

ADOPTIONS

Magistrates avail themselves of the services of Child Welfare Officers to obtain reports on applications made under Part III of the Infants Act, 1908, for the legal adoption of children. As far as possible, the officers satisfy themselves that the adopting parents are generally suitable, that any special needs of the individual child will be provided for, and that the proposed adoption will be in the interests of the child. Usually a probationary period in the foster-home is regarded as essential before adoption is recommended. Children may be legally adopted up to the age of twenty-one years, but there is usually some special reason for such a step being taken with those nearing that age.

The number of adoptions completed in the year ending 31st December, 1945, was 1,151. This shows an increase over the figure for the previous year, 1,065, and it is by far the highest for any one year yet recorded in this country. Ten years before, in 1935, the total was 316, which was near the average figure for earlier years, and it was not until 1937 that the 400 mark was passed for the first time. Thereafter there was a steady rise. In 1938 there were 516 adoptions, and in succeeding years the totals were 518, 604, 605, 685, 854, 1,065, and now 1,151. It would be largely a matter of conjecture to attempt to account for this remarkable and in many respects pleasing increase, but there is little doubt that the publicity given in the press during recent years to the legal adoption of children has had some influence on the position. There is evidence, too, that many adoptions come about because (a) the adopting parents had no children of their own, (b) they wished to have a companion for their only child, and (c) the mother of an illegitimate child adopted her own child upon subsequent marriage. It has usually been the case in recent years that the applications from prospective adopting parents outnumber the children available for adoption. This is particularly so in the case of very young babies.

Although there is provision in the Act for premiums to pass at adoption, it is rare that any such consideration passes. There were only 5 such cases last year.

As a rule, applications to adopt infant girls predominate, but the orders actually made reflect the numbers and sex of the children available. Last year 586 girls and 565 boys were adopted.

Of the 1,151 children adopted, 973 (492 boys and 481 girls) were illegitimate.

CHILDREN'S COURTS

Children's Courts were established in New Zealand with the passing of the Child Welfare Act, 1925. Prior to this date there were in existence juvenile Courts working under the provisions of the Justices of the Peace Act, 1908, but these were in practice largely a replica of the Magistrate's Court. The 1925 Act endeavoured, as far as practicable, to separate the Children's Court from the Magistrate's Court, and it came to be looked upon more as a Court of adjustment than a Court of justice. Proceedings take place elsewhere than in a Court room, they are private, and they cannot be reported in the newspapers except under certain rigid conditions. The procedure followed is for the most part informal and it varies according to the wishes of individual Magistrates, all of whom have to be given special jurisdiction to sit in a Children's Court. The Court has power to deal with children up to the age of seventeen years on complaints under the Child Welfare Act or for all offences other than murder or manslaughter. It may also deal with cases of children seventeen years of age and under eighteen if such cases are expressly referred to it from a higher Court.

Before any case can be heard in a Children's Court the presiding Magistrate must be furnished with a full report from a Child Welfare Officer on the child and his environment.

As one of the means of coping with the many problems of child welfare, the Children's Courts form an important part of our child welfare system. Not only do they provide the machinery for dealing at one stage with juvenile offenders and other children in need of the care of the State, in respect to both of whom legal requirements need to be satisfied, but also they frequently contribute in no small measure to the