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Relationship Between the Kindergarten and Great Literature: Shakespeare

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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE
KINDERGARTEN AND GREAT
LITERATURE

SHAKESPEARE

BY ELIZABETH HARRISON





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KINDERGARTEN AND GREAT
LITERATURE.

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NUMBER THREE

SHAKESPEARE

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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE KINDERGARTEN AND GREAT LITERATURE.

NO. 3.—SHAKESPEARE.

The woman whose lot it is to nourish childhood needs *insight* and *inspiration* even more than she needs knowledge and training. Does not insight give patience and sympathy? And does not inspiration breathe new life and new courage into the tired heart and bring with it that zeal which makes delving for more knowledge a joy rather than a task? Again and again comes the question: "where can we get more insight? How can

we fill ourselves with deeper inspiration?" Let us turn to Shakespeare, the mighty creator of modern art, and see what he can give us which will add to these two great motive-powers of life. First of all, he has set before us the environment of all life. The palace of the king, the courts of justice, the marts of trade, the privacy of the family life, the silence of solitude, each plays its part in the moulding of character, and the influence which each of these exerts is a fascinating study to the student who believes that social forces are factors in education.

Perhaps the most significant point gained in the study of Shakespeare's use of environment is that of the sudden change to primitive life when

he wishes to remould, reform or recreate his characters. Off to the unknown island is sent his Prospero, that he may meditate upon his weak relinquishing of responsibility and learn to use his knowledge and his magic art for men and not for his own pleasure alone. Off to a solitary cave among the mountains flees Belarius, taking with him the two young sons of Cymbeline that he may guide them into a strong, true manhood, unhindered by the corruptions of court life and the artificialities of society. It is in the forest of Arden that the wronged Duke finds "tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones and *good in every thing.*" Surely he has found compensation enough for the hollow life

he has left behind him! And Rosalind shines not so attractively in the fashionable and conventional court circle as when in simple peasant garb she freely lives her real self. Could the charming character of Perdita have developed as serenely in the palace of Leontes as it did in the humble, honest home life of the shepherd's cot? It is true that Imogen in the midst of the most luxurious of surroundings, presents the true womanly character, but against what odds does she contend!

What a significant lesson this great magician teaches us by that constant return to nature for the quieting of the restless, tired life, for the subduing of the rebellious, selfish will, for teaching the difference between the

essentials of life and those non-essentials which the extravagance of our city life leads us to overvalue. Off to the woods then, with your children when you begin to detect the craving for artificial excitement, the scorning of simple duties, the demand for luxuries as if they were necessities. Plain living and high thinking seem to have been Shakespeare's ideal as well as Emerson's.

It is hard to separate the evolution of character from the influence of environment in Shakespeare. The two are in reality but different parts of the same study. Still Shakespeare portrays for us the tremendous evolution of character without any change of surroundings. Who can study the

play of Macbeth and not realize the transformation which is going on as the brave and loyal soldier is slowly changed, by gnawing ambition, into the cowardly and superstitious traitor? Is there no warning in this for us? Do we not too often awaken and feed wrong ambitions by undue praise unchecked by the sense of responsibility which should always accompany the realization of added power. Are we always careful to lead the child to feel that added *strength* is added *responsibility*?

Again, who can follow without keen interest, the proud and irascible old Lear, who brooks not the slightest opposition to his whims, disciplined by his own folly, as he passes through every woe that age can feel, until we

hear him plead piteously, "You must bear with me. Pray you, now, forgive and forget. I am old and foolish." Or when he gently says to the weeping Cordelia after all hope of his restoration to the throne is lost, "Come let's away to prison; we two alone will sing like birds in a cage. When thou dost ask me blessing I'll kneel down and ask of thee forgiveness." How different is this from the uncompromising Lear who will listen to no suggestion of change from his arbitrary command! And yet—has not this change been wrought by the consequences of his own deed returning upon him? Would he have so softened had he been shielded from this natural consequence of his own deed? How many mothers are there

who fail to teach this all important lesson to their children, namely, that they make their own happiness or unhappiness? Slowly we watch the subtle influence of Cassius creeping over and changing the views of the noble Brutus. He stops not to reason out for himself whether or not Caesar is helping the Roman world. He accepts the views of Cassius and becomes his tool. Do we not see the same thing done in the political campaigns of to-day? Should it not lead the mothers of the future voters to teach their children to investigate and judge for themselves of a candidate's character? What a study of the conflicting influence of character upon character is the play of Hamlet! How the tender and beautiful person-

ality of Hamlet himself comes to naught through his lack of power to decide upon a course of conduct and then to pursue it! Does not this touching story say in most pathetic tones, to each of us: "Let insight and resolution be followed quickly by effort to attain, even if mistakes are sometimes made?" Long continued hesitating weakens any character. Sensitive refinement, quick sympathy, tender affection are not enough,—character needs robust, vigorous action to strengthen it and make it a power in the world. Many little achievements in childhood lead to more determination to attain the desired end in youth that culminates in that grand confidence in self which removes mountains, banishes the word

“impossible,” and pushes its generation forward.

Where in all history do we see so well displayed the effect upon character, of coming into responsibilities, as in the transformation of the gay, reckless Prince Hal into the quiet, thoughtful King Henry the Fifth? Many a perplexed kindergartner might take the hint and change her bright, restless, mischief-making boy into the thoughtful maintainer of law and order, by placing the star of leadership upon his breast. Many an anxious father who mourns over the rash and imprudent conduct of his son, seeing in it evidence of future dissipation, could learn from this story of Prince Hal that all his boy needs is work; responsibility of some

kind which will utilize the powers now running to waste. Illustrations of the development of character seemingly without number present themselves until a whole volume could be written upon this one theme alone.

When we turn to the study of man's relationship to man in order that we may rightly prepare the child for a future life of harmony with his fellowmen, we find that Shakespeare has portrayed it in a thousand forms. In fact the most interesting part of his inexhaustible genius seems to be his clear insight into the magnitude of the ethical world, the duty of each individual to consider himself as a necessary portion of a mighty whole. Here we learn in most emphatic terms that "each must do his part however

small," else the family, the trade world, the state, the church will suffer. The entire plot of his dramas may be summed up in a few words. Man as an individual is in conflict with the institutional world. If he refuses to be reconciled to the demands of this greater world, the waters of destruction close over his head and the play becomes a tragic lesson for all mankind. If he sees his folly, guards his weakness, or repents of his sin and thus returns to his right relationship to the rest of mankind, he is saved and is restored to peace and happiness. Whatever may be the conduct of the individual, the ethical institution is and must be preserved.

Lear's kingdom may seem for the

time being to be torn to pieces, but in the end Albany restores just government to England.

Macbeth may murder his king and slay his fellow general and put to flight every loyal man in Scotland, but the play closes with peace and order restored to the bleeding land.

Hamlet, As you like it, Tempest, and a dozen other plays, all bring to us the deep and lasting impression that the mind of man has reared with infinite pains this majestic structure, which we call the *institutional world*, where the weak may find refuge, the wise man peace, and even the wicked, if he chooses, may learn through law the nature of his deed and turn from it. It seems to me that this is a much needed lesson, for those restless re-

formers, who see in individualism the cure for all the present evils of the world, who would tear down the strong protecting walls of law and authority because they sometimes seem to protect the wrong.

The ethical institutions of the world are not only "the product of man's deepest spiritual nature," but they also prove to him the existence of the possibility of spiritual advancement which becomes the angel of hope in our hours of darkness when the pessimistic view of the world presses itself on us. From them we learn that *men* may be mean and petty, but that *man* is noble. That individuals may be selfish and weak, grasping or over-ambitious, but that humanity, as a whole, is grand and unselfish.

Is there not inspiration for all of us in this thought? And does it not add to our respect for the wonderful genius of Froebel that his insight led him to teach the child through play, the significance of this institutional world?

Another has well said that Shakespeare and Froebel are the two great thinkers who have most effectively used the drama to help them bring the large and varied experiences of mankind to the necessarily limited life of the individual. Neither of them originated plays. Both used the material which generations of human joy and sorrow had accumulated, making luminous the commonplace incidents by the insight which showed it to be an universal experience.



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Registration in 1885.		Registration in 1892-3.	
Teachers,	5	Teachers,	104
Mothers,	2	Mothers,	453
Total,	7	Total,	557

Total No. Students enrolled, 465 } Total Registration, 2,987
Total No. Mothers enrolled, 2,522 }

Kindergartens supervised by the College in 1892-1893, . . . 47

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