

The Heritage of Pestalozzi

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THE HERITAGE OF PESTALOZZI

by

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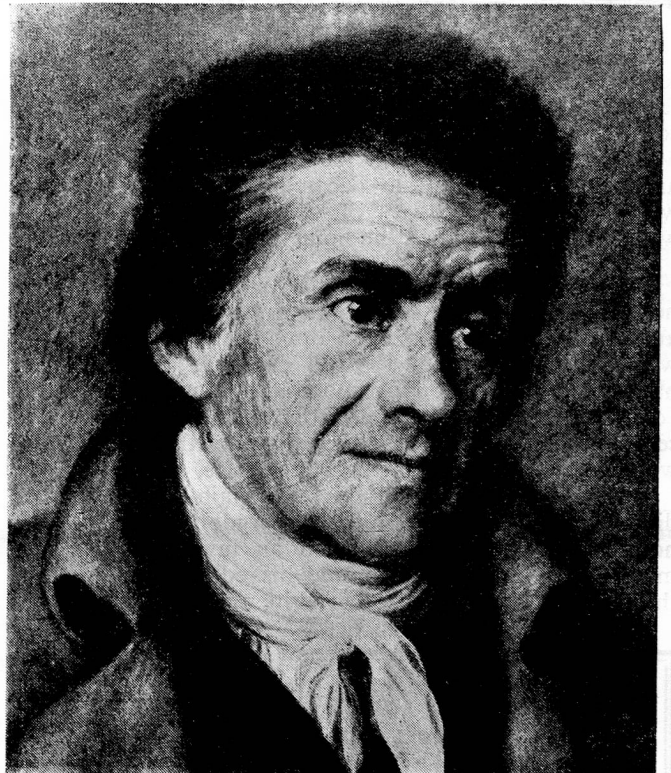
Pestalozzi was born on 12th January 1746 in Zurich. The exact place of his birth is not known, but he was probably born either in the house of the Schwarzen Horn in Zurich Ruden, or in one of the houses of Obern Hirschengraben. Upon the death of his father, the family moved to that part of the city on the other side of the Limmat, in the Werdmühle quarter.

Later they moved to the house of the Roten Gatter, Münstergasse 23, which is the first place historians are sure Pestalozzi lived. Here young Heinrich passed the greater part of his youth. At the College Carolinum he was significantly influenced by Bodmer and Breitingen, he also became interested in political meetings. Rousseau's "Emile" influenced him a great deal, and he finally decided to make teaching his profession. He wrote of his ambition, and for the time lived with his uncle in Richterswil. Many of his letters to Zurich, went to Anna Schulthess, a merchant's daughter with whom he had fallen in love. About this time, when he was twenty-two years old, Pestalozzi worked with Lavater, who soon became the young man's trusted counsellor.

Fond memories of boyhood bound Pestalozzi to Höngg, where his grandfather was minister. The place behind the churchyard was the playground of the poor children, and when, as a boy, he visited his grandfather, Heinrich used to join them in their play. It happened that the city councillors had ordered a "beggar-chase" by the mounted police each month—apparently their method of trying to rid the country of poverty.

Once, after having already been previously chased away, Pestalozzi bolted the churchyard gate in an effort to keep the police from entering. When his grandfather heard of it, instead of giving the boy the expected thrashing, he took the weeping lad in his arms and said, "There, there, you brave boy. I too wish the rich gentlemen from Zurich could find other means to deal with the poor than with police and beggars-chases". When he grew to be a young man, Pestalozzi began to dream of his life ambition: the emancipating of the illiterate from their shackles of ignorance, the care of the homeless, and the rearing in homelike atmosphere of orphan children. But at this time he himself was so destitute that he abandoned, for the moment, his ambition to teach

and do social work. In the autumn of 1768 he obtained a piece of land in Birr, Aargau, and began to earn his living as a farmer. The following year he married Anna Schulthess and they began life together on the rocky, boggy, large rambling farm in Birr. Scraggly firs and elders clumped together in scattered groups, and close by raced the grey waters of the Reuss, swirling down from the looming mountains.



Already in these first days Pestalozzi came to know the bitterness of disappointment. After trying to enlist the aid of neighbouring farmers in his social projects, he had to postpone his ambitions for a second time.

He was a failure as a farmer, and was going deeper and deeper into debt. Finally Anna lost patience, and told him that her brothers would take over the farm, as well as the most pressing debts. She would then set him up in business, and he would be the head of this new venture. But there burned within him the flame. "I have a large house, and the poor have none" he said to Anna. "My hands fail me in my present work and to you labour is irksome. If we have poor ones with us, then we will be really rich. They can spin for their livelihood, and I will teach them. That will be real work. After all, I am not in your employ." Carrying out this noble idea, he took poor children into his home, and at one time had as many as fifty staying with him. He wrote of the conditions these poor young ones had been forced to live in, and took great pleasure in teaching them. But in 1870, five years after he had started this plan, he was forced by the authorities to send the children back to regular institutions.

Then came a period of literary activity. He wrote "Abenastunde eines Einsiedlers", and "Lienhard und Gertrud", a novel of country folk. During this time, too, he visited the surrounding business houses, and listened much to the talk of farmers, learning always more of their philosophies, their mode of living.

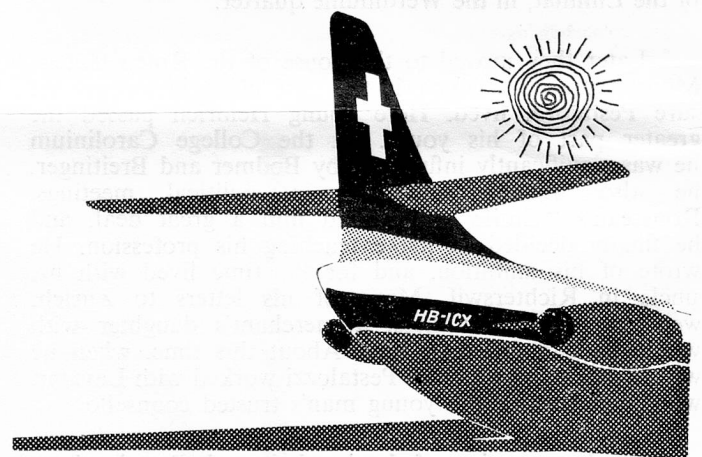
Somewhat later Pestalozzi came again in contact with the business world. A foreigner named Notz needed a townsman as proprietor of his shop, or at least someone in whose name he could run the business. Pestalozzi, for a small consideration, allowed the man to use his name, and then went to the "Platte" in Zurich, where he started a shelter for the poor of the city. Then, in the middle period of his life, came the French invasion. Poverty increased, and half-starved, homeless children roamed forlorn as lost puppies. At Stans, Pestalozzi became a father and a teacher to these young unfortunates. He did so much in educating and taking care of them that Michelet said, "He wants his school not only to teach and shelter them, but to become a mother of them as well". But the necessity of wartime halted this work when the French turned the home into a military hospital.

Scarcely had fate turned once more against him when new coloured threads were spun in his life pattern. Swiss authorities gave Pestalozzi an opportunity to continue his work in the rooms of the old castle in Burgdorf. His name was now becoming more and more famous, and educators and students came from all over the country to see him, and to learn the "Pestalozzi method". Later he worked for a time in Münchenbuchsee, where he also founded a school. But in this flat, plain-like country so different from the green hills of Burgdorf, Pestalozzi did not feel at home. He accepted an invitation from the mayor of Yverdon to continue his educational work in this small town, and started to write again on his theories.

These were the happiest years of Pestalozzi's life. He was doing, unhampered, that which he had always wanted to do, and for the first time he was able to work without being troubled by material worries. Once again he revived his old dream of helping the poor by founding a home in Clindy for indigent children, and in the following year, 1819, this was combined with a home in Yverdon. An old man now, his life ambitions were at least being realized. In 1826 he wrote some papers on his work in Burgdorf and Yverdon, and in his eightieth year, returned to Neuhof, where he spent his last days in contentment. He died on 17th February 1827.

Pestalozzi lives on. Essentially an idealist and a dreamer, he was a dreamer who had turned dreams into realities. Time has erased much of the material evidence of his work, but the personality of this man who had such boundless compassion for humanity cannot die. His name will inspire through the ages.

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