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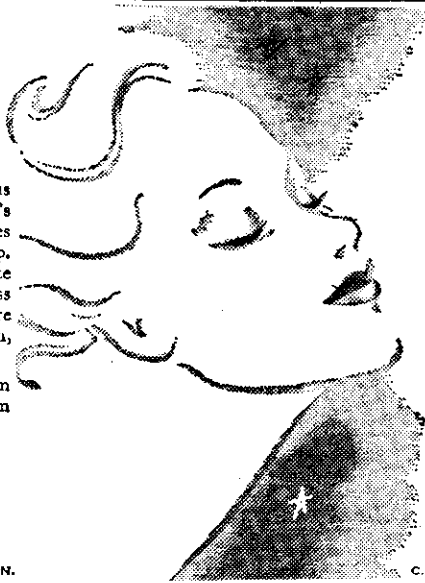
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A QUESTION OF SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT

More Problem Children at
Brian Knight's Hostel

TWO issues ago we gave an account of an interesting experiment being made in Auckland to deal with problem children. There are, of course, other institutions similar to the one described, but this is one that has come under our notice. Here are some further observations by our representative.



... Demonstrating his magnificent windmill

THERE is one child from South Westland in Brian Knight's hostel, another from north of Whangarei; but these are exceptions. Most of the children come from nearer at hand, from places within the Auckland Province and even from the city itself.

What sort of homes do these children come from, I wanted to know.

"Well, suppose there's been a divorce, the child is being brought up by one parent," Mr. Knight said. "For some reason, or for a whole lot of reasons—who is to say whether it's plain lack of authority or not so plain presence of stress—the child becomes unmanageable or difficult in some way or other. Or say one parent dies and the other struggles along in a lop-sided household. Or maybe there are two parents but the child suffers from some perhaps sudden and obscure mental or emotional disturbance."

"But, on the whole, you don't find these children in normal homes?"

"What is a normal home?" Mr. Knight retaliated. "I don't want that to sound too cynical. I mean: can the outsider tell what is the real emotional stability of any home? I've had a child from a home in which you could see everything that money could buy and a seemingly smooth and happy atmosphere—yet the child was mysteriously awry. There was something very much askew in that seemingly perfect home. But still, it is true that most of these cases come from homes in which there is quite obvious strain. The children need treatment, but what about getting at the cause? What about finding out what can be done to prevent all this wholesale divorce and separation and breaking up of homes?"

"All right, what about it?" I said. "Does it come your way?"

"Certainly it does. For every child I have to study there are two parents who must be studied too. Unless, of course, there's just the one parent. It's simple enough, dealing with the children here at the hostel, but that's not the end of it by a long way."

WE were in Mr. Knight's study at the hostel talking about the children with the house-mother and the secretary. I wasn't prying, but I couldn't help noticing the card on the desk which said in very large letters CABBAGES!

"Excuse me, but what is cabbages exclamation mark?" I asked.

The secretary explained that it was her way of reminding herself to remind Mr. Knight to call for the vegetables after the trustees' meeting to-morrow.

"Where do you get them?"

"At the market."

"Does someone go and bid for them?"

"No. We've got one firm that looks after us. An auctioneering firm. They buy the right stuff for us at the right price and they make sure that we get our share if anything is going short."

"Is this a special contract?"

"No. It's their goodwill. They look after us very well and we get good vegetables."

In the garden I had noticed some rows of silver beet, onions, and carrots. The children had begun gardening where the rocks were cleared; but so far they had had only a few exciting nibbles of their own produce. Only a beginning, but there is a plan...

Mairangi Bay. The name is magic in the hostel. Every February the children, with teachers, house-mother and cook, remove to Mairangi Bay to live in the Presbyterian Girls' Camp there for a fortnight.

"There isn't another thing that happens in the year to compare with it," said Mr. Knight. "That fortnight sets them up. You wouldn't know them after it. They bathe and career about and build things and gather things and have whole paddocks to run wild in—of course it's the only sensible thing. It's the only sensible way to have them living. We ought to be in the country all the time. That's my ideal—to get a place in the country, four or five acres, let them learn to grow flowers, be self-supporting, grow their own vegetables, keep a few hens and ducks. A fortnight a year is only a nibble—but we'll get there yet. It may be years, but we'll get there."

THERE was a knock on the door. It was Michael to ask for a pin to complete his windmill. No, not two pins, just the one. With extreme politeness he accepted the pin and withdrew. Ten seconds later he was tearing up and down the lawn, for all the world to see, demonstrating his magnificent windmill—one thick stick pinned across another thin stick.