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KEEPERS' CHAT

(NOT FOR PUBLICATION)

Subject: "Clothes for the Infant." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

Publications available: Mimeographed leaflets on infants' clothing

How do you suppose I spent yesterday afternoon? I went to a style show, a private style show, staged just for me--and one of the most interesting style events I've ever attended.

No, it wasn't a spring showing of the latest in toggery for milady. No, it wasn't Paris models for madame and mademoiselle. It was an exhibit of clothes for the up-to-date infant. Babies' wear, not from Paris, but from the Bureau of Home Economics. And the show was staged not by a French costumer, but by Miss Margaret Smith. I don't think I've ever told you about Miss Smith, have I? I'd like to introduce her now. She's one of the Bureau's clothing specialists, and has been working on children's clothes, studying especially the right clothes for the infant. And a much-needed study that is.

The baby's job in life, as we all know, is to grow and develop properly. And two of the things he needs for that job are plenty of sleep and plenty of exercise. Also he needs to be happy and comfortable. Comfortable clothing has a lot to do with quiet sleep, and allows freedom to exercise small legs and arms.

Any mother today is shocked at the thought that babies once were dressed in swaddling clothes or strapped in papoose bags. But the styles for infants of only a few years ago--and even some styles used today, are uncomfortable and far behind the times. Long skirts, long slips, quantities of petticoats--both heavy and light, starched dresses, frills and lace to scratch tender necks, tight necklines to cut and pull, gathers at necks and wrists, puffed sleeves, openings down the back with many hard little buttons to lie on. We've all seen babies wearing this kind of clothes.

While women's clothing has become simpler and more comfortable with the years, baby styles haven't progressed much. Many a present-day baby is dressed still as if he were living in Victorian days. Yes, many a modern mother who herself is wearing modern free-and-easy styles puts her baby in clothes belonging in the age when modest ladies even draped the legs of their pianos, and when women's clothes covered them from chin to toe.

But Miss Smith's styles for the baby are different.

The first model she showed me was a little lavender dress with lavender slip to go with it. Very simple in design, but very attractive and dainty. It had a front opening that went all the way down. You have no idea how much easier and pleasanter that makes the job of dressing and undressing, both for the mother and the baby. Old-style dresses had to be pulled on over the baby's head. And it was such a job to get each little hand through the tiny sleeves. Then it was another job to get all those little buttons fastened down the back. But with

these new dresses and slips, which spread flat on the table, you just lay the baby on the garment and fold him into it. The simple cut and the front opening makes this possible. Then all you have to do is to tie two little tapes together and baby is all dressed. Yes, the fastenings on these little garments are tapes instead of buttons. And, by the way, the front opening makes laundering easy, for these simple garments can be ironed flat and there are no ruffles and frills to fuss over.

Sleeves? Oh, I forget to tell you about them. The sleeves are short, wide at the bottom and cut raglan style. Raglan sleeves, you know, are roomy, allow for plenty of freedom to move, and don't tear under the arm as kimona sleeves are inclined to do.

The next thing I noticed about this little lavender dress and the slip to go with it was that they were both cut on the bias. Miss Smith explained the advantages of the bias cut.

"It allows for fullness and freedom without uncomfortable gathers, said she. "And that's a big point in the baby's comfort, and for ease in ironing. Also garments cut on the bias require less material than straight garments. And that's a point for thrift."

"By the way," she added, "did you notice the neckline on this dress? It's cut low in front so it won't pull or choke, or become tight with growth. And the fastenings, you see, are of twistless tape just passed through the little worked loop here and tied."

"This is the first dress for a small baby that I ever saw in color," I said.

"Oh, yes," she said. "The smart baby today wears colors instead of always dead white. Of course, the colors are delicate to suggest daintiness, never dark or vivid. Look here." And she brought out an armful of other baby dresses. "You see we're using pale pinks and blues as well as delicate yellow green and lavender. These colors give variety to the wardrobe and are most becoming to the baby."

As I began to look over all these very charming but very simple little dresses, Miss Smith called my attention to another important feature. The front opening on each one overlapped generously.

"Feet have to kick and small knees have to be up in the air very frequently" she said. "This overlapping in front prevents dress from gepping on such occasions and allows the baby plenty of room to kick without uncovering his feet. The dress is just long enough to cover the feet--about twenty inches for the average baby."

I saw several little slips, also cut on the bias, with overlapping front openings. These were sleeveless with deep armholes and a low cut neckline. Such slips will do double duty in the wardrobe. They can be used not only as slips but also as little dresses for hot weather.

Some mothers like straight instead of bias garments, so Miss Smith has made a few models of this type. Of course, straight garments need to have added fullness at the neck to give room for growth and activity. A little blue dress in the display had this fullness put in with tiny shirring done with deep

blue thread. Another dainty, all-white dress had fine crocheting around the neck for a tane to run through. This allowed for adjustable gathers.

I asked Miss Smith what materials she considered best for baby's dresses and slips.

"Those that are soft, durable and easily laundered," she replied. "Fine quality nainsook, batiste or lawn are all good. No starch is ever used, or course. These fabrics come in the delicate pastel colors so becoming to babies."

"And please tell me about finishes," I asked. "How do you suggest finishing necklines, edges of sleeves and so forth?"

"I always try to use a finish that won't irritate the skins and one that is easily made and laundered. This rules out rows of lace or starched ruffles. That little lavender dress you like so well is finished with a tiny shell edge, you see. This pink one has a rolled hem finished with a decorative stitch. And the green one here has a tiny narrow white binding."

There's lots more to tell you about those baby clothes. I wish I had more time. But we'll continue some other day. In the meanwhile, let me tell you that all these little models are very easily made. In fact, Miss Smith designed them with the home seamstress in mind. And if you want directions for making some for your baby's layette or for a baby shower for someone else's baby, we have some fine mimeographed directions to send you. These directions are illustrated with a picture of the dress and a diagram showing you how to make the pattern and cut it out.

Have you a pencil handy. Then, here is what you can write for?

First, directions for making an infant's bias dress with a yoke front.
Second, directions for making an infant's shirred dress with simulated yoke.

Third, directions for making an infant's one-piece summer dress or slip.

In case you can't remember all that, just write me for the leaflets on infants' clothes.

Thursday: "Questions".

