

**A STUDY OF CHILD-
NATURE:
FROM THE KINDERGARTEN
STANDPOINT**

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A Study of Child-Nature: from the Kindergarten Standpoint by Elizabeth Harrison

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ELIZABETH HARRISON

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PREFACE.

These Talks for Mothers and Teachers were given before my classes in Chicago and elsewhere. They are now published at the earnest request of the members of those classes, and are in nearly the same form as when given, which accounts for the number of anecdotes illustrating different points, as well as for the frequency of personal reminiscence. Fully aware of their many defects, but knowing well that "Charity covereth a multitude of sins," I give them with a loving heart to the mothers of America. I hope that the thought underlying them may be as helpful to others in the understanding of little children as it has been to me. I trust that these pages may lead each reader to a deeper study of Froebel's thought.

E. H.

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INTRODUCTION.

In the educational world is growing the realization, in a practical way, that "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world." The importance of the first years of the child's life is beginning to be acknowledged; his physical welfare has become a recognized study, for it is seen that the health and strength of maturity depends upon this early growth. Until the time of Froebel, the founder of the Kindergarten system, scarcely any thought was given to the right or wrong training of the infant's natural instincts; few people dreamed that this had aught to do with the development of character in succeeding years.

The child's manifestations of these inborn instincts have been laughed at, played with, and even related as interesting anecdotes by the fond mother,—the thought that they are worthy of serious study seldom entering the mind of the average parent. It is this study to which Froebel invites the mother. He calls it "The Science of Motherhood."

Investigation of apparently insignificant instincts shows them to be the germs of world-wide and ever-enduring truths. Hence the importance of the Kindergarten study. The mother is aided by it in the care and understanding of her young child when the bond between them is so strong that instinct is apt to give the right impulse; she is also greatly assisted in the comprehension of her child's more mature years, after the growth of his individuality has somewhat separated them. "The child is father to the man" in character as well as in physical development. We readily acknowledge this when we admit that superstitions cling to the wisest minds,—such as a distaste for beginning a piece of work on Friday; an uneasy sensation when the salt-cellar is upset; a dislike to see the new moon over the right shoulder, and other irrational prejudices. When we remember that all one's after-life cannot entirely obliterate them, do we not realize how lasting are early impressions?

Froebel has said: "The destiny of the nations lies far more in the hands of women—the mothers—than in the hands of those who possess power, or those who are innovators, who seldom understand themselves. *We must cultivate women*, who are the educators of the

human race, else a new generation cannot accomplish its task."

One of the greatest lines of the world's work lies here before us: the understanding of little children, in order that they may be properly trained. Correctly understood, it demands of women her highest endeavor, the broadest culture, the most complete command of herself, and the understanding of her resources and environments. It demands of her that she become a physician, an artist, a teacher, a poet, a philosopher, a priest. In return, it gives her an insight into science, into history, into art, into literature, into human nature, such as no other culture can command, because each of these realms has to be entered that its wealth may be conquered as an aid in rightly understanding the little child entrusted to her care, not for the added glory it will bring to her.

The following facts place this study of child-culture upon the broad basis of a science.

FIRST: THE CHILD BEARS WITHIN HIMSELF INSTINCTS WHICH CAN BE TRAINED UPWARD OR DOWNWARD.

SECOND: THESE INSTINCTS GIVE EARLY MANIFESTATION OF THEIR EXISTENCE.

THIRD: THE MOTHER'S LOVING GUIDANCE CAN BE CHANGED FROM UNCERTAIN INSTINCT INTO UNHESITATING INSIGHT.

Let me illustrate this change of instinct into insight. A young mother, who had been studying Froebel for some months, placed her four-year-old boy in my Kindergarten. I soon saw that he was suffering from self-consciousness. In a conversation with the mother, I told her that I had discovered in her child a serious obstacle to mental growth, viz., self-consciousness. "What is the cause of it?" said she. "If the child had not such a sensible mother," I replied, "I should say that he had been 'shown off' to visitors until the habit of thinking that every one is looking at him has become fixed in his mind." Instantly the blood mounted to her face and she said: "That is what has been done. You know that he sings very well; last winter my young sister frequently had him stand on a chair beside the piano and sing for guests. I *felt* at the time that it was not right, but if I had known then what I now do, I would have died rather than have allowed it."

Instinct is often overruled by others; *insight* makes the mother stand invincible for her child's right to be properly brought up.

CHAPTER I.

THE BODY.

THE INSTINCT OF ACTIVITY, OR THE TRAINING OF THE MUSCLES.

All little children are active; constant activity is nature's way of securing physical development. A seemingly superfluous amount of nervous force is generated in each growing child. The organs of respiration, circulation and digestion use their needful share. The rest of this nervous power is expended by the infant, in tossing his limbs about, in creeping and crawling; by the growing boy, in climbing and running; by the young girl—who must not climb or run, as such conduct is not ladylike—in twisting, squirming and giggling; thus gaining for her muscles, in spite of prohibition, some of the needed exercise. Making a restless child “keep still” is a repression of this nervous energy, which irritates the whole nervous system, causing ill-temper, moroseness and general uncomfortableness. If this force