

Finding Babies for Folks 1915 to Adopt

There are more requests for girls than for boys. When orphans are seen in the right kind of environment there are not enough of them to supply the demand. The story of a remarkable experiment

By Henry Dwight Chapin, M. D.

IF PEOPLE could choose their children instead of just taking the ones that come to them—as most folks have to do—some curious things would happen. Sometimes the “choosers” themselves would be much more surprised than anybody else.

I think I know something about it, for I have watched people who did select their children and I know what an interesting process it is.

You notice that I said “most folks” have to be contented with the children they happen to get. That sounds as if some people do the choosing deliberately; and that is exactly what I meant.

Hundreds of men and women not only decide what they want, but look over the stock, pick out the child that comes nearest to filling the bill, and take it home with them.

But others—and here is where the surprises come in—have their minds quite made up as to just what they intend to get—and then go home with a child that doesn't at all fit the specifications! They have started out, perhaps, to acquire a pink and white girl baby; but find themselves homeward bound, hand in hand with a freckled little boy.

Or they may do just the opposite: go forth bent on getting a boy, a regular little fellow whom they can call “Son,” and send to college, and take into the firm when he grows up. But somehow or other they find themselves going away with a little bit of femininity in their arms, a clinging little girl creature from whom you couldn't separate them if you tried.

But whatever they take, the point is that they did choose it. They didn't have to accept it. For these are the people who look over “the available stock” and make their own selection. And the “stock” is composed of orphans and waifs and foundlings, homeless little beings who have no claim upon anybody—or, if they have a claim, it has either been repudiated or it cannot, for some reason, be discharged.

I wonder just how much the word “orphan” means to most of you who will

read this article. Perhaps to a few of you, grown men and women though you are, it will bring the heartache you always have when you look back at a lonely childhood, when no one belonged to you,

a child's heart and mind and body, to be a lonely little waif on the stream of humanity.

But to most of you I doubt if the word means anything real and vivid. You have read about orphans. Perhaps you make an annual contribution to some asylum whose report is sent to you—and which you never read.

But are you acquainted with any orphans? Do you know how many of them die in the asylum you help to support? Do you know how an orphan feels, what an orphan thinks, whether an orphan is happy as a child has a right to be? Did you ever have an orphan in your own home? I doubt it.

Well, I have. In the past seven years my wife and I have taken ninety-eight of these friendless little creatures into our home and have kept them until we could find someone to adopt them. It has been a wonderful experience for us. The babies seemed to like it, too. And almost ninety-five foster fathers and mothers—for sometimes two children went to the same new parents—are happier to-day because of our experiment.

New York City is a vast clearing house for these little waifs. But perhaps I should have been as indifferent to them as most people are if my work as a physician had not brought me so close to them. My experience with them began with a clinic at Bellevue and later in the babies' wards of the Post Graduate Hospital; wards with long rows of little beds, each holding some helpless mite of humanity, too young to know that it wasn't getting a square deal from life, but not too young to suffer in body and spirit because of that fact.

“But,” you say, “those babies in institutions have nurses to look after them. They have good care. I don't see how they would be

much better off in your home or in mine.” But they would be! In the first place, Nature intends us human beings to be cared for *individually* when we are babies. Many animals and birds are born in groups; broods, or litters, or however they may be called; but human beings are not. Except in rare cases we come into the



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Mrs. Chapin and one of the babies

and you belonged to no one—except to the institution where you were an orphan yourself.

Some of you who have children of your own now will reach out jealously and take them into your arms when you think of that word. For you, too, were “left an orphan;” and you know what it means, to

world singly. We are meant to receive special personal care; and if we don't receive it, the weaker ones among us will die. Or, worse than that, they will grow up without health of mind, or heart, or body.

A dozen babies under the care of one nurse cannot possibly get the physical attention they ought to have. Each has to wait its turn. Even though its need is very special and urgent, it has to live under a system. The system is necessary, because without it there would be hopeless confusion. It is the only way to take *wholesale* care of babies; but it is not the right way to take care of *one* baby.

It is easy enough to give you the proof of this. From 1909 to 1913, in the New York state institutions for the care of these children, almost half of those under two years of age died! The exact figures are 422 out of every thousand. In the same four years, taking all the children of that age in the state, only 87 out of a thousand died.

Just think that over for a minute and realize what it means. Remember that the orphan children were included in the figures for the state as a whole. If they had not been, the contrast would be all the more startling.

You see, it means that about 350 out of 1,000 babies in institutions die just because they haven't the normal life a baby should have.

We have become hardened to figures. They don't appeal to our imagination. To feel his matter as you should, you ought to see the wasted little bodies, the faces wrinkled like the faces of little old men, the tiny arms outstretched in an instinctive search for the loving response a child craves.

Added to this is the very practical question of contagion and infection. Children who eat, sleep, and live in herds are more exposed to contagious diseases than they are in families. And their resistance is not as great, because as a rule they have less physical stamina.

BUT this is not the only trouble, nor the greatest trouble, with the institution child. The biggest want in his little life is love! Not just a general kindness. Most nurses and matrons are kind. But a baby needs to be personally and particularly loved all by himself.

I make this statement as a physician, not as a sentimentalist. Just as surely as a baby's hands reach out for something to cling to, his whole nature reaches out for love. If he does not find it, he is a bewildered little outcast in the world. And his bodily health suffers to a degree that would seem incredible to people who think that children are merely "little animals" who need only food, sleep, and physical care.

This is no theory of my own invention. It has been proved over and over again

that, strange as it may seem, even a *poor home* is better for infants than a *good institution* is. In three states, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and New Jersey, the authorities realized this fact and began to "board out" some of their dependent children. That is, instead of putting them in institutions, they placed them in private homes and paid for their care.

Of course they do not stop there; they have physicians and nurses to keep an eye on the children. But the woman of the house takes care of the baby in her charge. And it has been proved that even humble homes, sometimes homes that are none too clean, are better for the children than are the most immaculate and scientifically conducted institutions.

For instance, not long ago a woman inspector reported that in one of these homes she had found the baby "boarder" crawling about the floor and playing with the coal scuttle. The floor itself, she said, needed sweeping, the coal scuttle was black—naturally—and so were the "boarder's" face and hands, and his clothes.

them. We did not adopt the children. I knew we should not need to do that. Many people want to adopt children. And many more *would* adopt them, if they knew where to find a nice healthy baby. Most babies really are nice when they are healthy, especially if you see them in a home environment.

I wish more of you would prove this to yourselves by a practical demonstration. The change which comes over a child when it is taken out of an institution and put into the atmosphere of a real home is sometimes almost unbelievable.

EVEN though you have no intention of adopting the child, you would do it a wonderful service by giving it just a temporary home environment. Because there really are very many persons who would adopt children if they could see them as a child should be—a happy little individual, instead of just one of a herd of small animals. There is something abnormal about children who have to live in crowds. It isn't the natural way for them to live and they show it.

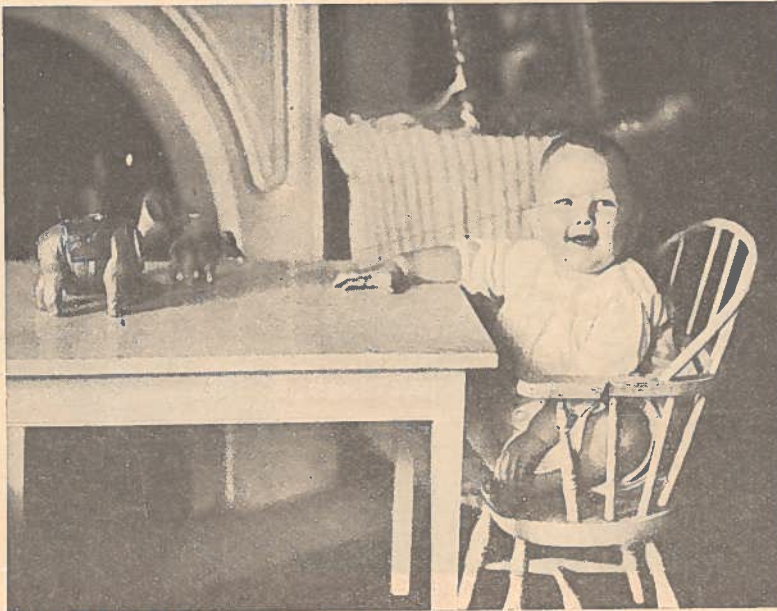
But take the same child away from the institution and put him into a home environment and he not only blossoms out as a flower does in the sunlight, becoming more attractive and more lovable, but he also assumes a new value in the eyes of the world. His stock goes up by leaps and bounds.

Of course, we dress him up, for one thing. And while clothes don't make the child, any more than they make the man, they certainly do help! And the law of "to him that hath shall be given" is one that applies in his case, too; for the very fact that someone already has cared for him makes other people more inclined to take an interest in him.

In the institution he is nobody. In a private home he is somebody! He appeals then to people who have good homes of their own and who care for the refinements of life. He seems somehow to be more their own sort when they see him in the right environment.

As I said before, we have taken ninety-eight children into our home in the past seven years. In the nursery on the third floor there are two beds and a low round table for the older ones—for we have had them all the way from one month old to six years old. A hobby horse is there, and toys; and there is a closet full of little clothes. The morning sun shines in at the windows. It is just a simple, cheerful, homelike room which almost anybody could provide.

To show the effect on their health—only one child out of the ninety-eight has died. And do not think, because they happened to be in a doctor's house, that they received attention they would not receive in other homes and from the average person of kindness and intelligence.



PHOTOGRAPH BY BLANK & STOLLER, INC.

The ninety-seventh baby

But when we looked up the previous record of the woman who had taken the child, we found that she was one of the very best foster mothers we had ever found. Every baby that we had given into her care had grown fat and healthy.

Of course we investigated the matter further than that. And we found that her house was not immaculate, it is true. But it was as clean as the house of the average hard-working woman, with dinner to get and a washing to do. No doubt, while she was hanging out the clothes, the boarder had made free with the coal scuttle. But there he was, fat and healthy, just as all the rest had been. He had found what he was looking for; not only a scuttle to play with but a home and a mother. And the home-and-mother part was the important thing to him.

Because I realized that this need of a home and individual care is the important thing with babies, we began about seven years ago to take a few of them into our house. My wife was willing, so we fitted up the third floor of our city home for

The nurse is not specially trained. She does not need to be. She is just a woman with common sense who loves children. And those two things—common sense and love—are worth more than anything else to the babies.

The fact that we had children to be adopted soon became known; not by advertising, but by word of mouth. And from the time it was found out, right up to the present, the demand for our little folks has been greater than the supply.

This demand has been wonderfully interesting to us. The kinds of people that have wanted the children, and the kinds of children they wanted—or thought they wanted; the instant attraction between certain children and certain of our visitors; in fact, the whole experience has been wonderfully full of sidelights on human nature.

SOME requests come by mail. Others are by application in person. Most of the people we either know or know of. Those who are entirely unknown to us we investigate. Sometimes the application comes from a childless couple. Occasionally a couple that has only boys come to us for a girl; or it may be the other way around—they have only girls and ask for a boy. Sometimes people with an only child come to us for another, because they don't think that it's a good thing for the child to grow up alone.

Not infrequently the applications come from unmarried women who for one reason or another think they will probably remain single, but who want a child whom they can love and who will love them. Often a society woman who has gone the social rounds becomes tired of the froth of life and wants something real. And a child is the only thing that fills that want with her. Recently I had, from a wealthy bachelor out West, a request for two boys! That was unusual; but a great many more men would adopt children if they didn't feel so helpless about caring for them.

If you had decided to adopt a child, the chances are that you would say you didn't want a very young baby. At least, that is what most people say. They dread the nursing and teething period, the constant care and the inconvenience. They have an exaggerated idea of the difficulty of "raising" a little baby.

But the people who do take the little babies are more than repaid, I am sure. There is no love so enduring as that whose seed is sown in infancy. The child whose love for you begins before he even knows that it is love will have the roots of it so deep in his nature that it will live as long as he does.

And for yourself, just from a selfish point of view, you will miss perhaps the most wonderful part of the experience if you do not have your child during the

"Oh, I want that one!" the visitor will say.

And "that one" will hold out his arms. Years ago we learned never to insist that any man or woman take any particular child. We learned this lesson from two experiences, the only ones where children were returned to us. Every child is taken on the condition that he can be brought back if those who take him are not satisfied. But in both these cases where the children were returned we had made the mistake of not waiting for that mutual affinity to show itself.

IN ONE of these cases a woman of wealth took a boy four years old. She was sincere in wanting a boy in her home, but her ideal was the "Little Lord Fauntleroy" type, whereas the particular boy she took, although a fine little chap who had given no trouble during his stay with us, was not a Little Lord Fauntleroy, by any means.

The result was that before long we began to get distress calls from her over the telephone. I imagine that she was trying to mold him too forcibly to her ideal—and he was too much of an individual to be so molded. Finally, in protest against taking what seemed to him an excessive number of baths, he calmly got into the tub with all his clothes on! She demanded of us what she could ever do with such a child. We ourselves had our doubts by this time, and so we took him back.

A little later someone else, with more insight—and more sense of humor—

adopted him. He is doing finely now and has never caused any more trouble to his foster parents than any healthy boy has a right to cause. And he has brought them as much good cheer as any healthy, normal boy is capable of bringing.

In the other case, a woman took home with her a baby of the "crawling age," but after a try-out of a few weeks asked to return it. She said it made her nervous. Of course we took the child back. But later we found out the real cause of her dissatisfaction.

It seems that her husband fell so in love with the baby that every afternoon he would hurry home from his office, dash up-stairs three at a time, and spend hours playing with it. The woman was simply jealous. That was all.

In both these (Continued on page 234)



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Dr. Henry Dwight Chapin is a New York physician who has given special attention to the diseases and problems of child life. His experiences in hospitals and orphan asylums led him to undertake the remarkable experiment he describes in the accompanying article. Within the past seven years he and Mrs. Chapin have taken ninety-eight children into their home, and in every case, after a few weeks of real care, the children were adopted into good families. Doctor Chapin is the author of several books, including "Health First—The Fine Art of Living," the first five chapters of which are devoted to the care of babies and children

time when you are the whole universe to him. You may think that by waiting until he is older, you can choose more wisely. But the earlier you take a child the more easily you can make it what you want it to be.

Almost always, the people who want to adopt our little folks come to "look over" the children first. This is highly desirable, too. They can sit down and watch the babies at play; and—what is very important—there is an opportunity for the natural affinity between a particular grown-up and a particular child to show itself.

We have found that this "affinity" is the surest indication we can have that the child will be happy with its foster parents, and the foster parents happy with the child.