

BLACKBOARD DRAWING

BLACKBOARD DRAWING

by

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P R E F A C E

THE value of Drawing as a means of education cannot be over-estimated. For some years past attention has been directed to this branch of the school curriculum, but more especially since Pestalozzi and Friedrich Fröbel pointed out the significant part it plays in the development of the little child. The first expressions of the baby are shown in the movements of the arms and legs, in screams, and later on in various guttural sounds, but after a certain period of the development of purely animal strength, the child desires to touch and handle everything he sees: second only to the need of movement is that of touch.

For a time the mere feeling and grasping surrounding objects contents him, but he will soon need something more: "it is a necessity of the child's mind to give out again in concrete form the ideas and images which it has taken into itself, and thus to fix in clear objective shape the dim undefined images floating in its little brain." As a step towards this, the child's favourite occupation is to dabble its hands in some soft substance such as earth, clay, putty, and sand. Gradually he attempts to mould something he has seen in these pliable substances, and modelling becomes one of the first necessities of the

child's life. When clay and sand are not to be obtained he uses sticks, beads, bricks, shells: anything and everything will be made to play their part in the construction of wonderful edifices. Later on drawing will be attempted as another means of making clear the child's own impressions of the external world. The outlines of things are first perceived by the child. Notice how the baby will feel all round the lines marking the limits of different things: the edge of the table, his chair, and toy. The principal lines are noticed and drawn first: there are no curves, no surfaces, no fillings in of any description.

The most uncivilised races make use of straight lines only when ornamenting their gourds, shields, and household utensils; the curve seems to mark a considerable degree of artistic culture, and as the baby develops in exactly the same order as does the race, we find the earliest representations of the little child to be straight lines—a bird flying overhead, a tree, a dog, a man, are all represented at first by a straight line in different positions.

A large tray filled with sand is an invaluable addition to nursery requisites. On this the child may receive his first

drawing lessons. Either by means of a pointed stick, or with the child's own finger, all kinds of objects may be drawn. Later on a small blackboard of about 28 x 20 inches in dimension will partly take the place of the sand tray. Where a blackboard cannot be obtained a yard of black unglazed American cloth stretched on thick cardboard or a small drawing-board will form an excellent substitute. Provide the child with a large overall, a duster, and some pieces of white and coloured chalks, and his happiness will be complete. One by one should the mother introduce a fresh form, and show her child how to improve his own productions.

Fröbel says: "Whatever a child already knows from what life gives and needs he puts into his drawing, examining and making it pass in review before his soul and mind as though to look it all over and to choose right and avoid wrong in the needs of his own future life."

Drawing is the step from mere looking at things to making a picture of them.

Blackboard drawing will be found to develop the æsthetic nature of the child much more easily and rapidly than ordinary drawing on slates and paper. The larger surface to be dealt with and the thick piece of chalk will tend to make the lines bolder and more graceful: the whole arm, instead of only the wrist and hand, is exercised; the amount of pressure required on the chalk will be likely to make the drawings decided and firm; while such great results

are produced so easily and in such a short time that the child is delighted, and his interest will never flag. The drawing of flowers, leaves, animals, and objects will increase his observation; for he must look to find out all the details and parts most carefully before he can draw them. He will make many little discoveries, as for instance that many plants possess the same number of petals and stamens, that some leaves are round while others are oval, etc. Thus his knowledge of natural objects will be greatly increased; and his walks among the lanes and fields, his play in the garden, will have acquired an interest undreamed of before.

The following course was compiled for the benefit of mothers and teachers who are unable for various reasons to receive a systematic training in this important subject. Frequently I have heard students say, "It is impossible for me to draw; I have tried, but it is of no use." The reason of failure is generally this: they draw a man, a house, horse, cart, anything that comes into their mind first, or anything they can copy from a picture, without beginning with the simplest things and proceeding onwards gradually to the more difficult: they have, in fact, no method in their work, and it is practically useless. Half an hour spent every day at the blackboard will soon produce marked results. Another reason why the majority of drawings are so unsatisfactory is owing to the lack of observation on the part of the students: they see without seeing. Never lose an opportunity of examining

everything that may prove of value in your lessons: use your walks and holidays as so many opportunities for becoming more intimately acquainted with the beauties of nature; watch the ant at her work, the spider with her web, the habits and surroundings of the thousands of creatures that swarm around on every side, and I promise you a more entrancing book, filled with tales of domestic life, of tragedy, of love, than you ever found before.

There will then be no lack of subject for illustration; and let the delight and happiness of the little ones, and their appreciation of your efforts on their behalf, amply repay you for all the patience and steady perseverance you have given. You will then have aided in some way towards the carrying out of Fröbel's great summons to mothers and teachers: "Come let us live with our children, that all things may be better here on earth."

M. SWANNELL

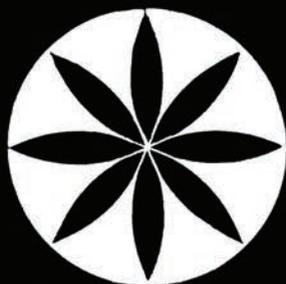
STREATHAM, 1896

CIRCLE PATTERNS

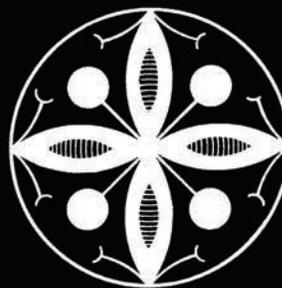
PLATES I, II, III

IN commencing a systematic course of Blackboard Drawing, it is scarcely possible to find a better starting-point than the circle. Not only does the value of circle drawing lie in the fact of giving greater accuracy to the eye, but a thorough practice of it gives the pupil confidence in his own power of making the necessary large sweeps and curves, besides giving him greater power over the use of the chalk than does any other form. Then, too, just as Fröbel took the ball, the most perfect and simple solid and symbol of unity, for the first of his series of Gifts and Occupations, so may we take the circle, which is the simplest and most perfect of outline forms and figures, as the basis on which to found a graduated series of blackboard designs. Little children as a rule make their best symmetrical forms with circles. The drawing may be far from accurate, but the idea of symmetry has been found to be more marked and perfect when making use of circular forms rather than others. The pupil should not be allowed to stand too near the blackboard, for this would prevent him using the whole of his arm from the shoulder: care must be taken never to use only the wrist and fingers, as in ordinary drawing, or it will soon be found that the results are small and weak in outline instead of being large and bold.

The drawings should be as far as possible the result of the child's own thought and invention. For the first lesson or two the teacher might draw a simple pattern on her board for the children to copy; or she might give them the same centre for a pattern and let each child make what



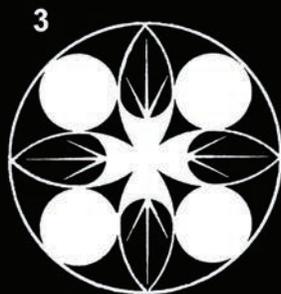
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3

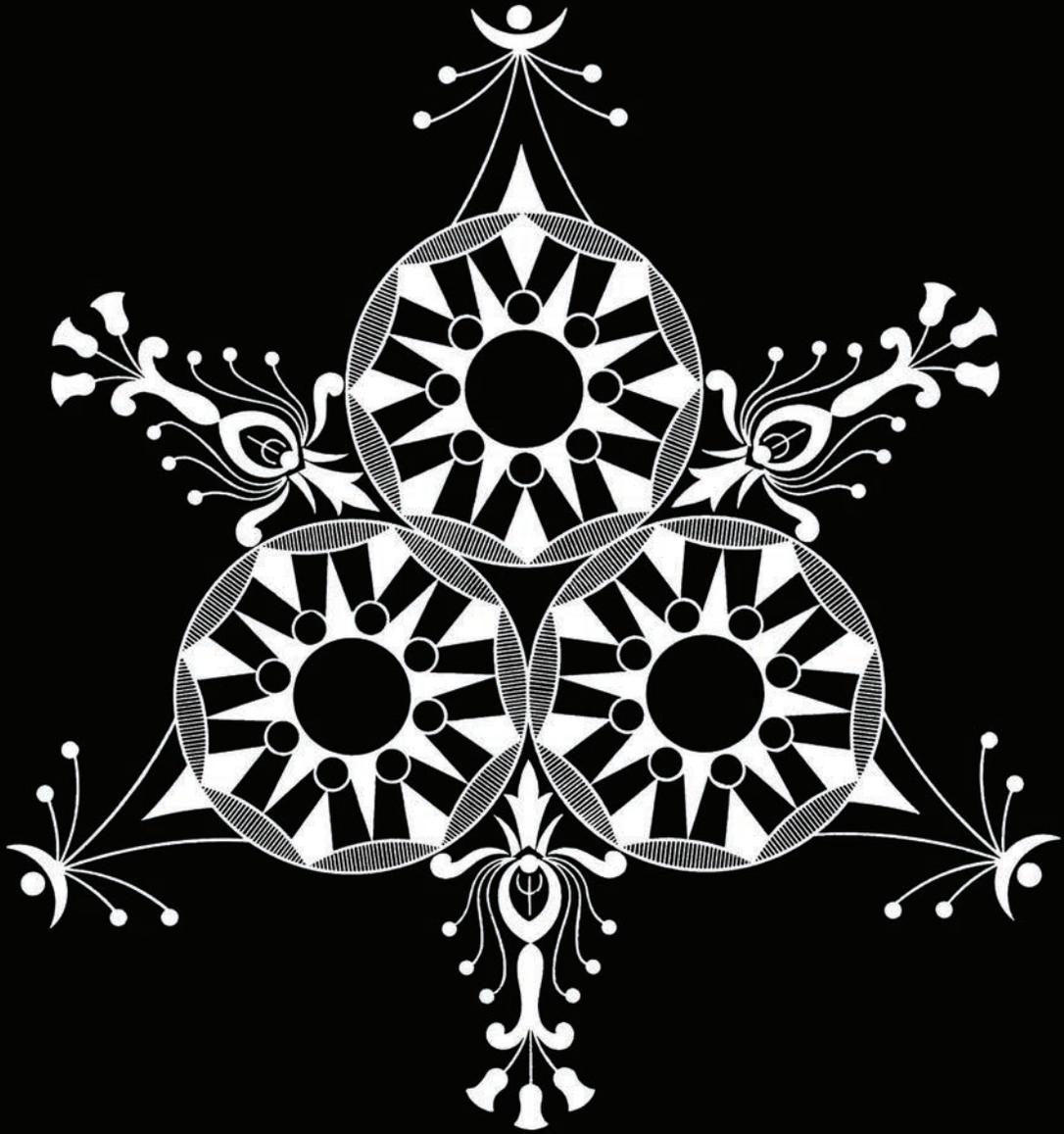


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additions he pleased, for sometimes children are a little afraid at first of working quite alone. Then, too, the rings may be used here with great advantage. For the benefit of those who are not acquainted with Fröbel's Gifts and Occupations, I will briefly describe this Gift. It consists of a number of metal rings whose diameter varies from two inches to half an inch. Each ring is cut in one place for the purpose of linking numbers together in a chain. Besides these are other half rings and segments. This Gift is used in the Kindergarten chiefly as an aid to developing the æsthetic nature of the children, but also for number and picture-making. The children should lay any symmetrical pattern with the rings and half rings and proceed to copy these on their blackboards. This will be found a great help in developing their powers of invention: in a little while they will not need the rings, but will be able to produce similar forms to those laid at their own pleasure. The children must never feel that they are able to make use of the teacher's brains whenever they find themselves in any little difficulty, or they will be unable to produce original patterns; but at the same time the teacher must be always ready to suggest and modify here and there. Frequently it will be found that children invent more difficult patterns than their limited drawing power can produce on the blackboard. The result then will be confusion and scribble. The teacher should do her best to find out what the child is thinking of, and endeavour to modify the pattern to such an extent as to bring it within his drawing capacities. From the beginning, "filling in" parts of the pattern should be allowed; for this gives a certain boldness perceptible at once to the child, although of course he would not be able to say so in these words, but would tell you "how pretty it is" or "it is a lovely pattern."

Children should be encouraged to find circular leaves and fruit, as the Indian cress, poppy heads, oak galls, etc., to take the place in their designs of simple circles.



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The variety and number of patterns are endless, but they may be divided into two classes:—

I. Those within the circle—Plates I and III.

II. Those having one or numbers of circles as centres—Plate II.

It is always best to commence with the patterns formed within the circle. When once the large circle is drawn the design will be much easier than those belonging to the second division; and besides this, the drawing of large circles is more beneficial than the drawing of smaller ones. Having once obtained a fairly correct circle, let the child draw round the line three times to the left, then three times to the right, or vice versa, without once raising the chalk from the board. This will be a help to him in drawing circles freely and quickly in a short time. Above all, insist on the lines being very clear and distinct. The chalk will frequently break, but the child will soon find out for himself the best ways to hold it so that it will not break even when making very “white lines.” The teacher must be careful to chat about the work occasionally in order to rest the child; for the little hands soon get tired, and are unable to press the chalk sufficiently to obtain the necessary firm clear lines, although the child himself will not be in the least weary of drawing.

On Plate XXVII is a photograph taken of a little boy's work at the end of one term's lessons. It is entirely his own invention, and when his teacher suggested a slightly different design he said he should like to think of one quite by himself. However valuable a long course of such patterns would be, it is never wise to continue them unbrokenly week by week. A flower or simple object suggested or brought by the child to be drawn will form a pleasant and useful break.



OBJECTS FROM THE CIRCLE

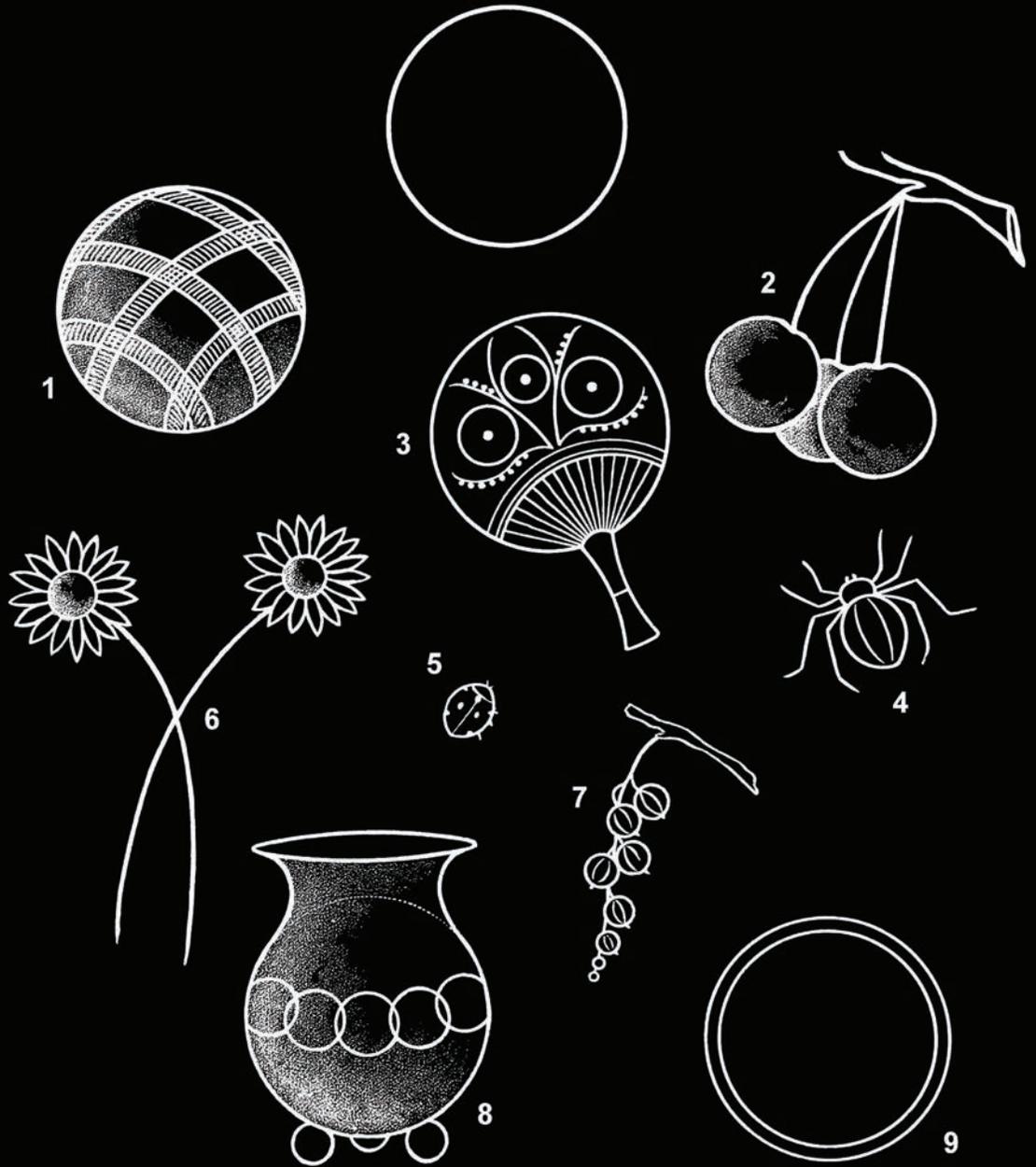
PLATES IV, V

THE drawing of objects is more suitable for very tiny children as a beginning than the patterns; for the idea of symmetry is not yet developed, as in the case of children of six and seven who have had a thorough training in the Kindergarten with the use of the Gifts and Occupations,—tablet-laying, paper-folding, paper-cutting, etc., or with children who, not having the advantage of attending a Kindergarten, yet are taught by a careful mother or nurse to draw in sand with a stick, on slates, paper, etc., and are shown how to use flowers, sticks, acorns, and stones in the formation of beautiful patterns and designs.

Then, too, the drawing of simple objects is a great help in the development of the observing faculty, besides appealing more closely to the little child's surroundings. It has been noticed that children of from three years to six or seven years of age always draw animals, flowers, or objects when left entirely alone, while those of seven years and upwards more often draw patterns than objects.

Circles of various sizes should be drawn clearly on the board: they must never be very small, or there will be no room inside for any markings that may be required. The first objects must be very easy, and obtained with the addition of the fewest possible amount of lines—*e.g.* an apple or cherry, as shown in the illustrations.

Each object should present a new feature of difficulty until the child is able to draw quite difficult objects, as the fish and gong (Plate V, Figures 1 and 4). In this, as in all other subjects, the great law of proceeding from



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the known and easy to the unknown and more difficult must be kept in mind. The teacher should always let the children think of their own objects and draw them after careful examination of the thing itself. If the drawings are not correct, she must help the little ones from her board. It is of much greater benefit to the children to let them find out their own weakness for themselves; they will then be better able to appreciate and value their teacher's help. Coloured chalks may be used effectively, and will prove very valuable in teaching *little* children. Colour seems to inspire them at once. A tiny child was given a piece of white chalk and asked to draw an apple on the blackboard. She looked at the board, then at her chalk, and said she could not do it. Just then her eyes fell on some red and green chalks lying near, and, picking up these, she quickly drew an apple with a rosy cheek without any difficulty. She had only noticed the colour of apples, and not the form, and so was unable to imagine an apple drawn with white chalk alone.

Comparatively few natural objects are circular in form: with the exception perhaps of half a dozen leaves, the outlines of a few flowers, some fruits and seeds, all are more or less *oval* in form. No animals are entirely circular, although some may appear so at first sight to the little child, and do actually take this form at times—*e.g.* hedgehog, woodlouse, sunfish, etc.

The shading used occasionally in the illustrations is entirely for the use of students. It is not wise to let little children shade objects, as the idea is too difficult for them to understand; it is better to endeavour only to get true outlines.

