

OPEN AIR SCHOOLS.

By DR. ALICE VOWE JOHNSON,
F.R.C.S.I., D.P.H. *Cantab.*

Med. Off. Lambeth Poor Law Schools, M.O. Central Foundation School and Kennington Secondary and Cripples' Hostel, Camberwell, formerly Asst. M.O. L.C.C. Education and M.O. Birley House Open Air School.

In Germany a thorough system of school inspection has been carried out for the last sixteen years. Six years ago the school doctors in that country found that from 3 per cent. to 5 per cent. of children who were able to attend school were not benefiting by the instruction, and were deteriorating physically. These children were not mentally defective, neither were they suitable for a physically defective school. They were children who were suffering from anæmia, tubercular glands, chronic bronchitis, and early phthisis, nervous and undersized children, whose physique had been impaired by under-feeding and bad housing. Six years ago in Berlin it was deemed necessary to start an open air school for this class of children, and a site of five acres was found about three miles from Charlottenburg, conveniently near a tram line, in a pine forest, where the soil was sandy. Here 100 children of this type were taken and kept there during the day for three summer months, and even this short experiment showed excellent results. At the end of the three months 23 per cent. were cured, and 45 per cent. greatly improved. The next year this school was open for five months, during which time half the cases of anæmia were cured and one-third of the scrofulous. The increase in their weight was remarkable, averaging 6 lb. to 7 lb. per child.

The buildings at Charlottenburg consist of several open sheds, where the children are taught and fed in bad weather. In addition to these they have an open air gymnasium, many hot water baths and a sun bath. The children arrive in the morning at 8.30 and remain until the evening. They receive four meals a day, and sleep in the open during the afternoon for two hours. They are provided with a mackintosh for wet weather, and a rug for cold, a deck chair and a pair of wooden clogs. The ordinary school lessons are reduced to half, nature study and games taking a more prominent place than in a normal school. Not more than 25 children are given to one teacher, and a trained nurse is in attendance all day. For defective vision, tonsils and adenoids, the children are treated and operated on in neigh-

bouring hospitals. They increased visibly in mental attention and alertness, their behaviour improved, they became more orderly, cleanly, punctual, obedient, better tempered and kinder to each other. The improved health and absence of bad surroundings account for the greater part of this.

The London County Council, finding after some years of medical school inspection that they, too, had about 3—5 per cent. of children who were deriving no benefit from the ordinary school curriculum, started their first open air school four years ago at Bostal Woods, near Woolwich, and the year after schools were started at Shooter's Hill, Kentish Town, and Forest Hill, about 90 children between the ages of seven and fourteen being admitted into each school. The children arrive by trams to the schools at 9 a.m. They then have breakfast of milk, porridge and bread and butter. Two and a half hours of lessons follow, judiciously broken by games, and a lunch of bread and butter in the middle of the morning. Dinner at 12.30 consists of meat, two vegetables, and a pudding. The children eat at small tables, and each table is presided over by a father and mother, who look after their small family. After this a two hours' sleep in the open, either in a deck chair, or what is better—a hammock. The Council's hammocks, invented by Dr. Rose, are made of sail cloth through which two poles are passed, and fixed on wooden uprights 1 ft. 6 in. from the ground. A rug is provided in cold weather, and a mackintosh in wet. After the rest, they do lessons for an hour and three quarters, followed by a tea of bread and butter and jam or fruit. Some games finish the day, and they return home by 6.

The trained nurse undertakes the bathing and the diet, and sees daily to any mild cases of eyes and ears, &c.

All the children start the day with breathing exercises for a quarter of an hour—and for weak backs there are remedial exercises too.

The lessons consist of practical arithmetic, measurements being made, with an inch tape, of trees and other objects in the open, and calculations based on them.

Geography is taught by the children making a large map to scale in clay or sand on the ground. They indicate the rivers by string in a depression, the hills raised, the towns shown by clay buildings, the manufactories of pottery, cotton, chains and so on are shown by a deposit of their own materials. Coal and tin mines are indicated in a like manner. The main routes to Ireland, Germany, France, Holland and America are shown by lines of little boats

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)