

## BABY CRAFT

WELCOME ADVICE  
TO BUSY MOTHERS

No one in the world is busier than the mother of a tiny baby, but she doesn't mind so long as her little one is healthy and happy.

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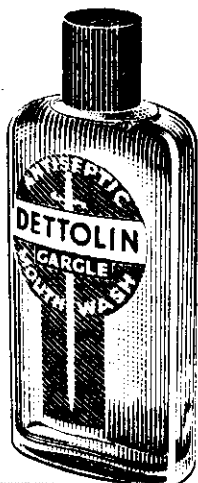
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## PROBLEM CHILD

ALLAN J. NIXON, who has written this article for "The Listener" is Senior Teacher at the Auckland Institute for Remedial Education. Though he writes from personal experience, the names of young people mentioned in the article are, of course, fictitious and their characters are masked.

**P**ROBLEM child! Visions spring up of cherubic infants slicing the axminster with pen-knives, or perhaps of somewhat older children clubbing their baby brothers in a spirit of detached enquiry. But are there *really* children like that? There are.

When Mother's nerves finally give out, the decision is made, without regret, to jettison the child. Of recent years, the splendid Greek custom of exposing children in jars has fallen into disuse, so that the little unwanted one is consigned instead to the—Institution. That institution is *me*, and some other people with robust constitutions and presumably no nerves.

Of course you've read A. S. Neill, and you know what a "free-school" is. Children, so the theory runs, are universally repressed. Just abandon restraint, therefore, and after a brief riotous period the essentially *good* nature of the "natural child" will assert itself. Laugh, if you like, but that's the story! The technique of our institution is based on it: we offer to reform children by this means.

### Mostly Boys

And so in their dozens they come: this one because he is destructive; that one, for a precocious sex-interest; the next, because he is uncontrollable, or unteachable or incurably truant, or perhaps a sneak-thief. Inexplicably, almost all the problems are boys; the few girls are unhappy little compulsive thieves, who stop being problem children, for the time being, if you give them a morsel of affection.

"Lawless" is the most descriptive word for our children in the mass. The free-school atmosphere admittedly doesn't make for slavish obedience, but even so the most Spartan of disciplinarians couldn't reduce these kids to the state of saying "sir," or of obeying any

command within five minutes of its pronouncement. This aggressive indifference to the wishes of the world is a healthy thing in children—it is the pre-neurotic child who is over-concerned with the welfare of others—but teaching school (my job) is rather hectic under the circumstances.

### A Morning at School

You will remember your own school-days—even rows of desks, complete silence, 50 children working to a timetable. Nothing like that for us. A mere five pupils comprise a class, which sounds good—but three of mine have been "dumped" by other class-teachers as unteachable, and the remaining pair as uncontrollable and truant. A morning's school-programme may run thus: By deceit, you've lured them all into the school-room before 9.15. To-day, you feel, some work will be done. And perhaps you do contrive to fit in an hour's teaching for the bribe of cocoa at 10.30 is powerful this weather. Some time round 11, you assemble them again for singing — and you ask yourself why music has so compelling a power over these bitter little desperadoes. For they will not play together at any game we can devise, yet they will sing together for an hour at a time.

### Change of Attitude

Experience with such children makes you hate them intensely as a group, and binds them individually to you with stronger bonds than normal children can weave. After a time, you no longer define your charges as children who are problems; instead, you think of them as children who *have* problems. You realise that their "crazy" behaviour is never quite crazy. It is always aimed at the solution of their problems, though sometimes the aim is erratic, because they are only kids. The pathos enters because, so frequently, their problems have no solution.

# DARN!



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