

Child care in Switzerland

Autor(en): **[s.n.]**

Objekttyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): **- (1948)**

Heft 1089

PDF erstellt am: **28.04.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-690727>

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CHILD CARE IN SWITZERLAND.**(Pestalozzi-Dorf.)**

A most captivating account of Switzerland's progress in the care of its own children and its initiative in caring for refugee children was given to a meeting of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique on April 20th, by Dr. Charlotte Carey-Trefzer. The lecturer, a Swiss doctor of distinction, has had much first-hand experience in this field and is actively associated with the great experiment of the Pestalozzi-Dorf. We reproduce below a summary of what she said about the Pestalozzi-Dorf:

Now to our experiences with Refugee Children. We had two categories of them, the ones who came over our frontiers as real refugees, with or without parents, some of them smuggled into Switzerland under false names, often taken over by our soldiers whom they first thought to be Germans, so that their first experience in our country was terror. I need not tell you what most of these children, Jews or children of political refugees had gone through before they reached our country, there gruesome stories are all too well known.

The other category were the so-called Red Cross Children, they had been selected in France and a few other countries by respective organisations to spend a holiday of three months in Switzerland. They mostly came from some sort of a home, their war experiences varied according to the place they came from. The children of bombed Calais would naturally present a different picture from those of Paris who had known little bombing but undergone all the moral dangers of occupation or the Marseille children who had learnt what it meant to be starved. — They were billeted on families. The Red Cross had thousands of families on their lists, far more than children. The Swiss showed an almost eager desire to have these children, at last they could do their share in fighting the war.

What new problems did these children bring?

Physically they showed different degrees of under- and malnutrition. Lots of them showed signs of neglect, skin infections, lice, etc., dirty habits. Those with any sign of tuberculous infection were, of course, at once sent to special sanatoria. The others got rid of their troubles quickly when given hygienic care, they were well fed and picked up weight and most of them left Switzerland as well clothed healthy-looking children — back to their country, to the same old miseries,

to the same dangers. How long would the benefit of their Swiss Holiday last? But for the time-being nobody did or dared to face this question.

Psychologically the problems were far more complex from the beginning. The real Refugee Children came mostly first into military emergency camps from where they were, sooner or later moved into families or special Homes, with or without their parents. I visited several of these emergency camps. It is not a bright chapter in the history of our child care. The Care of Refugees should never have been given to the military Department. Although they had the barracks ready, could organise the transport and feeding, they had absolutely not the qualifications to deal with such a delicate problem. Most of the men in charge did their best, were full of good will but just could not cope with the problems. The Refugees were not easy to deal with, their nerves were shaken, they had a deep dislike for any military drill and who could blame them after having undergone German Militarism. They very often took our help for granted, we were the lucky ones who had managed to keep out of the war, it was our duty to help them. Although almost every Swiss person thought the same, we did not like to be told it, very humanly we expected gratitude and not criticism. Only the best psychologists could have dealt with them without losing their tempers, and been able to help them over their miseries. It took our government all too long to realise the mistake, but in the end the lesson was learnt and the situation improved rapidly. The public for a long time did not realise what was going on, warning voices had been suppressed, our Swiss Press was censored, but when they knew they acted. The result of this situation was that a lot of resentment arose on both sides and it did not improve the condition of the children.

For those children who would have to stay in Switzerland till the end of the hostilities, once they left the camps mostly private organisations took over the care and billeted them on families or placed them in homes. We have seen many of privately billeted children in our hospital. Some fitted in quite well. Others presented problems the foster parents could not cope with. Some children got over their difficulties by themselves after having settled down in a harmonious home. So many of them were terribly old in mind, had learnt to hide their distress. I shall never forget a girl of ten who seemed to be quite happy with very nice people, but who suffered from severe Asthma. We soon found out that it was a nervous asthma and took the girl for

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treatment. It appeared that the child had suffered from the most terrifying experiences and lived in a state of constant anxiety. The foster parents had no idea of what was going on in the Child's soul. She told me all in bits and then; *je ne pouvais pas raconter tout ça à marraine, elle est bien bonne, mais si saïve.* We were able to cure the child and leave her with the foster parents, who proved most understanding after having had explained to them what was wrong with the child and how to deal with her.

With the Red Cross Children we had similar experiences, but few of them could be treated as they did not stay long enough. Those who proved really unmanageable in private families were put into homes. In this connection I remember three children who had come to the Kinderspital as emergency cases after having completely upset the home where they had been billeted the day before. They were complete little savages, could not talk properly, they had a language which only they understood. They climbed all over the place like monkeys, took everything they could get hold of and hid it under their mattresses. The girl had screaming fits whenever a man approached her. These children presented the nearest picture I have seen of those vagabond children which wander about in Europe by millions, the *Besprisornis* of Russia after the last war, you may remember the beautiful film "The way to Life." Average Swiss parents could not be expected to cope with such children. We met many who had a strong feeling of failure when they had to notify the Red Cross that they could not keep a child. They were really unhappy about it, but had to think of their own children as well.

The Homes or Hostels for the Jewish Refugee Children were mostly very successful. I visited several and stayed there some days to investigate the children. For many Children it was the first place where they knew they could stay and settle down on this earth without fear of being chased. They were trained and prepared for a new life in Palestine where they would go all together. They were a family, the leaders of the homes were mostly refugees with a similar fate. The children gained a feeling of security and were happy.

The Red Cross Hostels had on the whole a more improvised character. It had been expected that all the children could stay in families. But soon the Red Cross was faced with the problem of finding houses and suitable house-parents for these hostels. Some were successful. Others not. I stayed for a week in one of them where thirty boys between twelve and fifteen had been put together, and investigated everyone. The boys had not been able to stay in families, the ones being bed-wetters, others too undisciplined, some stealing, vagabonding, etc. The house had two wings, one was a restaurant. It proved to be the most difficult hostel, not enough room, one big dormitory, and the quite well qualified house-parents found it beyond their power to get control over the boys. They had developed a sort of *Maquis*, one being the leader, nearly every day they organised some mischief, broke into the village school and stole all the children's skis, etc. Only for the meals they would appear in corpore, for lessons or work they would disappear again. And yet after observing and investigating them I got the conviction that each of them could have been made a useful happy member of community, provided we had the right surrounding, the right educators and sufficient time. As they were they

would be a menace to Society. One night they behaved like mad and nearly set the house on fire. When the snow melted dozens of empty wine-bottles were found which they had stolen that night from the restaurant cellar.

Whose fault was it? Was this house the right place to keep thirty boys who had completely run wild and developed their worst instincts under the German occupation? Were three months enough to really help them? On the other hand millions needed help, how could a solution of these problems possibly be found.

More and more of these questions arose for any person who had to deal with these children. The statistics of Switzerland's help to Refugee Children sounded impressing, yet how would we find these children if we went out to France and other countries to follow them us?

That is where Corti's plan of Children Villages steps in. Beside and as a continuation of these more improvised and short time actions which for a long time were the only thing we could do, let us start something really lasting, really good, something worthy of our best Swiss traditions.

In some healthy, beautiful spot of our country we would start building a village for European War-Orphans. Each House, built like a real little home and yet adapted to the needs of the circumstances would shelter a family of 12-16 boys and girls of different ages with Fosterparents of their own nationality. The children would stay there with the same parents and brothers and sisters till they were recovered, body and soul from their unhappy experiences and till they had been schooled and trained to face the needs of life. They would keep their own nationality, their countries needed more than ever a young, healthy generation, yet they would be in daily contact with children of other nationalities but with the same fate and would learn to respect and love them. A small but living league of Nations. When ready to go back into their own countries we would not just send them back to uncertain conditions, we would before have taken up contact with people of same ideals who would help them to settle down in their countries. They might even have spent holidays in their own country while staying with us.

The best educators, doctors, teachers would look after them in the Village, would study the needs of these children and the best ways to help them and communicate their experiences to others. This first Village would therefore be a centre of useful research in the care of war damaged children and its value would reach far beyond its actual helping so and so many hundred children. People of other countries could come and train there and later, when their own countries had materially recovered enough from the war, they could start similar Villages there. It opened a thousand possibilities to study and improve child care as a whole and Switzerland herself would benefit a great deal by it.

It would also give every Swiss person a possibility to co-operate according to his means and faculties. It would be striking a cord in the hearts of so many Swiss who had felt the urge to do something really positive and lasting in that period of destruction and futility. We could give the patronage to the Swiss Children and in that way teach them international responsibility and fellowship. We would name it after *Heinrich*

Pestalozzi, the great man who more than a hundred years ago had shown us the right way in Child Care.

A small Pestalozzi Village now stands in Trogen with nine pretty houses built in the Appenzell-Style grouped round an old farmhouse. French, Polish, German, Austrian and Italian War-Orphans have already started their Way to life there. It was built by voluntary workers of Switzerland and other countries who spent their holidays up there, perhaps the most satisfactory holiday they have ever spent. The Village is under the patronage of the Swiss Youth who has taken this responsibility with great enthusiasm and has already helped in the most various and efficient ways. From the smallest to the biggest, from a Swiss school making furniture for a house to Ciba in Bâle giving a whole house to the Village, a great majority of the Swiss are doing something for it and consider it as partly their own.

The budget of the Organisation lies in the hands of Pro Juventute, The Don Suisse has participated as well as the Red Cross.

Educators and doctors from many countries have spent some time up there, taking up the challenge and started similar Villages in their own countries.

If you want a good tonic against depression and desillusionment, go to Trogen and have a dose of that happy, hopeful little world. We are going to start a British House soon. If a cord has been struck in your hearts as well, you might feel like helping the British Committee to finance it.

150 YEARS "LIBERI E SVIZZERI" or How the Canton Ticino Achieved its Independence.

(Extracts from an address given by Mr. J. Eusebio to the members of the Unione Ticinese.)

The Feudal System.

To-day we are here to celebrate freedom. It is not many days since it was said in the House of Commons that "the flame of freedom had once again been snuffed out in Europe."

We generally say we are free when we mean that we can do just what we like, that we have no duties to perform. Political freedom is much the same thing. It is taken to mean that a country or a community is free to do what it likes, to rule itself as and how it likes, that it owes no allegiance to any despotic ruler or to any other nation.

The young ones amongst you may feel inclined to ask: "But is not Switzerland a free country?" — "Why has our home Canton enjoyed only 150 years of self rule?" — Well, I shall make it my task this afternoon to give answers to these two questions, as briefly as possible and I hope you will bear with me for a short while.

During the Middle Ages the common man was tied to the land, under the feudal system; he was the servant of the glebe, agriculture being at that time the general occupation. The villein, as he was called, tilled the land on which he had been born for his lord, to whom he had to give up a portion of the produce, generally a tenth, and who had the right of life or death over him. Besides this, the villein was called upon to do specific work for his overlord, either "week work," that is labour for certain days a week regularly all the year round, or "boon work," extra labour when there was special need for it such as during harvest time. The land then was owned by large proprietors with wide farms (latifundia) tilled by this slave labour. There were, it is true, so called "free-men," but these were few, having acquired their tenure through performing military or other special service for their lord. There was also another way of escaping the land, through the priesthood, as the Church itself was one of the largest landowners.

The Swiss Become Free.

As a system feudalism, which obtained over Western Europe in mediæval times — in Great Britain no less than on the Italian Peninsula — was better suited to fertile, flat-lying country. In mountainous regions, such as Switzerland, where Nature is at once majestic and niggardly, and the life for human existence correspondingly hard, it could work but imperfectly. The hardy Swiss, on either side of the Alps resented it. It was not long before on the North side, the Swiss broke free from the rule of the Emperor, Albert I, of Austria, the cruel Habsburg who had feudal rights over most of the territory of the three original Cantons, Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden, and banished his oppressive agents. Thus it has been said, that the Swiss by their emancipation gained the first triumph for the democratic principles in Europe over an area larger than the city state. Few historical events have been more beneficial than the establishment of Swiss freedom by the valour and energy of a subject race, they helped to restore to the Continent of Europe the ideal of political liberty.



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