

"TODAY I played with a canoe and filled it with blocks and sailed it up that side and back again this way," a poised, five-year-old Dennis informs the rest of his class. "Any questions?"

Jonathan wants to know how big the canoe was and Dennis stretches his arms as wide as he can to demonstrate. To Kay he enumerates the colours of the blocks. After some thought he tells the teacher that he thinks there were probably 60 blocks in the canoe, although Ian, who helped in the filling and sailing process, is of the opinion that there must have been 100 blocks inside it. One day, promises the teacher, the class will fill it again and count the blocks to make sure.

This is an everyday scene in the infant room of a Wellington school, where number work is no longer a drudgery of learning figures and tables by rote, but where, under the new system encouraged by the Education Department, the aim is to give the children a sound fundamental knowledge based on their experience with spatial relationships and their association of numbers with their ordinary activities, from which mechanical learning follows naturally.

(continued from previous page)

gargantuan and gifted playboy of London's musical life. He gave England its first hearing of compositions by such important contemporaries as Delius, Richard Strauss, and Sibelius. His father's death and some gigantic speculations in London theatrical real estate left Sir Thomas in 1916 the nominal ownership of London's famous Covent Garden Opera House. He promptly lost a fortune filling it with some of the most memorable opera London had ever heard. In 1932 he founded and conducted what was to become the finest of England's symphonic ensembles, the London Philharmonic. A few months ago Beecham finally got back to England after several years in Australia, Mexico, and the United States, and immediately started rehearsals with the London Philharmonic. At his very first rehearsal Beecham snapped his baton in two, sent for a new one and grasped it with such vigour that it splintered, imbedding a sharp sliver of wood in the palm of his hand. He left the rehearsal in a taxi for the nearest hospital, where a surgeon removed the sliver. A few minutes later he was back, triumphantly waving the extracted sliver aloft. He kept it as a souvenir.

During the next few months Sir Thomas will be back in the United States, where he has become one of the most popular orchestra and opera conductors. At 65 he is still at the peak of his unique career. The pill business has long been outshone in international celebrity by the conductor. Though they still derive an income from it, neither Sir Thomas nor his five elderly sisters take any active interest in the business. They are all, in fact, a little irritated by the persistence of journalists who never seem willing to forget that Sir Thomas was once helped on his way by a laxative.



## ARITHMETIC IS FUN

At nine o'clock in the morning this infant room presents an appearance far removed from the conventional idea of a schoolroom. When the children arrive they drink the milk provided for them, then settle down for an hour to one of the activities which have been planned beforehand by the teacher. Everything is ready, and the room has been cleared as much as possible to give everyone plenty of space. Some go to the small easels which have jars of paint attached and create pictures which are no worse for being on newspaper and not canvas. There are chalks, too, for the encouragement of artistic faculties. In one corner of the room is a "Wendy house," with two windows and a door just big enough for the children to enter. Plenty of coloured blocks of all sizes give ample scope to young architects whose original structures scattered round the floor display some interesting modern trends.

There is remarkably little quarrelling and the children are too happily employed to make very much noise. The teachers efface themselves completely, giving assistance if they are asked, but otherwise leaving the members of the class entirely to their own devices. It is apparent, however, that all the occupations so cheerfully engaged in by the children have been carefully selected to give instruction on definite lines.

### Everything With a Purpose

Number work is no longer a separate subject, but enters into every activity taking place in the infant room. Emphasis is placed on encouraging the manipulative skill of the child, who, through practical experience of spatial relationships and comparisons of quantities and weights, unconsciously acquires a sound knowledge of numbers which serves as a perfect basis for the more formal work entered upon later.

All the equipment is light, colourful and easy to handle. Although the material provided appears to the children merely as something delightful to play with, it has all been designed with the purpose of helping them to make discoveries for themselves. For instance, in the "Wendy house" there are three different-sized dolls, each with its own wardrobe and a bed of an appropriate length. The children soon learn which clothes fit each doll and that one which will not fit the smallest bed can be placed in the largest.

Similarly the blocks, which include some shapes suggestive of archways, or



A picture jig-saw in Primer 3 to teach recognition of number groups

spires or chimneys, to induce the children to use their imagination in their building, are all graded so that relationships in size are soon discovered. Differently sized and coloured pegs fit into matching holes on a board and elementary jig-saw puzzles also provide a means of learning. It has been found, however, that once the children have mastered these puzzles and found that they can be built up into only one picture, they prefer the coloured wooden mosaics, from which they can create many different geometrical patterns, many of which show distinct originality of design.

Right from the beginning, the children play games and learn jingles which all include some numbers. Even the smallest soon play an elementary form of quoits, which involves scoring. Saying "Ten Little Nigger Boys" with actions, or trying to defeat someone else at dominoes is a very effective way of learning what numbers mean, and the tables which are taught at the same time do not become routine chants, but are based on a thorough comprehension of the figures involved in them.

### Playing Shop

Everything which is included in the normal activities of the child is brought into the classroom. They set up shops for buying and selling goods with which they are familiar, and as reality is the

key-note of all such projects they soon discover the relative values of various commodities, and incidentally learn arithmetic through having to give change and weigh out fixed amounts. Another project involves the following out of a morning's activities in an ordinary home, which involves an elementary knowledge of telling the time, and the prices and quantities of the vegetables, milk, and groceries as they are delivered.

Such ideas as these not only help to bridge the wide gulf between the reality of home life and outside activities, and what has too often been the unreality of a dull school routine, but also assist the children to acquire a much broader foundation of knowledge, which stands them in very good stead in every subject. When they say "Two and three are five" they can visualise some actual experience in the classroom where they added two objects to three others to make a group of five, or when they recite the weights and measures tables they know what they are talking about because they have weighed groceries and measured the amount of liquid contained in their milk bottles. Thus it has been found that the children taught under this system in the first year or two are far better prepared to continue with more abstract problems of arithmetic than those who can do little more than say their tables with no real understanding.