



CHAPTER XIV

Educational Experiments and Suffrage

IN ALL HIS ACTIVITIES toward betterment, Joseph proceeded upon the principle that a necessary condition to mental and moral improvement is the re-arrangement of the physical conditions of life. As the old Physiocrats maintained that culture is historically derived in its various forms from types of physical environment, and that civilisation is a consequence of geographical conditions, so there are those of us who believe that the making of the individual man or woman is conditioned, not so much by the artificial environment of class-room and text-books, as by the environment of physical things and conditions found in early childhood. It is through dealing with conditions of real importance and interacting with a world whose significance is vital that any learning worth while must be derived. It is attitude toward God and His Law determines all, and the more, far more, when it is conscious attitude with conscientious enactment, in the seeking to be ever more in His image.

At various times Joseph endeavoured to secure a

larger measure of instruction and practice in gardening for the children, believing as he did in the unlimited possibilities of the soil in making men and women. As in most other cases during that period, he was before his time. The authorities were quite willing to be given financial assistance, to be applied as they thought best. They would give no grant and almost no facilities for gardening, believing that nature study was quite sufficient. Nature study at that time, as indeed at present, consisted in the Council Schools of little more than producing before children a few flowers, twigs, leaves and tadpoles, with possibly a dove, rabbit or guinea-pig kept in confinement in the classroom. While the silent pressure of industrialism makes itself felt even in the infants' class, and especially in the growing provision for manual and technical training, those occupations which deal more directly with nature, which are vital in the conservation of national life and of overwhelming importance as the basis for individual development, have found, and still find, in British schools only sporadic and feeble support. Short-sighted education authorities are eager to serve their masters by producing in increasing quantity a proletariat of mechanical skill without knowledge of, or interest in, the one occupation which could save it from the wretched conditions that prevail in the modern industrial labour market, and, at the same time, make life more worth the living.

Apart from what was done for the teaching of gardening in connection with the Vacant Lands Cultivation Society, Joseph's endeavours toward altering the machinery of education resulted in disappointment. At Mayland*, however, where he was free to organise a school without official interference, as there was of course no grant from the education authority, he succeeded in producing an institution which might, had circumstances continued favourable, have become a model school of great influence. He called to his assistance the experience and judgment of Miss Maria Findlay, a veteran leader in the cause of educational reform, and, with the enthusiastic support of his teachers, arranged for the children of the colony a curriculum which had few equals and no superiors. It was concerned to a large extent with the every-day occupations seen about them, gardening, carpentry and the care of animals; and even the more formal materials of instruction were never permitted to pass out of touch with reality.

Having built and equipped such a school, having provided admirable teachers and an unsurpassed curriculum, he invited the Education Committee of the Essex County Council to take over and incorporate it in their system, and to give assurance that its excel-

*A full account of this enterprise is to be found in "School Life."
(George Phillips and Son, 1914.)

lences would be maintained. There was no place for it in their system.

More effective as to ultimate results was his co-operation with Miss Margaret McMillan, in her efforts to improve the physical conditions of childhood. This original and energetic reformer, devoted to the cause of poor children, feeling always the futility of instructing minds housed in bodies underfed, unclean and often diseased, has given her life, with its rare wisdom and ability, to arousing the nation's interest in its children. She has worked with teachers, with public authorities, with politicians, on the platform, at conferences, everywhere that opportunity presented itself, with unsurpassed zeal, and in the end with astonishing success. Joseph met her as she was leaving Bradford, after achieving for that city the proud distinction of incorporating into the local educational system provision for the hygienic needs of children. In conversation at the farewell gathering arranged in connection with her departure, he discovered that here was a personality with views and ideals of unlimited importance for the well-being of the future generations, very much in harmony with his own most intimate convictions, and worthy of every degree of support.

He offered at once to give financial support to Miss McMillan, who had drawn up a scheme of hygienic centres of larger scope than Bradford had been able

to allow her. Miss McMillan came to London and soon afterwards at our home in Bickley the offer was renewed, made definite, and attached to a scheme with which Miss McMillan intended to approach the Education Authority. This was in May, 1904. In November of the same year they went together to interview the Education Committee of the London County Council, and made an offer of £5,000 to assist in carrying out a plan of health centres. The Committee was, and especially its officers, of course, conservative, and treated the innovation with the usual degree of suspicion. As very often happened when Joseph was present, the interview became somewhat stormy,—he usually succeeded in expressing his opinion of men and things. The central idea in the plan was the establishment and equipment of centres in the various districts of London for the hygienic inspection and treatment of school children. These centres would, of course, necessitate the installation of baths. The Committee was willing to accept the money without the plan. Asked what they could do with £5,000, they agreed that they might be able to establish two centres. Miss McMillan knew that with this money she could establish a much larger number. Joseph told her that he could see little prospect of success in dealing with the authorities, and that it would be better for her to do her work alone, with his support.

During all this time Miss McMillan was working

for medical inspection in the schools, feeling that the whole movement toward the physical betterment of children would have to be of a piece. She prepared a précis, and secured the supporting signatures of the most enlightened medical men of London, such as Sir Victor Horsley, Sir Lauder Brunton, Mr. Forbes Winslow and Sir J. Crichton Browne. She secured also the support of the then president of the National Union of Teachers. Armed with this document she went to the House of Commons and interviewed her friend, Mr. Jowett, M.P. for West Bradford. Her plan contained three provisions—compulsory inspection, an annual report, and a supervisory board at Whitehall. Neither from Mr. Jowett, nor afterwards from Mr. Birrell, M.P., President of the Board of Education, was much encouragement received. Not daunted, however, she again interviewed Mr. Jowett together with Mr. Illingworth—Mr. Birrell's secretary—gave them further details, and also an estimate of the cost. Thereupon, Mr. Birrell received a deputation, introduced by Mr. Keir Hardie, M.P., and supported by several eminent medical men. Satisfactory results soon followed. Medical inspection was embodied in the Education Bill of 1906, and on July 16th, the clauses referring to it were carried in the House of Commons. The Bill was dropped in December, but the clauses providing for medical inspection

were inserted in its successor and carried in the Education Act of 1907.

Miss McMillan carried on a ceaseless propaganda in favour of Treatment centres during these five years. In 1908 Bradford Clinic was opened. Later in the same year Miss McMillan obtained permission from the London County Council to use a single small room in Bow, and, supported by Joseph, established the first school clinic. The education authority, however, being still distrustful and unsympathetic, sent few patients: the result of which gave them the opportunity to assert that the treatment was too costly. It amounted to 7s. 6d. per child. In the meantime the London County Council entered into an arrangement with certain hospitals to treat the school children sent to them, at the rate of 5s. per child. And on this ground it was decided not to continue with Miss McMillan's scheme. Confident that her efforts were on right lines, Miss McMillan decided to drop all connection with the school authorities and proceeded with her own plans. As will be seen later, she demonstrated that her plans were sound. She went to Deptford and organised a private clinic, attended by two physicians, a dentist and a nurse. Not having to depend upon the County Council to send patients, the clinic was at once filled. From then, to the present, children have continued to pour in, and the treatment per child has been found to amount to 2s. 6d., half the hospital rate.

This aroused the much-belated interest of the London Education Committee, and in 1911 it agreed to assist with a grant for dental treatment. This was followed in 1912 by an additional grant for eye and ear treatment. Miss McMillan has published seven reports, showing methods, results and cost. Through these, the Deptford experiment has become known throughout the world, and the school clinic will soon be everywhere an established part of the educational machinery. Holding firmly to her original idea of hygienic as well as medical treatment, Miss McMillan has widened the scope of her clinic to include remedial drill, and open-air camps for boys and girls. In 1911 she opened a baby clinic, and in 1913 a baby camp.

The camp school may yet play a great part in solving the question of natural education for all. Certainly a generation of camp educated children would have the land hunger, and also some knowledge of how to use land in town and country. There are seventy children under seven years old living the open-air life on the ground Joseph secured for use before leaving England for the last time. This, the first open-air nursery is, also, perhaps the largest in the country.

In this way Joseph placed his resources at the service of originality and devotion. While increasingly absorbed in other reforms, his interest in the Deptford experiment continued to the end. Just before leaving England on his last journey, while on a visit to the

clinic, he happened to see some vacant land close by. He wrote to the County Council and secured the use of it to Miss McMillan.

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It is needless to describe the ways in which Joseph gave encouragement and assistance to the cause of woman's suffrage. To him it meant attainment of freedom, freedom and equal opportunity, and right relation between the sexes.