

### ILLEGITIMATE BIRTHS

During the year the Department continued to make confidential inquiries concerning all illegitimate births, which are notified to the duly appointed Child Welfare Officer in each district. In the majority of cases it was found that suitable provision had been made for the child by the mother or other relatives, so that no further action was necessary on our part.

During the year ended 31st March, 1947, 1,580 illegitimate births were notified to the Child Welfare Officers. Of these infants, 824 were residing with their mothers and 35 with other relatives, 50 were committed to the care of the State, 320 were in registered foster-homes or nursing homes, and 266 were adopted. In a number of cases inquiries have not been completed or the child died.

The number of illegitimate births, as recorded by the Registrar-General, over the period 1st January to the 31st December, 1946, 1,824, was the same as for the previous year. The difference between our total, 1,580, and that supplied by the Registrar-General, 1,824, is no doubt due in part to the different periods represented and also perhaps to the time lag between recording and notification.

### INFANT-LIFE PROTECTION

The foster-homes in which infants up to six years of age are, by private arrangement, placed apart from their parents are required to be registered under the provisions of Part V of the Infants Act, 1908. The number of registered homes at the 31st December, 1946, was 690 and the number of infants placed was 788. The foster-homes were visited regularly by the Child Welfare Officers to ensure that the health and general welfare of the infants were adequately safeguarded. Many children remain in these homes after the age of six years and quite a number are adopted by their foster-parents.

### ADOPTIONS

The rapid rise over the last ten years in the annual figures for adoptions in the Dominion has continued and has made an increased demand on the services of Child Welfare Officers, who report to the Magistrate on all applications received. The number of adoptions completed in the year ending 31st December, 1946, was 1,383, which exceeds the figure for the previous year by 232 and constitutes a new record for any one year.

The figures for the previous nine years are as follows: 406, 516, 518, 604, 605, 685, 854, 1,065, and 1,151.

Any attempt to account for this remarkable increase would be largely a matter of conjecture, although it is probable that improved economic conditions generally and press publicity given during recent years to the legal adoption of children have had an influence on the position.

Most of the applications for adoption are received from (a) couples who have no children of their own, (b) parents who wish to have a companion for their only child, and (c) mothers of illegitimate children who wish to adopt their own children upon subsequent marriage.

Children may be legally adopted up to the age of twenty-one years, but the great majority of those adopted were in the group from infants up to five years of age. Although there is provision in the Act for premiums to pass at adoption, this rarely takes place. There were only four such cases last year. Applications to adopt infant girls usually predominate, but the orders actually made reflect the number and sex of the children available. Last year 679 boys and 704 girls were adopted. Of the 1,383 children adopted, 1,131 (568 boys and 563 girls) were illegitimate.

### CHILDREN'S COURTS

(1) *Total Appearances*.—It is gratifying to record a further substantial decrease in the figures for all children appearing before the Children's Courts. Table 2 shows a decrease of 214 in these figures—2,026, against 2,240 for the previous year and 2,529 for the year 1945. This represents reductions of approximately 10 per cent. and 11 per cent. respectively, or a total reduction over the past two years of 20 per cent.