

# How Day Nurseries Help Toiling Mothers



ASSISTANT NURSES ATTEND TO A "BOARDER'S" ABLUTIONS—Photo by a Staff Artist.



"MUCH LIKE OTHER LITTLE BOYS AND GIRLS"—Photo by a Staff Artist.



HIS AFTERNOON NAP—Photo by a Staff Artist.

OF THE GREAT mass in whose behalf much philanthropic effort is expended there are, generally speaking, two great classes, those in need of charity and those in need of assistance. The one, slack and improvident, is ever a drag upon society, while the others are but transient charges, needing chiefly a helping hand and the encouragement guaranteed in such assistance. Of this latter unfortunate class a large proportion is women, the majority of whom have been reduced by the demands of families to a dependence that their single effort is inadequate to relieve. Widowed by death or desertion, there is a vast army of women over the land compelled to spend long days from home, toiling for the mere physical maintenance of a vaster army of children who, during their enforced absence are exposed through unrestrained, indiscriminate association to the awful moral starvation responsible for the wrecks that make up the other class.

As the great aim of the modern scheme is being directed in the interest of the children, an intelligent, systematic effort has evolved the day nursery or Creche, a boon to parent and children, at once helping the former to help themselves and rescuing the latter from the streets.

Incomplete in the beginning, for the first Creche was opened less than thirty years ago, experience and confidence have contributed to its improvement until today the system is so perfected that its very name is synonymous with self-respecting effort. There are now few of the larger cities that do not support from one to a dozen of these day nurseries, until they have become so important a factor in the philanthropic scheme that a federation of day nursery associations has come into existence, their representatives coming from all parts of the country to meet in council for mutual helpfulness.

## Lives Up to Its Name.

Notwithstanding the well established character of the work, there are still many in ignorance regarding the real usefulness of the Creche, and for these let it be understood that the institution is literally what its name implies. It is an ideal nursery where those compelled to be from home all day may bring their children and at a trivial cost have them well cared for, clean, warm, well fed and surrounded by home influences, while they go back to the sewing, washing, scrubbing or work in factory or shop by which they earn their livelihood. It is not a pauperizing institution, for each patron pays for the care of her children, a uniform scale having been adopted which, while it far from covers the actual expense of the children, still preserves the self-respect of the mother, who knows she has done all that she is able to do.

For one child 10 cents a day is charged, and for each additional child from the same family 5 cents is required. Where mothers are too poor to pay even this sum they are usually allowed to do something about the establishment equivalent to that amount, and it is the rule that these patrons of the Creche count nothing a hardship that will secure to their children the care and advantages of the home.

The hours of the nursery are limited only by the necessity of the mothers, and as early as 5 and 6 o'clock in the morning the little ones begin coming in. Some tiny babies in arms, for infants of any age are admitted, are brought to the door before daylight on winter mornings and received into the care of the warm nursery, while their mothers hurry on to their work. From these tiny tots children up to 6 and 8 years

of age are received and so complete is the equipment that each one receives just the right care, the right amount and kind of food, exercise and rest. There is the department where the "wee birds" are taken and after a bath are permitted to sleep all day long, or lie awake as they choose in the cleanest of white iron beds under the care of a nurse who knows all about babies and just what they need to keep them well and happy. And there is another place where the toddlers, after being put in order, make each other's acquaintance, talking in that language intelligible only to themselves and those who love them, between the numerous naps and lunches of the day. For the children of 3, 4 and more the kindergarten affords a never-failing source of delight with its beautiful games and work so suited to stimulate and direct the purity and beauty of the child mind, and of all the influences of the nursery this kindergarten training is generally recognized among the most valuable. In this manner the mornings are spent with occasional recesses, during which a scamper or some more hilarious diversion is enjoyed.

Of all the long day there is perhaps no

feature like the dinner and supper hours. First of all, the dining room is scrupulously clean with its bare, stained or painted floor. The tables are low and covered with clean, white cloth or oilcloth, in the center of which some flowering plant is usually placed. The chairs are arranged according to the size of their occupants and the table service is of substantial white ware, while at each place a clean napkin or bib is neatly folded. While the rules vary with each establishment, as a general thing the children assemble by bell signals and, forming in line according to size, march to the tables. At another signal all heads are bowed and hands clasped while blessing is asked in unison, after which all are seated, the napkins and bibs carefully adjusted, and after one more signal—this usually a nod of the matron's head—these juvenile prodigies become children again and conduct themselves very much after the manner of other hungry children, no better, perhaps, but certainly no worse.

The afternoon is the trying part of the day, for the little ones are tired from their busy morning and only an hour of games is allowed after the noon meal and all are

put to bed, a quiet settling upon the whole house that is broken only by the busy nurses, who hurry about picking up and putting things to rights in the play rooms.

In institutions where children over 6 years of age are admitted they are usually sent to some nearby school during the day, returning at noon and after school, remaining until they are called for by their parents.

## Created by Necessity.

The necessity for which such institutions exist determines their locations and accordingly they are usually established in the poorer quarters of the city. Those institutions fortunate enough to have play grounds are the exception rather than the rule, for in the crowded cities the available ground is usually entirely occupied by the building and a large, airy, cemented basement affords a substitute. It is here the children play for an hour or two after their nap until the bell calls them upstairs to be cleaned up for supper. By 6 o'clock the parents begin coming for them, but it is usually after 7 before all have been taken home, and then the busy nurses commence their preparations for the next morning, when they must do all over again that round of bathing, feeding and caring for their little charges.

It sometimes happens that contagion comes into the nursery. This is the constant dread of matron and nurses, for it means a siege of redoubled vigilance and, more dreaded than all, quarantine, which sometimes prevents the removal of the children from the home, necessitating long weeks and often months of seclusion and after that weeks and weeks of fumigation and disinfecting. Coming from all sorts of homes as the children do, it is little wonder that there is not more sickness than there



"IN A CLEAN LITTLE BED"—Photo by a Staff Artist.

is, but by exerting every hygienic precaution, maintaining regular habits and proper food, the little folks are kept well, and if when returned to the Creche in the morning a child shows any indication of illness he is promptly banished to the infirmary, to await developments.

## Helps Struggling Mothers.

With such assistance as this it is little wonder that mothers are enabled to continue the struggle that otherwise might discourage them. Relieved of anxiety for their children during the working hours, the little ones are returned to them when the day's work is finished with evidence of good care and happiness on the bright faces of their children that stimulates the weary worker to still toil, offering promise that makes it all worth while, and while hundreds of applications are made to the day nurseries for children to adopt, it rarely happens that a patron will consent to give up her child.

It was in response to the call of Mrs. O. C. Dinsmore that seventeen women, members of Unity club of the Unitarian church, assembled in the parlors of the Paxton hotel, September 23, 1887, and organized the Omaha Charity association, for the purpose of providing some such home for the children of the city whose parents were unable to care for them during the day. With Mrs. T. L. Kimball as president, Mrs. T. M. Orr secretary, Mrs. G. A. Joslyn treasurer and a dozen or more other earnest workers, the organization set about the establishment of a Creche. Of course the first need was for a building and accordingly, in November of that year, the lot at Nineteenth and Harney streets was leased (rent free for twenty-five years) to the association by the city. Then came appeals for a building, which by dint of hard work and liberal support was finally secured, furnished and opened by February 22, 1889.

The two dormitories and nursery upstairs were equipped with beds furnished and endowed by various women of the city. On February 25 the work was opened in the new building, though during the year of 1888 children had been cared for in a small frame building at the rear of the lot.

## Work in Omaha Extends.

As the work progressed the women found that there was need not only of a day nursery, but of a boarding home for the children as well, and accordingly provision was made for the resident care. The capacity of the home is about forty charges, a good proportion of which are boarders, for the care of which \$1.50 is charged a week.

(Continued on Seventh Page.)



TEN TIRED BABIES ALL IN A ROW—Photo by a Staff Artist.



MEAL TIME AT THE CRECHE—Photo by a Staff Artist.