

During the year there were 180 transfers of infants from one home to another. This compares very unfavourably with the percentage of transfers of children boarded out from the industrial schools, and is much larger than is desirable or at all necessary. Every change of home is accompanied by a certain amount of discomfort, at least, and sometimes of danger, to the infant. In industrial-school work the matter is in the hands of one person, the manager of the school to which the children belong; with the children now in question every one is subject to the moods and, unfortunately, to the financial necessities of its parents—generally of its mother—and too often the change is dictated by the relations between the mother and the foster-parent, rather than those between the foster-parent and the infant.

The care given to the infants by the foster-parents is as a rule not at all to be measured by the payments made to them. Happily a great many of these good women are so constituted that a friendless or ailing infant appeals irresistibly to their compassion, and a very great deal of patient self-sacrifice is given to their charges. The Department's long experience of the boarding-out system justifies it in claiming for the great majority of these foster-parents the utmost respect and esteem.

Following the system that has been so successful in connection with the boarding-out of children from the industrial schools, honorary local visitors are appointed whenever it is practicable to do so. The industrial schools have the benefit of the services of a large number of these ladies, many of whom have for years gratuitously and unobtrusively devoted much time and interest to this unselfish and benevolent work.

The directions issued to foster-parents are annexed hereto.

RATES OF PAYMENT TO FOSTER-PARENTS.

The Act provides that no payment shall be made to or received by a foster-parent except in pursuance of an agreement approved of by a person appointed under the Act. In this matter the Department has proposed nothing more than to satisfy itself in every case of the adequacy of the payment, and its intervention on no occasion has been required. In 574 agreements that have received approval the rates of payment to the foster-parents are as follows:—

22 at the rate of 5s. per week.	297 at the rate of 10s. per week.
16 „ 6s. „	2 „ 10s. 6d. „
2 „ 6s. 6d. „	3 „ 11s. „
29 „ 7s. „	28 „ 12s. „
75 „ 7s. 6d. „	36 „ 12s. 6d. „
40 „ 8s. „	1 „ 14s. „
4 „ 8s. 6d. „	2 „ 15s. „
16 „ 9s. „	1 „ 20s. „

Generally the relations of the infant provide clothing in addition.

The Department has been unable to give effect to one of the most important provisions of the Act—namely, that which empowers it to pay foster-parents for the maintenance of infants on default of the parents to meet their obligations. It is provided by the Act that for any such payments the near relatives of the infant shall be liable, and the term “near relative” has been given a very wide interpretation. But the prescribed method of recovery is by action at the suit of the Secretary for Education on behalf of the Crown (the debt being declared to be a debt due to the Crown), and there appears to be no method by which such a procedure can be expeditiously and economically brought into operation. In no case has the Department seen its way to undertake proceedings by the prescribed method, and therefore it has not appeared justifiable to commit the Government to the large expenditure involved in the one proposal without the compensating advantage implied in the other.

EXEMPTIONS.

The Minister may exempt from the provisions of the Act—

- (a.) Any institution that is supported wholly or in part by moneys of the Crown or by public subscription;
- (b.) Any near relative of an infant;
- (c.) Any person as to whom the Minister is satisfied that the Act should not apply;

and under this authority exemption has been granted to the institutions and homes set forth in the following list. The conditions of the exemption are that the home is to be open at all times to persons appointed under the Act, and that no infant is to be removed from it without official consent. The last-named condition arose from a case that came to the knowledge of the Department, which showed that the persons in charge of these homes are not always in a position to undertake inquiry into applications for infants, and, as a matter of fact, do not always realise how great is the necessity for the most careful investigation. In the case referred to, the infant was taken from the home under the pretence of adoption. It was not adopted, however; it was used to extort money from the parents, and was finally abandoned.