

Pestalozzi : pioneer of modern education

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Pestalozzi . Pioneer of Modern Education

By Dr. A. Burgauer

GIVER TO THE POOR AT NEUHOF
VOICE OF THE PEOPLE IN
" LIENHARD UND GERTRUD " ;
AT STANS, FATHER TO ORPHANS ;
AT BURGDORF UND MUNCHENBUCHSEE
FOUNDER OF SCHOOLS ;
IN YVERDON, TEACHER OF HUMANITY.
ALL FOR OTHERS ! NOTHING FOR SELF !
HIS NAME BE BLESSED !

SO READS the epitaph at the Birr schoolhouse of Johann, Heinrich Pestalozzi, famous Swiss educator of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. This at least is one epitaph that does not overstate in its praise. Pestalozzi lives on in the memories of his countrymen, and the cities connected with his work still have evidences mutely testifying to the greatness of this man whose only concern was the welfare and happiness of others.

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 Oberrn Hirschengraben. Upon the death of his father, the family moved to that part of the city on the other side of the Limmat, probably in the Werdmuhle quarter.

Later they moved to the house of the Roten Gatter, Munstergasse 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 Breitinger, 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 Hongg, 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 beggar-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 head of this new venture. But there burned within him that 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 1780, 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 "Abendstunde 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 his 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 Munchenbuchsee, 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 last being realised. In 1826 he wrote some papers on his work in Burgdorf and Yverdon, and in his eightieth year, return 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.

NEWS OF THE COLONY

A TRAGEDY ON CHRISTMAS DAY

Tragedy has struck the families of two Swiss descendant brothers, sons of Friedrich Schlup, who, in the earlier years of the century, had settled his family on a farm near Waiuku.

The four children of the two brothers' families set out together for a trip to Auckland and, unfortunately, met with a dreadful head-on collision on the Papakura-Waiuku highway. The accident took the lives of all four children. They were:

Andrew Marshall Schlup, 14-year-old son of Mr and Mrs Fred Schlup, farmer, Glenbrook, Waiuku, and their 18-year-old daughter

Beverley May Schlup, a very promising student of science and music.

Colin Leo Schlup, 19-year-old motor mechanic, son of Mr and Mrs Leo Schlup, university lecturer, 25 Rarangi Road, St. Heliers, and their 11-year-old son

Murray Ivan Schlup.

A few members of the Schlup families had joined our Swiss Christmas Party in Auckland, and we shook hands to wish a Happy Christmas in each other's homes. Who would have expected that our wishes would not become true! It is difficult to express in words our deeply felt sympathy for the Schlup families. Human mind is too weak to understand the sudden passing away of the promising youth of two families. God alone can understand. May He help the lonely parents. —F. Kaegi

TWO SWISS ON A TRIP HOME

Mrs M. Kung, 34 Bentley Ave., New Lynn, and Dr. L. Bossard, 24 Edmond Street, St. Heliers, left just after New Year on the M.S. Castel Felice for Switzerland.

Mrs Kung is longing to see again her relatives and friends she has not seen since her immigration with her family about 10 years ago. We wish her the very best in old Switzerland.

Dr. Bossard, our former president of the Society and honorary member, travels his own original way. He has arranged to travel by land over India, Afghanistan, Persia, Turkey, Balkan to Switzerland. No doubt, this is an outstanding effort for a man of his age, and it's a risk as well. We wish him as much success and pleasure as he has courage.

SWISS CHRISTMAS IN AUCKLAND

Many said that it was the finest party of the year when we gathered in Auckland around our Christmas tree. There was no electric light for a long time. No conducting of carols was necessary—they started in one corner and took hold on all . . . just like that! Father Christmas was generous, and our ladies baked a great variety of Swiss Christmas cakes. Mrs G. Fluckiger made a great Zuepfe for each table, and several Schnegge for each child. Swiss songs and tunes by the never failing Alf and Charly (accordionists) brought the evening to a very happy end.