

# A swiss Kindergarten

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## A SWISS KINDERGARTEN.

*(The following article is reprinted from the July 6th issue of "The Times" (Educational Supplement) by courtesy of the Editor.*

Zürich's most modern kindergarten was opened last December. It cost 260,000 francs (£21,000) to build and equip, and to-day it is one of the educational show-pieces of the city.

Careful consideration went into every detail. The building is on two floors, each for a group of 35 children. Each floor has one large room, the whole of one side being window and the whole of the other cupboard space. One of the end walls has a large black-board fixed at a level convenient for the children to use themselves, and a door at the other end leads into a large store cupboard — the dream of every nursery school teacher. At one side is a sink with two cold-water taps, again at a convenient level for the children. A spacious cloak-room outside, with pegs for coats and stands for shoes, contains a wash basin, with two small lavatories adjoining. The kindergarten is light and airy with a cheerful appearance, but the garden was obviously not considered of great importance by the planners. It is hardly as large as the play-room, and, apart from a couple of small sand-pits and a bench or two, is provided with no equipment for the children's outdoor play.

In comparing Swiss kindergartens with English nursery schools, there are two important differences to keep in mind. In Switzerland the kindergartens are officially for four- and five-year-olds (the children do not go to school until they are six), and in practice nearly all the places are reserved for five-year-olds. Small children seem to be treated as younger than they are. There is a considerable body of educational opinion in England which would prefer to keep the two-year-olds in their own homes, but few educationists here would doubt the value of nursery school life for the average three-year-old. Because the children in Swiss kindergartens are older than those in British

nursery schools, a higher standard of achievement is required of them in concentration and execution, and more emphasis is laid on acquiring skills than on general social training.

The second important difference between Swiss kindergartens and British nursery schools is that there is no meal or rest period as part of the kindergarten routine in Switzerland. Great surprise is expressed by the Swiss on hearing that the British nursery schools provide food and rest for their charges not only because it may be more convenient for the parents, but also because it may be beneficial for the children to eat and sleep in a group rather than in the home where the mother's strong emotional feelings may encourage the development of difficult behaviour on the part of the child at these times. Swiss children arrive at the kindergarten at 8, leave again at 11.30, return to the kindergarten at 2 and go home at 4.

The morning and afternoon periods are both spent partly in group and partly in individual activity, and when the weather is fine the children play for short periods in the garden, or go for walks in the neighbourhood. Organized group activity may last from three-quarters of an hour to an hour, according to the attention and interest of the children, and the teacher's other plans. When the method now adopted in many modern nursery schools in England, whereby all group activities are optional, was described to the young teacher in the kindergarten, she explained that in Switzerland it was thought that the children must learn to concentrate, and that they should not be allowed to leave the group because they were not interested.

But there was little to complain of in the group

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activity at this kindergarten. The teachers' personal relationship with the children was excellent. She treated them as social equals, though when the individual work started the children were not allowed to go freely to whichever activity attracted them, but the teacher asked for volunteers for painting, chalking, cutting-out, jig-saw puzzles, and so forth, and then picked out a few children for each from those who put up their hands. They were not allowed to change if they got bored, as some did. Others showed surprising concentration and worked keenly and hard.

One table served as a work-bench with pieces of wood, hammers, nails, and a small saw. The teacher said that she did not specially supervise that table, but that the children were taught how to use the tools and there had been no accidents. At another table children were painting. They were thoroughly enjoying themselves, but would have got more satisfaction had they been given larger pieces of paper and thicker brighter paint. Elsewhere little girls were puppet-making, though it was a pity to see that the last constructive work was done by the teacher and the puppet given ready-made to the child.

At another table two children were cutting out flowers in coloured paper and sticking them on sheets of cardboard. When they had finished they cleared up extremely efficiently of their own accord, without any directions being given by the teacher. One child swept the waste paper up while another fetched a sponge, damped it, and wiped over the table where she had been pasting. The teacher said that the children were always expected to clear up after they had been working, and took it as a matter of course.

It is the custom in Swiss kindergartens to hold parents' meetings from time to time. In this kindergarten one had not yet been held, but it was the teacher's intention to call a meeting soon to discuss very simply what the children do in the kindergarten and why, and to give the parents an opportunity for asking questions. But it appeared that they were not particularly interested. The teacher said they they did occasionally come to her to discuss their children, but that there were very few children who were difficult and that it was not, therefore, very necessary.

The really fundamental characteristic, however, of all good kindergartens or nursery schools is the provision by the teacher of an environment in which the children can work and play busily and happily, and this characteristic, generally speaking, is not lacking in Zürich's newest kindergarten.

### SWISS SPORTS.

At a recent delegates meeting from the various Swiss Societies in London it was decided to hold this year the Swiss Sports. They will take place on Saturday, June 21st, at the Polytechnic Sports Ground, Chiswick, at 2.15 p.m. Admittance will be free as usual. The Athletic events will comprise the High and Long Jump, the 100 Yards, Half Mile, and Relay Race as well as the popular Veterans Walking Handicap. There will be other numerous, amusing games for children and grown ups.

It is hoped, that the date will be ear-marked by you and your friends to make a success of this, the only open air function of the Swiss Colony.

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