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MEETING OF DIRECTORS OF CHILDREN'S VILLAGES

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PESTALOZZI CHILDREN'S VILLAGE AT TROGEN

In August 1944, M. Walter Robert Corti, the Editor of the Swiss magazine "DU", published an article suggesting the establishment of an international children's village in Switzerland. A deep desire to help children who had suffered through the war - and particularly those who had lost father, mother and home - impelled M. Corti to find means of giving them enduring help from every point of view.

The scheme for providing a peaceful oasis for war orphans, in the midst of a world filled with hatred and destruction, made a strong appeal both in Switzerland itself and abroad, and, in particular, to a number of well-known teachers, social workers, psychologists and doctors. The suggestion revived hope in many hearts. In view of the urgent need to carry out the scheme without delay, the small group which had gathered around M. Corti endeavoured - successfully - to obtain the assistance of the important Swiss organization "Pro Juventute". "Pro Juventute" then undertook the provision of funds and the establishment of a permanent Secretariat with press and film services, and made contact with the countries whose children were eligible for admission.

In the meantime, it was necessary to set up some simple organization designed for the special purposes in view. The "Pestalozzi Children's Village Association" is now a legally operating body; a Board of Directors and an Executive Committee are responsible for dealing with practical questions.

M. Otto Binder, the General Secretary of "Pro Juventute", originated a scheme for a financial appeal of a type suitable to the idea of the children's village, designed not merely to collect money but also to inspire among the Swiss people a movement which would provide constant support for the whole undertaking - an aim which was realized with greater generosity than we had dared to hope. All gave according to their means - the babies in nursery schools, school children, adolescents, grown-ups - so that we received all sorts of gifts: money, household utensils, toys, linen, clothes, etc.

The idea of appealing to young people in every country to come and help to build children's houses was particularly successful.

The Commune of Trogen, in the Canton of Appenzell (to the south of Lake Constance), made the necessary site available on conditions which made it practically a gift.

The foundation stone of the Pestalozzi village was laid on 28 April 1946, when the Landsgemeinde was held (our original type of democracy, where all citizens meet to elect their government and determine their laws). A few weeks later the first financial appeal was launched. Thousands of school children throughout the country sold ladybird pins with the motto: "Good luck to the children of the Pestalozzi village and those who help them." The proceeds - 500,000 Swiss francs - made it possible to begin work immediately.

On 25 May the first volunteers went up to Trogen to begin the preliminaries to building. To the present date, more than 1,200 volunteers from every corner of the world - even from overseas and from the East - have offered their services to the Pestalozzi Village. They have done almost all the work of levelling the ground, and have been of the greatest assistance to the builders. In the volunteers' camps, young people belonging to nations which, a short time before, had been fighting with one another, met. Co-operation in a work of peaceful reconstruction brought them together and they came to look upon each other as human beings, leaving aside questions of nationality. These young people thus helped to lay not only the material but also the spiritual foundations of the Children's Village - a fact of profound moral value.

The most varied groups among the Swiss people: private individuals, societies, clubs, firms etc., kept on sending money contributions or gifts in kind. Many instances of sacrifices and sympathy already mark the story of our financial campaign (which of course is continuing, since the village depends on gifts for existence). Up to now, the campaign has made it possible to build and furnish, partially or wholly, thirteen houses, and to restore an old building.

When the building began, the first war-orphans from the South of France arrived and were temporarily lodged in the Trogen Orphanage until the first house was ready to receive them. The number of children in our care, which was 132 in August 1948, will be about 200 by the end of the year.

The outstanding factor in the present situation is that most of the houses are already occupied and that fresh groups of children are to be accepted. At the present time (August), we have children who have been here for over two years and others who arrived three months ago.

It would, therefore, be premature to claim many permanent results, although the life of the village is now fully developed and every opportunity

for observation is offered.

Position and climate. The Pestalozzi Village lies among the hills in the Canton of Appenzell. The landscape is ideally suited to the work undertaken. The hills close by give an impression of security (in the evening the lights of the neighbouring villages shine hospitably). A little further off, towards the south, rise the impressive masses of the Alps, while to the north, the eye can range into the distance over Lake Constance.

The climate is remarkably healthy and bracing. All around lie green fields and woodlands with no factories to taint the atmosphere. Lots of pure air. In summer the children go bathing, and in winter enjoy skiing and tobogganing (there is snow for about four months).

In the Canton of Appenzell, farming is the chief industry (cattle and agriculture), but there are also small crafts and varied industries. The children thus live in an area producing basic necessities; they see where milk and butter come from, how bread is made, and they can also watch the different kinds of building activities going on at the Pestalozzi Village.

The village is built on two hills. The new houses have been erected round an old and imposing farm-house, surrounded by ancient lime trees. The children's houses have been designed entirely with the object of creating a family atmosphere. Each house is designed for sixteen to eighteen children, the house-parents with their own children and a help for the "mother". The whole group forms a community. Hans Fischli, the architect of the Children's Village, wanted it to be entirely suited to the countryside. He therefore chose the Appenzell wooden house adapted to the Village's requirements. Each house comprises two sections, connected by a small entrance hall. In one part there are the bedrooms for children and grownups, and in the other the workroom, common-room, and school-room. Three to five children sleep in each room, and each child has his own bed and cupboard. Every house has showers and a bathroom, central heating and a tiled stove, by means of which the common-room and school-room can be warmed in the spring and autumn. The kitchen is next to the common-room.

The furniture is simple but practical, and creates a cheerful atmosphere.

The offices, assistants' rooms, stores and sheds for the animals, are housed in an old farm in the centre of the Village. The central kitchen, near the old farmhouse, is the only stone building. The laundry and ironing-room are also in that building. The play-ground and playing field lie between the two hills.

Organization of the Village. The chief aim of our Village is to cure children of the physical and psychological ill effects of the war, so that after a few years they may return, strong, to their countries, to serve both them and mankind in general.

Contact between children in such a colony as this brings out their spiritual and cultural characteristics and will thus help to establish a supranational community. The constant effort to maintain a balance between the various members of one national group and the national community, on the one hand, and between the national community and the village community, on the other, has determined the organization of the Village, which could only be federal; the federal organization is reflected in every aspect of the village life - for instance, the central kitchen provides the main meals and the kitchens in the separate houses allow for the adaptation of those meals to the national habits. Each group eats separately in its own dining-room.

We have no impersonal central services to meet the requirements of daily life. Each of us has his own part to play in the life of the village, besides his duties in the house. The children work in the central kitchen and the "mothers" help the laundress and the ironing-woman. (Some of the washing is done actually in the houses). The children share as far as possible in all the work of the village - in the garden, the workshops, transport, etc. The Pestalozzi Village is not in the least isolated. We have many bonds with the Commune of Trogen, which takes a keen interest in the life of the Village. Our children do errands in Trogen, go to the hairdresser there, to the post-office, etc. They also have contacts with Trogen families and they always take part in the local events for young people (school-treats, skiing competitions). The people of Trogen are also interested in the cultural and artistic life of our Village.

Trogen is a village with about 2,000 inhabitants, prepared to move with the times. A long-standing educational tradition survives there, and there is also a senior school comprising several departments. A hundred years ago, a citizen of Trogen founded an orphanage and maintained philanthropic works. Several of Pestalozzi's fellow workers came from the district of Trogen.

We try to educate principally by example rather than by precept. We therefore seldom refer to the need for understanding between the different nations but try to act on that basis in daily life.

Medical and Psychological Service. The children accepted by the Village are all undernourished without being precisely ill. It was, therefore, unnecessary to provide for a doctor attached to the Village. The doctor at Trogen generously offered us his services, and looks after all our children's physical condition. When necessary, they are cared for in the hospital at Trogen.

We have, however, a nurse attached to the Village. She helps to look after sick children in the houses, checks their weight, carries out blood tests, etc. She also keeps statistics of the children's physical development and their illnesses. The Village has its own dispensary.

A qualified psychologist is in charge of our Psychological Service, which has to second the work of the educators and, if necessary, look after

the children themselves. The teachers are in close contact with the Psychological Service and regularly report their observations of the children. This contact has proved very useful and productive, for it is often necessary to remedy serious abnormalities. The Psychological Service also has a room for remedial treatment.

The second part of this report deals mainly with educational, psychological and school problems.

To sum up, it may be said that our Petalozzi Village is developing gradually. Various forms of activity are still being perfected. What we need, among other things, is a house in which the whole community could meet; but we hope that this desire will be fulfilled in the not too distant future. We still have to build and equip a few additional work-rooms, as we have made handwork experiments with war-handicapped children, which have yielded excellent results. Similarly, artistic work (drawing, painting, modelling, singing, music, eurhythmics) is a very important factor in our system of education. Although the playing field is not yet finished, our children have always had lessons in physical culture.

Here, as everywhere else where there are children, life develops spontaneously in the ways most appropriate for the particular ends in view.

Our experiments have taught us that, apart from differences of nationality, culture and language, there are many more factors likely to unite than to separate the nations; it is our duty to discover them. We therefore hope to achieve our aim and overcome all the difficulties we may encounter.

As our children are still very young (between six and thirteen years old), the grown-ups rule the village; but, as our aim is to train independent men and women, we shall give the children opportunities to take a more active part in the village life, so that they will go back to their own countries, later on, imbued with a deep desire for understanding, with respect for other nations, tolerance and the will to help in building a happier world.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDEPENDENCE AND COMMUNITY LIFE
OPEN TO THE VARIOUS NATIONS IN THE
PESTALOZZI VILLAGE

In considering these opportunities, it is necessary first to take account of the three following constant factors:

- (1) the child, i. e. the composition of the national or international groups;
- (2) the responsible educators;
- (3) the purpose of education.

With regard to the first point, eight houses are at present occupied by 152 total orphans from seven different countries, speaking six different languages. Children between the ages of six and thirteen here represent France, Poland, Austria, Hungary, Germany, Italy and Finland.

After their arrival in the Village, and a certain period of adaptation, our children show signs of a great need for affection from a grown-up. They want to make up for everything they have missed. During that period they develop affections not only for their new "parents", but also for visitors whom they have just met. Boys of twelve play with dolls. Girls of the same age want to be comforted for the slightest disappointment. The children would like to be spoiled. On his birthday, a boy of seven said: "I'll punch the head of anyone who doesn't give me a birthday present, except the grown-ups". We have to make some allowance for that need of compensation.

At the outset, there are not many natural points of contact between children belonging to different nations. Premature efforts by educators in that respect are often resisted by the children. After an initial adaption period, a phase of development often very rapidly begins.

That phase lasts a varying time according to the age of the child.

The first difficulties arise when the child goes back to his native country. The teacher's peculiarly delicate task is to reduce such difficulties to the minimum.

With regard to the second point, each group of children finds educators from its own country in the Pestalozzi Village. One of the Village's guiding principles is to maintain a healthy national consciousness. For that purpose, we entrust the children to a group of educators of their own country. What do such educators bring with them? Many of them do not feel as sure of themselves, abroad, as in their own country. Frequently an exaggeration of their national attitude is apparent. This shows how important it is to choose the right assistants and how difficult it is to assemble a uniform group of educators in the Children's Village.

With regard to the third point, relating to the aims of education, I quote below remarks by Mlle. E. Rotten, who has attempted, in co-operation with the teachers in the Pestalozzi Village, to summarize the aims of the Village as follows:

- (1) to ensure physical survival and the best possible intellectual development for the children entrusted to the Village - at least until the end of primary schooling. These children will subsequently return to their countries and be placed in circumstances appropriate to their needs and abilities ;
- (2) to create a family atmosphere in each house, respecting and encouraging the linguistic, national, cultural and religious characteristics of the original background;
- (3) to build up a school community of children and educators, with a tolerant outlook, respecting the ideas of each individual and practising communal life and mutual help;
- (4) to take advantage of the exceptional circumstances of the Pestalozzi Village and so - through co-operation between educators of different nationalities and bearing in mind educational experiments already made - to make our modest but practical contribution to the solution of present-day educational problems;
- (5) to devote particular care to the evocation and promotion of a pacific spirit; to discover the internal and external obstacles to its development and endeavour to overcome them. The best means of achieving that object is to base our work on the results achieved by modern psychology and group psychological research, taking into account the child's natural intuition, with the aim of establishing happy relations between the individual and the community.

In short, our task is to return to their countries young people who have learnt to think independently; who, whilst ready to stand on their own feet are conscious of each individual's dependence on others; and, who, in that spirit, will seek to live in, and for, unity.

In order to achieve that aim, subject to the conditions mentioned under points (1) and (2), we have adopted the following method:

- (a) monthly conferences of teachers and house-mothers;
- (b) weekly conferences of assistants;
- (c) morning meetings of house-fathers three times a week;
- (d) optional daily meetings.

With regard to the last item, the teachers have recently fallen into the habit of meeting at four o'clock, when the post arrives, to have a cup of tea. This provides an opportunity for free discussion and friendly contact, which often produces better results than a four-hour conference of teachers.

There are meetings and "refresher weeks" outside the Village, designed to bring educators into touch with one another.

Life in the Postalozzi Village. Besides the building up of a real home for the children, all the opportunities naturally offered by work, play and celebrations, are used to bring children of different nationalities together. For instance, simple gymnastic apparatus designed for the children are an attraction outside the times allotted for physical culture.

The school is, of course, also devoted to the aims of education in a large village community and thus establishes a true community between nations. In that respect, too, it is necessary to follow a well-considered plan, founded on experiments already made. The position may be stated more or less as follows:

During the period of school attendance, three main stages in the child's development may be distinguished; lower, intermediate, and higher. Each covers about three school years. Here, too, we have to take account of the children's need to make up for lost time, which has already been mentioned.

First Stage: Instruction in the mother tongue, in the child's own home. Field of interest; the house, the family, local surroundings, the native country. Beginning (not methodical) of the study of the common language of the Village in games, singing etc.

Second Stage: Instruction in the mother tongue. Each nation continues to study the principal subjects separately. In the last year, special preparations will be made for the children to pass on to collective instruction. Beginning of instruction, in common with children of other nationalities, in the following subjects: gymnastics, drawing, music, gardening and handwork. (These subjects, in particular, do not require much linguistic knowledge.)

Field of interest: the native country in a wider sense. Beginning of systematic instruction in the common language of the village.

Third Stage: Instruction both in the common language of the Village (German) and in the mother tongue. Collective instruction in the common language of the Village for children of all nationalities in the following subjects: history of civilization, general geography, natural history, mathematics, physics and chemistry. Teaching about the literature, history and geography of the children's own countries, and religious instruction, are still

given in the houses.

Field of interest: other countries, the earth, the world.

The essential condition for the success of the higher stage is the teaching of the common language of the Village. This is begun informally, through games and singing, when the child arrives, and becomes systematic as soon as he reaches the age of nine; groups of children whose native languages are different are taught together.

After a total period of six years' teaching, it should be possible for children at the higher stage, to follow instruction clearly given in the subjects mentioned. The need to treat any subject with the greatest possible clarity of expression may, indeed, be considered an advantage. (Apart from history, the subjects taught are concrete and readily assimilated, such as mathematics, physics, chemistry and natural science.)

A second requisite for the success of the higher stage is the realization, at the intermediate stage, of the aim to be achieved. To take the teaching of history as an example; the focus for the teaching of history in the intermediate stage will, of course, be the history of the children's country; however, the choice of material and the manner in which it is presented is of great importance - without being tendentious, it should definitely emphasize those factors which may lead to an understanding of other nations, beyond the purely national sphere. This dual method - such a presentation of history, on the one hand, and communal life in a mixed working group, on the other - cannot fail eventually to produce a lasting impression. In this light, the teaching of history may help greatly towards the attainment of the educational aims of the Children's Village.

The children attend the elementary classes up to the sixth grade. Pupils with a special gift for languages have an opportunity of learning a second foreign language, from the seventh grade onward.

The senior classes will be divided into two sections:

Section A. For the more intellectually gifted pupils, capable of learning quickly:

Section B For those who learn more slowly and whose talents lie more in the practical field.

If a child is specially gifted, and if it seems that he should be encouraged to follow an academic profession, he may attend the Canton school in Trogen. This will be possible, however, only in exceptional cases.

No strict rule can be laid down regarding the time children will stay in the Village. That must depend mainly on their needs, the situation in their native countries and the opportunities open to the child when the time comes to give him appropriate vocational training.

Careful preparations are made for the children's return to life in their native countries; adoption by god-parents, regular exchange of correspondence,

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holiday visits, which may be extended as the children grow older; and, particularly, very active co-operation with the "Associations of Friends of the Pestalozzi Children's Village, Trogen" in the various countries (which are prepared to look after the children when they return home).

As regards the degree of "self-government" among the children, we would say:

For the time being, we have no suitable organization grouping all our children. In the case of the Pestalozzi Village, such an organization could develop only from within the houses themselves. There are at present a few houses in which the children meet regularly to discuss problems concerning their own house and also problems concerning the whole Village. When the eldest children understand the common language of the Village, a school community comprising the older pupils and the teachers may spring up spontaneously. In no circumstances, however, could such a community be imposed by the educators.