

WARFARE AGAINST IGNORANCE AND CRIME

BY DR. GEORGE F. KUNZ¹

THE National Kindergarten Association was incorporated in 1909 to secure the establishment of a sufficient number of kindergartens for the millions of children of kindergarten age in this country, only a small percentage of whom were at that time enjoying the benefits of this instruction.

In 1913, at the invitation of Dr. P. P. Claxton, at that time United States Commissioner of Education, the Association co-operated with him in establishing a Kindergarten Division in the Bureau of Education at Washington, and provided a divisional chief and several specialists until July, 1919, when a bill was passed by Congress terminating the co-operation of the Bureau of Education with a number of associations which were assisting in its work. However, many important pieces of work were accomplished during the six years' affiliation.

Among these was a survey of the training schools for kindergarten teachers, which revealed much lack of uniformity in ideals and standards. The survey of state laws emphasized the need for their revision in almost every state of the Union, and the compilation of kindergarten statistics showed that only one child in nine was receiving the educational advantages of kindergarten instruction. Much of the information gathered in this way was printed and issued in bulletin form by the government. An important bulletin was that entitled "The Montessori Method and the Kindergarten," written by Miss Elizabeth Harrison, then President of the National Kindergarten College, who was sent to Rome by the Association to attend Mme. Montessori's first class for teachers, and afterward experimented in Chicago with three Montessori classes for different types of children.

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During the affiliation with the Federal Government, field work was started by the Association in California, that state having passed in 1913 a law providing for the establishment of classes upon petition of parents. The Field Secretary of the National Kindergarten Association was a special collaborator of the Bureau, and through her efforts more than 400 classes have been opened. It is estimated that at least 100,000 children on the Pacific Coast have enjoyed the advantages of these kindergartens, and the number will grow larger each year.

The legislative example set by California has been followed by several other states which have passed similar laws on the subject—Nevada, Texas, Maine, Arizona, Wisconsin, Kansas and Pennsylvania. Bills introduced into the New York State Legislature have been defeated three times, although endorsed by practically every state organization interested in civic welfare. Another kindergarten bill will be introduced next winter.

In states where favorable laws have been passed, the Association has conducted field work as far as its limited income, dependent upon voluntary gifts, has permitted. However, the co-operation of the Federal Bureau of Education, and of many organizations, notably the National Council of Women, with 10,000,000 members, has been of inestimable value in arousing public interest in a subject so vital to the future welfare of our land.

Animated by his keen sense of the importance of forming right habits of thought and action early in life, Commissioner Claxton, in co-operation with the Association, instituted in 1917 a service to help parents whose children were not receiving the advantages of kindergarten education, to train their little ones in their homes. Articles written by mothers, many of them former kindergarten teachers, were issued upon request, to more than 2,000 papers and magazines having a combined circulation of 50,000,000. This service has been continued ever since. Of the first year's service, printed in bulletin form by the Bureau of Education, 13,500 copies were issued free, and 5,000 copies have been sold by the Government Printing Office at fifteen cents each. Letters received from 26,000 mothers prove that this service is meeting a great need.

The practical value of kindergarten education has been demonstrated beyond question, and the task that remains to be accomplished is the establishment of sufficient classes for the 4,000,000 children between four and six years of age now being deprived of their rights. The Association is constantly utilizing every possible means of creating a popular demand for kindergartens, and a clear vision

of the goal to be attained serves as a guide in choosing the most practical methods for realizing this ideal.

Everyone interested in the industrial, artistic, scientific, social and spiritual uplift of our people, upon which rests the safety and advance of our republic, should give hearty support to the National Kindergarten Association in its efforts to secure educational advantages for the host of little children now being deprived of their rights.