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Can Women in War Industry

By Leslie B. Hohman, M.D.

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IN WAR-CROWDED Baltimore, a week before I made my pleasant visit to the family of Frederick and Mary Berckman, of Hartford, Connecticut, I had encountered two children in my practice whose case—at first glance—seemed to justify a fear being expressed throughout America today. The fear is that with so many women taking defense jobs, and every prospect that vital industries will require still more, we are in danger of ending with a generation of orphans of the storm.

The mother of the two Baltimore children obtained a factory job as soon as the boom began. Her income, plus the increased war wages of her husband, enabled them to buy a secondhand car. She hired a nursemaid for their girl of five and their boy of six, an irresponsible girl who nagged at the children constantly and had no control over them. Instead of paying the slight additional amount for which the exceptionally competent woman next door offered to take full daytime charge of the children, the mother spent her money on clothes. She and the young father, away at work all day, were out nearly every night with their premarriage crowd.

"I know our children feel they are neglected and that no one cares about them," the mother said to me. "But at night my husband and I have to have recreation. How can I be a good mother?"

My answer drove straight at what I consider the starting base for any serious discussion of the child-training problem of working mothers—in war or peace.

"If children feel neglected," I said, "it is because they have neglectful or inadequate parents; not because their mother has a job outside the home."

She disagreed heatedly. But her past record as a mother, which she reluctantly revealed point by point in reply to questions, finally convinced her of the truth of the statement. After marriage the two babies had come too quickly and money had come too slowly to permit the care-free evenings out and the dashing clothes, which remained her driving interest as they were when she was single, working in an office, and a popular member of a happy-go-lucky group.

HER children never had any intelligently planned training. Bored by family responsibility, she parked them unfairly upon her aging mother for hours on end. Much of her time was spent in what bored women euphemistically call shopping—aimless looking and prying in stores, a movie, and arrival at home in the late afternoon, tired and out of sorts. On evenings when she and her husband did not put the children to bed and go to a cheap neighborhood movie, they generally were too snappish to be fit companions for a bubbling boy and girl.

Only a poor excuse for a mother was lost by that boy and girl when their mother seized upon a war job as an excuse for dropping practically all pretense of living up to her responsibility to them. They were orphans even before the war. My own observation is that this is true

almost without exception in cases of so-called "defense-emergency neglect."

The task of working women who are mothers, too, involves unquestionable difficulties which we must face squarely. Yet it gives women and their husbands a chance to prove dramatically and quickly where their deepest interests are.

If I had had any doubts on the question, my trip to the Hartford home of Fred and Mary Berckman would have converted me. Their whole household teems with evidence that their children are to them the most important consideration in the world. Their unflagging interest is the solid foundation for the first of the specific rules to be drawn from their highly successful experience.

THE first rule is that mothers who are working must deliberately and determinedly plan to spend ample time with their children. To Mary this is not in the least burdensome. She delights in helping with the lessons of all her merry brood—second-grader son Junie, and the daughters Eileen, Fredica and the eldest, Catherine, in the fifth grade. Mary sings with them, laughs with them, tells them stories in her fine Irish brogue of County Mayo, where she was born and lived until she came to America nineteen years ago.

"We make things interesting in this house," Mary said—an excellent boost for girls and boys along the road to happiness and security.

With all her fondness for her children, Mary could not accomplish so much time with them if both she and Fred had not organized their days carefully with that very purpose in mind. Her early shift at the Colt arms plant brings her home in the afternoons about the time the children arrive from school. She mixes them a malted milk, does preliminary work on dinner, then lies down for an hour until the children call out that their father is home from work. Fred is there at noon, too, from the Royal Typewriter plant just across the street, to help the youngsters prepare the lunch that has been arranged by Mary before she left for work.

Not much is to be gained by a detailed study of the exact schedule Fred and Mary use. Each working mother will have to arrange a schedule according to her individual working hours and her individual problems. We can be sure in advance that those who haven't the will to succeed will seek excuses for not doing so well as Fred and Mary—such as, "Neither my husband nor I can come home at noon." We can be equally sure that those who sincerely try will find some way to make certain that their children are well cared for while they are at work.

One mother I know who has an important executive position and commutes every working day to her desk rises much earlier every morning than she otherwise would have to, so that she can have breakfast and a long chat with her daughter. In the evenings, also, she always manages to spend some time with the child. They talk gaily of topics which interest the little girl. Their companionship is far closer than that of most daughters with mothers who haven't any outside work to do.

be Good Mothers?

A writing assistant on a daily radio program who has few unfilled hours at home during the week still arranges to find brief and happy intervals for her young son every day. The main feature of her admirable plan comes every Sunday. The entire day is her son's. Any reasonable suggestion he makes on how they shall spend his day, she follows merrily. They have grand fun. The scheme often means that she and her husband decline week-end invitations, but they hold to their plan and enjoy themselves more than they would on the missed parties. The result is that the son is held to his parents by the strongest possible bonds of wholesome affection.

The general attitude of mothers—and fathers too—is a more powerful influence than the actual number of hours they spend with their children. Couples like our two young Baltimore defense workers, who want to act childless and who find association with their children irksome and dull, do not fool their children by staying home and snapping at them. Fewer hours and more companionship would be much better.

A child's sense of security is fostered psychologically by stability in his environment. Despite all protestations of love at odd moments, young children in a harum-scarum household are likely to develop unstable emotional habits and a feeling of insecurity.

I am convinced that jobs for mothers outside the home generally help to create the stability of environment that is so essential. The gain usually more than offsets the loss of the hours in which the mother has to be away. Besides the scheduling of household routine imposed by regular employment, there is the added advantage for children that the inefficient mothers whose home management is hit-or-miss and disturbingly unreliable will learn to be more efficient by working where efficiency is required.

THE skill and willingness in housework which Fred acquired when he took it over completely while his heart would not permit more strenuous exertion, makes him an ideal partner for a working wife. This suggests still another flat rule:

If children are to be reared successfully in families with employed mothers who haven't enough money for nursemaids and servants, it is absolutely necessary for husbands to help their wives with home duties and with the children's training.

Many unemployed wives would say offhand that their husbands could never learn. They probably would be pleasantly surprised. An outside job for a wife usually seems to cause a striking improvement in the husband's domesticity. Every husband of a working wife to whom I have mentioned the problem assured me that he felt obligated to help. "I never did before my wife got a job," several said. "After all, why should I when I had done my part and she had nothing else to do?" Not taking the husbands' statements of their own virtues as final, I made extensive inquiries among employed wives I knew. With hardly any exceptions, they cited their husbands for extraordinary household accomplishments.

Even when father knuckles down to do his share, there will be plenty of chores left for children in homes where both parents have outside jobs and abundant assistance cannot be hired. That is a great good fortune for the children. If we had enough working mothers, there would be a reinstatement of work training and early feeling for useful accomplishment. Too many young boys and girls are missing this valuable training.

WATCHING the Berckman children, I thought how much more fortunate they were than the ten-year-old son of an idle, prosperous mother who recently sought my advice because she saw, at last, that something was going wrong with him. Something had been going wrong since infancy. His mother and nursemaid and later his whole family waited on him hand and foot. An important part of my prescription was that useful chores be found for him. The family is having a hard time following the prescription after its long habit of spoiling the boy.

The troubles of mothers who have jobs will be greatly lessened if they and their husbands enforce good training while they are at home. Mary and Fred established a cornerstone by affectionate discipline from infancy, not shying from occasional punishment when it was necessary to stop the development of traits that would handicap their children.

Merely the presence of a mother in the house will not make children behave—as harried neighbors can testify. Mothers cannot incessantly watch children old enough to go out and play, and it would be harmful to the children's self-reliance if they could. The best guaranty is the trained-in reliability and independence that enable Mary to say confidently: "My children never have done anything I told them not to do. I can trust them completely."

War or no war, outside work should never be undertaken by mothers until adequate care and training of their young children are assured. The arrangements frequently are hard to make, but rarely impossible. Where there is money enough, a qualified woman can be paid to come in and take charge. In most neighborhoods where money is not too plentiful, some woman who has proved her skill with her own children will be glad to augment the family income a little by taking care of one or two more for eight or nine hours a day.

No story of the problems and difficulties that working mothers meet could give a complete picture without prominent mention of the intangible gain that is nearly always overlooked. With few exceptions, women are made more interesting to their girls and boys by an outside job. Mary Berckman is a shining example. She is in brisk step with the world of today. She has sorted out her values under the test of stern realities. She has no time to be bored, no time for gossip. She always has time for companionship. It is not surprising that she, with Fred's excellent help, fills her children's lives with happiness.

★ HOW AMERICA LIVES ★



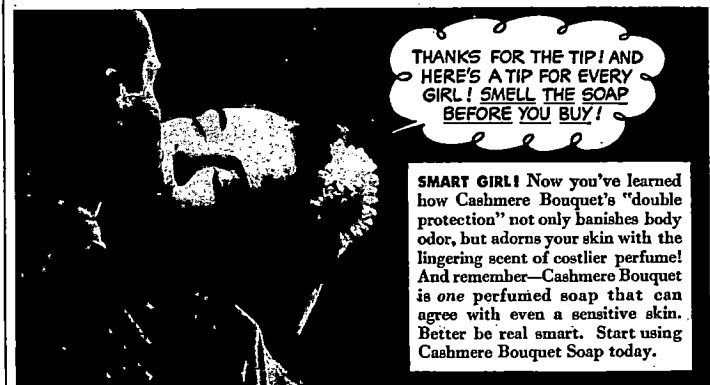
One-Kiss Katie —That's Me!

WHAT'S WRONG, KATIE? Surely not the balcony—the scented night—the harvest moon. No, the scene's made for love. And yet, there he is, after kissing you just once, dancing with that little stranger. Katie, stop risking your daintiness with an unpleasant-smelling soap. Discover the *fragrant* way to stop body odor. Avoid offending—learn the feminine secret of "double protection"...



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