

Unwanted Children Find Parents Across the Sea

By VIRGINIA LEE WARREN

A little boy named John is now living happily with his parents in their beautiful home outside Stockholm.

There would be nothing unusual about this except for a couple of things. John, who had no last name until he went to Sweden, is American while his parents are Swedes. Also John is black and he has a medical problem; he has a heart defect. But the couple who adopted John were so eager to get him that they were willing to pay the fare of an American adult to bring him to Sweden.

This has raised hopes that more black children, even those with physical handicaps, will be taken by Swedes.

"The problem over there is to find children to adopt," said Mrs. George Edwards, executive director of Spence-Chapin Adoption Service, the other day in her office at 6 East 94th Street. With her was the Service's associate director, Mrs. Charles Bynum.

Both women had returned only a short time before from escorting 20-months-old John to his new home across the Atlantic and it was they who described John's new parents' place as "beautiful." The adoptive father is a teacher in a private school. The adoptive mother also teaches part-time and writes at home.

"Couples in Sweden have been adopting from all over the world—Vietnam, Korea, Pakistan, Ethiopia," said Loyce Bynum. "There are more than 500 couples there who very much want children."

"And they are more specific about age than race," said Jane Edwards. "They usually leave out race when they are applying."

But what will it be like for a black child to grow up in a country that is about as white as Ivory soap claims to be pure—99.44 per cent?

Spence-Chapin is not worried. While the adoption service would like to keep American children in their native land, it believes that if no one wants to adopt them here, which seems to be the case with many black ones, then they are better off with adoptive parents in Sweden.

"We met some people who had taken a little boy from Ethiopia," said Jane Edwards, "and for some years they lived in the north of Sweden. Then they moved to Stockholm and the children there teased the little black boy; but not about his color; they didn't seem to notice that. What they thought was funny was the way he spoke; the accent is different up north. Also they laughed at some of his country ways."

As a matter of fact, when little John

got to Sweden he found he has a dark-skinned brother. The Swedish couple had adopted a Filipino child two years ago. He is now about 4.

While a few other American children have been sent to Sweden for adoption, Mrs. Edwards and Mrs. Bynum believe that they are the first representatives of an agency to go to the country and talk the situation over, face to face.

First they visited the Adoptions Centrum, a private agency in Stockholm that acts as a referral service and a clearing house for couples who have adopted or hope to do so. There the two women from Spence-Chapin showed to a few of the couples some movies of two little white boys, one 3 years old, one 5, who have minimal brain dysfunction. "Both of them are so blond they could be Swedes," said Mrs. Bynum, who happens to be black.

The two women also left photographs and records of other American children who are available for adoption through Spence-Chapin.

The nonblack ones that the agency would like to find parents for in Sweden are:

¶Two Oriental boys; the 3-year-old has eye defects; the 6-year-old has a two-year mental lag.

¶White 3-year-old twins; the boy has a fairly serious heart disease; the girl also has medical problems.

¶A white boy who has normal intelligence but is a dwarf.

¶A white girl of five who is in a wheel chair and is a bit below average in intelligence.

Some of the black children like little John, have medical problems and they too will be hard to place.

There are persons in this country who have opened their hearts and homes to handicapped boys and girls. Through Spence-Chapin a white couple not long ago became the legal parents of a white youngster with a hip deformity and a black couple adopted a little black victim of cerebral palsy.

But mostly these children must make do with foster homes where they may have good care but where they are likely to be so impermanent that they feel they never really belong.

"Now there's a chance that the Swedes will adopt some of them," said Mrs. Edwards. Both she and Mrs. Bynum pointed out that the children will have dual citizenship and that medical service in Sweden is free so that if little John, for instance, should need heart surgery, it will not cost his new parents anything.

"Free medical service can mean a lot to someone who is taking a handicapped child," said Mrs. Bynum.