



Women and the Home

Radio is the slender wire that brings the world and its affairs into the tiny kitchens and living rooms which hitherto had isolated so many housekeepers in the performance of their duties
—Margaret Bondfield

INTERVIEW

BABY'S HOME

I PICKED my way among the formidable array of prams and push-carts that cluttered the building entrance.

From inside came the shrill call of children's voices, the murmur of adults, the disconsolate wail of an infant.

A tiny toddler, looking like a particularly huggable bunny in his blue Angora suit, lingered in the doorway.

He gave me an upward glance from reproachful blue eyes.

"I've had too much dinner," he said.

An elder child came forward and grabbed his hand.

"Don't take any notice of him," she apologised, "he's only a baby."

The small lass, herself, was about four.

Mothers, Nurses—And Babies

I stepped into the cool, mellow entrance lounge, with its polished wood walls, its wedgewood blue curtains and settees. They were filled at the moment with a friendly, chattering group of women. Several held infants in their arms. Other toddlers played together in a corner of the lounge. The atmosphere buzzed pleasantly with conversation — and its main purport—was babies!

With but one or two surprised glances that I had ventured, unarmed, into the fray, my entrance passed unnoticed. A nurse appeared at an inner doorway, an attractive figure in her white uniform and red knitted jacket.

"Come right in," she invited me, "we've been expecting you."

She introduced herself as Nurse Thomas. Nurse Davies gave me a fleeting smile across her desk where she was interviewing an Italian mother with her pretty little dark-eyed bambino.

I surveyed the room with interest. Everything spotless and shining — and dedicated, obviously, to His Royal Highness Baby!

In one corner a tall white stork stood guard over a bassinet which served as a model for instructing mothers in the care of their infants. On the wall, two or three attractively coloured charts. In another corner, the all-important weighing basket, and a special machine for older children and adults.

Welfare of Mothers

That was one of the surprising things I learnt about the Plunket Society. They not only cater for the welfare of children but of their mothers as well.

One of the most important activities of the Clinic is the Ante-Natal section. Expectant mothers are watched over and guarded, helped and advised. Two mornings a week are devoted to this work, which is supervised by qualified nurses.

A special Physical Culture Class is a part of the treatment, and two visiting masseuses are in attendance at the Clinic.

Nurse Thomas told me they have had wonderful results from the Ante-Natal section. When the babies arrive the nurses spend two or three mornings visiting the mothers in their homes, instructing and advising them in the proper care of their babies, till the children are old enough to be brought to the Clinic in person. In this way the nurses are able to keep in touch with the mothers right through—and to continue helping the wee ones through their first important months of life.

The Italian mother and her bambino were making a smiling and voluble exit. Another mother was ushered in, carrying a young baby in her arms and with another toddler clinging to her side.

Nurse Thomas nodded across at them. "Those are two of our babies. The elder one was carried in just like that a few years back—now she walks in herself."

Hanging in the Balance

Nurse Davies had taken the baby from the mother's arms and placed him in the weighing basket. His mouth and eyes opened in a surprised questioning, and his chubby legs and fists beat a tattoo in the air.

The young mother hung eagerly over the scales. To her those slowly mounting pounds were her most engrossing interest in life. So as to ensure a greater accuracy the mother is instructed to weigh the child's clothes before bringing him into the Clinic. This is usually done on a pair of home cooking scales, or, if there is an obliging tradesman handy, at the local grocers.

Every mother attending the Clinic has a small book made out in her name, and in it is a Chart, in which the weight of the child is entered weekly, the food and medicine prescribed, and other important details.

Treated As Individuals

It did not need the assurance of these two smiling nurses, with their kindness, their zest and their enthusiasm, to realise that the Plunket Society is not a mere Social Service, devoid of any humanising element. Every nurse in the Society is an individualist, and the mothers and children are not treated collectively, but as distinct individuals. These people are names—not just scientific labels.

To further promote this spirit of friendliness, and to meet the mother on a social footing, twice a year a Mothers' Afternoon is held at the rooms. There are fancy stalls, fun for the kiddies, and afternoon tea and converse for the mothers.

Fashion On Wane

London dressmakers are worrying over the English woman's growing disregard for clothes during these war days. As one costumier says: "They think it patriotic to take no notice of their appearance—and the dressmaking industry is suffering as a result. About 85% of sewing girls are out of work."

Lady Amptill, who owns a smart dress salon, declares that she has not sold one dance dress since the war. It is a common sight to see women in West End restaurants to-day dressed in slacks and tweeds.

The working committee behind the Plunket Society is a particularly zealous one. On these good people rests the responsibility of keeping the various Clinics on a financial footing, and there is never a lack of volunteers. Added to this there is an annual Street Day Collection, usually a ball and a garden party to further swell the funds. How worth while is the object behind their efforts the Plunket Society mothers can best testify.

Nurse Thomas told me on most afternoons they have around forty visiting mothers and their babes. One morning a week is devoted to older children from two to five years.

Fathers Don't Escape

At the moment the chief medical adviser to the Plunket Society, a lady doctor, is touring New Zealand, and will examine some 10,000 children.

"It sounds an awful lot of babies," I said.

Nurse Thomas laughed.

"You would be surprised. We have 800 on our own district list, 80% of the child population.

"How about the fathers," I asked. "Do you also manage to bring them to heel?"

"Whenever we can—and you have no idea what a difference it makes. It is not always easy to contact them in their homes during our visiting hours, but when we do, I find they take an intelligent interest in our methods, and prove a great help to their wives in the home."

"A fifty-fifty responsibility," I suggested, "that is only poetic justice. . . ."

"Or retribution?" said Nurse Thomas with a smile.

A Line on Fashion

The Empire line, a pencil slim effect, except for the high, rounded bust.

The wasp waist-line, in which the tiny waist is emphasised by clever designing. The low hip-line.

The bogus bustle, usually a simple bow tied at the back of a severely cut frock.

The real bustle, which is a development of hip drapery.

These Should Interest You:

Talks prepared by the A.C.E. Home Science Tutorial Section, University of Otago:

"Kitchen Time." Monday, May 6, 1YA 3.30 p.m., 2YA 3 p.m., 3YA 2.30 p.m.

"Most of Us Need More Milk." Wednesday, May 8, 4YA 3.15 p.m.

"In Reply to Your Inquiry." Thursday, May 9, 1YA 3.30 p.m., 3YA 2.30 p.m.; Friday, May 10, 2YA 3 p.m.

"When Wintry Winds Whistle." Friday, May 10, 4YA 3.15 p.m.

"First Aid Treatment of Wounds in Civil Practice": Representative of St. John Ambulance. Tuesday, May 7, 2YA 11.30 a.m.

"Fashions": Mrs. E. Early. Tuesday, May 7, 3YA 11.15 a.m.

"Bringing Up the Small Child (2) Jealousy in the Family": Mrs. Beatrice

From the ZB Stations

1ZB: "Queen Mothers of England." Wednesday, May 8, at 7.45 p.m.

2ZB: "Songs at the Piano." (Reg. Morgan). Tuesday and Thursday, 3.30; Wednesday, 4.15 p.m.

3ZB: "The Shopping Reporter." (Grace Green). Mondays to Fridays at 11.30 a.m.

4ZB: "Harmony Lane." Sunday, May 5, at 4.30 p.m.

All ZB Stations: The Telephone Quiz, 8 p.m. Saturday

Beeby. Thursday, May 9, 2YA 10.45 a.m.

"Help for the Home Cook": Miss J. M. Shaw. Friday, May 10, 3YA 11.15 a.m.

"Music and Flowers: The Place for Flowers": Majeska. Saturday, May 11, 1YA 11 a.m.

"Music and Flowers: Flying and Flowers": Miss Jacqueline Cochran. Saturday, May 11, 2YA 10.45 a.m.

"Music and Flowers: The Influence of Flowers": Princess Alexandra Kropotkin. Saturday, May 11, 3YA 11 a.m.

"Music and Flowers: Bon Voyage Flowers": Henri Villar. Saturday, May 11, 4YA 10.50 a.m.