

The Pestalozzi villages

Autor(en): **Bovet, Pierre**

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"The period of intense occupation which we have been enjoying for the last three years will come to an end one day. Uncertainty will crop up again and with it, the struggle to maintain a normal level of activity, to keep prices and wages up to a sufficient standard. The chaotic conditions in which the modern world is plunged cannot last much longer; adversity may assume an unexpected form, it may grow more profound, spread, penetrate from one plane to another, be attenuated temporarily only to break out again. All that we can do today to inspire confidence, to help on the reconstruction of war-stricken countries and, widening the base of our own national prosperity, fortify the pillars supporting it - all that we can do to strengthen the reasons we have for hope and faith, which our people sorely need, just as do the people of all nations - this will, in the long run, enable us to keep taut our will to live in peace and the job of work."

THE PESTALOZZI VILLAGES.

The idea of creating villages specially equipped with everything a child victim of the war requires if it is to recover its mental and physical health, to find its way in life and take its first steps in the occupation for which it has shown greatest aptitude - the idea of the "Pestalozzi Village" - has met with a moving welcome in many countries. The first of these villages, built by the selfless devotion of Walter Corti at Trogen in Switzerland, has already been followed by others in Italy, Germany and other countries, and it has already been possible to form an "International Association of Pestalozzi Villages."

And yet we must realise that the name of these villages is not so widely understood as their aim. There are men and women who, more concerned with the future than the past, ask - who was Pestalozzi? Why has his name been chosen for the villages which are to give new life to the child victims of the war?

For the Swiss, the name of Pestalozzi is a symbol of all that is best in the Swiss heritage. The places where he lived are sanctuaries. In 1909, his home at the Neuhof was bought for the nation, largely by the efforts of the teachers and pupils of all the schools in Switzerland. Thus like the Grutli, the green spot by the Lake of Lucerne which saw the birth of the Confederation, the Neuhof is a national possession.

What is the reason of Switzerland's profound attachment to this man and the places he lived in? It is not very easy to explain, for in Pestalozzi's lifetime, the Neuhof was mainly the scene of his profoundest discomfitures. In 1769 he settled there on his marriage, at the age of twenty-two, to begin life as a farmer - the venture failed completely. In 1774 he began to take in small children to begin their education - another failure. In 1824, at the age of 78, he returned to the Neuhof after the breakdown of his educational venture at Yverdon, and two years later it was from the Neuhof that he set out in a sledge, one snowy day, to die at Brugg, the little neighbouring town.

For that matter, wherever Pestalozzi lived was a scene of defeat for him. At Zurich, his native city, his attachment to a trend of ideas too liberal for the oligarchic government of the mid-18th century closed every opening, civil or ecclesiastic, to him while he was still a student. Every venture he started - the Neuhof, Stans, Burgdorf, and Yverdon, broke down.

The training centre which now exists at the Neuhof is vastly superior, both from the agricultural and the educational points of view, to what it was in the time of Pestalozzi. And even during his lifetime, Wehrli at Hofwil and the Père Girard at Fribourg went much farther than he in realising the schemes he had at heart. Yet these villages bear the name of Pestalozzi - WHY?

The first thing which interests us in Pestalozzi is his devotion to the abnormal or crippled child. Rousseau, whom he admired so much, wrote in Emile: "I should never take charge of a sickly or infirm pupil, though he were to live to eighty. In wasting my labour on him, what should I be doing but doubling society's loss and depriving it of two men instead of one?" And it must be admitted that when a son was born to Pestalozzi, he brought him up without any great show of common sense, and certainly without any respect for Rousseau's theories. But he was passionately interested in the boy, and noted his observations. We can infer from them that Jaqueli was not quite normal. At the age of eleven he could neither read nor write, he was a failure both as a student and as an apprentice to a trade. His case was diagnosed as one of slight epilepsy. But all that merely intensified his father's love for him. When Pestalozzi opened the doors of the Neuhof to the children of the poor, no abnormality, intellectual, moral or social, could stop him. The majority of the children he took in would today be classed as difficult or backward. An attentive study of the notes on the 37 pupils he had in his house in 1778 shows that the mentally deficient were at least as numerous as those who seemed normal.

"To save from destitution the children of the lowest class of humanity" - such was his programme. He alone followed it and abode by it throughout all the vicissitudes of the Neuhof. Yet it must be admitted that while the inspiration was admirable, the results were not reassuring. There is nothing in Pestalozzi's methods which could be compared with those of obscurer men who have, in later days, inspired such women of genius as Mme. Montessori and Mlle. Descoeurdes.

We have to admit it - Pestalozzi's fame is not based on his methods with abnormal children, nor on his success in handling them.

"We are told that it rests on his pedagogic ideas."

Pestalozzi was not outstanding in the practical application of his ideas - all the evidence points the other way. But he put forward two fundamental ideas for the education of the people.

The first which he set forth in his novel "Lienhard and Gertrud" (1781)^{.x.} was that of the working school. It consisted in the combination of the teaching of reading, writing and arithmetic with manual labour - spinning and weaving - which would mean a livelihood to the learner.

The second idea which he expounded in "How Gertrud Teaches her Children" (1800), after his first attempts at Burgdorf, is that of "training in first principles." If, he explains, in teaching children, the teacher sets out from the very first principles of the subject he has in hand, and if progress is carried on in methodical stages from those principles, it should be possible to create school books of such a kind that the most ignorant of schoolmasters or the most untaught of mothers will be able to use them as successfully as highly trained teachers.

Both ideas would repay study. Yet the fate which awaited them in "the century of the child" was not such as to make us regard them as Pestalozzi's chief title to fame.

The first of these ideas which, at the beginning of the 19th century, went by the name of the "industrial school," achieved no lasting success in spite of some excellent work done in Switzerland. It is interesting to note that it was, in a way, rediscovered by Gandhi in economic circumstances in India which bore a certain resemblance to those in Switzerland at the end of the 18th century. Further, we must admit that the elementary school of the 19th century did not take Pestalozzi as its model. As to his actual "method" we may say that it was only too successful. We cannot deny the justice of the remark once made to him by a visitor - "Monsieur Pestalozzi, you are trying to mechanise education." For a generation like ours, which,

.x. Translation published in the Everyman Edition, J. M. Dent, London.

thanks to Claparède, has begun to understand Rousseau and a form of education governed by the needs and interests of the pupil, the method by which Gertrude taught her children in 1801 seems far less progressive than that put forward by Rousseau for *Emile* in 1762, and it is from the latter, far more than the former, that our own methods descend. Nor would the finely conceived Dalton and Winnetka systems devised by Miss Parkhurst and Carleton Washburne seem to owe much to Pestalozzi. They rather take us back to the forgotten achievements of Lancaster, and, in Switzerland of Père Girard.

No - the greatness of Pestalozzi resides neither in abstract ideas nor in the application of concrete methods. It has a much deeper root. It springs from a conviction on which both his main theories are based. The ideal of the workshop school and of teaching "from first principles" have one notion in common - the part which the mother is called upon to play, not only in the upbringing of her children, but in their education in the narrower sense of the word. He does not contemplate turning the schoolroom into a workshop, as we would be tempted to do today; on the contrary, the family living room, the room in which the mother watches over the spinning and weaving which are done at home, must also become the room where she teaches her children reading, writing and arithmetic. On the other hand, if Pestalozzi pursues with fervour his enquiry into the primary elements of knowledge, it is because he wishes to put the mother into a position to teach them to her children herself.

The whole of education, as Pestalozzi conceives it, is founded on the maternal instinct, on the feeling from child to parent and parent to child, that primordial human relationship which he regards as the most immediate of all.

No man before Pestalozzi had conceived to this depth, the meaning of the love a mother bears to her child, and the child to its mother. Read Chapter XLIII of *Gertrud* - there is in it a picture of a child asleep in its mother's lap which explains the whole of Pestalozzi.

The sight which met his eyes daily at the Neuhof in the years following the birth of his son in 1770, became the inspiration of his whole life's work, beginning with his very first attempt to make a home for outcast children in 1774. He brought the figure of the child into literature for the first time. Twenty years later, when his orphan grandchild came to live with him, the same vision came to him again, and he drew from it an interpretation of childhood, a conception of the springs of morality and religion and of the growth of filial feeling, and his proclamation of the essential part of education - the education of the human race in love.

Love - the end and the means.

"O God, my Creator, preserve in me the only strength Thou hast given me - preserve in me my love," he prayed at Yverdon on New Year's Day, 1809.

It is important in this connection to remember that Pestalozzi saw these miracles of love with the eyes of faith rather than in the light of personal memory. Neither he nor his little Jacques, it would seem, owed the best in their education to their mothers. In both families, it was an old servant who embodied maternal devotion. It was of the old servant who brought him up that Pestalozzi wrote - "I should turn in my grave, I should know no happiness even in Heaven, if I could not be sure that she would be more greatly honoured than I." In every woman there beats the heart of a mother. That is an experience which awaits the children in the Pestalozzi villages.

Now at last we are in a position to answer our question. It is here that we can see Pestalozzi's greatness, and realise why his name stands for so much. It was his vision of the loving child growing by all the love that is given it which drew all who could feel its beauty round Pestalozzi at Burgdorf and Yverdon.

We too, like them, have seen wars and revolutions. We may, perhaps, be readier than they to realise the urgency and splendour of his vision, of his definition of education - the education of the human race in love. May the

Pestalozzi villages, throughout the world, be villages after Pestalozzi's own heart.

Pierre Bovet,

March 1948.

Honorary Professor, University of Geneva.

SUNDRY NEWS.

IMPORTANT SPEECH BY FEDERAL COUNCILLOR VON STEIGER.

On the occasion of an assembly that took place in Berne in celebration of the jubilee of the Constitution, Federal Councillor von Steiger, head of the Federal Department of Justice and Police, delivered an important address the significance of which was undoubtedly prompted by the events that recently took place in many countries of Eastern Europe. He referred to the important part played by the Canton of Berne during the foundation of the modern Confederation in 1848, and said that the Federal Constitution of the new Confederation is a masterpiece, the principal features of which are still in force today. He then continued - "Only in liberty can a people be educated to freedom. Liberty is a precious gift that should not be squandered. We shall defend it to the last, but we do not permit it to be used against freedom itself and against the security, honour and independence of our country. It is precisely on account of our having been educated in freedom that we are in a position to judge where in a true and orderly democracy the limits between right and misuse lie. Personal freedom must never mean the furtherance of one's own selfish interests, whilst other groups of the community are threatened in their economic existence or even when they are in need. In a democracy, blind obedience is replaced by a sense of responsibility. For those who are working against the liberty of our country, the freedom of opinion and expression only serves to further interests other than the true interests of their country. It usually begins with pilgrimages, manifestations of sympathy, telegrams and proclamations in favour of strange ideologies and how does it end in many countries? The right of free expression of opinion does not constitute a right for propaganda in favour of foreign ideologies and foreign states. It ends there where the activity is directed against one's own country; therefore, for the protection of the constitutional order, such propaganda as tends in an unlawful manner to bring about a change in the constitutional order of the Confederation and the Cantons, must be prohibited. Our way of life, our economic and social conditions, must be such that no one will find it attractive to follow the false prophets on their misguided path. Even though Switzerland co-operates wherever co-operation is required in the service of humanity and a reasonable economy, her policy of neutrality and independence must never be put in jeopardy. The necessity to be united in war and peace determines also the scope of the Cantonal sovereignty. Without independence of the Confederation there cannot be independent Cantons; without a free Switzerland there cannot be any freedom for the individual.

MILITARY AEROPLANES CRASH.

The military aeroplane that was engaged in observing the exercises of a regiment for the protection of the frontier, crashed near Obereggen. The observer, Lt. Emanuel Bruehlmann, born 1923, of St. Gallen, and the pilot, Cpl. Hans Giger, born 1926, of Zürich, were killed. A few days later our Air Force once more suffered a heavy loss through an emergency landing exercise near the aerodrome of Locarno, Maj. Pista Hitz, born 1910, instructing officer of the Air Force, and his pupil, Cpl. Willy Kiene, born 1926, of Vernier (Geneva) were killed. The cause of this tragic accident has not yet been determined. Maj. Hitz who had been in the service of the Air Force from 1937 was one of our best pilots; he played a prominent part in the rescue of the Americans who crashed on the Gauli Glacier last year.