty. As the boy becomes conscious of his skeleton, his intellect begins to mature and he understands what is mechanical. He feels that the earth is a great sphere through which he can set out on a voyage of discovery, and so, after puberty, we must teach children how to come to terms with the life of the planet upon which, henceforward, they will be called upon to act with *self-consciousness*. In the present article it is impossible to go into this subject more fundamentally, but it could be shown that all the teaching is in line with the various organic processes in operation during each period of childhood.

Let us now consider certain examples which show quite clearly the difference between teaching that is based upon the needs of the growing human being and the customary educational methods of to-day.

. The 1st Class in the Waldorf School consists of children between the ages of 6 and 7, the 2nd Class of children between the ages of 7 and 8, and so on, up to the 12th Class where the boys and girls are between the ages of 17 and 18. The children pass through these twelve Classes one after the other. Before reaching the 8th Class they must have been taught the whole history of the world I quote this merely as an example. By the time a child reaches adolescence and begins to use all his faculties, he must also have an understanding of

the development and being of man. In the 9th Class we recapitulate the history taught in the 8th Class, that is to say from the fifteenth century down to the present age. But the way in which we present it is completely different. The child must now learn to think in a different way about a subject with which he is already familiar.

Instead of teaching history purely in the form of anecdotes and biographies, we now endeavour to awaken in the child an understanding of the trend of historical events' and the connections between them. The history of *ideas* thus takes the place of a mere narration of outer events. . This will enable the child to understand, for example, what happened at the time of the Thirty Years War, when the *religious* element which had hitherto influenced action in the world disappeared and gave place to a much more external view of events. The Thirty Years War began as a religious war and ended as a political war. Richelieu's politics; although he was a Cardinal, were not religious politics, but *French* politics. And in Lecky's account of the history of painting we find traces of the same change. The Madonnas of Giotto are still filled with the element of *Piety*; but when, Titian paints a Madonna he sets out to express the element of mere *beauty*. And so by means of similar examples in the different branches of teaching, we can demonstrate outstanding trends of thought and ideas in history, and in the 9th Class we thus awaken in the child an understanding of the world of ideas. This is precisely what he needs between the age of fourteen and fifteen.

If we can bring a right and healthy influence to bear upon the child at this important turning-point in his life, we shall get over the difficulties which are so well known to educationalists'.

In the 10th Class (composed of children between their

fifteenth and sixteenth years) we repeat the whole of Oriental history, the history of India, Persia, Egypt, Babylon and Greece up to the conquests of Alexander the Great. We can describe in a kind of fairy-tale, how humanity came down step by step from a world of Gods to the point where the *personality* of a human being becomes the significant factor.

Oriental and Greek history demonstrates this slow development of personality in the human race—a stage which the child reaches at the age of fifteen or sixteen. And we shall do well also to speak of the Niebelung Legends, of the heroes who worked through the human descendants of ancient-individualities belonging to the world of the Gods.

At this age the child should be taught to know and understand the earth, not merely from the point of view of its physical geography but also that of its meteorological and climatic conditions. We should teach him about the oceans and their currents and explain the way in which plants and animals, races and nations are distributed over the face of the earth. All this will make the child realise that his bodily development is proceeding on the solid foundation of the earth. When the soul-and spirit has taken hold of the bony skeleton, the human being wants to be aware of solid earth beneath his feet and longs to participate consciously in its processes of ebb and flow, in its marvelous rhythms and in all that is living on its surface.

The teaching given in the 11th Class has a very special duty to fulfill to boys and girls between the ages of sixteen and seventeen. Up to this age the human being has been entering into possession of his organism and finding his feet, as it were, on the earth considered as a whole. But from this moment onwards he must liberate himself,

free himself from his body. If he does not succeed in doing so, he becomes the slave of his body. Under the control of the processes of nutrition, eroticism will lay hold of him under the control of his bony skeleton, will-to-power will arise in him. Such will be the inevitable result of an incomplete education, which has helped the being of man to take possession of the organism but has not made him master of his body.

The moral aim of the 11th Class may be expressed as follows: it is to lead the boy or girl to the heights of culture, to a point where the instincts and passions are freed and the inner forces spiritualised without being completely suppressed. We should now introduce the pupils to the story of Parsifal, to the wonderful world of the Trouveres and Troubadors and their songs. The figure of Parsifal in, its purity and wonder has a most noble influence upon youth. By calling up such images in the mind we can lead youth on to sublime heights, just because we have first led it down to earth.

And so, finally, we arrive at the culminating point of school life. In the 12th Class, where the pupils are between the ages of seventeen and eighteen, we must help them to understand their own nation through its best literature, in order that they may realise their own special mission and place in the world.

The teaching given at this age must be universal in its scope. Having given an idea of the Middle Ages in the 5th Class, we now try to convey to the boys and girls an idea of the world in which they will actually have to live, again by quoting the story of Parsifal. And so having been given an idea of the purpose and aim of history as a whole, they now begin to understand the development and mission of the nation to which they belong.

What has been said here in reference to the teaching of history and literature (and the two subjects are intimately connected) is merely a brief sketch and an example of the kind of teaching given in all the different branches. The development of the human being is the goal of all education. And so, although it is based on definite methods, all the teaching given at the Waldorf School has an individual note. The *way* in which we teach the child, as well as *what* we teach, is based on the needs of his inner being.

The knowledge of man's being made accessible to us by Rudolf Steiner, to the attainment of which we ceaselessly strive, is the torch which lights our path. We endeavour to discover every tendency of the child's being, to learn how to handle each different temperament and give individual teaching even in a very large class. Above all we must never forget the deep influence which education has, not only upon the inner life of the child, but also upon his *bodily* constitution. Again and again Rudolf Steiner made us realise that at every moment the teacher is bringing about reactions which perhaps only after the lapse of many years set up tendencies either to disease or health. That is why the teacher must never forget that he is also a healer, called upon not only to give loving help to every human being individually, but to bring his influence to bear upon the ills of culture and civilisation. His attitude to children cannot but be filled with an element of devotion and reverence, for he knows that in every child there lives a being who comes from eternity and must return to eternity, and that he meets this being on earth as a veritable messenger of the Divine. His duty as a teacher is to make the way to the earth easy for the human being, to dispel the obstacles presented by his bodily nature and so to smooth the path along

which the individuality must develop. The teacher himself must be illumined by knowledge of the universe for this alone can give him strength in action. But he must not instill this knowledge into the child as a favour conferred by science. In full freedom the child must find the path which leads him to his *own* individual goal. We must not give the child cut-and-dried instruction or imbue him with a dogmatic view of the world, but make it possible for him to rise *of himself* to the heights of knowledge and morality. Herein the teacher feels his freedom.

. In an age when all over the world it is impossible to come to an understanding in matters economic or political, it must become possible to find a ground of agreement in education. A way must be found which will lead men to harmony.

Rudolf Steiner's art of education is a precious gift to the world. It is not the outcome of intellect alone but of observation and understanding of the development of the human being at his present stage of evolution. It is essentially the right education for our time, because in every detail it is inspired by the Spirit of the age. What is of eternal value in ancient systems is contained in the art of education inaugurated by Rudolf Steiner, but as well as this it is able to meet the needs of modern life and help mankind to the attainment of a glorious ideal. To work in this field is to prepare the future of the human race. It is a sacred task in which the whole world is called to cooperate. Each nation has its special mission, but the mission of *all* the nations together is to create a harmony which will never arise as the outcome of Wars or Treaties, but only when men find each other' in the realm of free spiritual activity.