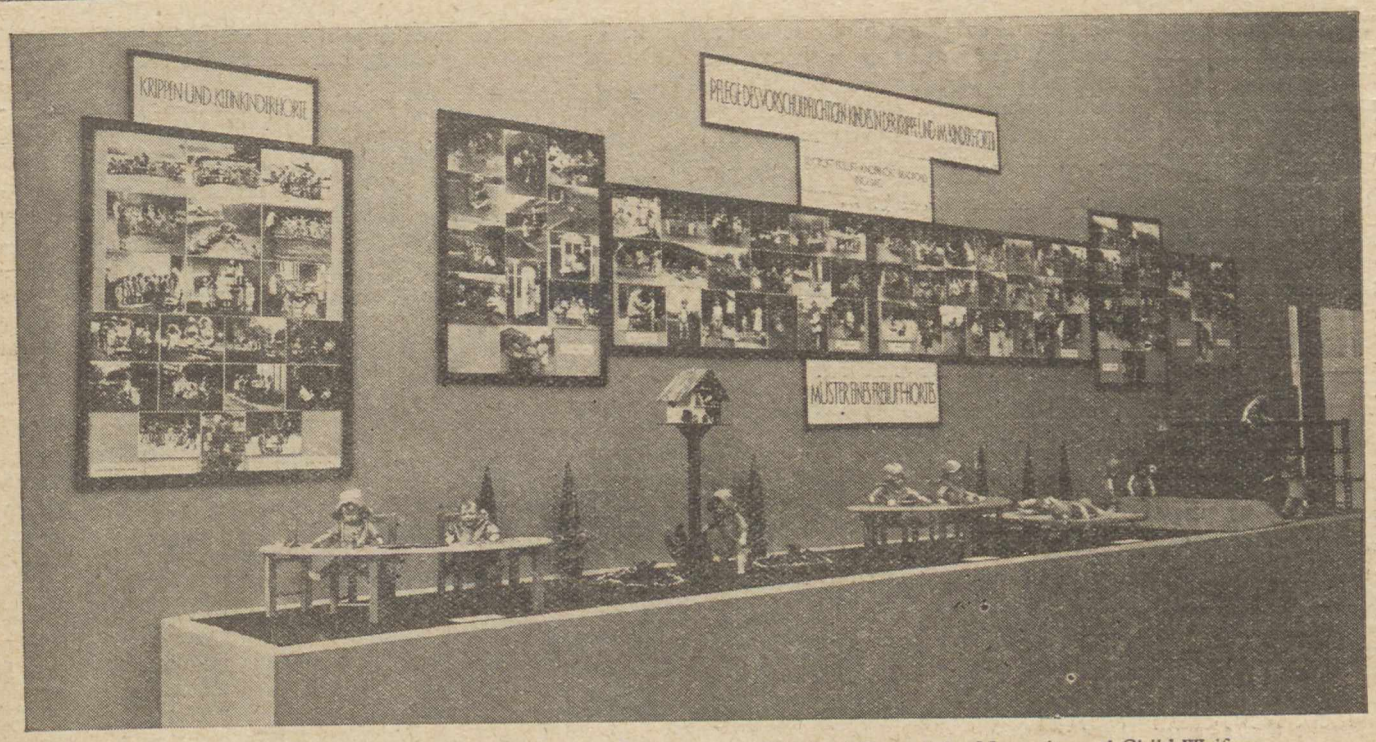

Model of an open-air nursery school exhibited at Dresden by the National Council for Maternity and Child Welfare

American patterns—it is improbable she ever will—but there are many ways in which we might copy our transatlantic cousins and be the better for it. Certainly we might adopt a little of their utilitarian outlook where museums are concerned. In Great Britain we have retained to a certain extent the learned society outlook and have regarded museums primarily as collections for the specialists. Only in a hundred or so of British museums is any popular educational work done, whereas in America the acid test of a museum seems to be whether it attracts the general public and is of use to schools. In addition, the larger number of American institutions and the somewhat greater love of experiment in the American character have resulted in a much wider diversity of museum effort than in Great Britain.

Many of their museums specialise in circulating loan exhibits to schools, with the full co-operation and appreciation of city educational authorities. I saw particularly fine organisations of this kind last year at New York, St. Louis, Cleveland, Brooklyn, Buffalo, Charleston, Chicago, Erie, Newark, Philadelphia, Rochester and Trenton. The Educational Museum, St. Louis, maintained by the Board of Education of that city, circulates cinema films and gramophone records, in addition to the usual museum specimens, to schools in the city area. In 1930 alone, over 62,000 collections, aggregating 600,000 objects, and 770,000 books were actually lent to schools. By contrast, our own Victoria and Albert Museum lent 39,312 works of art, 18,544 lantern slides, and 519 books in the same year. The Cleveland Educational Museum lends slides, pictures, 35mm. and 16mm. films, charts, stereopticons and motion-picture projectors, in addition to commercial and natural history models. Eighty-four thousand sets were thus distributed in 1929-30, amounting in all to well over three-quarters of a million objects. The material is sent out to schools for one week, deliveries being made by vans.

It is a curious fact that whereas this cinema work is done in the United States by museums, here in England it is done by Local Education Authorities, without reference to museums as such: in spite of the fact that careful tests have proved that the short film supplemented by actual objects gives the best possible results, particularly in the teaching of history and geography.

Giving True Perspective

Besides the popular educational tendency, there is the tendency in America to create new models of folk lore, and science museums, of which the new Ford Museum at Detroit and the Buffalo Museum of Science are conspicuous examples. The main thought behind the creators of these museums seems to be that the individual must be instructed as to his place in American history or in the biological sequence; by no means new ideas, but certainly presented in bold and unusual ways. Henry Ford, for instance, who once remarked that 'History is bunk', has dramatised at Dearborn, U.S.A., three centuries of engineering or domestic progress. But where this idea differs in its execution from similar ideas carried out in Sweden, Denmark and England, is in that Mr. Ford believes that the circumstances of a period should be presented as the people themselves at that time would have seen them. The old engines are meticulously rebuilt, missing parts reproduced and replaced, old pewter and brass are polished up and the dents smoothed out. The mellowing quaintness of antiquity, he argues, gives a completely false idea of antiquity. Thus in period buildings, covering many acres (the main museum building alone covers eight and a half acres), one may see the consecutive phases of American civilisation as the pioneers themselves saw them. The whole world has been ransacked for appropriate buildings and exhibits, and the museum and historical village which are to be formally opened to the public some time this year are undoubtedly to be one of the museum marvels of the world.

It is perhaps only too easy to visualise this idea corrupted into an entirely new kind of commercial advertising museum, and perhaps before long we shall see museums erected by other industrial magnates or corporations which will combine museum methods with advertising, somewhat in the same way that they now combine music and advertising over the American radio. But apart from that there is something bold about the idea that does appeal to the general public and gets them interested.

Practical Pointers

Even more fascinating, perhaps, is the new Buffalo Museum of Science, where Mr. Chauncey J. Hamlin and his staff have endeavoured to illustrate the story of the universe and the story of man in new and interesting ways. From a large central hall ten other halls radiate, dealing successively with physics and chemistry, astronomy, geology, biology, invertebrates, vertebrates, evolution, heredity, man, and primitive races. As an indication of the novel methods employed, the Hall of Heredity and Environment may briefly be noted, but each hall is so full of new ideas that it is somewhat invidious to single this one out for special notice. This hall has a striking series of wall cases, each illustrating the effect of heredity and environment upon the individual, and the observer is made to feel that there is a lesson for himself in each one of them. The descriptive pamphlet begins with the question, 'Why are some people good looking and others mentally brilliant?' and the exhibits illustrate why 'like begets like' not only in plants and animals but also in man. The pamphlet concludes with the following: