

## E S S A Y:

### A HISTORY OF THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL FOR JEWISH DEAF CHILDREN, 1865-1949, AGAINST A BACKGROUND OF GENERAL TRENDS IN EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE:

1.

From 1792, when Dr. J. Watson, nephew of Thomas Braidwood, established the Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb in London, until 1860, the education of the deaf in Britain had been conducted by means of the manual and sign method. This method was commonly known as the "French system", since it was adopted from the original system introduced into France in 1760 by the Abbe de l'Epee. Dr. Watson's school was situated in the Old Kent Road, and numbered amongst its pupils several Jewish children, who came from families amongst the large Jewish population in that area.

2.

In 1860, Mr. Van Asche, a pupil of Mr. Hirsch of the Rotterdam Institute, came to England at the request of a wealthy Jewish merchant named Solomons, to educate Solomon's deaf-mute daughter. Mr. Asche taught by the German, or oral system, and subsequently opened a private school in London. In the same year; 1860, a School was opened in Northampton, and it is believed that the system used was the pure oral. However, it was not until 1865 that the oral system was used and brought to the notice of the general public.

3.

It was a matter of some concern to several notable Jewish men of that time that deaf Jewish children should, by virtue of their handicap, be prevented from receiving the benefits of the teachings of the Jewish faith. In exactly the same way, many hundreds of years before, devout men of various faiths, amongst them being St. John of Beverley had striven to educate the deaf mute in order that he might be able to enjoy the inestimable blessings of a knowledge of the Divine purpose. Among these Jewish men was a Mr. Henry Isaacs, later to be knighted for services to his country. He had two daughters, both born deaf.

4.

With a natural concern for providing the best possible education for his children, Mr. Isaacs had made exhaustive enquiries into the methods of educating the deaf then in use, and had finally sent his daughters to the Institute in Rotterdam, where they were educated by the German system, introduced into Germany years before by Samuel Heinicke, at approximately the same time as the "French" system was gathering force in Paris.

5.

A group of Jewish men, including H. Isaacs, S.L. Miers, and A.H. Moses, sought for funds with which to establish a school specially for Jewish Deaf Children. Baroness Rothschild agreed to help, and the school was started in Whitechapel, with six children. The first teacher was the Rev. C. Rhind, who taught by the "French", or Manual system. Mr. H. Isaacs, however, by demonstrating the results achieved with his own daughters, was able to persuade the school committee to engage a teacher conversant with the "German" or "Oral" system. The committee accordingly asked the Head of the Rotterdam Institute Dr. Hirsch, to recommend a suitable teacher for the post, and Dr. Hirsch sent a Mr. Van Praagh, one of his own pupils. The committee appointed Mr. Van Praagh, and requested that he also trained some Jewish teachers in the "Oral" method. Thus to this school belonged the honour of being the first "Oral" establishment in Britain. The school was dependant on voluntary contributions, as were most of the other schools in Britain, and appeals for funds were frequently made to the Jewish communities.

6.

Mr. Van Praagh was tireless in his efforts to secure the interest of the general public in the oral method of educating the deaf, and it can truly be said that he was instrumental in swaying public opinion towards the time when the "Oral" system was to be almost unanimously adopted in Britain. He fixed the age of admission at six years, showing that he was conscious of the necessity for making an early start with the deaf pupils if they were to reap full benefit from the oral system. Evidence of the general interest in his work can be seen by the fact that he was asked to educate non-Jewish children as well, which he agreed to do. A fee

for non-Jewish children was fixed at £10. per annum, day pupils only.

7.

The curriculum of the school comprised Articulation, Litereading, Writing, Arithmetic, History, Geography, Grammar, Calisthenics, Drawing, Needlework, and, for the Jewish children, instruction in Hebrew and Religion. This was a very ambitious curriculum for the times, as the notion that a deaf pupil could benefit by education in normal subjects to this extent was, if not new, at least rare.

8.

As the number of non-Jewish pupils fell away to two, it was decided to abandon the scheme, and keep the School for Jewish children only. This decision gave dissatisfaction to some of the school committee, who resigned, and opened a new school for the deaf, non-denominational, in Fitzroy Square, London. Mr. Van Praagh became the Director of this new establishment, which later served the dual purpose of school and teacher training college. It was from this college that Van Praagh wrote his "Plan for the Establishment of Day schools for the Deaf and Dumb", which he subsequently read at a Head Teachers Conference in Lancaster in 1882. The loss to the Jewish school of the services of an excellent teacher was the gain of a much larger part of the deaf community. Mr. Van Praagh carried on his ceaseless efforts to spread the doctrine of the benefits of the Oral system until his death in . One of the more interesting of the ways in which he attracted attention to the education of the deaf was the occasion on which he persuaded Princess Alexandra to attend an examination of his pupils, at which examination one child is reputed to have distinctly recited the National Anthem.

9.

Application by the committee to the Vienna Institute for the Education of the Deaf led to the appointment of Van Praagh's successor, a Mr. Simon Schontheil, who was a very able teacher of the Oral system. In the same year, 1874, the school received a certificate from the Local Government Board, recognising it as an efficient school for the education and training of the Deaf and Dumb.

Children from the provinces were now admitted to the School, fees being met in part by the Local Guardians.

10.

From it's original home in Whitechapel, the School had already moved, in 1865, to premises at Burton Crescent, and now, ten years later, moved again to Notting Hill. At the ceremony of consecration of the new premises, a Mr.E.A.Davidson made the observation that besides the educational benefits of the Oral System, it was beneficial to the health that the speech organs and lungs should be exercised, and he further stated that it had been shown that the incidence of consumption was greater among deaf mutes than amongst other people, owing to the inactivity of the lungs. This view was shared in later years by many medical authorities, amongst them being the renowned Dr.J. Kerr Love.

11.

In 1880 a conference of teachers of the deaf was held in Milan, under the Chairmanship of Abbe Tarra, a renowned Italian teacher and firm exponent of the Oral system. It was almost unanimously decided at this conference to adopt the Oral system in most countries, and tribute was paid to the way in which the Jewish school had pioneered in this work in Britain. One of these tributes was delivered in a speech made by the Head teacher of the School for the Deaf in Doncaster, the Rev.W. Ware. At subsequent conferences of Head teachers similar tributes were paid many times, and at the request of Richard Elliot, Headmaster of the school at Old Kent Road and Margate, many delegates from all parts of the country visited the Jewish school to see for themselves the results obtainable under the Oral system. In the words of Dr.Buxton, Secretary of the Society for the Training of Teachers of the Deaf, "On the morning of the last conference some of us went together to Mr.Schonthells school. We saw then what opened our eyes. Then commenced the moving of the waters of which we see the results to-day". Here Dr.Buxton was referring to the practically unanimous adoption of the Oral system in Britain after the Milan Conference. At a conference of Head teachers in 1881 in London, Mr.S.Schonthell gave a report of his methods of teaching, a section of which report can with advantage be repeated here. "Rarely write, never gesticulate, always speak. Do not cut up your words and sentences, and let emphasis clearly mark

the chief sounds, radical syllables, and the most important words. Lipreading will then be easy, the voice will sound naturally, speech will come forth spontaneously, and the double affliction of being deaf and dumb will undoubtedly be overcome".

12.

In 1884 the Jewish School received a Silver Medal from the International Health Exhibition, the President of which was H.R.H. the Prince of Wales. In this and in many other ways the school was well represented at educational conferences and meetings. In 1887 Sir Philip Magnus became the President of the School Committee, and served on a deputation to Lord Cranbrook on the subject of the recommendations made by the Royal Commission, appointed by the Government to enquire into State Aid for schools for the Blind and Deaf. Thus, in 1893, the Jewish school became eligible for a capitation grant from the Government of the maximum amount, to wit, £5. 5. Od. £2. 2. Od. of this was to be devoted to handicraft instruction, and as a result of this interest in handicrafts received a new impetus in the school.

13.

This new interest in handwork was stimulated by the appointment of Mr.S.Kutner, as Headmaster, on the resignation of Mr.Schontheil after twenty years in that position. Mr.S.Kutner, a former pupil of Mr.Schontheil, had been the Senior Oral Teacher at the Royal Schools for the Deaf, Manchester. As a result of Mr.Kutner's special interest in handwork, the school was awarded a gold medal at the Paris exhibition of 1900. He was also responsible for the publication of a "Vocabulary for Deaf Children" in which progressive lessons in language development were copiously illustrated. Far in advance of its time, this book is still used in some lessons at the Jewish school. Mr.Kutner also became President of the Teacher's Society, a body which met monthly to discuss professional subjects. During this period also great pains were taken to keep the physical instruction on a high level, and for several years the school held a shield awarded by the National Physical Recreation Society.

14.

In 1895 the School Board of London agreed to

pay £27., per annum for the education and maintenance of any Jewish child the Board sent to the school, day pupils receiving a reduced grant of £12. Later the L.C.C. reduced this grant to £12., the remainder being covered by an agreed Government grant under the terms of the 1893 Act. Under the terms of the same act it became imperative that the school found new accommodation, as the present building in Notting Hill failed to fulfill the requirements of the Act, considering the increasing number of pupils. Eventually the school moved to extensive premises in Nightingale Lane, Wandsworth, where it is still situated this day.

15.

In 1900 an article written by the Rev. Isadore Harris appeared in a publication named "Israel", and gives a fairly clear picture of the type of teaching going on in the School, and, indeed, in most oral schools at that time. He mentioned the beautiful grounds in which the boys learnt gardening. The gymnasium, workshop, and needlework rooms also came in for special mention. The writer watched certain classes at work. The young children were taught articulation at the same time as reading, that is, they watched the teacher make a sound, they imitated it, then pointed out the particular sound on a wall chart. In the senior classes the lipreading was excellent, and Mr. Kutner pointed out to the visitor that all mistakes in lipreading were corrected orally, before being written on the blackboard. In reply to questions from the Rev. Harris, Mr. Kutner gave as the average pupil's attainments on leaving the following abilities: the possession of a fair knowledge of language; the ability to converse with and understand their friends, and, to an extent, strangers; some knowledge of geography, history, arithmetic, grammar, Hebrew, religion, Scripture and drawing. In addition to this the girls were taught sewing and housework, the boys woodwork, cardboard modelling, and gardening.

16.

The numbers of children desiring admission into the school necessitated the building of a new wing, which was completed in 1905, and opened by Her Royal Highness Princess Christian of Schleswig-Holstein, who was very interested in a demonstration of the children's attainments. Dr. Michholtz, H.M. Inspector for Special

Schools, highly commended the language training of the school, and pronounced the school to be a model of its kind. Unfortunately the income from the school funds did not keep pace with the expansion of the establishment, and in 1911 the Committee proposed to the L.C.C. that they take over the educational side of the school, the religious instruction to remain under the control of the committee. The school was heavily in debt, partly as a result of the high fees which had to be paid to teachers to keep on a level with salaries paid by the L.C.C. These negotiations were still being discussed when the outbreak of War in 1914 put a stop to this and many other similar matters of importance to the educational world.

17.

From 1918 to 1928 were ten fairly uneventful years in the history of this school. One incident was the resignation of S. Kutner and the appointment of Miss H. Davids as Headmistress. From 1929 Local Education Authorities who sent Jewish deaf children in their area to the Jewish school contributed an agreed sum towards the cost of maintenance and education; but the L.C.C. would only do this from the age of seven. Consequently the school income had to meet in full the costs incurred by taking as pupils children of nursery age from the London Area. This necessity had two marked results. The school became heavily in debt through excessive maintenance costs, and many children of nursery age were denied admission because the school could not afford to pay for the facilities for educating and keeping them.

18.

About this time ideas towards the education of the deaf were undergoing a significant change. Whereas hitherto residential institutions for the deaf were considered as asylums, or places of refuge for the deaf mute, they were now being thought of primarily as schools. Accordingly many institutions changed their names, and in the case of this particular school the name was changed in 1933 from "Jew's Deaf and Dumb Home" to "The Residential School for Jewish Deaf Children". Note too the absence of the word "Dumb". Admittedly the school had had a high standard of speech training for sixty-eight years, yet so hard do old customs die that even at this time the deaf were commonly referred to as the "Deaf and Dumb". I might

even go further and say that this entirely misleading term is still in common usage to-day, even amongst the professional classes.

19.

In 1935 Mr. S. D. Hart replaced Miss Davids as Head. Mr. Hart was very interested in all forms of progressive changes in education, and was especially interested in the use of hearing aids to develop to the utmost degree residual hearing in the deaf. Accordingly, in 1936 a Multitone group hearing aid was installed, at first as a fixture in a separate room. This proved unsatisfactory, as it was not always convenient to move classes to this room, leaving all their teaching apparatus in their own classroom. In the following year the aid was made portable, which proved to be a much more satisfactory arrangement. The aims of the school were, in these pre-war years, to "Train and Educate children to earn their own living, and to instruct them in religious Knowledge". To fulfill these aims the curriculum included two afternoons per week in what might be termed "pre-vocational training". Boys were instructed in woodwork, with a view to a future apprenticeship to a cabinet maker, gardening, boot-repairing and shoe-making, tailoring and book-binding. The girls received instruction in domestic science, in a cottage in the school grounds specially altered to suit this purpose, dress-making, and limited instruction in laundry work. Physical education had always been an important part of the curriculum, as witness the winning of a shield for many years, mentioned in Paragraph 13, and right up to the outbreak of War in 1939 the children received expert tuition in a well-equipped gymnasium. This attention to physical well-being was fully justified, as could be seen by the firm, purposive way in which the children walked about, and responded quickly to new situations. Every week-end the children went for walks in the local parks, and often these walks formed the basis of the lessons during the ensuing week. Education through personal experience had been long accepted as a worthwhile method of instruction at this school.

20.

During the 1939-1945 War the school was



evacuated to Havering House, near Marlborough. Conditions were far from ideal, space was cramped, everyone lived on top of each other, and often different classes had to share the same classroom. The staff, however, were able to give much more time to their pupils than would have been possible before, with the result that a very good atmosphere of friendship and co-operation existed between the Staff and the children. During these war years Mr. Hart died, and was replaced by the present Head, Mr. L. J. Benham.

21.

On returning to London, the school committee again attempted to negotiate with the L.C.C. for financial support, with the approval of the Ministry of Education, but to date no satisfactory decision has been reached. Other Local Education Authorities pay in full the annual education and maintenance costs for Jewish children from their areas, but the L.C.C. will only pay education costs, which leaves a deficit of £80. per child to be met by the school. As more than 50% of the children come from the London area, the position is very serious, and each year increases the school debts thus incurred.

22.

Since 1945, the nursery facilities have been improved, and there are now sixteen children of under five years of age residing in the nursery wing. Other improvements have been the installation in a special room of a group hearing aid, designed by Dr. T. S. Littler, of Manchester. The curriculum, reflecting the modern trend, includes Arithmetic: Language, History, Geography, Nature Study, Elementary Physics, Electricity, Civics, Reading and Art. Physical Education, including all kinds of games, is held at least four times a week for all classes. Twice a week the senior boys attend parades of the local Jewish Lads Brigade, travelling on their own. Last year two of the partially deaf boys practised drumming with the Brigade's bugle band. The boys also have evening classes each week in which they study Electricity, Hebrew and Tailoring. The senior girls go once a week, also on their own, to L.C.C. evening classes in typewriting, while on other nights

they learn Hebrew, dressmaking, and general domestic science.

23.

In conclusion, it may be interesting to note how the present aims of the school have altered in the last thirteen years. The present Head of the school gives as a brief summary of the aim of the school, "To give a general education, broad in outline, so that the child will have an extensive fund of experiences, both actual and vicarious, on which the child can draw to help it to meet and overcome difficulties experienced in adult life. To ensure a capacity to adjust to new social conditions, and to thus enable the child to become a useful socially competent citizen. To give a knowledge of religion and the Jewish faith, so that the child is not denied the comforts that come from spiritual knowledge and beliefs".