

CHRISTCHURCH.

The Secretary for Education.

I BEG to report that there are now 194 homes licensed under the Infants Act in the Canterbury-Westland District, and 200 children boarded out.

On the whole we have a very good class of foster-parents, and it has been found necessary to cancel only three licenses during the two years. Most of the foster-parents become very much attached to the children, and in a great many cases keep them without any hope of payment for maintenance, although they may be in poor circumstances themselves.

I feel very strongly that something should be done to secure the foster-parents from loss in the matter of maintenance. There are a great many cases where the foster-parents are owed large sums, which they are not in a position to lose. The form of agreement which is signed by foster-parent and person who undertakes to pay for maintenance does not appear to be of the slightest value in most cases; and if a child's mother is summoned for maintenance, she confesses judgment, and that seems to be the end of the matter so far as payment is concerned.

I beg respectfully to suggest that the foster-parent be authorized, when the payment is, say, four weeks in arrear, to take the child and leave it with the person who signed the agreement.

With further reference to the maintenance question, I beg to point out that subsection (2) of section 46 of the Infants Act is very misleading to foster-parents, who take it as a guarantee that, if the parent does not pay, the Department will.

Medical attendance for boarded-out children: With reference to this I would respectfully suggest that the Department should appoint a medical officer to attend children under the Infants Act free, or at a nominal charge, where cases are recommended by the District Agent or Visiting Nurse as deserving of such consideration. I may mention that Dr. Lester, of Christchurch, has been most kind in attending several cases of illness in licensed homes, on my recommendation.

I am still strongly of opinion that the work in connection with the Infants Act should not be done at the Receiving Home.

Christchurch, 9th May, 1910

ANNA B. COX,
District Agent.

DUNEDIN.

The Secretary for Education.

REPLYING to your memo. with reference to the working of the Infants Act, I can only say that where the homes are convenient and even fairly comfortable, with capable foster-mothers on the one hand, and the responsible parties are keeping up the maintenance and supplying the child with necessary clothing on the other, all is well. We certainly have a number of good homes, and some splendid women as foster-parents, but our great trouble just now is to find homes at all, the demand is so much greater than the supply. We have some homes where conditions are not what we could wish, and where we are conscious that, while the foster-mother assents to the Visiting Nurse's proposals in her presence, in her absence they are not carried out—not always through unwillingness, but because they do not appreciate fresh air and much cleanliness; however, as we cannot find enough suitable homes we must use these.

We find in the working of both the Industrial Schools Act and the Infants Act that folks are loth to take the care of the tiny ones, and particularly so where they are puny and delicate. Little ones from eighteen months to five years are easily placed.

At times the pressure of work is much increased by the non-payment of maintenance-money and the need of clothes. While we recognize the fact that it would be unwise to relieve the parents of their responsibility, yet we are anxious to help and encourage the foster-parents, who, on the whole, are a most devoted and unselfish set of women; but this side of the question entails the expenditure of much time and work, and the non-payment often closes to us a good home.

Even when the children are really ailing it is difficult to get the parents to consent to a medical man being called in, as they object to the expense; and in some cases doctors have refused to come on account of having previously lost their fees. Our own doctor has in more than one case since I became manager of the Caversham Industrial School given her services simply to relieve my anxiety, as she had done in the time of my predecessor.

If the present arrangements for the working of the Infants Act continue, I would beg to suggest that we have a medical man appointed, in the same way as we have for the industrial school, to whom the foster-mother could apply after gaining our consent as in the case of the industrial-school children. At the time of the last epidemic of whooping-cough and measles many tiny babies were attacked, and in cases where they were teething complications frequently arose calling for medical skill, and yet we could not insist on the doctor's attendance unless we were prepared to take the risk of having to meet the expenses, which, however willing one is, is not continually possible.

At this juncture we seem to need a Receiving Home. We are constantly being rung up by the Matrons of the Maternity Homes to say such-and-such a baby or babies must go out by a certain date: have we homes we can recommend the mother, who must set to work and earn a living for the child as well as herself? What is wanted is a Home in charge of a lady experienced in the care and feeding of babies, where the healthy babies could be placed temporarily (the Home, of course, receiving the maintenance-money), and where the puny, delicate ones could be nursed to a degree of health before being placed out.

Dunedin, 23rd April, 1910.

MAUDE KEMPTON.
District Agent.