REVIEW AND CRITICISM

*Natural Education.* By Winifred Sackville Stoner. Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill Co., 1914. Pp. 295.

Mrs. Stoner tells how she trained her little daughter, by a system which she calls "natural education," so far to exceed the average child of her years, that Winifred Sackville Stoner, Jr., has acquired a nation-wide reputation for her mental and physical attainments. Mrs. Stoner does not claim more for her daughter than that she is "a healthy, normal, happy child, possessed of unusual physical strength and more knowledge than most children of her age." This result was achieved through "the help of living close to 'Mother Nature,' and in the company of the great giants, 'Observation' and 'Concentration,' and the spritely fairy 'Interest,' assisted by mortals' best friend, 'Imagination.'" However this may be, Winifred's achievements are rather breath-taking to the average reader.

As Mrs. Stoner, like Ellen Key, is a firm believer in pre-natal influence, Winifred's education began before she was born. Mrs. Stoner read good books, had beautiful thoughts, heard good music, looked at the beauties of art and nature, and indulged in happy imaginings and the performance of good deeds.

When the baby was six weeks old, she sat alone; she also lay quietly or kicked pugnaciously, according to whether her mother read her Tennyson's "Crossing the Bar" or "Horatius at the Bridge." Before she was six months old, she could ring at request the red, blue, or green bell, which hung at the foot of her bed. At one year, she scanned from memory the first ten lines of Virgil, repeated "Crossing the Bar," brushed her own teeth, and talked like a grown-up person. At sixteen months she learned to read. At eighteen months she directed her nurse how to get to the parade grounds at Old Point Comfort, or to the wharf to watch the boats, and she knew the difference between a ship, yacht, steamer, brig, launch, etc. Before she was two years, she astonished hotel clerks by writing her name in the register. At the age of two, she asked an art-dealer why he did not have a Venus de' Medici in his shop as well as a Venus de' Medici. At that age also, she was sent to near-by stores to make purchases, and she invariably called the clerk's attention to any error in change, if only a penny or two. From the age of two, she began to keep a diary. Before she was three, she copied tales and wrote original rhymes, letters, and stories on the typewriter. At three, she rode horse-back, was remarkably proficient in spelling, knew all of her notes and could play simple airs on her play-piano. Before she was four, she had learned Latin declensions and conjugations as singing exercises, and when just four "she lost faith in the wisdom of some professors who did not understand the salutation 'quid agis' and gazed at her blankly when she spoke of the courses at the table *ab ovo usque ad mola.*" At four also she embroidered a mat, and received a diploma for being able to read, write, and speak Esperanto. Before she was five, she could scan from memory the first book of the *Æneid,* knew over five hundred sayings from great Latin authors, and knew by heart all of Longfellow's "Hiawatha." At the age of five, having (122)
read the poem only once, she repeated “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.” She taught her playmates Esperanto, translated Mother Goose rhymes into Esperanto, had a high school knowledge of history, literature, and mythology, and expressed her thoughts in eight languages. Before she was six, she learned the waltz, two-step, and three-step. At seven, she played chess. At eight, she composed a jingle which named all the bones in the body. Between eight and ten she did all her mother’s marketing, and was pronounced a shrewd buyer. At the time the book was written, when she was ten years old, she could recite portions of Caesar, Cicero, Sallust, Livy, Horace, etc., and had translated their works. At that time, also, she was teaching a large class of children ranging in age from five to fourteen, in the Teachers’ Rooms of Carnegie Institute.

This incomplete summing up by no means represents all Winifred can do, only these are the performances mentioned, together with the age at which they were accomplished.

In training Winifred’s mind, Mrs. Stoner was not afraid to give it plenty of occupation from earliest infancy, her belief being that it is lack of occupation which engenders bad habits in both old and young. She does not believe that thinking and study by themselves have ever produced evil results, and she fed Winifred’s brain as early and as generously as her stomach. She was treated as a thinking human being from the day of her birth. The sense of hearing was the first to be developed, by letting the child hear constantly sweet and rhythmic sounds. Then her ear and eye were trained by the colored bells already mentioned, which hung at the bottom of her bed. When she was six months old, her mother “placed a border of white card-board four feet in height around the walls of her nursery. On one side of the wall I pasted the letters of the alphabet, which I had cut from red glazed paper. On another wall I formed from the same red letters simple words arranged in rows, as bat, cat, hat, mat, pat, rat; bog, dog, hog, log. You will notice that there are only nouns in these lists. On a third wall were the numbers arranged in ten columns, one to ten in first column, ten to twenty in second, etc. On the fourth wall there were pictures of notes in the musical scale.” Her colored nurse, who had a sweet voice, sang to her the letters of the alphabet, while Mrs. Stoner pointed to them. About here, one begins to wonder how a family of ten would have fared, if a single child needed and absorbed so much time and attention.

Later on in Winifred’s life, games were used in endless ways to teach arithmetic, literature, geography, music, dancing, history, mythology, and languages. Most of these games were played with cards and were invented by Mrs. Stoner as the occasion arose, though parcheesi was also used. Through the type-writer, Winifred learned construction, punctuation and spelling. Jingles, too, played a prominent part in collating facts and impressing them on the mind. All out-doors was used as a school house, and the study of trees, flowers, birds, insects, and animals, combined with drawing and photography, constituted a valuable part of Winifred’s training.

Mrs. Stoner has very decided ideas on discipline. She highly disapproves of all corporal punishment, all scolding, the saying of “don’t” and “must,” the rousing of fear in a child, teasing it, or permitting it to say “can’t.”
daughter's case, she was apparently able by prizes, rewards, and deprivations, approval and disapproval, the telling of fairy stories applicable to the morals of the case, and other quiet means, to get the desired results.

She dismisses Dr. Montessori with a curt word of praise for her work with defective children, but thinks her system can never be of benefit to normal children because it lacks imagination. One feels quite certain that even if Montessori had contributed a hundred times more than she has to the science of pedagogy, Mrs. Stoner would still have condemned her work on account of the Italian educator's reference to "foolish fairy tales." For fairies are Mrs. Stoner's pet hobby. She even goes so far as to state that she has "never met anyone reared in a fairy-less home who grew into a warm-hearted, happy man or woman." This and similar generalizations arouse in us a faint suspicion that with all her learning, Winifred will probably lack scientific accuracy and restraint of expression.

There is no doubt that Mrs. Stoner has done an amazingly fine piece of work, developing her little daughter mentally and physically to a very high degree of proficiency, and opening up to the child endless channels through which pleasure reaches her. The question is,—could you achieve approximately the same results by applying these methods to other children? Mrs. Stoner apparently believes you could. Even granting that Winifred is not a very unusual child, there still remains the fact that Mrs. Stoner is a very unusual mother, and Winifred has no brothers and sisters with whom to share her. The sad conviction is therefore born in on the mind of the reader that the applicability of this interesting experiment will be necessarily limited, owing not so much to the lack of proper children as to the dearth of suitable parents.

E. R. W.

NEWS AND COMMENT

Dental Hygiene in New York City Schools.

As a result of the dental hygiene week, held in New York City in May, 700,000 boys and girls have been equipped with individual tooth-brushes and dentifrice. The importance of keeping the teeth clean has been explained to the children, and they have had it impressed upon them that much toothache can be averted by using the tooth-brush with paste or powder at least twice a day. The response from the children has been hearty and almost unanimous. If the authorities can follow up this enthusiastic beginning with regular and thorough dental inspection and treatment for caries, there is no doubt that the health of the rising generation will be greatly improved and their efficiency likewise.

International Congress of Education, August 16th to 28th.

Teachers going to California this summer should so plan their itinerary that they may attend the conventions in Oakland from August 16th to 28th of the National Education Association and the International Congress of Education. These conventions, which undoubtedly will be the greatest educational meetings ever held, will assemble in Oakland's new Municipal Auditorium.