

Orphanages Without Orphans

(To the Editor)

Sir.—I was interested to read the article in August 20 issue of *The Listener* entitled Orphanages Without Orphans, and your editorial commenting on the article. I would like to draw your attention to the fact that the issues raised in the article were fully dealt with in my study entitled *The Institutional Care of Dependent Children in New Zealand*, published by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research. It is disappointing that the author of the article, and apparently the editor as well, are unacquainted with such a study, which was partially responsible for the decision to introduce study courses in social work at Victoria College.

H. C. MATHEW

(Invercargill).

(Most authors of forgotten books feel sore. Not many advertise their soreness.—Ed.)

Sir.—As one with personal experience, I would like to congratulate "D.M.M." (and *The Listener*) on her really splendid article, "Orphanages Without Orphans." The effects of Institutionalism on a sensitive child are nothing short of brutal, and I personally, at 72, would unhesitatingly say it were better for such to die (and be done with it all) than to live and suffer its effects, not only in childhood, but on through the years.

Whom to blame? Those who cling to old traditions, customs, ways and means, public rather than private charity (a lovely thing, private charity), and, worst of all, ignorance.

We could well do with more of the calibre of D.M.M.

OLD ORPHAN (Auckland).

Sir.—May I heartily commend you for publishing in *The Listener* the article "Orphanages Without Orphans" and your leader inviting discussion thereon. If New Zealand is to retain a reputation for an interest in social questions there must be a forum to keep public opinion informed as the emphasis changes. A social reform must permeate an informed society.

"D.M.M.'s" article raises many points. Her frontal attack on the whole question of dependent children being maintained in Orphanages is a brave one. Even if many people disagree with some of her statements, or the emphasis she placed on certain aspects of the problem, few can disagree with all or deny that the problem merits fresh attention.

An excellent way to examine social problems is through the windows of Children's Homes, because children, being helpless, are the first casualties.

Now, as "D.M.M." notes, the view from such windows today is a picture of broken homes, in-



creasing at a disturbing rate. I think that statistics would show that within the last 25 years this group of children in New Zealand Institutions has risen from quarter of the total to about 60 per cent. (if "D.M.M.'s" figures for one Institution are general). It would be interesting to know the causes for this. Are conditions affecting children in other groups ("total" orphans, illegitimates, children who have lost one parent) being gradually solved so as to leave more accommodation for those from "broken homes" or are the latter the most urgent applicants for admission? Or are there other factors?

Another question arises. Many of the children, having parents and relatives outside, keep in touch with them and, when old enough to go to work, go back to them. Here is an aspect with which Orphanage Committees and Councils, being set up to care for children bereft and destitute, have no machinery to deal. Yet if the best for the child is to be done some parallel work of rehabilitation and home-making ought to be attempted among the parents and relatives to whom the child will return.

War creates its social problems, but it often hastens a social solution which is capable of adaptation to similar problems in peace. Thus children's pensions, though introduced in 1912, were inadequate and not fully accepted as a right until the 1914-18 war. After the late war the Heritage movement started, which seems a better and more enlightened method of helping war orphans. Could a similar scheme be applied to other children in similar need? Though the number of children in Orphanages whose father is dead is small and decreasing (probably about 5 per cent.) they might be eliminated altogether. In any case many of those brave widows bringing up their families under

many difficulties would appreciate help, friendship and advice.

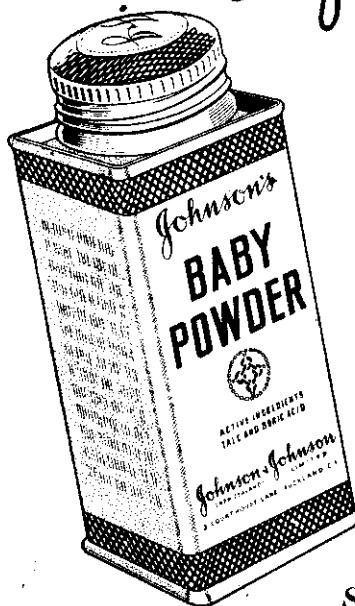
Could the ideals behind Heritage be adapted to deal with the wider problems of the deserted wife, the deserted father, the broken home? Would friendship and advice help to mend some of these broken homes and take the children

OUR CONTRIBUTOR

SEVERAL correspondents have written complaining that our article "Orphanages Without Orphans" carried initials only—a just complaint it had been an attack on individuals, but thin where the target was a system. What matters is what was said, not who said it. But our contributor has no wish to remain anonymous. We withheld her name in the first place because she was anxious not to appear to be seeking personal publicity. She then wrote again asking us to use her name, but when her letter arrived the issue had been printed. She is (Mrs.) Doris Meares Mirams, Beverley Hill, Timaru.



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