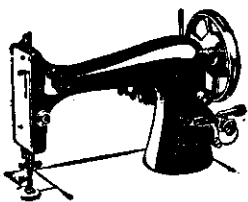




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BACKBLOCKS CHILDREN NO LONGER

We Interview A "Visiting" Teacher

BACKBLOCKS children are no longer children of the Never-Never Land—thanks to the work of the Correspondence School. They even have visits from their teachers—special teachers who call on and establish personal links between them and the school. One of these "visiting" teachers gives a glimpse into her work in this interview with "The Listener."

"**B**ACKBLOCKS children are charming," we were told. "They are shy at first and rather self-conscious, but this soon wears off and you feel you have known them all their lives. It is fascinating to go among them and enter into their lives."

These visiting teachers are chosen each year from the staff of the Correspondence School. They do three months out visiting at a time—forming personal contacts with the children, straightening out problems, talking with the parents and generally bringing the Correspondence School vividly into their homes.

"Our work starts before the first term begins. We have to write to all the homes we want to visit and arrange dates and times, find out what transport there is, and arrange alternative dates in case anything goes wrong. All these preliminaries take time. Then before we go we get a teacher's report on the children we are to visit—their ages, disabilities, the number in the family, any problems connected with their school work, everything that can help us with our visit."

"You are not examiners?"

"No, very definitely not. Neither examiners nor inspectors. Our visits are friendly, informal trips. We have to be very careful not to give the children the idea that they are being reported on. Sometimes they are quite fearful of our visits. One little girl was sick with worry by the time I arrived. Happily these feelings quickly vanish and by the time we have to leave the children are really sorry to see us go. We are always sorry to leave them too. We never feel our stay has been long enough. Indeed it is never longer than a week-end at the most, and there is always so much to do and so much the children want us to see, once they have overcome their initial shyness."

Domestic Arrangements

"You have interesting experiences, no doubt?"

"Yes, very interesting. In one home I visited the little boy had found a starling's egg still warm from the nest. He had wrapped it in flannel and was keeping it in the hot water cupboard. When the time came for me to go the baby bird was just beginning to move inside the egg. We were both very sad that I couldn't stay to see the bird come out. Of course we have to move on as the transport is available."

"Do the transport arrangements rest with you or is the onus on the parents?"

"Oh, no, they are our problem. But the parents are very good and come in to meet us whenever they can, which usually means whenever they can collect enough petrol. It was quite funny one day. I was sitting in a car waiting for the parents to finish shopping. There was a four-year-old in the car, so we started talking. He told me all about the family and where they slept. Then he said:

"Joe, my big brother, isn't very pleased you're coming. He has to move into my bed so that you can have his."

A System of Bundles

"What do you do about luggage?" we asked her.



"... To be able to ride is a big point with them"

"I travel with a ruck-sack and a suitcase. I send the suitcase from station to station and add things to my ruck-sack as I need them. I seem to be having continual little tiffs with the guard over that suitcase, but it always arrives at the next station when I want it. Clothes are a problem, however, especially in summer, with light frocks needing an ironing. Frequently mine don't get it, though occasionally we can get to a hotel to use an iron. I'm starting a new system now, a system of bundles. I have made bundles of clothing at home and numbered them, then as I need different things I will write home and ask for bundle five or whatever the case may be."

"All this journeying and hurrying about must be very tiring?"

"It's frightfully tiring. Each family naturally looks upon our visit as their special event. They make a big occasion of it. We are on the go all day with the children. Then in the evening we sit up late talking with the parents. Before we go to bed we have to make out our reports. Then early in the morning in come the children. It is really a twenty-four hours' job. We have a lovely time, but we are always on duty."



"How do the parents react to your visits? Are they always pleased to see you?"

"With hardly any exceptions they welcome us with open arms. Each family vies with the next in hospitality. Every night is a party. We are deeply grateful for their friendship. There is always at least one person in a district who makes her home a kind of base camp for us. The people of the backblocks always seem to be happy. Even though they are on their best behaviour when we are there, wearing smiling faces and clean clothes, we are able to judge their general condition pretty well. One thing we do notice is how education-minded the parents are. We can't tell them enough about the school and its ways. Many of them also find time in their very busy lives to be interested in the adult courses in the Correspondence School as well. Most of them want to take up some of these courses, but they are rather shy about making the move. That is one of our jobs—to start them off. Many are unaware that such courses exist. Most of the women I see are more interested in doing these things than in following fashion trends or film gossip."

No Comparisons!

"You must need to be very adaptable to succeed in your work."

"We have to be very tactful. The life is full of pitfalls. One thing we must never do, for example, is to mention any of the other children we visit. There must be no comparisons. Each child must feel that he is important as an individual. One of the great things about the Correspondence School is that each child makes his own pace. He is able to progress as he masters the work. This is especially important with incapacitated children, who are a fair proportion of Correspondence School pupils. But they are wonderful children, these young invalids. So brave. They plod on with their lessons, and when they have a setback they try again just as keenly. It is our job to make them feel they really belong to the school. Of course school broadcasts help a lot



with this. They are always thrilled to hear their own particular teacher over the air, and whatever else they don't keep, they all seem to keep their personal letters from their teachers. I have never visited one child who hasn't had every letter neatly stored away."

(continued on next page)