

THE WRIGHT-KINGSFORD HOME FOR CHILDREN.

A journalistic expedition in search of copy is, at its best, not always one of the episodes one looks forward to with any very great degree of enthusiasm. Usually it means

seeing, hearing and subsequently writing many things that one has seen, heard, and written before, and an effort to find some new impression of this or that branch of the activities in which one is interested, that will give a new angle of vision and discover fresh developments. In such a frame of mind we journeyed one day to the Wright-Kingsford Home, at Granville Road, North Finchley, prepared to find the usual highly altruistic and splendid organisation, which characterise many other institutions, some large, some small, of a more or less similar type. But here one instantly forgot the institutional aspect of the enterprise and sensed an atmosphere of individuality, of idealism and aspiration and achievement too. A light-hearted joyousness seemed to pervade the mood of everyone from the Superintendent (Miss Blanche Wright) down to the tiniest of the inhabitants of this bambino castle, for such it is, both literally and practically; we recognised the Home at once by the little bambinos on their blue plaques placed here and there on the gables, and the hospitable reception we received from the real bambinos, in every part of the building, conveyed the idea that they knew they were welcoming us to their own home, one in which they experience to the full the pride of possession. We went round the Home just as tea was about to be served, and at the low tables, seated in the tiniest of chairs diminutive little people stretched out small hands in glad, unanimous welcome—"Shake hands with me, lady, shake hands," and so we made the round of them with but one interruption, when a dignified and very handsome little toddler, with a fine head and fair curls, rose solemnly from his chair, crossed to our side of the table and lifted his face with the command, "Kiss me lady." We performed the rite with solemnity equal to his own and then, still treating his act of hospitality as one much too serious for a smile, he returned with dignity to his wooden chair again.

And we went through other nurseries to be met always with the same gentle childish courtesy and realised that it is not only a healthy body that the Wright-Kingsford Home seeks to give to these little children, for whom it has made itself responsible, but also characteristics of mind and habits of courtesy that will help much to make the road of life more smooth for them and for those with whom they come into contact. Further, the obvious happiness of the children bespeaks an absence of any unnecessary repression and yet an environment that ensures a truly ethical development, one that must produce character of a fine type in that section of the coming generation who spend their happy childhood in the Wright-Kingsford Home.

In hearing something of the history of the Home one is

struck with the apparent insignificance of the event that brought it into being—a nurse picked up, in her off-duty time, George Moore's "Esther Waters," and thereby was inspired to open a Home for illegitimate babies. She and a friend, also a trained nurse, took a cottage at Walton-on-Thames, selected the best room it contained as the nursery and furnished this and the remainder of the cottage

simply and economically. The history of these days is given light heartedly, casually almost, with no tendency to enlarge upon the difficulties that had to be overcome; that there were plenty of those we can gather, for Public Opinion, that wicked magician who obstructs the road to the fulfilment of many an inspiration, reared up a spectre which has many times scared the timorous and the ordinary; the spectre is named, "The Risk of Encouraging Vice." Fortunately, the two nurses saw the other side of the lantern and thought only of little ones who might be caused to "stumble" if they did not persevere with the work they had taken for their province. The first baby came before the house was ready and soon eleven others had arrived to bear it company; as one little maid constituted the staff one can imagine that the "off duty time" was conspicuous by its absence, and we are told that the day began quite frequently

at 4 a.m., while bedtime had many times to be deferred until small garments for the last arrival could be made. At that time each mother paid 5s. weekly, or what she could afford, towards the maintenance of her child; after three years a larger Home had to be found, and it was decided that it should be nearer London, so that the railway journey might cost the mothers less.

A house was found at Finchley; the change was made and soon forty babies were in residence; but, alas! a sad disappointment followed. The house proved insanitary, and the Medical Officer gave orders to quit; luckily a neighbouring vicar and his brother came most generously to the rescue and offered the Manor House at Friern Barnet as a temporary residence. Faith in the need for the work they had undertaken brought to the nurses confidence in its ultimate success, and with much courage they decided to buy Fallow Corner estate with its fine house and grounds. The freehold was bought, with the help of a mortgage, for £4,000, but nearly £800 more was required to complete certain details connected with the purchase; this last mentioned amount had just been cleared off when the Great War altered the whole position. A widespread newspaper appeal for funds produced no result, but, fortunately, the position of affairs was made known to Sir

John Kirk who, without a day's delay, went up to inquire into affairs; he placed the whole matter before the Shaftesbury Society and the Ragged School Union, and they generously decided to incorporate the Home with their other schemes, and arranged that it should bear the name of the Wright-Kingsford Home, in order that the splendid work of the two nurse founders might be perpetuated. A certain amount of the income of the Home is received from the



Photo] V. J. Riches.
MISS BLANCHE WRIGHT.



Photo] V. J. Riches.
MISS ELLEN B. KINGSFORD,
F.B.C.N.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)