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La Ruche

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THE rearing of children—whether in the sense of training or in the sense of free unfoldment—is still causing much dispute. The tendency of the times is to produce uniform and average types. Spontaneity and originality are considered out of date and useless. In fact, the less creative man is, the better his chances in every vocation of life.

The division of labor has never before reached such height, nor has man ever before been so much degraded to a mere machine. The spirit of an Emerson or a Goethe is rare indeed, and impractical for our daily life. The most lamentable quality of modern man is his great capacity for adjustment. His activities are mechanical; his work, instead of liberating him, is riveting his chains still deeper into his flesh. The iron necessity of eking out a living imposes such occupations which are remunerative, though in no way related to his nature or inclinations. The question is not as to what could give the greatest satisfaction or joy; rather is it what gain, what material results can accrue therefrom.

The same spirit actuates the ideals of our times in the rearing and educating of the child. Most parents see in the school, the college and university the medium of profitable positions. They

look upon education as a good investment, eagerly awaiting the time when they and their children will reap the dividends.

The idea that the rearing of the child—whether boy or girl—implies a consideration of the individual tendencies, has vanished from the horizon of parents and educators of to-day. No wonder they fail to grasp the importance of free unfoldment and growth. * * *

An attempt to give the child an opportunity for unhampered development is being made in France by Sebastian Faure. The latter became widely known during the high tide of the Dreyfuss campaign. Together with Emile Zola, Anatole France, and Octave Mirbeau, Sebastian Faure fought the corrupt nationalistic and militaristic cliques which were endeavoring to use the Dreyfuss affair to further their own reactionary aims, mindful of Dr. Johnson's remark, that patriotism is the resource of knaves.

Faure is considered the most formidable foe of the reactionists, because of his remarkable oratorical ability. But Faure's particular forte is his opposition to religion and churchism, with which, as an ex-priest, he is thoroughly familiar. Faure might be compared to Robert Ingersoll, except that the ideas of the former are much broader and higher. He did not stop at free thought; but, as Anarchist and educator he is equally uncompromising in his opposition to economic and social iniquities. Faure is a practical idealist—one that applies his theories of a happier future to the immediate regeneration of society.

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"La Ruche" is an hour's journey from Paris; it is situated on the outskirts of a village named Rambouillet, a former stronghold of French nobility and now owned by the government, serving as a summer resort of the President.

Two years ago comrade Faure bought the land on which he has built his "Beehive." In that comparatively short time he succeeded to transform the former wild, uncultivated country into

still due on "La Ruche." That done, the venture will become self-supporting, enabling Faure to enlarge his family.

Our visit to "La Ruche" was most interesting and instructive, and we regretted that time did not permit us to prolong our visit.

We were driven to the station by the friend who had met us on our arrival. She proved to be not only a kind and lovable person, but also a highly intelligent woman with great independence of character. Being too early for our train, we were asked to have a drive through the famous Rambouillet woods, passing the palace where the French President, M. Fallieres, was spending the summer.

How forcibly the place contrasted with "La Ruche"! The latter, an attempt at a new life, new human beings, new habits. Rambouillet, representing the decayed pillars of old and tottering institutions. What a contrast!

Sebastian Faure calls his attempt a work of "education and solidarity." May it prosper and serve as a noble example for others to follow. In a world of sham, hypocrisy and misery, is there any grander work than the rearing of new men and women?

I asked comrade Faure what the relations of the children were among themselves and how they treated each other.

Faure replied: "It is surprising how frank, kind and affectionate the children are to each other. The harmony between themselves and the adults at 'La Ruche' is highly encouraging. We should feel at fault were the children to fear or honor us merely because we are their elders. We leave nothing undone to gain their confidence and love; that accomplished, understanding will replace duty; confidence, fear; and affection, sternness.

"No one has yet fully realized the wealth of sympathy, kindness and generosity hidden in the soul of the child. It is the effort of every true educator should be to unlock that treasure—to stimulate the child's impulses and call forth the best and noblest tendencies. What greater reward can there be for one whose life-work is to watch over the growth of the human plant, than to see its nature unfold its petals and to observe it develop into a true individuality. My comrades at 'The Beehive' look for no grander reward, and it is due to them and their efforts, even more than my own, that our human garden promises to bear beautiful fruit."

Referring to the subject of history and the prevailing old methods of instruction, I asked comrade Faure how that subject is being taught at "The Hive."

He replied, simply: "We explain to our children that true history is yet to be written—the story of those who have died unknown in the effort to aid humanity to greater achievement."

The comrades associated with Sebastian Faure are so thoroughly imbued with the spirit of the place that everything continues in the same harmonious way, though he, himself, is absent the greater part of the year on lecture tours. The latter serve the double purpose of education and raising funds for "La Ruche," forty thousand francs having been raised during the two years of "The Hive's" existence. Comrade Faure hopes to earn this winter a sufficient sum to liquidate the amount

a blooming spot, having all the appearances of a prosperous and well-kept farm. A large, square court, enclosed by three buildings, and a broad path leading to the garden and orchards, greet the eye of the visitor. The garden, kept as only a Frenchman knows how, furnishes a large variety of vegetables for the "Hive." Faure is not a faddist; but he believes that fresh vegetables contain more nutrition than meat; the latter is therefore served but once a week at "La Ruche." Nor do they lack fresh vegetables in the winter time, for the large greenhouse is well stocked. Almost anybody would be tempted to turn vegetarian at the sight of the inviting, artistically grouped garden patches. Added to them are an orchard and a flower garden, which further enhance the beauty of "La Ruche."

Sebastian Faure is of the opinion that if the child is subjected to contradictory influences, its development suffers in consequence. Only when the material needs, the hygiene of the home and intellectual environment are harmonious, can the child grow into a healthy, free being.

I had read of "La Ruche" when it was first founded. On my arrival in Paris I wrote comrade Faure that I should very much like to see his venture in operation. I soon received his kind invitation to visit the place, of which I gladly took advantage in the company of a friend.

At the station of Rambouillet we were met by a little woman, the housekeeper and general manager of "La Ruche," who was accompanied by a young girl of about twelve years, very pretty and healthy-looking. After half an hour's ride through the beautiful country, we reached the "Beehive." On the way I was struck with the affectionate relations between my hostess and her little companion, sweet and tender as chums. I soon learned that the same atmosphere prevailed in the entire place.

Comrade Faure, whom I had previously met in 1900, greeted us with simple cordiality, and knowing that we had come to see and to learn, he lost no time in showing us through the place—a rare treat, not easily forgotten.

The cleanliness and beauty of the “Hive” filled us with admiration. Most wonderful of all, however, proved the dormitory and lavatory of children, furnished in the plainest conceivable manner and yet producing a remarkably bright and cheerful effect. The latter was due to the hand-painted wall paper—a labor of love by some of the ablest artists of France. Flowers, plants, birds and animals were grouped in harmonious colors, thus quickening the imagination of the children more effectively than a hundred lessons.

Co-education is still forbidden by the lawmakers of France. It is owing, however, to the great popularity of Faure that the government does not interfere with him, who not only propagates joint education, but also maintains it at “La Ruche.” There the boys and girls mingle freely together in class-room, workshop and gymnasium.

The schoolroom lacked the usual awe-inspiring appearance—the children rocking in their chairs, listening to their instructor whom they seemed to regard as one of their own number, telling them an interesting story. Never before had I seen such spontaneous joy as on that September afternoon, when Sebastian Faure led us into the classroom and—with the most serious face—introduced the “American comrades to the comrades of ‘La Ruche’,” addressing each little tot as Mlle. Janette or Monsieur Henri. No one could remain in doubt as to the affection the children bore Faure.

Naturally, we were very anxious to hear the views of Faure himself, as to his novel undertaking. Among other things he said:

“I have taken twenty-four children of both sexes, mostly orphans or those whose parents are too poor to pay. They are clothed, housed and educated at my expense. Till their twelfth year they will receive a sound elementary education; between the age of twelve and fifteen—their studies still continuing—they are to be taught some trade, in keeping with their individual dispositions and abilities. After that they are at liberty to

leave ‘La Ruche’ to begin life in the outside world, with the assurance that they may at any time return to ‘The Hive/ where they shall be received with open arms and welcomed as parents do their beloved children. Then, if they wish to work at our place, they may do so under the following conditions: One-third of the product to cover the expenses of his or her maintenance, another third to go towards the general fund set aside for accommodating new children, and the last third to be devoted to the personal use of the child, as he or she may see fit.

“The health of the children who are now in my care is perfect. Pure air, nutritious food, physical exercise in the open, long walks, observation of hygienic rules, the short and interesting method of instruction and, above all, our affectionate understanding and care of the children have produced admirable physical and mental results.

“It would be unjust to claim that the children have accomplished wonders; yet, considering that they belong to the average, having had no previous opportunities, the results are gratifying indeed. The most important thing they have acquired—a rare trait with ordinary school children—is the love of study, the desire to know, to be informed. They have learned a new method of work—one that quickens the memory and stimulates the imagination. We make a particular effort to awaken the child’s interest in his surroundings, to make him realize the importance of observation, investigation and reflection, so that when the children reach maturity, they should not be deaf and blind to the things about them. Our children never accept anything in blind faith, without inquiry as to why and wherefore; nor do they feel satisfied until their questions are thoroughly answered. Thus their minds are free from doubts and fear resultant from incomplete or untruthful replies; it is the latter which warp the growth of the child and create a lack of confidence in himself and those about him.”