

## CHILDREN ARE



One cold winter morning in Baltimore last January a young couple rose early, and after looking in on their children who were still sleeping, went a few doors down the road to open their filling station for the day.

The wife was cleaning around the office, the husband checking the cash when a terrified youngster burst in on them: "Your house is on fire," he shouted, "your house is on fire."

The woman gasped in disbelief, "My house, but....." That was impossible. She had left it just a few minutes before. Then in sudden horror she turned to her husband, "The children, John, the children."

They ran up to the house where smoke could be seen from the kitchen window. It was impossible to get through the door, the smoke was so thick. Frantically the wife ran around to the side windows where neighbors were already tugging at storm shutters, the woman hysterically calling to the four children still in the house. The mother rushed to the windows, started to claw at the shutters, managed to rip the wood off its hinges. She smashed the glass with her fist and pulled herself into the smoke-filled room.

Reaching the baby's crib, she crawled with the child in her arms to the window, lifted him out to a neighbor. The woman touched him and shivered. He was already dead. In the meantime, the father had made his way into a rear room, carried out their five-year old son. Together the husband and wife brought the two other children to the window, just got outside and collapsed themselves. The four children, ranging from eight months to five years, were dead. Smoke and fumes had suffocated them. Firemen found that a kerosene oil stove had caught fire in the kitchen, created the poisonous gases that filtered through the rooms.

One of the youngsters apparently had tried to use the telephone but had lost consciousness, a neighbor reported later. The woman found the party line open when she tried to call the fire department.

The deaths were a cruel blow to the mother and father. But a fact that is more cruel is that it is not an unique accident. It is duplicated in many American homes every day. Thousands of children die in home fires every year. The National Board of Fire Underwriters reports at least 2,000 fire deaths are of children under five years of age, when it is unlikely that they can help themselves in an emergency.

Seeking the causes of fires in which most young children die, the U. S. Office of Education selected at random 800 cases reported in the newspapers.

They found: 165 were caused by stove explo-



sions; 100 by people who tried to quicken a fire with kerosene or gasoline; some 31 children were burned to death while playing with matches.

In 300 of the fires the cause was never found, and the remaining 204 started in various ways, from defective electric cords to spontaneous ignition of oily rags and paint cloths.

Of these 800 children, more than half were under five. The survey showed, too, that in at least 250 cases the children were alone in the house.

A tragic fire broke out recently when six children were left alone in their upstate New York home overnight. All six children died in the blaze that spread so quickly neighbors couldn't get to