

recognized. The women are delighted to show us that the little limbs are getting rounded and the little faces rosy, and look so pleased when we praise their love for and care of the children. Some of the women are amazingly unselfish and loving to the fragile, ailing little creatures under their care.

I think that the babies we get who are cared for in our licensed homes get on the whole a good start in life. The serious question is, what becomes of all the illegitimate babies who never come under the control of the Infants Act? A leading medical man told me the other day that, some weeks, three and four cases of girls in trouble are brought to him. He thinks that, if it were known that a child could be supported by its parents in a licensed home without the parents' names being publicly known, the lives of many children would be saved, as girls would not endeavour to obtain abortion to hide their shame. It is not the money they are unwilling to pay, but the exposure that they dread. I do not know how this could be done, but it must be remembered that the children of those girls, who doubtless belong to the more intelligent classes, would be better worth saving, from the State's point of view, as future citizens, than those of the class of girls whose children we mostly get.

Nursing-homes where a woman takes one patient at a time, and so need not be registered, are a menace to infant life; illegitimate children are frequently born in them, and are placed out without coming under the control of the Infants Act. I am sure that little or no good result has been obtained from inspection of the Registrar's books. Would it not be possible to have it made necessary for every woman in whose house an illegitimate child is born to at once notify the Education Department of the fact, and for the Department to have power to send its women officers to inquire as to the future home of the child. I am quite sure that it would be wise to have all nursing-homes registered and inspected.

I think that a cottage hospital is urgently needed for babies who require careful nursing—indeed, whose lives can only be saved by skilful treatment. I have nothing but praise for the behaviour of many women who have nursed children back to health at the sacrifice of their own health and comfort; still, I am sure that many babies would be saved by being admitted to a cottage hospital where they would be treated by the medical man appointed by the Department, and nursed by a woman whose sole care they would be, not by a woman with all the work of a house on her hands, as well as the claims of her husband and her own children. If the parents were made to pay for the children's maintenance in the hospital, the cost of the upkeep would not be so great. If it were established it would be an excellent place of training for our receiving-home girls after they leave school.

It is almost impossible to avoid making a mistake sometimes, and granting a license to a home that is unsuitable. When we discover our mistake we watch the home carefully, never recommend parents to send infants to it, and soon find some reason for asking the woman to return her license to us, and thus the home is closed. Drink gives us more trouble than anything: we suddenly get a hint that a foster-mother whom we like and trust is addicted to drink, although her house is clean and well kept, and the baby is thriving; but, knowing how the drink habit grows, and the danger of a woman under its influence caring for a baby, especially at night, we feel great anxiety until we are sufficiently certain to be able to withdraw the license. Of course, it is only women who are drinkers at home secretly who can deceive us even at first.

The weak spot in the system is undoubtedly the maintenance payments. I wish something could be done to help the foster-parents in that respect. Some of them say that they get their money more easily now than formerly. That may be so in some cases, but many women are very badly paid. I think that the reference to this subject in the Act needs to be removed or explained. The foster-parents say, "Why is it there if the Department does not mean to get the money for us?" That clause causes dissatisfaction, and makes the women think that the Department is breaking faith with them.

I think many of the foster-parents are hardly treated on account of the attitude of the police towards the committal of infants to the Receiving Home. There are children in licensed homes whose parents are not supporting them, and who have been brought under the notice of the police as destitute, without any result. By the Department's instructions, when a foster-parent does not receive payment we tell her to bring the matter under the notice of the police. But if the police will not take the case up the poor woman goes on keeping and clothing the child for months while its parents do nothing towards its support.

I do not believe that children benefit by life in an institution as compared to life in a foster-home. The longer I work among industrial-school and infant-life-protection children, the more I admire the results of boarding out, and therefore I grieve to hear of such institutions as the Foundling Homes it is proposed to establish here and in Auckland. Such institutions are surely unnecessary in our young and prosperous New Zealand. I have done a great deal of boarding-out for the Department, and do not hesitate to say that I could still find hundreds of homes in which to place children with good, kindly women who would treat them as their own, and where they would grow up among green fields and in the free open life of the country, and not in narrowing institutions. It is not helping to raise the moral tone of people to encourage them to give up their natural responsibilities and allow them to hand over their little children to be nameless, friendless waifs in a Foundling Home. Surely it is far better to make parents support them, and have them boarded out in the homes of the people.

I met two very intelligent women lately who have recently returned from England. They are both deeply interested in the welfare of children, and have studied the subject of boarding out. They told me that in connection with Dr. Barnardo's work a large, amply appointed Home for infants was established in the country in England. A large number of babies were taken. In spite of every care they did not thrive. The rate of mortality was so high that the controlling authorities decided to use the Home for another purpose, and to board out the babies.

I feel very keenly about this, for I have good, loving women who simply beg me to give them a baby to love and care for, and often I have not one to give them.

ELLA S. DICK,
District Agent.

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