

INFANT-LIFE PROTECTION.

The Infants Act, 1908, provides, *inter alia*, for the licensing of homes and the supervision of infants placed in these homes, and for the legal adoption of children.

The attached tables show the position regarding infants in registered foster-homes and private institutions.

Adoptions. There was an increase during the year of 110 cases. The large total of 516 children adopted during the year is a sterling tribute to the increasing number of kind-hearted persons who are willing to assume full legal custody and responsibility for young children; in fact, we are unable at times to find suitable children for applicants. Only one order was revoked during this period because of the unsuitability of the home, probably on account of the pending birth of a child to the adoptive mother. The two orders which were varied were simply for the changing of the Christian names of the children concerned. As an adoption is such a vital happening in the life of the child, and especially the illegitimate one, it would not perhaps be out of place to give here a brief history of adoptions in New Zealand.

The first adoption statute was the Adoption of Children Act, 1881. This laid down the laws under which the adoption of children has since proceeded, although additional safeguards have been subsequently provided. This Act, however, was so clumsy that it was felt desirable to simplify it. This was done by the Adoption of Children Act, 1895, which repealed previous Acts and re-enacted the law in a simple fashion. It increased the eligible age of adoption to fifteen years and provided that where a child was over twelve years its consent was necessary. In 1906 the Adoption of Children Amendment Act provided that an adopting parent should not receive a premium in respect of an adoption except with the consent of the Magistrate. This was directed against the abuse of the adoption procedure whereby it was used in a few cases partly as an aid to a livelihood, or as a means of securing an immediate sum of money. Section 21 of the Infant Life Protection Act of 1907 made a further amendment by providing that a Magistrate might in special cases in making the adoption order dispense with the consent of the parent or guardian.

The statutory law of adoption as it stands to-day contains the amendments set out above and is embodied in Part III of the Infants Act, 1908.

Stipendiary Magistrates avail themselves of the services of Child Welfare Officers in obtaining reports on applications made under Part III of the Act for the adoption of a child. A probationary period in the foster-home is regarded as essential before adoption is recommended.

During the last five years there have been 185 adoptions of state wards. This is one result of the system of placement of children in private foster-homes and a further testimony—if one were needed—of the excellent results accruing from such a system. During the year ended 31st December, 1938, 516 children were adopted (31 being State wards), and in 15 cases premiums were approved by the Courts. Of the total number of children adopted, 106 were under the age of six months, 68 between the ages of six and twelve months, 176 between the ages of one and five years, 94 between the ages of five and ten years, and 72 between the ages of ten and fifteen years.

At the end of the year 695 infants were supervised in 638 licensed foster-homes. Of these homes, 592 had one child each, 40 had two children each, 3 had three children each, 1 had four children, and 2 had five children each.

Payments for maintenance, which were made by relatives, ranged from 2s. to £2 per week for each. There were 1,404 infants residing in licensed homes throughout the year, and of these 3 died.

TABLE 14.—PARTICULARS OF CHILDREN ADMITTED TO AND REMOVED FROM LICENSED FOSTER-HOMES DURING YEAR ENDED 31ST DECEMBER, 1938.

	Under 6 Months.	6 Months to 1 Year.	1 Year to 2 Years.	2 Years to 3 Years.	3 Years to 4 Years.	4 Years to 5 Years.	5 Years to 6 Years.	Over 6 Years.	Totals.
On the books at 31st December, 1937	105	97	123	123	131	97	95	68	842
Placed in foster-homes or transferred from other districts during 1938	216	88	93	64	46	38	17	..	562
Totals	321	185	216	187	180	135	112	68	1,404
Removed from homes during 1938—									
By parents or guardians ..	32	37	73	49	41	26	25	29	312
Deaths	1	1	..	..	..	..	..	1	3
Adopted without premium ..	12	51	26	17	16	10	6	1	169
In homes to which exemption was granted	1	2	1	3	1	..	..	..	8
Brought under operation of Child Welfare Act	4	5	5	3	1	1	2	..	21
For various other reasons ..	2	5	15	10	30	24	19	91	196
Total withdrawals ..	82	101	120	82	89	61	52	122	709
On the books at 31st December, 1938	62	65	127	96	101	101	88	55	695