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OUR KINDERGARTENS.

FOR THE LITTLE FOLKS. *Specially Written for the Otago Witness Christmas Number of 1895 by L. J. KELSEY.*

AR, far away in the little village of Ober-Weissbach, Thuringia, Germany, stands a large white stone building. There, one bright spring morning of 1782, when Nature was young and glad, a little baby boy was born. His parents named him Friedrich Froebel, but the children in our kindergartens love now to call him

DEAR FATHER FROEBEL.

Poor Friedrich had no happy childhood. His mother died before he was a year old, and his father, who was a very busy minister, had no time to look after his little son. The servant in whose care the poor little fellow was generally left, used to shut him up all by himself in a large room, where she thought he could do no mischief and come to no harm. Poor child! it was a lonely life. He had no toys to play with, and no mother to tell him stories. His one amusement was watching some workmen build a church near by. Then he would collect the little bits of furniture in the room and try and build a church, too. But the stools and the chairs and the tables were not like the nice blocks children build with now, and they tumbled down, and it was all very sad indeed. He saw the green hills, but he could not get at them; he heard the birds sing, but he could not count the eggs in their nests. When he went into the garden it was to wander about alone in a small confined plot, barred off from the hills and dales and trees of his native town. No one had any time for little

Friedrich.

When he was four years old, his father married again, and for a time home was happier. But by-and-bye this new mother had a little son of her own, and she neglected little Friedrich. Even more than he had been neglected before. He tried to do right, but he hardly knew how, and no one seemed to understand that his little heart was suffering for lack of loving tenderness and training. I am glad to tell you that when he was old enough he was allowed to go to school. It was a girls' school, but his teacher was kind and patient, and he spoke very lovingly in after years of the gentle lessons she gave him.

No life is all sadness, and when Friedrich was ten years old, an uncle visiting the family saw his unhappiness, and took him to his own home. Then followed five delightful years for our hero. He went to a school with forty boys of his own age. He learnt to fly kites, play cricket and marbles, and all the games in which German boys of 100 years ago delighted. He was happy everywhere now—at home, at school, at church, and, most of all, in the big world of Nature around him. But these five happy years pass all too quickly, and now Friedrich must decide what he will do to earn a living. He chooses an out-door life. He will learn farming and study forestry, and perhaps by-and-bye be a surveyor. So he was apprenticed for three years to a *förster*, or manager of forest land. I am sorry to say this *förster* was not honest, and he did not learn much from him. But his busy eyes, heart, and brain could not be idle, and with these he gained much knowledge of rocks and trees and flowers and soils.

I cannot tell you of all the ways in which Friedrich trained himself to work in God's world. At last, when the time came for him to settle, he found there was no work he liked doing so much as teaching. Then, he would say, he felt like a bird in the air or a fish in the sea. He was in his own element. But he did not teach like everybody else. He thought of his own lonely childhood, and remembered his longing for stories and for an outdoor life. He planned so many new and beautiful ways of teaching that he soon became a missionary, carrying his thoughts and plans to many German and Danish towns. And how do you think he succeeded his

and Russian towns. And now do you think he preached his sermons? He would ask some great man in a town if he might play with his children for a quarter of an hour or so while others looked on. You may be sure that neither children nor onlookers wanted Froebel to stop when the quarter of an hour was over, and so one game after another was played. Then schools to teach as Froebel taught were started in many different towns, the site being generally chosen for its natural beauty. It was not till Froebel was middle aged that he thought of teaching little children between the ages of three and six. History tells us how he racked his busy brain to find a real good name for these infant schools, where everyone was so happy and where all learned so much. But one day he was crossing a hill, with an old friend, talking about their work. Suddenly as they came in sight of a lovely valley, Froebel stopped and shouted to the mountain so that it echoed to the four winds,

“Eureka! Kindergarten shall my new child be called.”

Yes, these schools were to be Kindergartens, or Childrens' Gardens, where children were to grow as naturally as flowers. Old men and women are still living who can tell you about this first Kindergarten. They can still sing the songs they sang with Froebel, and describe the games they played. Especially do they remember those happy times, when Froebel, old and gray, but as happy as a little child, would lead them into the woods to rejoice with the sunshine, the birds, the trees, the winds, and all God's creatures. Froebel is dead now. He died in 1852. He has two very beautiful monuments. One is made of white marble, and is placed over his grave. It is a representation of the Kindergarten gift he liked to use most—viz., a cube, a cylinder, and a sphere. I cannot tell you how many lessons he taught with those three things. Part of the other monument may be seen in

THE TWO FREE KINDERGARTEN SCHOOLS IN DUNEDIN,

and it is about this monument I must tell you now.

First of all you must look well at the two pictures and tell me if you see anyone unhappy or lonely-looking there. I am sure you cannot. Yet some of these children have very

sad homes, sadder even than Froebel's. Their mothers often find it very hard to give them as much food as they need, or to clothe them warmly during the cold weather. Then we gladly help them. But look at the pictures again. You will see that many of the children have some of their work in their hands. They thought you would like to see that too. Then there is the doll, or "Baby" as we call her, and the little boy who loves to be called her father, standing on tip-toe. I am sorry to say that the day the picture was taken about a dozen of the children were away from the Walker Street Kindergarten, so the school looks very small indeed. I wish I could tell you about all the children, but I am afraid that would take too long. First, there is Jackie, a little deaf and dumb boy, who is sometimes rather troublesome, because he does not understand all that is going on around him. But he is always welcome, and his life is made happy as he learns to weave and to sew, to march and to draw. I took him a picture book the other day from a little child-friend, and, Oh! how I wish you could have seen his delight as he turned the pages, uttering an inarticulate "Bm, bm, bm." Here, too, is Katie, always ready with some resource in time of need. On being told she could not see herself without a looking-glass, she said, "Yes, she could, in a tray." "But if you had no tray?" "I would look in a plate." "But suppose you had no plate?" "Well, I would look in your eyes." She will often find a use for something another has thrown away, and she learnt to do this at the Kindergarten.

Rosie is a little Syrian girl, who has a very special love for our "Baby." Even when it is not her turn to nurse it, she loves to look at it and see that it is in good care. You will see her in the right-hand corner of the Walker Street picture. I do not know anyone who loves to come to the Kindergarten so much as Rosie. Many little waifs and strays come into the Kindergarten—by waifs and strays I mean cats, dogs, and Mr. Wind. Instead of being told to go about their business they are welcomed with songs, such as "I love little pussy," or "Which way does the wind blow?" The other day a dear little baby boy, who could just toddle, came in hand in hand with another child. He was too little to tell us his name. As we know he must have wandered away from some happy home

we knew he must have wandered away from some happy home where his mother would miss him, we told the policeman. But it was nearly three hours before his bewildered nurse rushed in to find the lost darling. He had been so happy, and had felt so perfectly at home, that I think when he grows a very little older he will want to go to a Kindergarten every day.

On fine days our children very often leave the halls and spend their mornings in the sunshine among the flowers and grasses outside. As they march along, they carry in their hands little red flags, with the word "Kindergarten" worked on. "Baby" is taken too. If they cross the little Dunedin river called the Water of Leith, they stop and sing about the brook. The wayfarers wonder who this happy band of pilgrims can be. On a wet day of course they must stay inside, but there they can make clay gardens with little lakes of real water and paper boats sailing across. The "Gifts," with which our children learn so much, are mostly wooden bricks and tablets shaped in different ways. I am quite sure you will agree with me that this is a very nice way of learning, and everybody is finding out now that for very little children it is a much *better* way than ordinary schoolrooms and lesson books. If these children were not in our Kindertgartens they would have long days with no one to look after them, and perhaps learn bad things that would make them afterwards bad men and women. So you have been helping us to do a good and lasting work, a work that not only makes our children happy, but must make you very, very happy too.

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