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20.22

Orphanages Without Orphans

(continued from previous page)

out of the Orphanage? Could Marriage Guidance Councils and similar social organisations link up with Orphanage Committees and develop a positive plan of home building or rebuilding?

Children's Homes are now only part of a much bigger social problem. They should be little more than "Casualty Clearing Stations." But the view from the window reveals a serious menace to the health of the body social.

I write to suggest that the time is ripe for an authoritative survey of the whole problem so that a new attack on a wider front may be launched. There is abundant public sympathy to call on to help the children. Let it be mobilised on the right lines.

(CANON) A. H. ACHESON
(Shirley).

Sir,—Being closely connected with Orphanage work I read with interest the thoughtful article recently published under the above heading and I should like to comment on some of the points raised. It has been said that "when the marriage knot becomes untied it is the children who are left at loose ends." What happens to these "loose end" children? They either remain with one parent, or are cared for by relatives, or are passed to the care of a Children's Home not an Orphanage. I agree that the first course is the most natural and desirable but unfortunately in these days, for varying reasons, it often means that the child is unsupervised while the parent works. Care by relatives in a family circle is the second best alternative, provided the child is welcome and his reception is not regarded as a burden. The third alternative is to place the child in a Home which has been established and which operates for the sole purpose of trying to piece together again the shattered life of the child. I cannot therefore agree with your contributor that the application of this third alternative "causes a casualty." Surely the casualty has already been caused and the Home seeks to do a valuable work in repairing it.

The matter of environment is too important to be overlooked and, while it may be felt that it is more desirable for a child to be with relatives than in a Home, a comparison of environments is often overwhelmingly in favour of the Home.

The question of admissions is always a difficult one. It seems incredible that any child should ever be told how fortunate he is to be in a Home, but presumably your contributor has had experience of this. However, while a child is certainly never told this, the fact often becomes very obvious when a background of indifference and callous neglect has been discovered. In fact the attitude of some parents towards their own children is the most unpleasant discovery that a Social Worker makes. Too often a parent seeking admission for a child has to be reminded that, whatever purpose Children's Homes exist for, they do not exist to relieve parents of their own responsibility towards their children.

The break up of family units is certainly to be avoided at all costs, but in the Home in which I am interested boys and girls are kept together until school leaving age and I am sure that this is not the only such Home in New Zealand. As far as any social inferior-

ity is concerned this surely is not the fault of the Home but of the public. If the public attitude towards Homes and their inmates is still coloured by the writings of Dickens then it is high time that these institutions publicised their work. That they are loath to do so is out of consideration for the children themselves.

I am sorry your contributor thought so little of the Christian motive in the establishment of Homes as to make no mention of it. Psychologists tell us that the two main needs of a child are love and sense of security. A Home does certainly supply the sense of security and with a staff regarding their duties as a Christian vocation and seeking to interpret the mind of Christ an atmosphere of love is surely created. Thus does the Home try to meet the main needs of the child.

My final remark is a message of encouragement to the rather depressing conclusion reached regarding the lack of progress and imagination in Home administration. Evidently your contributor is not aware that within recent years my Board of Management purchased a house in Auckland and transferred there six teen-age girls with a young lady in charge and with this small group created the nearest approach possible to a normal suburban family. This act implied the realisation that adolescent children, in particular, must be handled individually in a home-like atmosphere and I am sure that the establishment of this suburban home will be the forerunner of many more. This particular effort was capped by the fatuous remark of a Secondary School Mistress who said to one of the girls "I cannot believe you come from a Home, you look so happy."

N. A. REYNOLDS
(Manurewa Children's Home).

Sir,—“D.M.M.” bases her article on the Curtis Report, an excellent report of an investigation into the conditions of dependent children in the United Kingdom, but having no specific relation to New Zealand. When dealing with conditions in the Dominion “D.M.M.” qualifies her statements in such a way that only those to which they apply should be upset but, at the same time, in not naming those who offend, she casts a reflection on all who by providing Children's Homes seek to help dependent children in our community.

It happens that I am Superintendent of the Otago Presbyterian Social Service Association which maintains Children's Homes at Anderson's Bay, Dunedin, and at Lawrence, and for 40 years has cared for over 2,000 children in its Homes. You will notice I use the name Children's Homes and not orphanages, for this is the only name used by our Association. We are at pains to correct any who misuse the name of our Homes. Actually, the number of absolute orphans in our Homes is a very high percentage to-day.

It would be an easy matter for me to take “D.M.M.'s” points seriatim, and show how they are not applicable to our circumstances in Dunedin. The care that is taken in investigating admissions is so thorough that it is sometimes misunderstood by those applying, but no child is ever admitted if it is possible to make alternative arrangements. Being an authorised conciliator under the Domestic Proceedings Act I always do my best to bring the estranged parties

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