

# Family Health in Flats and Tenements

()VERSEAS visitors often comment on the sprawling nature of our towns and cities, and suggest we should go up in the air more, developing vertically to save costs. They are thinking of mileage of streets, of sewer, water and gas mains, telephone and electricity lines, and so forth. There is a powerful economic argument here for going skyways instead of "field" ways! Nevertheless, let us keep our present pattern of individual sections and homes as long as we can. In the Press, Wellington City has recently announced further residential flat development, and this is hailed as progress. From the city fathers' point of view it is! And there will be more and more of skyways home building as our country grows larger.

Believe it or not, there is a definite health hazard in big blocks of residential flats, but it concerns families. Care of children is changing. Old problems have lost their front stalls position—things like rickets, malnutrition, diphtheria and other infectious diseases are under control. New problems occupy the forefront these days, problems becoming more frequent as the social structure increases in complexity. We have the problem family. We have children with emotional disturbances due to maladjustments and wrong management in the home. In our country emotional disturbances have increased in the last twenty years. In all developed lands this is true. This rising tide of emotionally disturbed children and adults springs from our modern social structure. Many things play their part in this in overseas lands—parental apathy and neglect, bad housing, overcrowding with several generations living under one roof, causing family tensions and undermining discipline, the lodging type of existence of many families, flat existence, with its unnatural confinement of children and mothers in tenements, and lastly, spiritual and emotional starvation of mothers in bad housing or even in good modern blocks of flats or tenements.

In England, for some years now, there has been a drive to re-house the people. Great blocks of flats have been built, well planned, nicely spaced—young towns of modern tenements within big cities. This tenement and flat life has broken the patriarchal family system and scattered family units geographically. Aunts, uncles, grandparents are no longer handy to help out in family crises, nor to relieve mother from the all-the-year-round every day task of child care. The family can no longer meet its social problems, such as care of the aged and of the sick. Great tensions develop in this modern flat-dwelling life.

A factor in the tension is the rising standard of living, and the desire, encouraged by the secondary school children, to keep up with the neighbours. The desire arises for television, a car, and electrical appliances for the home. Hire-purchase brings these things, but

This is the text of a talk on health broadcast recently from ZB, YA and YZ stations of the NZBS by DR. H. B. TURBOTT, Deputy-Director-General of Health

the family potential is lowered. The budget is stretched too much, and savings are made in food. Surveys made recently show that the British diet was poorer in 1955 than in 1933.

A bigger factor in the family tension is mother. In big blocks of flats, she is cooped up with her young children, getting no relief till they are of school age. It is a seven day a week job. The big lawns and spaces between the blocks are too far away for toddler supervision. As the family grows and the cooping up seems endless, a rising proportion of "flat" mothers are developing emotional troubles, and, of course, child management suffers with a rising percentage of children with maladjustments. Other countries than Britain are experiencing this, such as Finland, Sweden, and Germany.

All sorts of expedients are being discussed to mitigate the impact of flat life on the family—a greater development of part-time nurseries, where mother can leave the children while she shops and has a hair-do; increased social work with family units; subsidised holidays and better family allowances. Everybody agrees that child care of the future calls for bolstering of the family unit, on the integrity of which child health hangs. The employment of women, and of mothers, is increasing. In the British Isles eight million women are now engaged in industry. Mother employment and mother emotional breakdown have to be countered by some State of local authority scheme to provide companionship for children, proper occupation for them, and some substitute "mothering."

Living in flats and tenements is proving a potent factor in mother emotional breakdown in overseas countries. In New Zealand we have so far hardly felt this. I'm sure we can't avoid blocks of flats and tenements in the future, but, for the sake of healthy family life, let us leave such apartments for old people, and folk without children.

## Leading Ladies

ON the night of June 15, 1953, Ethel Merman and Mary Martin sat on a couple of chairs in front of television cameras and demonstrated that skill and sheer personality which has made them the two leading ladies of musical comedy in America. A recording of that memorable performance will be broadcast in YA Theatre of Music on Saturday, August 18. The buzz-saw voice of Ethel Merman will be heard in numbers such as "There's No Business Like Show Business," "I Got Rhythm" and "The Sheik of Araby," while the more lyrical Mary Martin puts over "Wonderful Guy," "My Heart Belongs to Daddy" and "Wait 'Til the Sun Shines, Nellie."



## THE NEW ZEALAND DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH



## Blowing your nose can be a HAZARDOUS OPERATION

—unless you do it the right way

The right way is quietly and gently—without compressing the nostrils, and with the mouth open. Simply use the handkerchief in the usual way, and grip the bridge of the nose only, leaving the nostrils free.

## The wrong way can lead to trouble!

If you press the nostrils and blow hard you may spread and intensify infection by forcing the germ-laden secretions in the nose back into the Eustachian tube and start middle-ear trouble, acute earache, or possibly burst ear drums; or you may set up infected sinuses by blowing the secretions back into the sinus cavities.

## NOTE ON THE USE OF A HANDKERCHIEF

If you have a cold use a large handkerchief, and for the sake of others always cover your coughs and sneezes. Don't wave your handkerchief about or shake it, and change it as often as possible. The use of paper tissue handkerchiefs which can be burned or destroyed after use is recommended as hygienic.