

## A Modern Hebrew Kindergarten

(From a special Correspondent.)

THOSE of us who, living in South Africa, can claim to know a little Hebrew, have been taught it at *Cheder*. There we went through our small portions of the *Sidur* and *Chumesh*, and we considered ourselves quite intelligent and advanced if, at the end of those years of tiresome study, we could follow the prayers recited in the synagogue.

As we grew older, we felt ashamed and hurt that we had been forced to regard the tongue of our forefathers as something tedious and difficult, lacking that inspiration which our teachers claimed it contained. We questioned ourselves, and felt that, though we ourselves were somewhat to blame, there must have been some fundamental error in the way in which we were taught. Why was the language not made a living force to us, why had it to be something strange and remote?

I, for one, have always been perplexed about this difference between ourselves and the preceding generation in our attitude to the speech of our forebears, and have wished I could penetrate to the cause of it.

Then I heard lately that a new Hebrew kindergarten, one that aimed at being a model of its kind, had been opened in Johannesburg. I decided to pay a visit and see for myself what was the reaction of these youngsters to the difficulties of the Hebrew tongue.

I was informed that this kindergarten had hitherto been held in the Berea Synagogue, but that it was now permanently installed in the Yeoville Synagogue. There I found happy children, at ease and unselfconscious, against a background of attractive furniture painted in appealing colours, walls adorned with pictures, and vases filled with flowers.

I was shown into a *Succah*, warm and bright from the rays of sun pouring through the raftered roof, and it was here that the little pupils were taught. A door leads out of the *Succah* into spacious grounds which are being planted as lawns.

I arrived at 9 o'clock and noted how delightedly the children ran to meet their teachers, and how truly glad they seemed to be to come to school. I soon felt, unmistakably, that I was in a Hebrew kindergarten, for the first words that issue from the children's lips are in Hebrew, as they bid "Shalom" to their teachers.

AND so to work: The boys and girls formed a ring and drilled to commands given in Hebrew. Then they sang a number of Hebrew songs, and sang them not only with the charm usual to childhood, but with evident delight and also a remarkable clarity of enunciation. Here were kiddies, ranging in age from three to six years, using a speech which, but a few weeks previously, had been utterly unknown to them, and using it with an ease and a joyful pride which we older unfortunates never dreamt of attaining.

My visit happened to take place on a Friday, and I thereby gave myself an additional pleasure—that of



A Group of the Children with their Teacher.

participating in the "Oneg Shabbath." The children grouped themselves round the Sabbath table, over which presided Mrs. H. Kirsch, the Hebrew teacher, who is herself a Palestinian. The pupils answered in Hebrew the questions put to them in that language as to the significance of the day.

A "mother," a "father" and an "eldest daughter" were chosen, and they respectively lit the candles, made Kiddush and cut the Chalah, reciting all the Brochos in Hebrew. Most of the children had a sip of the Kiddush wine, but two or three objected that it burned their tongues! Each child ate a piece of Chalah, and to complete the festivities, sweets were handed round.

By then, it was time for a break. I witnessed an incident which showed me how naturally the use of Hebrew came, even after such a short time, to these small children. As they were having the lunches they had brought with from home, the noise of an aeroplane was heard overhead, and looking up they one and all cried spontaneously, "Aviron! Aviron!"

I then realised that this was the only way in which to teach our children Hebrew—to make it for them a living language, a joyous way of expressing themselves.

AT the inception of the kindergarten, it was decided that it was necessary to have instruction in English, so that the pupils should not be handicapped when they enter the public schools. One hour a day is, therefore, devoted to English. The three R's are taught by Miss E. Lurie, in the Montessori method, and the children seem to grasp new letters and words with amazing rapidity.

I apologised to the teachers for inconveniencing them by my presence there the whole morning, but they assured me that they were glad to have visitors, that they were anxious for people to come and see for themselves the work that was being done.

No better testimony to the successful working of the Modern Hebrew Kindergarten can be desired than the words of one of the mothers (herself formerly a teacher), who told me that she considered her little boy has "made astounding progress both in Hebrew and English."

## SOUTH AFRICAN JEWRY AND GERMANY

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The Executive has also been in touch with authoritative non-Jewish opinion, and is satisfied that its attitude hitherto has been in the best interests of German Jewry.

An important, confidential communication has been received by air-mail from the London Jewish Board of Deputies, which confirms the Board in its decision not to call public protest meetings at present.

THE unorganised and spontaneous refusal by individuals to trade in German goods or enter into any commercial relationship with German manufacturers, has had the effect of bringing home to the Ger-

man Government the seriousness of its anti-Jewish policy. The authorities in Germany have been inundated with cables from German agents, pointing out the serious consequences the present policy has on German industry and commerce. This unofficial boycott has had a more direct effect than any public protest meeting which the Board could have organised.

The Executive has referred in this report to all important measures taken to secure information and counsel, and assures South African Jewry that, being fully alive to its responsibilities, everything possible will be done by the Executive to work in unison with other Jewish world organisations to help our people in Germany in their desperate situation.

The Executive Committee, S. A. Jewish Board of Deputies,  
Johannesburg.