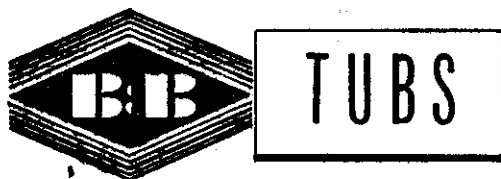


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THOSE "PROBLEM" CHILDREN



(Written for
"The Listener" by
MARGOT HOGGEN)

IT all depends on the way you look at it. You might think that children who are troublesome in school or who stay away consistently should be taught a real lesson so that they will be too scared not to behave properly or put in a regular appearance after that; or you might be inclined to the theory that the little dears should be allowed to express themselves no matter what the cost to the teacher and the rest of the class; or, like the Education Department, you might want to discover the fundamental reasons for anti-social behaviour among children in primary schools, and establish some means of finding out.

Last year, as an experiment based on similar work done in the United States and England over the past 20 years or so, nine women, all experienced teachers, were appointed to schools at Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin, Wanganui, Napier and Invercargill, as visiting teachers. The purpose of the appointments was that these women should make contacts with the parents or guardians of children whose behaviour or work at school seemed to indicate the need for educational or other adjustment. So successful has the work of these appointees been that it is hoped teachers of this nature will remain as permanent members of the staff and that systematised courses of training will be inaugurated to permit other interested teachers to fit themselves for this important work.

The Case of Claude

Visiting teachers are called on by staff members of primary schools to solve all kinds of problems. No child is ever troublesome, educationists say, without a sound reason, although the reason may sometimes appear a trifle peculiar in adult eyes. For instance, there was Claude. He would not attend school regularly and was consistently naughty. The visiting teacher was appealed to for help. She went to his home and found that there was little parental control, although Claude was not particularly difficult away from school surroundings. She called early one morning to take him to school herself, but he eluded her by climbing through a window. Another time she collected him from the pictures with a truant companion, took them both to afternoon tea and then escorted them on to a tram. Claude, after politely relinquishing his seat to somebody else, slipped off the tram away from the teacher. This kind of behaviour continued for some time, although you must remember that there was no ill-feeling between Claude and the teacher. One of the first aims of the visiting teachers has been to establish friendly relations

between themselves and the children concerned, and it is a great tribute to their tact, understanding and patience, that they have all succeeded so well.

Suddenly the problem was solved. The visiting teacher remembered one day how, in some of her successful attempts to talk to Claude, he had told her how anxious he was to go on to a farm. She pursued this theme, and discovered that an older boy in Claude's neighbourhood, through committing a series of trivial crimes, had been placed on a farm to rehabilitate himself. Claude's actions were now clear. He had tried to copy this particular boy with the hope that because of his misdeeds he too would be sent to a farm. With the co-operation of various people, Claude spent his holidays on a farm, and since then has given no trouble.



"... Eluded her by climbing through a window"

Most Common Cause

The visiting teachers have found that in nearly all cases the children who cause the most anxiety at school, not just by playing truant, but also by lack of concentration or some form of misbehaviour, are those whose domestic backgrounds leave much to be desired. The most common root cause of a child's misdemeanours, they say, is discord in the home. Or it occasionally happens that although a child may be well looked after from a mere physical standpoint, and lack for nothing in the way of food or clothes or toys, real affection towards him is missing. Without consciously knowing what is the matter, he will try to make himself important in someone's eyes, even if the simplest way to do it seems to him to be transgressing the laws, written and unwritten, which govern behaviour at school.

Girls Behave Better

It has been proved by visiting teachers that there is much to be done before every child is properly catered for by all branches of the community. For instance, they strongly disapprove of some films which children are able to see, because they feel that many standards of life and conduct portrayed on the screen fall far below those which children should have set before them. Teachers have found that on the whole, among the children attending primary school, there is far less trouble with girls than with boys, nevertheless they say there are really no facilities for entertainment and the right kind of social life among girls in the 14-16 age group.

There are a few organisations throughout New Zealand which do good service in catering for young people, but little

(continued on next page)



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