

The Poor Rich and the Rich Poor

By Grace Worth

IN my immediate neighborhood there are three children out of school because of their "nerves." Two of these children are recovering from St. Vitus' dance; the third is just plain "spoiled." All three are children of professional people, standing high in the community. All three have mothers who are nervous wrecks.

The lawyer's wife, who is attended by many specialists, is struggling to regain health by medicine, diversion and religion, with spasmodic improvement.

The professor's wife never goes out, but resigns herself to melancholy and housekeeping.

The doctor's wife has a succession of incompetent helpers, with intervals between their coming and going, when the rooms are dusty and disordered, and beds unmade at four in the afternoon. Repeatedly she comes to the verge of nervous prostration and must have a change of climate and environment.

These women have pleasant homes and hire help when they can get helpers. They have good income, devoted husbands and loving children. Automobiles are at their service if they care to go out. Yet they are too nervous to enjoy these blessings.

Their homes have abundant and lovely furnishings, hardwood floors, soft rugs, all the furniture there is room for, quantities of china, and an abundance of silver—all to be cared for. There are jardinières with palms and other potted plants, and, usually, conservatory flowers. There are pictures, books, magazines, piano, victrola, extension telephones—in fact all the conveniences and luxuries that women covet are theirs.

The lawyer's wife and the doctor's wife entertain frequently. Their husbands wish it, and they have everything to do with. It would be selfish not to share their homes. So there are dinner parties, children's parties, evening parties, and always company for Sunday dinner. They keep "open house" and are very hospitable. The mothers of these nervous children are very, very seldom alone.

The door bell is frequently ringing and the many friends drop in for a chat. O, no! None of them come so very often, but the family acquaintance is large and it won't do to offend these friends by not seeing them.

The children of these households get candy every day. There is plenty of money to buy it, besides plenty of friends to bring it as an easy return for the hospitality of the house mistress.

The children do not go to bed early. Father likes to take them out in the auto in the evening. In winter there are picture shows in the gaily lighted downtown district. In summer he likes to take them to band concerts at the park. He means to bring them home early as mother says but they begged to stay for the last film or they meet friends just as they are starting. At home dinner is often late, especially when there is company. These friends enjoy seeing the children, or the mothers think they do, so the children are dressed up like little dolls and allowed to stay up "a little while." What's the use of having money if your children can't have pretty clothes, and what's the use of their having such clothes if they never wear them?

When mother has company in the evening the guests must come upstairs to lay off their wraps. Down stairs the door bell is ringing and strange footsteps tread the hall, and the piano player is making a joyful noise. The children can't sleep if they do go to bed, so why put them there, poor little things, to lie awake fretting? So they stay up and when refreshments are passed the children are allowed to have "just a little." The big kind man who sits next to Harriet thinks "mother was a little stingy" and piles the little one's plate with more salad and cake and ice cream. He feels generous in doing it.

Even on nights when there is nothing special going on, the children have no habit of regular sleep at early hours and so cannot sleep. Harriet's mother says "Why, if I do put her to bed early she just can't go to sleep and some of us have to stay with her, and you know that's pretty hard these hot nights."

These little neighbors of mine cannot attend school. They tried it for a little

while last fall. The school system is "such a machine," you see, and "doesn't consider the individual child." The teachers "made such a fuss" if the children were "just a few minutes" late in the morning, and these children were too delicate to attend regularly, anyway. They soon got behind the rest and discouraged. That made them so nervous they had to be taken out. So they have lessons at home when the older members of the family can attend to it, which isn't often.

The three nervous ones play together. The children who are not nervous are all in school, you see. It never occurs to the mothers apparently that these children might react upon one another. But the mothers are so nervous too. They are just not equal to coping with fretful, discontented children and keeping them amused, even if they had the time.

Right in the same neighborhood there is a poor woman. She is so poor that there is only one large rug in the whole house. That is in the living room, where she and the children and the father all gather in the evenings to read or to play games about the beautiful, glowing open fire. There is not one piece of furniture in the house that isn't

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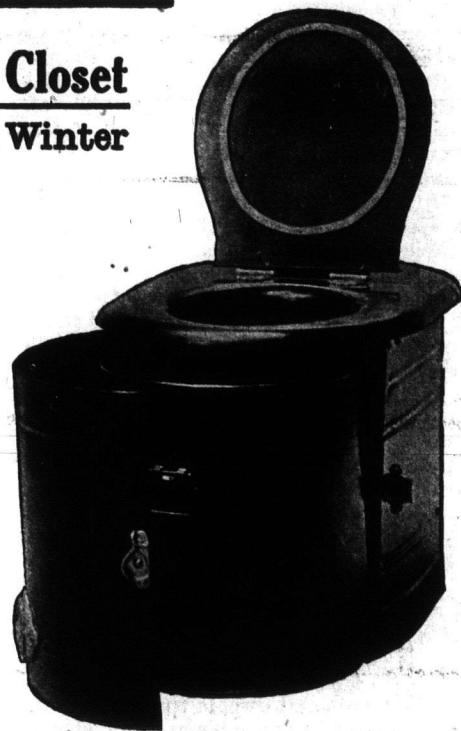
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