

CHILDREN WITHOUT SCHOOLS

Education In An Emergency

Written for "The Listener" by
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"... Neither they nor the community will ever be quite the same again"

THERE'S been a carnival spirit about Palmerston North these past few weeks, which owes nothing to the famed cherry-blossoms or the flowers in the Square. It is due to the children, and back of them to educational authorities who were not scared into reaction by an emergency.

They are just the same youngsters as before, but since the war took their schools away they have discovered a new sort of education—and it's fun. It is also a fine piece of organisation which gets children and teachers together where they can be of most use to each other, without using schools, and with a great deal more freedom and variety of activity than is normally possible.

When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour they indirectly took the schools away from Palmerston North children. They did the same in other cities, but in Palmerston North it was a wholesale affair, and schooling could have been at a standstill—if Palmerston teachers, and the local Education Board, and the central Education Department had been the kind of people to be scared into fits of inefficiency by an emergency. They were not.

The Department hacked through bales of red tape, the board and the teachers and the local people got together in a magnificent co-operative effort, and education came alive again before anyone had time to suspect it was even in-disposed.

Ospreys, Hurricanes, and Dingoes

The fifteen hundred children concerned were grouped in teams of ten, each composed of youngsters from the four classes from Standard III. to Form II., each with a leader and each with a



"... The never-ending joy of being functioning members of the community"

name of which the initial letter was a school identification tag. Ospreys revealed themselves by their initial O as from such and such a school, Hurricanes by their H as from such and such another. This enabled easy re-routeing of lost Ospreys and Dingoes, and was also considered very good fun.

"Subjects" were music, manual instruction, handwork, library and reading, physical education, jobs, gardening, educational cinema, organised visits and sketching; and each of these was supervised by one or more teachers. In actual practice both organisation and curriculum were a great deal more elaborate and a great deal more elastic than this brief summary can indicate.

What They Did

The actual proof of this educational pudding was in the eating. Most of the children, most of the teachers, and most of the parents regarded it as a pretty

satisfying feast. Children examined all the community services, the railway station, the fire brigade, radio station 2ZA, the destructor, the newspapers; they were to be found in the hospital lawns shelling peas for the kitchen, or in the laundry folding sheets and towels. Some helped the City Conservator in the Gardens. Boys distributed A.R.P. sand to householders. All received more didactic but still interesting instruction in the educational cinema; all enjoyed really inspired music teaching in the Little Theatre. Some of them wrote advertising plugs for the local commercial radio station, they learned to make puppets; they enjoyed outdoor sketching, they took part with gusto in the physical education course now specially designed to delight as well as to develop children.

teachers would be just as freely admitted. It could be found if the emergency continued.

It is, in fact, all a question of balance. Members of the generation that has grown up since World War I. must ask themselves rather bitterly what special merit there was in an education system which allegedly taught them the three R's more effectively than their children are taught, and yet left them so fumblingly uncertain of how to live in and for their community and of how to control and direct their political destiny.

These are the people who will give the "tool" subjects their rightful and fairly inconspicuous place in an educational scheme and at the same time watch with grateful understanding the expansion of civic consciousness, of social service, and of the sense of personal responsibility which has been touched off by the widespread but well-planned activities of Palmerston North children and teachers in recent weeks. These are the people with a justifiable grouch against an educational system which turned out to be nearly all tool and hardly any trade, while the colossal trade of living fully in the twentieth century went unlearned.

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Refugees

Remember us. We walk the world's highways,
Thralls of despair, with patient shoulders bowed,
The sea-spurned flotsam of that wave which lays
Our countries waste, and turns our feet from home.

Forget us not, when pallid twilight falls,
Mist rises softly, and the hills are grey,
World wayfarers, who envy you your walls,
The gleam of plates, the glow of new lit fires.

Our hearths are cold—long cold, the ashes lie
Grey, crumbling flakily. Naught ruffles them
But little winds most sorrowful that sigh
"Gone now so long — ah, shall they ne'er return?"

Kind strangers, pray for us, so we may raise
Our eyes, and see the wheeling sun of hope:
And know there is an end to pain that lays
Ice-fingered hands about our heavy hearts.

Remember us.

—K. E. GOULTER

Some Criticism

Yet it would be erring to suggest that Palmerston North's Emergency Education Scheme has been all carnival and joy, or that what has been done has escaped criticism. "Paterfamilias," "Mother of Ten," and "Pro Bono Publico" have all rattled their grisly bones in the local press, along with more genuine parents who are honestly concerned lest their youngsters miss the essential solid fare of education. Children must learn to read, write, and figure, and the organisers would be the first to agree that their improvised emergency scheme, so effective in other directions, has found little space for the three R's as yet. That ample space could be found, given more time and perhaps more