

The Cleverest Child in the World.

By PROFESSOR H. OLERICH.



HE writer has been asked to tell the readers of THE STRAND MAGAZINE of the wonderful educational attainments of Viola Rosalia Olerich, who is conceded to be by far the most advanced juvenile scholar that ever lived—at least, so far as records on this subject are preserved. I shall endeavour to tell the story of her wonderful life in the simplest way in which my words and pictures can do so.

TIME AND PLACE OF VIOLA'S BIRTH AND ADOPTION.

Viola Rosalia Olerich was born in the City of Des Moines, Iowa (U.S.A.), February 10th, 1897. I and my wife adopted her when she was eight months and four days old. At the time of adoption we resided in Lake City, Iowa, where the writer was superintendent of the public schools. On the 25th of July, 1899, we moved to Council Bluffs, Iowa, where Viola has resided with us ever since, and has received all her instruction from us at home.

PRINCIPAL OBJECT OF ADOPTION.

Our chief object for adopting a child was to test, in a practical way, a new theory of education, which we believe to be much superior to any educational system which has heretofore been used. The wonderful success with which we have so far met must, we think, stand as evidence of its merit. It is briefly outlined in this article.

HOW THE BABY WAS SELECTED.

No attempt was made to select a particular child; on the contrary, we desired to get an average child. Hence, physical health was the only point of pedigree which we regarded as of vital importance, and even of this we knew little or nothing.



VIOLA AS A CRY-BABY TWO DAYS AFTER HER ADOPTION.
From a Photo.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS.

We keep, perhaps, VIOLA'S a more complete DIARY. daily record of Viola's progress than was ever before kept of a child. The data used in this article are taken from this diary. This affords the reader an assurance that the facts given in this sketch were not jotted down at random from memory, as they too often are in such cases, but are as accurate as cautious clerical work can reasonably make them.

Viola's physical conditions were not very flattering. She was a pale, an almost sickly-looking baby, with a mouth that was a little crooked, and the right side of her face considerably fuller than the left. These defects soon began to diminish and disappear. Her cheeks assumed a healthy colour, and her face grew symmetrical. Viola's size and weight are about an average. At the time of adoption she weighed 14lb. 10z., and was 2ft. 11in. high. Now she weighs 30lb. 8oz., and is a little over 3ft. in height. Baby is now regarded



VIOLA A FEW DAYS LATER, QUITE HAPPY.
From a Photo.

as a "beautiful blonde, with brilliant eyes, soft golden hair, and a charming personality."

EARLY CONDUCT.

At the time Viola came to live with us she was a cry-baby, as may be seen from the first picture, which was taken two days after her adoption. We immediately began to teach her to amuse herself by playing on the floor with her simple toys. She soon learned to like this so well that she did not want to be held much. She thus learned early to amuse herself, a knowledge which is of inestimable value, and which every person, young and old, should possess in the



VIOLA'S FIRST LIBRARY, CONTAINING ONE BOOK.
From a Photo.

fullest measure. By being thus kindly treated and busily employed her habit of crying rapidly diminished, and her disposition became continually more jovial and amiable.

EATING AND DRINKING. Viola has always been permitted to eat as much of everything as she desired. Between meals she has always eaten whenever her appetite prompted her to do so. At the age of one year and six months she received her little lunch-counter, in which we always keep a supply of bread, crackers, etc., for her; and whenever she wants to eat between meals she goes to her lunch-counter, opens the lid, and eats as much as she wants, as she may be seen doing on page 135. When she has finished eating she almost invariably closes the lid and goes on playing. This practice is not only a useful lesson in establishing a healthy appetite, but is also a valuable lesson in order.

SLEEPING. Ever since Viola was with us she has slept alone and retired alone. The first few months she slept twice during the day. She has never been rocked, carried, or put to sleep. A child should have plenty of free, pleasant sleep, and a helpless child should always be taken up immediately after it wakes. It should never be first compelled to cry for assistance. To compel it thus to cry soon converts it into a cry-baby.

STATE OF HEALTH. Apart from incidental colds and the measles, baby has always enjoyed the best of health. She has been growing continually more vigorous from the first day she came to live with us.

HOW TREATED. I have always treated Viola with the utmost kindness and courtesy; have never even spoken a loud or harsh word to her. It is my opinion that every "bad boy" and every "bad girl" has been made bad by meddling interference. It has been said: "Spare the rod and spoil the child," but modern science, as well as common sense, is beginning to say: "Destroy the rod and refine the child." Intelligence, kindness, and freedom are, no doubt, the only factors that can really reform and refine the world.

METHOD USED. Viola has acquired all her knowledge in the form of play. She has never "studied" a lesson in her life; has never been asked to take a book. Her whole life has been a continuous game of delightful play. The writer invented and constructed much of the attractive educational apparatus with which the keen interest for learning was awakened,

and after surrounding her with this apparatus she has enjoyed complete freedom as to what and when to learn. She has always been the judge in this choice, and not we. All we do is to create an interest in learning and activity in whatever direction we desire her to develop.

HOW VIOLA LEARNED TO READ. Partly for the purpose of amusing herself, partly for creating an interest for books, and partly for the purpose of learning to handle books, Viola received her first book when she was thirteen months old. Soon after this we began to direct her attention to objects in the pictures and told her some interesting facts about them. In a few days she became intensely interested in these simple exercises. She soon brought her book to us for a lesson very frequently. At the time we gave her this book we also put up an artistic little shelf in a convenient place in the sitting-room, and told her that this little shelf would make a nice library for her new book, when she was not using it. She learned the lesson of keeping her book on it very readily. This was an important lesson in order.

With her first book she played for two months, after which it was put away and another kind of First Reader given her, which she also used for two months in a similar manner. She played with these books very much—perhaps from two to three hours a day. The forepart of the first book is considerably torn; the second is slightly torn in only two places. These simple exercises awakened an early interest for pictures and books, cultivated a taste for observation, strengthened attention, developed caution and memory, greatly enlarged her vocabulary, and created an appreciation of order and beauty; in fact, they started the development of most of the mental faculties.

She could give one sound of every letter when she was seventeen months old; then she learned to read short sentences which she had learned to speak readily. We printed these sentences on cards, and she learned to read them by the sentence-method. We then began to use the word-method also. In this way we used all the methods in an attractive way; sometimes one and sometimes another.

When Viola was two years and eleven months old she could read at sight, with force and expression, almost any reading-matter in the English language. She could also read German nicely before she was three years

old. At the age of three years and two months she read English, German, and French. There is, perhaps, not a word in the Baldwin series of school-readers, from the first, including the sixth, which she cannot readily read at sight.

German and French she learned to read almost exclusively by the sentence-method. The sentence is the unit of thought. We think in terms of sentences, and not in terms of words or elementary sounds. For this reason is the sentence-method the easiest and most attractive for little children, and produces by far the best readers. A young child should learn to read such sentences as it readily uses in its daily conversation, rather than learn new sentences by reading. This course makes the reading easy, delightful, and intelligible.

NUMBERS AND COLOURS. At the age of twenty months Viola could read all the digits, and recognise nine colours: white, black, and the seven prismatic colours. We taught the digits by printing large figures on pretty blocks which were hung on the wall. Each block had also a number of bright tacks in it corresponding to the numerical value of the digits. The colours were taught by fastening coloured ribbons to blocks, hung up in the same manner as the number blocks. These blocks were called for by number or colour whenever the baby and we felt disposed to play with them. Baby would then go and get the one she thought we had called for. We began with two blocks and gradually increased the number of them. At twenty-two months she could read all numbers not over 100. Now she reads numbers as large as octillions. She is also familiar with quite a number of shades and tints.

When she was one year and nine months she could draw the following on the black-board, or with pencil, when requested: A vertical line, a horizontal line, a slanting line, a cross, a ladder, and a circle. Since that time she has learned to draw many other things. Upon request she will now draw any kind of a line used in plane geometry, all the various kinds of triangles and quadrilaterals, a sphere, a square and a triangular prism, a pyramid and cone and their frustums, leaves of trees, and many other things of that nature. We began drawing with straight lines on the black-board, and explained their position;

then we took up the triangle, curved line, etc., gradually proceeding from the simple to the more complex.

Viola learned form very readily. **GEOMETRI-CAL FORMS.** Before she had attained the age of one year and nine months she



THE GEOMETRICAL FORMS.
From a Photo. by Tucker, Council Bluffs, Iowa.

could name and fetch any of the thirty-four geometrical forms shown in this picture. We first set up only three pieces—the square, the circle, and the triangle. Then others were added as fast as she learned the former.

When Viola was one year and nine months old she knew the national flags of twenty-five nations.

When all the flags were set up in a line she could get any one called for. In all these exercises we began with a few and then increased the number. In our teaching we never had any particular time set for certain lessons, but always followed our inclinations. The reader should firmly keep in mind that all Viola's learning was only play, and that she always enjoyed complete freedom on all these educational subjects.

In geography she first learned to locate and then to name the States and territories of the United States. The map we used for this purpose had no names on it. She could point to any State and territory and their

capitals when she was one year and nine months old. In this way she could soon name, locate, and read the names of all the countries and their capitals in the world. Then she learned to read and locate the names of oceans, lakes, mountains, rivers, capes, etc. She can now read almost any geographical name given in Frye's Geographies, and upon request she can find almost any prominent geographical name and place in a few seconds, when the closed geography is given to her for that purpose.

PORTRAITS
OF
FAMOUS
PERSONS.

At the age of one year and ten months Viola knew the portraits of more than a hundred famous men and women, representing nearly all schools of thought, both good and bad. She soon



THE PORTRAITS OF FAMOUS PERSONS.
From a Photo. by Tucker, Council Bluffs, Iowa.

became fond of playing with these pictures, and learned to recognise them in a short time.

The portraits were set in a card-holder, all in plain view, as shown in the picture; then baby was requested to get a certain one. In the first lesson only two were used, then the number was increased as fast as she learned to recognise them.

SEEDS
AND
LEAVES.

Before Viola was one year and eleven months old she knew and could name thirty-two different kinds of seeds and twenty-five kinds of leaves of trees. The seeds were put in little bottles and set in a neat case, so that all the bottles were in plain view at the same time. The leaves were pressed in a large book.

ANATOMY
AND PHY-
SIOLOGY.

At the age of one year and eleven months she could point to almost all the bones of the human skeleton, and to many organs of the body. She first learned to name and locate the femur, then the humerus, and so on. Now she can name and read the names of all the bones of the human skeleton, and locate nearly all of them. She can also read, name, and locate the external parts of the body.

Viola knew at sight and could name the twenty- LINES AND ANGLES. two kinds of lines and angles used in geometry when she was one year and eleven months old. These lines and angles were drawn on cards about the size of a common envelope, and she learned to recognise and name them in the same way as she learned the portraits, etc.

UNITED
STATES
MONEY.

At twenty-three months she named and recognised all the denominations of United States money which is now coined and printed by the United States Government, except bills over 100 dollars. We taught her the money by placing it in a shallow dish, beginning with the penny and the nickel, increasing the denominations as fast as she learned them. Sometimes we asked her to pick out a certain denomination for us; at other times we would pick out a piece and ask her to name it. In this way she learned to discriminate and to name, to observe and to talk, all of which are very useful in the practical affairs of life.

EXAMINA-
TION.

When Viola was one year eleven months and twenty-five days old she passed an examination before a disinterested committee of examiners (Miss Verna Lumpkin and Miss Martha Campbell, both competent and successful teachers of the public schools of Lake City, Iowa, the city in which we then resided), who found that she knew 2,500 nouns by having either the pictures or the



VIOLA'S EXAMINATION CERTIFICATE.
From a Photo. by Tucker, Council Bluffs, Iowa.

objects themselves brought before her. The committee estimated that she knew at least 500 more nouns which they could not present as objects or pictures, making a total of 3,000 nouns which she knew at this age—perhaps more nouns than the words of all parts of speech used by the average adult.

This examination was conducted by two distinctly different methods. By the first a large number of objects, or the pictures of them, were placed before Viola, and then she was requested to bring them one by one, after having heard each called for by its appropriate name. By the second an object, or a picture of it, was held up for inspection, and she named it. The latter method was used about half the time, although she could pronounce fairly well almost all the words in the list. The committee compiled a written "record" containing all the words of this list.

At two years she knew PUNCTUA- twenty - two punctuation TION MARKS. marks. They were drawn on cards, and learned in the same way as the portraits, etc. The reader will notice that all Viola's learning is in the line of practical knowledge—knowledge

which must be learned before we can read intelligently and write correctly.

Shortly after Viola began SPELLING. to read she also began to learn the names of the letters and to spell easy words, which were printed in large letters on cards, and these cards could be slipped into a groove on one face of attractive blocks, which were hung up against the wall, and which had pieces of pea-nut in them. Whenever she wanted a pea-nut we would ask her to get a block (we called these blocks pea-nut bottles) having a certain word on it. If she brought the block containing the right word she would first spell the word by sight, then from memory, and also often by sound. In this way she learned to spell readily and pleasantly, so that at the age of three she could spell a long list of words, many of them quite difficult, such as vinegar, sugar, insect, Viola, busy, mamma, Rosalia, February, biscuit, Olerich, American, Nebraska, Council Bluffs, Pompeii, Mediterranean, etc.

Here is a picture of Viola sitting ANALYZING at her little table examining and A FLOWER. naming the different parts of a



ANALYZING A FLOWER.
From a Photo. by Tucker, Council Bluffs, Iowa.



VIOLA'S LUNCH TABLE.
From a Photo. by Tucker, Council Bluffs, Iowa.

flower. She is very fond of flowers, and likes to separate them into their different parts. She can read at sight all the botanical names given in Youman's Botany. We have on numerous occasions passed this Botany and Steele's Zoology to the audience and offered a handsome book as a prize to anyone who would succeed in finding a word in either of these books that Viola could not readily pronounce at sight. So far no one has succeeded in finding such a word.

Viola could readily read manuscript before she began to practise writing. Her first writing, and also her first drawing, exercises were on the black-board. She never learned to print much, but began with manuscript. The small *i* was the first letter she learned to make, then *e*, *u*, *t*, *j*, *n*, *b*, etc. *O* was the first capital letter she made. She now writes both words and numbers quite readily. In order to make the writing exercises pleasant we often interspersed them with attractive drawings.

February 22, 1900, she received a Smith Premier typewriter, and took her first lesson in typewriting two days after this. In a few days she learned to put the paper in, run the carriage, feed the paper, and finger the whole of the keyboard with both hands. She strikes the keys so firmly and

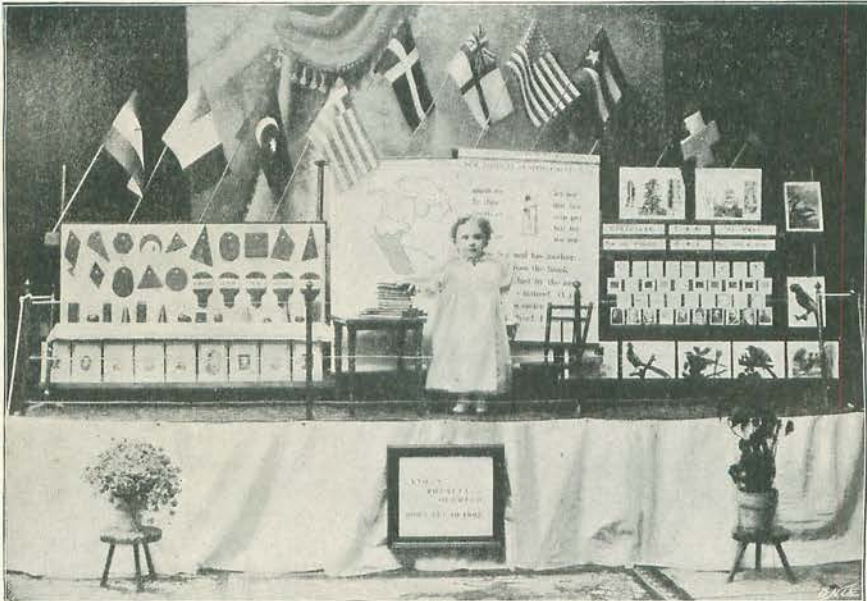
evenly that the letters are all full and distinct. She now not only copies manuscript and print, but writes very nicely without a copy.

MANY OTHER ACCOMPLISHMENTS. Viola now (May, 1900) knows the name and function of all of Webster's Diacritical Marks. She can correctly give out any lesson in McGuffey's latest spelling-book, where she closely observes the silent letters, the diacritical marks, the accent, and the syllabication of words. She can give all the elementary sounds of the English language, and can find words in a small dictionary. She recognises and reads the abbreviations of all the States and territories of the United States, of the days of the week, of the months of the year, and many others. She can quite

well classify sentences according to use and form, and punctuate accordingly. She is quite proficient in translating French and German into English, and is familiar with a large number of scientific terms used in astronomy, geology, grammar, physical geography, history, etc. Her attention, her memory, her observation, her power of discrimination, her reasoning, and her ability as a critic are as marvellous as her other attainments.



VIOLA AS A TYPEWRITER.
From a Photo. by Heyn, Omaha.



From a Photo. by]

VIOLA ON HER PLATFORM.

[Tucker, Council Bluffs, Iowa.

HER
ABILITY
TESTED IN
PUBLIC.

Viola's educational ability has been thoroughly tested in public on numerous occasions. She performs her work on her little elevated stage. Some specimens of her educational apparatus may be seen as shown in the picture. She is very fond of giving these exhibitions, and greatly admires the applause of her audience and the bouquets which she frequently receives.

ANSWERS
TO
QUERIES.

"What do you intend to prove with your educational experiment?" is a question very frequently asked. In reply to this I will say that there are many important principles which I desire to prove as far as an individual case can furnish proof of them. I desire to show that a child, at a very young age, can be a good reader, a skilful writer, an excellent speller, and an erudite scholar; that freedom and kindness produce far better educational results than coercion and cruelty; that interest, and not force, should be made the incentive for learning; that all learning should be in the form of play; that no injury

can result to the child, no matter how much it learns, so long as it is left completely free; that a comparatively young child can readily acquire a liberal knowledge of such important sciences as physiology, economics, psychology, etc.; that intellectuality and character depend almost entirely on *post-natal* education and only very little, if any, on *heredity*, or *pre-natal* influences, and that every healthy child, which is properly educated under the system of interest, kindness, and freedom, will have

an extensive vocabulary and a wonderful memory, as well as many other unusual accomplishments with which we now scarcely ever meet. The writer is confident that with the proper system of education, children, before they arrive at the age of eight, will have a larger store of useful knowledge than is now possessed by the average graduate, and they will acquire all this practically without any strain or effort. The truth of this statement may, we think, be easily demonstrated in a practical way by living examples. So far, Viola's rate of education is much in advance of the one mentioned above.



PROFESSOR HENRY OLERICH, WHO ADOPTED
AND EDUCATED VIOLA.

From a Photo. by Schmidt, Council Bluffs, Iowa.