

**SKETCHES OF
FROEBEL'S
LIFE AND TIMES**

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Sketches of Froebel's life and times by P. P. Claxton

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P. P. CLAXTON

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FROEBEL'S
LIFE AND TIMES**

Sketches of Froebel's Life and Times

WITH INTRODUCTION
BY THE

HON. P. P. CLAXTON
United States Commissioner of Education



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CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION, <i>P. P. Claxton</i>	vii
EDUCATION: FROEBEL, <i>John Jay Chapman</i> From "Causes and Consequences."	1
IN KEILHAU, <i>Georg Ebers</i>	28
From "The Story of my Life."	
INFANT GARDENS, <i>James L. Hughes</i>	124
From "Dickens as an Educator."	
GIRLHOOD DAYS AT KEILHAU, <i>Henrietta Schrader</i> , Berlin	147
Translated by Bertha Hofer Hegner Edited by Amalie Hofer Jerome, and reprinted from Kindergarten Magazine by her permission.	
BIBLIOGRAPHY,	195

INTRODUCTION

SEEK ye first the Kingdom of God." —On his first Monday morning in school, the boy Friedrich Froebel heard the children, all standing, repeat these words. They were the words of the text of the sermon to which the children had listened on Sunday. Every morning of the week they were repeated over and over again, by individual children and by the whole group, until they made an impression upon him, "as none had ever done before and none had ever done after." Writing of this event forty years later, he says, "Perhaps even then, the simple boy heard and felt that these words would be the foundation and the salvation of his life, bringing to him that conviction which was to become later on to the working, striving man, a source of incomparable courage, of unflinching, ever-ready, and cheerful self-sacrifice. In short, my introduction into that school was my birth into the higher, spiritual life." He who would understand Froebel's life and philosophy of education must bear this statement in mind,

and remember that for Froebel, the Kingdom of God meant the realization of the divine spirit in the individual man and woman, and of the divine order in human society.

No other educator has realized so fully the unity of nature, man, and God. No other has seen more clearly the vision of redeemed humanity, living in harmony with nature, governed by love, and rejoicing in ever-progressing creative work. No other has ever understood better that the Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of love, of light, of life, of truth, and of intelligent, skillful, effective service. For him, all roads lead to God. For him, God is the all-pervading, creative spirit of the Universe. The soul of man is a part of the divine essence. The education of man consists in the unfolding and revelation of this divine essence, through well-guided, spontaneous, creative activity. God is a creator, and man, made in his image, is a creator also. Education does not consist alone or chiefly in instruction or training, but rather—development and growth. The teacher is therefore a gardener, watching patiently and intelligently for the budding points of the soul, the nascent stages of interest, supplying suitable environment—food, light, and air—and protecting the child against those who, in their ignorance and ruthless zeal, would hamper and restrain, dwarf and warp, or unduly stimulate

the child by untimely prescription. The school is a garden in which children live and grow through healthy, happy, vigorous, active childhood, to strong purposeful manhood. Man, the child, is an active animal, a struggler alive and happy only in activity.

With a full understanding of the importance of spontaneous activity and the dangers of narrow prescription, Froebel avoided the dangers and absurdities of leaving the child, without guidance, to the unlicensed freedom of the savage. "The development of the child's inner being must be on the one hand spontaneous, and, on the other, in accord with the universal trend of life." To know, interpret, and apply the trend of life in guiding the spontaneous activities of the child, is a task worthy the understanding and skill of the wisest and best. "Would there might be for the human being, for my child, even from its first advent into the world, a correct comprehension of its being, a suitable fostering and management, an education truly leading to the all-sided attainment of its destiny." That there might be such loving fostering, such intelligent leading, he plead "that we live with our children, live for them, and give our lives to them."

And this is not mere sentiment, it is the highest statesmanship and the truest principle of economics, Charles Dickens, the advocate

of the kindergarten in England, was right when he declared, "there would be fewer sullen, quarrelsome, dull-witted men and women, if there were fewer children starved and fed improperly in heart and brain. Society can be improved only by making men and women better by wholesome education in childhood and infancy." When this principle is fully recognized in our democracy there will be a new perspective in legislation and a new adjustment of the agencies of government.

✓ It has been said that Froebel discovered infancy as the most important part of the life of the individual and its proper treatment as the most important problem in education. Truly a great discovery, and probably his most important contribution to education and his surest guarantee of immortality. Out of this discovery came the kindergarten which in some form must continue as an integral part of the world's system of education. Much of the program of the kindergarten grows out of the fact that the child cannot be developed alone, in contact only with nature, or even in contact with older people. The child is a social being and must have the society of other children. This social contact is most useful in play and co-operative work—a principle too often forgotten even by scientific students of the child and its education. "We are not wholesome