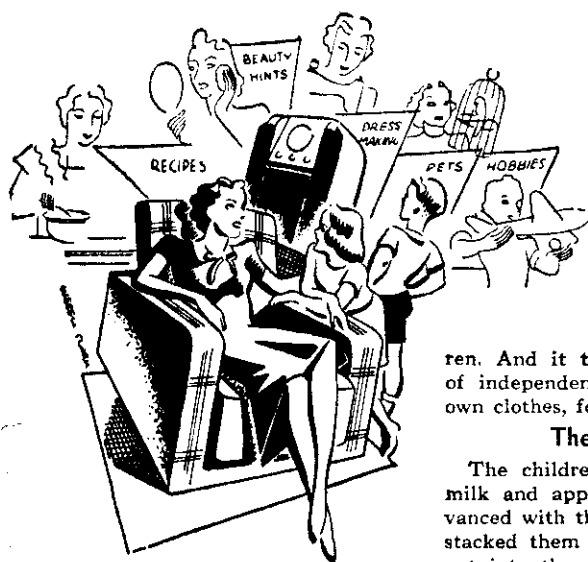


Women and the Home

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

THE VERY YOUNG IDEA



I SUPPOSE the answer to "When is an Exhibition no longer an Exhibition?" is "When it's closed." But the buildings still remain at Rongotai to remind us that the New Zealand Government, unlike the M.G.M. Studios, doesn't make a habit of assembling and dismantling its boom towns within a week. The model kindergarten is still standing, and in spite of its temporary nature, will soon become, amid widespread rejoicing, the permanent home of the Newtown Free Kindergarten.

At present the kindergarten is housed in St. Thomas's Hall. The ecclesiastical tone of the interior, with its lofty dark oak rafters is mitigated by the sound of high childish voices and by the flowered screens and the bright posters and pictures on the walls. I entered to the strains of 'The Teddy Bears' Picnic.' The director of the kindergarten was seated at the piano, while fifteen or so small children leapt and pranced around her. Then the music changed. The children ceased their prancing and moved slowly in their individual orbits. "That's the rhythm period," one of the teachers informed me. "The children are too young to have formal physical training, but this helps to develop their bodies and their rhythmical sense at the same time."

Tea for the "Tinies"

"How many children have you here?" I asked.

"About fifty. They're all from three to five years old. This is morning tea time for the 'tinies.'"

Tables with blue check cloths had been set up. Each place was provided with a plate and a glass of milk, while in the centre stood a large dish of quartered apples. The children drank their milk with evident enjoyment, and as the apples disappeared we peeled more. I remembered my own conduct at Sunday school bun-fights. "Don't they ever shove?" I asked.

"Sometimes," said my informant, "but then they have to wait till the end." Brief interval punctuated by a howl from Brian, who had spilt his milk over Sylvia. In this case tears were some good, as he was given some more. "The important thing that kindergarten teaches a child is how to live with other child-

ren. And it teaches them some degree of independence—how to put on their own clothes, for instance."

The Parents Help

The children had now finished their milk and apples. One by one they advanced with their plates and glasses and stacked them on the tray, then trooped out into the sunshine for half an hour of building mud pies and sand castles. "Are they the same at home?" I asked the director, who, having dismissed her rhythm group, was able to spend some time answering my questions. "If so, they must be rather nice to have around."

"Yes, I think some of the training they get here must carry over. It's just a matter of habit formation. And we're in very close contact with the parents. Before any child comes to the kindergarten I go to his home several times. Then he's used to me, and it isn't such a big transition from home to kindergarten. And the mothers help in the actual running of the kindergarten by taking it in turns to come each day to help. This is a Free Kindergarten, which

means that one-third of our running expenses is paid by the Government, and the other two-thirds are raised by the parents. We have a committee which organises bridge evenings and socials on behalf of the kindergarten."

Sleep After Play

"How do your children get on when they go to ordinary school?" I asked.

"They usually settle down much more quickly," said the Director, "because they've learned to live with other children. We don't have any number work or reading here, of course, but they have a distinct advantage over non-kindergarten children in that they have learnt to control their bodies and to handle things. It won't be a completely strange world to them." She glanced at her watch. "But now it's time for their morning sleep. After their play period they all rest till twelve, which gives them time to have their shoes and coats on when their mothers call for them at a quarter past. The 'tinies' will be in bed already."

We tiptoed behind the curtain of the stage. On twenty little canvas stretchers lay twenty small rug-covered forms. A head was lifted from the pillow as we appeared, but subsided at a warning shake of the Director's head.

Outside in the sunshine the other thirty were enjoying themselves. There was a large sand pit for one thing, and unlimited quantities of water. Then there were two large rocking horses, a slide, and a large packing case you could climb in and out of.

The Director, with the aid of her two assistants, collected the children and brushed off the surplus sand. "I'm going now," I said.

"Good-bye," said the children. I felt their thoughts were elsewhere, probably on the sand they were leaving. With a lingering glance at the rocking horse, I started towards the street. I really am rather too big for that sort of thing. Then a thought struck me. "Do you want an assistant?" I called.

"Yes," came the reply, "but you don't get any pay for the first two years." I caught my tram.

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