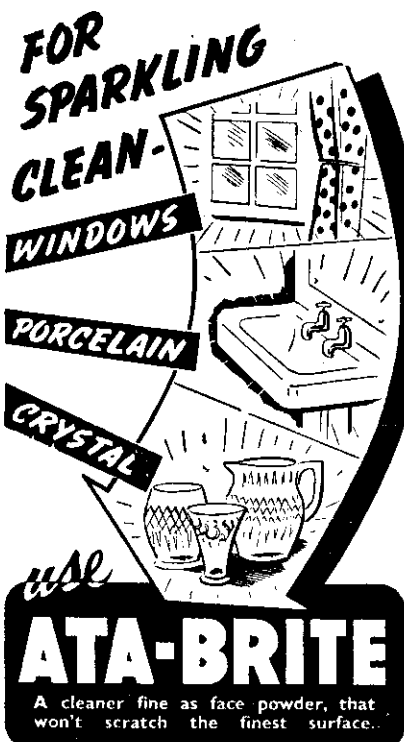


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"IT'S THE EVENT OF THE WEEK"

Plunket Day Fell On Monday

MONDAY is, for most people, washing day, so it says a great deal for the stamina of New Zealand mothers that so many of them are capable of making it Plunket Day as well. For "taking baby to the Plunket" is a long and exhausting business, and one that is best attempted by a mother who has filled in her morning (or what is left of it between feeds) with the less energy-demanding household chores. We were surprised therefore, when we visited a Plunket Room on a recent Monday, to count six prams on the lawn outside, five prams and two go-carts on the porch inside, and a correspondingly large gathering of mothers and infants in the inside waiting-room.

The waiting-room was an interesting place, quite apart from the presence of mothers and children. On the far wall hung a portrait of Sir Truby King, eyeing his domain with precisely that air of fatherly concern we would associate with a Stalin or a Lenin. On a slightly lower level were ranged photos of outstanding Plunket babies, with wide smiles, firmly rounded limbs, and no adenoids. There were charts showing the composition of milk, the vitamin content of vegetables, the weight increase of a normal baby, and a blackboard chalked with emergency instructions.

Simplicity is the Keynote

The infants, like their mothers, were all dressed in their best clothes. The fashion expert will detect a new trend in baby wear — an increasing emphasis on simplicity for both boys and girls. Whereas a few years ago it was easy to distinguish the girl baby by the lacy wrap and coy poke bonnet edged with bunny wool, to-day both boys and girls wriggle in plain jackets and leggings of garter stitch.

"Is it a boy or a girl?" we asked the mother on our left, deploring the "it" but seeing no way to avoid it.

"She's a girl," said the proud parent. "Six months old last Tuesday."

"Just a week older than Ian," chimed in the mother on the other side. The mothers inspected each other and their offspring for a moment or two in silence. Then Charmian's mother said "What a fine little fellow! How much does he weigh?"

"Fourteen pounds four ounces," said Ian's mother. "Nurse says he's getting along very nicely. Gained four ounces last week, and I've started him on orange juice."

One-and-a-half Teeth

"I started giving Charmian orange juice four weeks ago."

"And how much does she weigh?"

"Fifteen pounds seven ounces. But of course," added Charmian's mother hastily, "She's a week older."

"I think," began Ian's mother, "that teething keeps them back a little. I've been having quite a lot of trouble with Ian this week and I'm hoping nurse will be able to suggest something. Are you having much trouble?"

"Yes, Charmian is being a little difficult. But it looks as though it will be through any day now." Charmian's mother put a finger in the baby's mouth and indicated a pink gum.

"Oh no," said Ian's mother, "I'd say another week at least. Why, Ian's second tooth is just like that."

The Plunket nurse popped her head out of the door. "Mrs. Blank?" she inquired. Ian's mother, as she swept into the inner room with Ian, flashed back to Charmian's mother a triumphant smile. Charmian and Charmian's mother transferred their attention to the mother and baby on the settee behind. And this time it was Charmian who came off best by half a tooth, for Margaret, at seven months, wasn't showing any.

Charmian's mother could afford to be friendly. "I haven't seen you here before," she said. "Have you been living in the district long?"

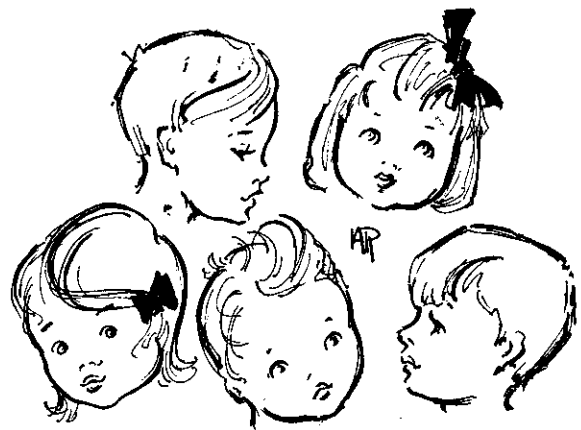
Mother of Three

"We've been here a month, but I usually come along to Plunket on Tuesdays. That's probably why we haven't seen each other before. And apart from Tuesdays I scarcely ever get out at all. Plunket is the big social event of the week for me!"

"Yes, a baby is a tie," agreed Charmian's mother.

"Oh, it wouldn't be so bad if it was just Margaret. But there's Graham—that's Graham over there — and then there's Peter who's just four."

She called Graham to her. He was a sturdy almost-two in blue gaiters and a beret, and he wasn't very pleased at being recalled from his fascinating pastime of poking all the babies in the room in the stomach and saying "Bubba" contemptuously. However, Charmian was



a fresh target for his attentions, and the newly blossoming friendship between the two mothers was almost spoilt by Graham's lack of respect for the infant Charmian. But fortunately Peter made a well-timed appearance, and the two toddlers were despatched to the garden to play.

At this time mothers and children were passing in and out of the nurse's inner sanctum, and for each mother who passed out of the Plunket rooms and into the street at least two more arrived, so that more and more perambulators were collecting on the lawn and in the porch, and more and more mothers and babies were waiting in the waiting-room. The population of the room had changed almost completely since we first went in. Ian's mother and Ian had departed looking pleased with themselves, so it seemed likely that Ian had put on another four ounces. Charmian's mother and Charmian had departed, looking less pleased with themselves. Could the nurse have said that Charmian was putting on a little too much weight? We hardly think so, so it was probably that tooth that Charmian's mother was worrying about. Margaret and Peter and Graham and mother had all trooped in simultaneously but Peter and Graham had both come out again and wandered out on to the lawn chewing their Plunket booklets absentmindedly. And mother and Margaret were having a long heart to heart talk with nurse, probably about Margaret's teeth.

The babies outside resented this. One of them, a mere three-monther, set up a thin wailing, whereupon the mother jogged him up and down on her knee muttering soothing nothings, oblivious of Sir Truby King's fierce glare at this violation of the Plunket Code.

The afternoon wore on. Now the number of departures was slightly higher than the number of arrivals, and gradually, as four o'clock approached, the waiting-room emptied itself.

We walked down the path with the last mother.

"Not the end of the day for you," we remarked.

"Hardly," she sighed, mentally rehearsing the evening's time-table. But it was not a weary sigh, for the afternoon's visit had given her courage to face another week of time-tables. She proudly proffered her Plunket book and we noted that Baby Richard had gained seven ounces last fortnight, and was now running neck and neck with the Plunket Curve.



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