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# ACCIDENTS IN THE HOME

## An Open Letter to Dr. Turbott

DEAR Dr. Turbott.—It is a good piece of work that you and your department are doing in *The Listener*. For months I have read your articles and followed your advice. But this week I find you writing about my own particular job, and so I propose to speak to you as you would speak to me were I so presumptuous as to try to lay down the law on diphtheria immunisation or some such topic. For I am one of those many women who were so rash as to choose that unpleasant year 1942 as a fit time to add to their families, and I have now a toddler who must be kept safe in the home.

My home is modern and small—it is of the type that the State is erecting by the thousand to house its young families. It has no porch or veranda where a toddler can be shut up to play safely, so the result is that all my housework is done with the determined co-operation of a two-year-old. Anyone who has ever performed this feat of generalship knows that nightfall brings a prayer of amazed thankfulness that another day has been got through without disaster. The hedges have not yet grown up

around our garden, and we cannot procure any fencing material, so if I allow my toddler outside for fresh air and sunshine while I work inside, I must break off every five minutes to see whether she has escaped to a neighbour's garage or whether she is stroking the legs of the baker's horse. Those experienced in the care of a lively child of this age will tell you that it is no part-time occupation, yet mothers are expected to do it efficiently and to run a house as well. And we must not expect rest, or a day off, nor must we ever be ill.

Perhaps, Dr. Turbott, things sometimes go slightly awry in your department when members of your staff are away with 'flu; perhaps your own work gets behind hand when you are afflicted with some such ailment. But have you ever wondered what happens to us when we have 'flu? We get up at the usual hour in the morning, cut lunches, tidy up, hang out the clothes, and cook the dinner; we don't work so smartly as usual, we find ourselves "Accident prone," breaking cups, cutting our finger, and we are not so lightning-quick darting after toddlers or whisking away knives and scissors that older children have left lying around. Maybe through our own "carelessness" and "foolishness" in not staying warm in bed when we have a temperature, we end up in hospital with pneumonia, "occupying precious hospital beds and tiring our overworked nurses' feet," but what can we do about it?

These are surely the times when most accidents happen—when a mother is a little slower than usual, through sickness, through exhaustion, through sleeplessness caused by coughing or teething children. When we complain of faults and delays in the postal service, the tramways or other public service, we are told that we must make allowances, that staffs are short-handed, overworked; and most of us have enough humanity to make these allowances. Do you know anyone more overworked than the present mother of small children? Does not your own humanity suggest that a woman who has undertaken the discomfort and the expense of child-bearing will do all in her power to prevent her child from becoming disfigured or from suffering—if she fails it is because the odds against her are too heavy.

I have spoken of the inadequacies of the modern home, but what of those who have no home—those thousands of families who are living in apartments, with their cooking, washing and sleeping arrangements crowded into two rooms? Next time you see a disfigured child in hospital, Dr. Turbott, visit its home, talk to its mother, and try to understand her job.

Now to be practical. This week I managed to get some coal, so at last I can have a fire; but for my own peace of mind (and in order to avoid your opprobrium) I need a fire-guard. For the past year I have tried, unsuccessfully, to buy one in Auckland. Will you please tell me where they are to be had?

In all good will.—TODDLER'S MOTHER (Auckland).



## Looking Ahead—

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