

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK
Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom
Band: - (1957)
Heft: 1304

Artikel: Pestalozzi (1746-1827)
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-691960>

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PESTALOZZI (1746-1827).

The wave of enlightenment which swept over Europe in the 18th century did not leave Switzerland untouched. In science, literature and art this small country contributed a by no means negligible share to the new spirit and produced men who were to become world-famous. Not the least of these was Pestalozzi who throughout his long life laboured for the reform of elementary education. His writings and his practical experiments laid the foundations and led to the introduction of modern methods, which are still practised, in the art of teaching.

The Pestalozzis were of Italian extraction, their family history can be traced back to the 13th century. In mid-16th century Antonio Pestalozza (as the name was then spelt) who married the daughter of Dr. Muralt, the leader of the Ticinese protestants, left Italy and settled in Zürich, the traditional asylum of so many persecuted protestants. From him stemmed the Swiss lineage of the Pestalozzis.

Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi was born in Zürich on 12th January 1746, one of seven children of whom three only survived childhood. His father was a surgeon with a small practice which was so little remunerative that he found it necessary to increase his income by doing clerical work for the Town Council. He died when Heinrich was barely 6 years old and left his widow with three small children in anything but prosperous circumstances.

At the age of eight Heinrich was sent to the grammar school at the Fraumünster. He was an intelligent pupil but given to long bouts of dreaming and absentmindedness. Good-natured, somewhat uncouth and of unattractive appearance, he was often the butt of the boys' ridicule. He was a problem child and a source of anxiety to his mother who cherished visions of his becoming a clergyman. But this was not to be.

When he was fifteen Heinrich was transferred to the Collegium Humanitatis at the Grossmünster and two years later, in 1763, admitted to the Collegium Carolinum where he came under the influence of Bodmer and other celebrated teachers to be trained in philology and philosophy. Here it was that young Pestalozzi at the most receptive and formative period of his life, became acquainted and made friends with many of the most talented students of the time, among them Lavater and Fuseli the painter who later became the rage of London art circles. He also joined a group of young intellectuals who, in weekly informal meetings discussed, smoking their pipes, art, literature, history and social problems. He became a devoted disciple of Rousseau whose "Contrat Social" and "Emile" made a deep and lasting impression on him. "Emile" was his bedside book much to the consternation of his mother who could not understand her son's predilection for work that had been burned by the public hangman in Paris and Geneva.

Soon these spirited and enthusiastic young men took a hand in local politics, criticised the government and published a periodical and many outspoken pamphlets. These were considered subversive by the authorities who ordered their suppression and the arrest of their authors. Pestalozzi was immensely proud of his three days imprisonment but from that moment he never ceased to struggle for social reform

and an improvement in the conditions of the exploited peasantry. He had seen their misery and was passionately determined to better their lot and that of their children.

Some of the meetings of these young men happened to be held at the house of a well-to-do grocer and confectioner named Schulthess with whose daughter, Anna, Pestalozzi fell in love. Eight years older than he, Anna was an attractive girl, tall, fresh complexioned, with mobile features and fine dark eyes. She was well educated, musical (she possessed her own spinet), able to speak French, fond of reading and always neatly dressed. Heinrich found her ideal. The young people became engaged much against the wishes of the girl's parents whose notion of a suitable son-in-law was not a shabby, awkward student without material prospects. But somehow their opposition weakened and in the end a grudging consent was given. On 30th September 1769 the couple were married in the parish church of Gebisdorf. Anna's parents, to mark their disapproval, were not present.

A year later, Jakob, who was to be the only child, was born. He was a delicate child who had inherited neither his father's robust health nor his mental gifts. He suffered from epilepsy which even the celebrated Mesmer could not cure and he died in early manhood. Meantime Pestalozzi had taken to farming. With the financial assistance of relatives and friends he acquired the "Neuhof" property which later he enlarged to serve as a school for the children of the neighbourhood. As a teacher he was in his element, as a farmer he failed. Lack of experience, bad harvests, his wife's illness and the fact that he had no head for figures

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led to disaster. In 1779 he had to admit insolvency, the land was sold and the school closed.

Pestalozzi now turned to writing. He founded and edited a "Schweizerblatt" and expounded his educational theories in a novel "Lienhard und Gertrude" which achieved an immense success. The book went into several editions, made his name known throughout Europe and gained him the gold medal and a money prize from the Economic Society of Bern. This novel and a later book "How Gertrude Teaches Her Children" are considered the best of his pedagogic writings.

Between 1782 and 1799 Pestalozzi took an active part in Switzerland's internal politics. He became an enthusiastic admirer of the French revolution though he deplored its excesses. In 1792 the French National Assembly conferred on him the honorary citizenship of the Republic. After the fall of Robespierre, he visited Paris for the first time.

The French invasion of 1798 and the creation, imposed by Napoleon, of the Helvetic Republic in which the feudal privileges so long enjoyed by a ruling class were abolished, met with much opposition. Only a few of the cantons accepted the new order, the inner cantons especially resented it bitterly and prepared for armed resistance. Pestalozzi, now acknowledged as the leading educationist and whose prestige, it was hoped, would influence public opinion, was appointed by the Government to take charge of what today would be called the ministry of propaganda. He became editor of "Helvetisches Volksblatt", the official Government organ, and wrote numerous pamphlets in which moderation, patience and unity were appealed for. A special appeal was addressed to the people of Nidwalden warning them against rash action and pointing out the hopelessness of armed resistance. This appeal somehow never reached the people for whom it was intended, but even if it had done so, it is unlikely that the fanatically brave Nidlanders would have laid down their arms. Their heroism resulted in merciless suppression by fire and sword. The enraged French troops destroyed Stans and inflicted heavy casualties on its defenders. Among the 500 dead were 119 women and 26 children, and there were more than 400 orphans that had to be cared for. Here Pestalozzi was the man of the moment. The Government entrusted him with the management of an orphanage which he, working day and night, got ready within a remarkably short time. Under his unrelenting care, the orphaned children, most of whom were in a dreadful state of neglect, found a home which gave them not only material comforts, but a good education and above all the individual loving attention that was one of Pestalozzi's main considerations and the secret of his success as a teacher.

In 1799 he was offered the headmastership of a school in Burgdorf. Under his direction the school flourished, but in the course of time friction and dissension arose between Pestalozzi and his assistants some of whom disagreed with his methods and intrigued for his removal. In the ensuing struggle he, never a good diplomat, had the worst of it and finally resigned after having been six years in charge of the establishment. But he had not lost the affection and the confidence of his pupils many of whom as well as most of the assistant teachers accompanied him when, in 1805, he moved to Yverdon where extensive premises were put at his disposal. The Yverdon




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school opened with a staff of eight teachers and with seventy pupils. The institution became famous and children from every part of Europe entered it. For twenty years Pestalozzi directed the school and applied his method with considerable success. During the Yverdon period his wife died. The school was closed in 1825 and the ageing Pestalozzi retired to his beloved Neuhof. He had two more years to live: on 17th February 1827 he died, active to the last. He was laid to rest in the neighbouring village of Birr, mourned by all of Switzerland.

Modern education owes much to the reforms Pestalozzi introduced. It is difficult to assess in a few lines a theory of teaching which it took the founder himself several books to explain. A tentative definition might be that to a child's mind understanding is only possible by spontaneous perception, the result of observation or as he summed it up, "Intuitive self-development under controlled guidance". Pestalozzi's genius lay in an instinctive and loving appreciation of the young mind. He was untiring in his efforts to draw the best out of his pupils.

Pestalozzi was a hard worker and an indefatigable writer. His literary output was tremendous; the style, to a modern reader, appears often diffuse and florid, a fault shared by many authors of his period. Like many warm-hearted men he was impetuous and not always tactful. It is related that when in 1814, after the battle of Leipzig, the allied armies marched through Switzerland on their way to Paris, Pestalozzi headed a delegation sent to the Czar Alexander's headquarters in Bale to protest against the requisition of the Yverdon school buildings for use as a field hospital. The Russian emperor who had probably heard of Pestalozzi from La Harpe, his Swiss tutor, received him in audience, was most affable, and promised that the order would be rescinded. Pestalozzi, overjoyed, took the opportunity to deliver a passionate speech pleading for the abolition of serfdom and the introduction of universal education in Russia. He became so excited that to the horror of the brilliant staff present, he literally buttonholed the Czar and pushed him against a wall.

In personal appearance he was unprepossessing. His friend Louis Vuillemin, the Vaudois historian, describes him at the age of sixty, in these words: "An ugly fellow, dishevelled and unshaven, his face pockmarked and blotchy, without a neckband, his trousers badly buttoned, a dragging jerky gait, but sparkling eyes and a facial expression that could be deeply sorrowful or shining with happiness. His speech was sometimes halting or rushing forth like a torrent, it could be a song or a thunderstorm. Such is the man we called Father Pestalozzi, a man we all loved".

To-day, the name of Pestalozzi is associated with all that is finest in the realm of elementary education. The children's village in the Appenzell in which war orphans are brought up by his method, is a fitting memorial to this great and lovable man.

J.J.F.S.

Note:— Much of the material for this sketch is taken from a biography by Prof. Hans Ganz published in 1946 and reprinted last year as one of the "Trigon Taschenbücher" issued by the Origo Verlag, Zürich.

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