

THE
LARGEST
SCHOOL
IN THE WORLD.

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Illustrated with special Photographs by A. B. HUGHES.

THE SEVENTH STANDARD
AT WORK.



THE Jews' Free School, situated in Bell Lane, Spitalfields, comfortably accommodates more than 3500 children, and if any larger school exists it must be in some undiscovered country whose civilisation has escaped European notice. Circumstances that make the Free School one of the most interesting institutions in London have little to do with its mere size. The difficulties and interests of working lie in the surroundings of the pupils. More than ninety-five per cent. of the children attending the school are the sons and daughters of foreign refugees, ignorant of their own names, poverty-stricken, scarcely robust, and so accustomed to ill-usage in the lands of their birth that they cannot at first understand kindness. The task of raising such helpless ones from a condition of ignorance, training them to adopt English methods of thought and life, and freeing them from superstition, while preserving and cultivating religious belief, is one of such magnitude that neither masters nor com-

mittee can for one moment cease from their labours.

To find the date of establishment one has to look back nearly eighty years, for the school started on a very small scale in the year 1817. It spread gradually, and to meet the growing demands additional rooms were built and various structural alterations made. However, each decade found the work of its predecessor insufficient. Additions, thought stupendous in 1840, would be laughed at in 1850, and the extent of improvements may be gathered from the fact that during the past fifty years more than £100,000 has been spent, and there is plenty of work now waiting for additional funds. At the present moment there are forty-four class-rooms for boys and twenty-seven for girls. These are lofty, well-lighted and well-ventilated rooms, their accommodation powers varying from forty to seventy pupils. There is also a large hall on the ground floor with class-rooms all round. As it stands the hall can hold about 400 people, but its uses are not all scholastic. On the occasion of great Jewish holidays it serves as

a synagogue for the poor, and then the partitions are taken down from the ground floor schoolrooms and the seating accommodation is doubled. The hall is also largely used for social and communal purposes, and is of great value in the crowded neighbourhood of Spitalfields.

The Free School receives from endowments about £3000 a year, Government and fee grants contribute about £5000, and subscriptions, donations, and special annuities supply the rest of the annual expenditure, which may be roughly set down at £12,000. The normal attendance is ninety-six per cent., an average considerably higher than that of the Board schools, and the latest Government grant is £1 1s. 2d., as against the average 18s. 3d. of the voluntary schools. These figures speak eloquently for the management.

The head-master of the Free School is Mr. Moses Angel, whose vigilance, care and energy make it difficult to realise that he is already in his eightieth year. He is still in attendance every morning before the school opens, arriving from his home in the west end of the town at half-past eight, summer and winter alike. "Practice is better than precept," he says when friends suggest that this devotion to duty is excessive. He has been head-master for more than fifty-six years, has personally trained all the masters under him, and all the leading provincial Jewish schools are under the direction of his pupils. The times have found him moving, able to understand and ready to appreciate the need for alterations and modifications of original schemes. The great East-End problem has to all intents and purposes sprung into existence during his consulship, and to him and

his able vice-master, Mr. L. B. Abrahams, must be placed the credit of conquering an enormous difficulty. The poor foreign Jews are not like refugees of other nationalities; they have an intellect

deciding factor, and a *sine qua non* is that such training should be practical, firm and sympathetic, and that it should impart in a



MR. MOSES ANGEL.
(Head-master of the Jews' Free School.)

few years such a groundwork of common sense and high principle as will enable the recipient to pass unscathed through the temptations and drudgery of the existence awaiting him. The religious element is no small matter and has not been overlooked. An hour and a half is daily devoted to Hebrew and religion, with effects only possible among the Jews, who take the keenest delight in religious observance and are unwearied searchers in the labyrinth of biblical commentary, where they learn to argue and become experts. The Government inspectors make no allowance for the time allotted to religious teaching, or for the time taken in teaching the children to speak English. They apply the same judgment rules to the Jews' Free School as to any other school under their direction, and their annual reports, from the time when Matthew Arnold made the first inspection in 1853, have been uniformly good, the excellence of arithmetic among the pupils being described in a recent report as "phenomenal."



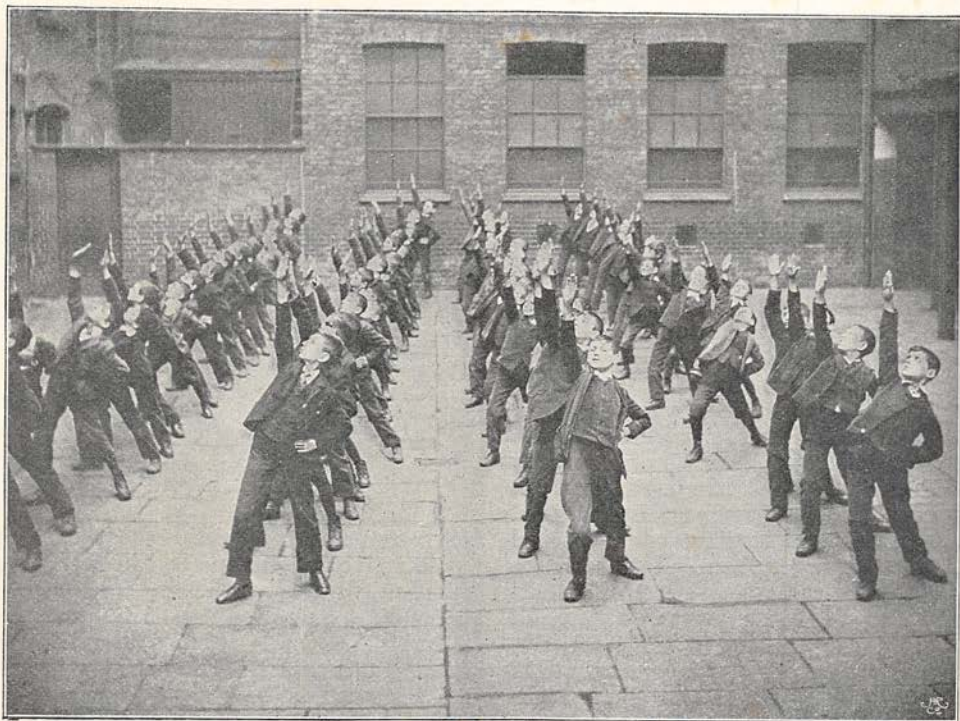
From a photo by] [Vandyk.
MR. L. B. ABRAHAMS, B.A.
(Vice-master of the Jews' Free School.)

which may rise to great achievement and become a blessing, or degenerate into cunning and become a curse. Training is the

The best way to obtain an idea of the working of so vast an undertaking is to visit the place on a working day. From a visit, and the courteous assistance of Mr. Angel and Mr. Abrahams, such facts as follow have been gathered and such theories as are suggested have been conceived.

Jewish refugees divide certain East-End slums with the very poor Irish. They come for the most part from Russia, Poland and Germany; they know no other language than Yiddish. For them papers are printed and notices posted in that mongrel language. They seldom or never use their surnames,

This initial difficulty is but a small one compared with some that follow. The children must be freed from the condition of terror in which they first come to school, a condition evident as soon as a boy is called before a master, when he leaves his place in class, turns white and trembles perceptibly. Then come the letters of the alphabet and a few simple words, and here again a fresh difficulty presents itself. As before mentioned these children get no domestic vocabulary and probably cannot even practise English in their homes, where Yiddish reigns supreme. It is fortunate



DRILLING IN THE OPEN AIR.

being content with the Hebrew, that only takes first names into account. Thus some Polish edition of John Smith, son of Tom Smith, would be called in the Hebrew John the son of Tom, and Smith would be ignored. Consequently when the ignorant children come to school for the first time they give their names in Hebrew method, and many a boy whose real name is an offensive compound of gutturals will call himself Abraham son of Isaac or Moses the son of Jacob, which is picturesque in its way but might lead to confusion where more than 2000 boys are concerned.

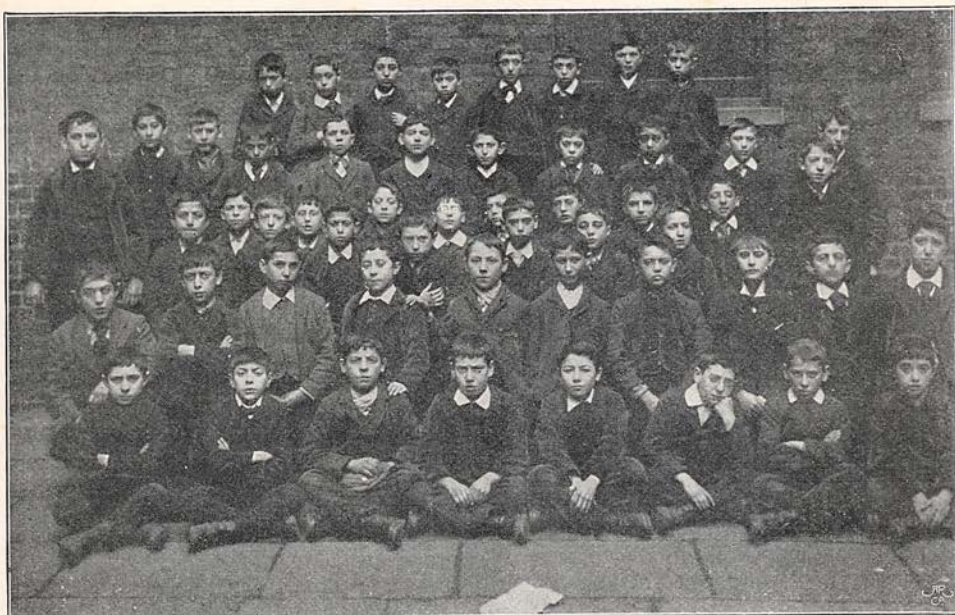
that the children love their school life and work very diligently, or progress would be very slow. When reading and writing are on the way to be mastered, drawing is commenced, and here the wisdom of those responsible for the curriculum becomes apparent. Jews are notoriously deficient in manual dexterity—the brilliant exceptions go to prove the rule. Their faculties are critical rather than creative, and have been developed in accordance with this condition. At the Free School a system of thorough training of mind and body alike bids fair to arrest one-sided development in the rising generation.

No visitor can go over the school in Bell Lane without being impressed by the constant evidence of care and attention bestowed by all concerned in its management.

A separate staircase leads to every set of class-rooms, so that in case of fire or panic exit would be easy. The School Board regulations recommend the cleaning of Board schools at least once in three weeks; here the place is swept twice a day and scrubbed throughout twice a week. Disinfectants are used lavishly, and as the result of this care the school has never been closed on account of an infectious disease. Considering that the 3500 pupils are, with very few exceptions, living in the slums, this is a

nearly ten times the number of inmates, must give satisfaction without any help in case of need or allowance in case of failure. Unless pupils and masters had the same enthusiasm, unless the *entente cordiale* between them were maintained, the success of the school would become a thing of the past; the vast institution would fall by reason of its own weight.

It must not be imagined that all the poor Jewish children find admission within the portals of the building in Bell Lane. Although "first come first served" is the rule, there are hundreds clamouring for admission, and the sight on a day when vacancies are filled is one not easily forgotten. Crowds of



A GROUP OF SEVENTH STANDARD BOYS.

praiseworthy record. In the very smallest matters this scrupulous care is observed. In how many middle-class schools where slates are used are a sponge and water provided to clean them? A simpler and dirty method is tolerated in many places. A trifle in its way, certainly, but trifles are responsible for much that is good or evil in the working of a big institution. And in connection with the arrangements of the Jews' Free School, it must be remembered that in common with other voluntary schools, it has to satisfy her Majesty's inspectors without receiving any advice from them. A Board school with its 400 pupils is advised on many important matters by Board experts. This place, with

anxious parents with equally excited children fill every available place in the street, besiege every entrance until the regular pupils find it impossible to get in. Formerly some of the weakest were actually trodden under foot in the rush for educational advantages, and nowadays the assistance of the police is invoked to keep the crowd in order. Entrance being effected, the pupil remains until he is thirteen or fourteen, by which time he has probably reached the seventh standard. Then the spectre of parental poverty steps in between him and the higher education, and he is left to shape his own future in new surroundings. Herein lies much danger. The boy has been trained until his brain is

capable of receiving impressions that will last through life. In this condition the inevitable destiny forces him away from the place where he would be well advised and where his development would be carefully watched. He passes from school to the world, from supervision to independence, from carefully selected literature to the fascinating doctrines of socialistic and revolutionary organs of thought. He is not yet old enough to weigh such literature in the balance of judgment, and to affirm or reject it in sober mind, and therefore the early years of his career are attended by a grave danger. That the great majority survive the danger is apparently due to the vast amount of religious observance that occupies the hours snatched from work and sleep. This condition of things is not noticed in ordinary Board schools because the mental standard is lower.

From the crowd of children turned out year by year in the Bell Lane school there can be little doubt but that a course of higher education would yield to society many men whose labours would benefit humanity. Unfortunately there is a grim necessity about the need for paying work, and it is only the sudden ascent of a great mind, whose working nothing can repress, that the hidden possibilities of the place become apparent. At the present moment teaching is the only refuge from the routine of mechanical work open to the pupils, and this opening results from the fact that the school trains its masters from among the pupils, and thereby secures in every case the knowledge and sympathy born from long connection with the surroundings.

The method of training is very simple, but

could scarcely be improved upon. When a boy, who has shown a marked disposition to be a teacher, has completed his own work he is allowed two years' probationary trial. This term is sufficiently long to remove all half-hearted aspirants and find out others who, having the will, lack the ability. The survivors are articulated for four years, during which time they prepare for the Government examinations and prepare to become graduates of London University. They also receive Hebrew instruction from the head-master and other well qualified professors, and take certain Government examinations to be appointed Queen's scholars. Thus the fully qualified

teacher at the Jews' Free School has himself been a pupil and sat in the place of those he now teaches. He brings to his work the initial sympathy resulting from long association, a thoroughly practical knowledge of the pupils' requirements, and a well-balanced mind for consideration of matters that another man would find impossible to settle.



THE COOKERY CLASS.

Although there are thirty-five certificated teachers on the boys' side and twenty-five certificated governesses for the girls, these numbers do not exhaust the resources of the school or the percentage of pupils turned teachers. Many of the London, provincial and colonial Jewish schools have their masterships mainly recruited from the Jews' Free School, and it can be easily seen that such teachers with a mass of useful experience are very valuable all the world over.

It is impossible within the limits of a single article to deal adequately with so large a subject. Lack of space forbids anything

more than mention of the girls' side, where 1300 children are trained under the direction of Miss Lipman and her able assistants, where they are taught, besides ordinary school subjects, sewing, cooking, and other useful aids to their particular struggle for life. No detailed mention can be made of the various types of children, of their physical development and recreations. But it is only necessary to consider that the output of finished pupils is large, and that the numbers in the school do not diminish; to remember that the Jews' Free School has been established for nearly eighty years, and has

moulded the social as well as the school life of most of its pupils, and the most careless thinker must recognise the institution's paramount power for good or evil, and, as a citizen, be glad to think that the power has been so excellently used, and that the results have been so satisfactory, not only to pupils and masters, but to the State itself. The East-End Jews are models of law-abiding workers; crime among them is rare, temperance flourishes, the domestic virtues are nowhere more strictly honoured. May not the Jews' Free School fairly claim some credit for this state of things?



NEW BOYS, ALL FOREIGNERS, IN THE PREPARATORY CLASS.