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# The Kids Next Door

(Written for "The Listener" by EVE GRAY)

MY, but they're tough guys, the kids next door! At least that's what they would have you believe. But they've given me a different slant on that vexed question as to whether the movies and radio serials are training potential criminals, etc., etc. You see, logical reasoning argues that they must be, and I'd rather lapped it up without really thinking about it; and I've come to the conclusion that a lot of other folk do the same.

Welfare officers and others with more experience of the species small boy will probably argue that my heroes are exceptions, and that films and radio are large contributors to juvenile delinquency. Perhaps I agree, but not nearly so arbitrarily as I once did. Now I am pretty sure that the parents and the home can be the deciding factor. Given parents with a real interest in their children's welfare and no objection to a little sacrifice and extra trouble in order to keep them off the streets, a youngster should be able to enjoy a reasonably vetted assortment of what comes from the ether and the celluloid and still make a good citizen. (The vicious type of film is not good for adult or child.)

## The Kids Arrive

My one and only is a girl, and I'd had little to do with small boys since I was a small girl myself, and must confess that as the furniture van drew up at the door of our new home last year, and two youthful forms erupted from the gate next door to "help unload," my mind went with some misgiving to the proximity of our living rooms to the adjoining back lawn. It was the closest I had ever lived to a neighbour, and I could see that little of those folks' doings could escape me.

But the past 12 months have left me amazed at the activities of 10- and 11-year-olds; especially amazed at the ease with which in their play they turn to good account the hours spent on Saturday afternoons watching the thrilling exploits of their heroes of the screen and the sessions of their favourite radio thrillers. As I said, I have always thought rather severely of the effect of films on the plastic mind of the youngster, but if it is no worse than it has been with these two healthy-minded specimens, then there is little to worry about.

## Make-believe

Our house is built high enough to look right over their big back lawn, which sensible parents have left free of garden to cramp them, and where open house is kept for any of their playmates who wish to come and live their make-believe lives with them.



"Colossal battles are fought"

The drawn-out school holidays at the beginning of the year particularly were a revelation to me as to the inventiveness and imagination of small boys. The days rang with their fresh voices and laughter. Of course, the most used phrase is always "Now say you be (or do) so and so," as they go from one adventure to another in the wake of their film or radio heroes or villains. Snatches come over the hedge to me as I go about my chores in house or garden. "No. 1 submarine is coming up"; "My bus took that one fast coming in to the terminal"; "Scotland Yard calling Eagle Patrol police car"; "See if there are any clues or footprints about"; "Say John be a skeleton waving round in the air." (I missed the context there, and never knew what caused the aerial rattle of bones.)

Colossal battles are fought, with machine guns "mowing them down" and bodies strewn here and there, and a silent figure moving from one to another, turning them over, only to announce, "They're all dead!" As I write, they have just fought off a whole posse of "United States Mounties"—it isn't often they get their facts mixed like that. That the chivalrous side is not neglected is often evident, for there was a time when "Hold that fire, there's a woman up there" was rehearsed several times before pronounced satisfactory. For some time lately I couldn't place a most peculiar sound which seemed to be rasping their throats. It dawned on me that it was the cry of the cockatoo which ran through *Bush Christmas* and which had lately been shown here.

## Mimicry

The mimicry of sounds is excellent. Whether in later life their throats will show the effects of the appropriate and extremely life-like imitation of machine and Tommy guns which are used "from the hip" or realistically poking through the barricade, provided by the trellis over the path, is an interesting question.

There is nothing that is not grist to their amusement mill. Several days of

(continued on next page)



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