

## PART II

### THE KINDERGARTEN

#### CHAPTER I

##### THE FIRST PLAY

MAN'S nature demands that each of his actions, whether mental or bodily, should be in relation to a corresponding object in the external world. When no suitable object is found to satisfy this demand the instinctive craving for activity finds vent in fancy and fantasy. But to these possibility sets no limits, nor does reality impose on them any form. So, instead of strengthening the child's capacity to use the things about him to express his thoughts and feelings, they tend to weaken it.

But even more than the activity of limbs does the activity of thought require its complementary object. Hence, it is by no means a matter of indifference what object is given to the child as truly corresponding to the needs of his nature. Its choice should be determined neither by chance nor by caprice, but by a recognition of those needs. It should be complementary to that nature, and thus at once like it and opposite to it.

If we observe what objects the child spontaneously chooses as such complements of his activity we see that they are inanimate things, and yet, strangely enough, heavy things. He loves stone and wood best of all. A boy delights in carrying big, heavy, things; and prefers

them for playthings ; a girl makes of a boot-jack or of a piece of wood her favourite doll.

But weight, or the attraction of matter, is the lowest expression of energy, which is, as it were, the life of nature, and which in a higher stage appears as sensuous attraction, and in its highest and purest form as spiritual attraction, or love. This evolution is seen in every child, and it determines explicitly the kind of object that should be given to him when his self-activity begins to show itself, and when, how, and why, it should be given. It should correspond to the needs of his nature. But the child is a being, complete in himself, who experiences many contrasts in his life, which yet are harmonized because they are his. So he needs an object with corresponding features. As like himself, it must, therefore, be one of which he can in imagination make anything he will ; as unlike and complementary, it must be seen as an external means by which he can carry out the purpose with which he identifies himself.

This gives the characteristics of the child's first plaything, and shows the deep meaning hidden in his choice of stick, stone, boot-jack, piece of wood, bag of sand, or, in another direction, clay, mud, or sand-heaps.

But above all, for the freest exercise of his activity he prefers the ball, which can be shown to be to him the unifying centre and representative of all which he seeks as complementary to the impulses of his nature towards development. For in it he finds at once exclusiveness and a general representation of all things, rest and motion, generality and particularity, all-sidedness and singleness of surface, visibility and invisibility (for it has invisible centre and axes). So by means of the ball a child can represent outwardly many things which he finds

in his own soul as desires, ideas, or thoughts, and he can also imitate countless things that he sees around him. Thus the ball is at once a means of representing outwardly his inner life, and of bringing into that life by imitation the external world. This explains why the child so loves the ball as a plaything.

Play to man, especially in childhood, is a mirror both of thoughts and feelings, and of surroundings. In childhood it is emphatically a mirror of the innate need for life and occupation. So a plaything is any thing which is related to the child as means to purpose, and which, by creating pleasant anticipation, calls forth play in which he finds fresh and continuous pleasure. Play is, therefore, really the product of the connexion of related opposites—the free activity of the child and the mobility and consequent responsiveness of the object. The ball, then, by its manifold movements and free adaptability, is most richly related to the child's impulses towards activity, and so most easily arouses in him the pleasure of play, and is, consequently, his dearest plaything. Right up to the age of youth, especially in Germany, various games with balls are the favourite forms of play. But in this earliest stage we are concerned only with the ball itself in its simplest form and in its simplest relations. It may be free or attached to a string, and in each case it can be moved either freely and indeterminately, or vertically, horizontally, or obliquely, with reference to given surfaces. Here, as it were, it acts as guide into the world of things, tracing their outlines by its movements, and so representing them.

But the ball as a plaything should be considered not only in its shape and in such relations to things as have just been indicated, but also in its relations to the child himself. These may be found in size, colour, number,