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Sot for sale. Adoptive parents can avoid heartache by waiting for babies—like these at the Spence-Chapin Adoption Service—from recognized agencies.

Babies for Sale

By HENRY F. and KATHARINE PRINGLE

A black-market infant can cost you up to $10,000—and you won’t know what you’re getting. How do some reputable people—including doctors and clergymen—innocently abet this practice? What can be and is being done? Here are the facts.

EVERY year 75,000 children are legally adopted in the United States. Yet the demand for adoptable youngsters is greater than the supply, and by far. That is one reason why the established social agencies are slow in supplying infants for the applicants who want them. The undersupply of babies is very definitely why the so-called gray market flourishes, wherein misguided individuals—doctors, nurses, lawyers, ministers and others—arrange adoptions. It is the reason for the widespread black markets which are operated by shysters and criminals.

Babies are, quite literally, on the auction block because there are ten or more potential adopting couples in this country for every child available for adoption. Prices have gone as high as $10,000 on the vicious black market, although $1500 and $2500 are much more common. Payments are made to unscrupulous attorneys and other racketeers, for children who may be feeble-minded or diseased,
This couple adopted both of their babies through the Spence-Chapin Service. Records of child-placement agencies show that there are from ten to twenty potential foster parents for every available baby. It took time and red tape to adopt her son through an authorized agency, but this mother knew he was healthy. People who "buy" black-market babies risk getting sick—often fatally ill—children.
At the Spence-Chapin agency, babies are examined regularly to make sure they are in good health before they are placed with foster parents.

Members of the clergy, equally well-intentioned, are also to blame at times. A minister may have in his congregation sterile couples who want to adopt children and have run into the inexorable law of supply and demand. He regards it as his Christian duty to bring them together with a baby. The adoption may turn out perfectly well. But if the child should be defective, the foster parents can't very well ask the minister to support it.

No adoption system is without its failures. Agencies make errors, too, even the best of them. But their record is considerably better than that of casual placements. A few years ago the late Dr. Catherine S. Armatruda, of the Clinic of Child Development at Yale University, made a study of 200 adopted youngsters, half of them placed privately and half through recognized agencies. In her report Doctor Armatruda emphasized that she was not asking perfection; after all, children who stay with their natural parents are not always ideally situated. Of the 100 agency placements, she rated seventy-six as good: a healthy normal child in a serene home. She was somewhat dubious about sixteen agency choices and rated eight as bad. But she found that only forty-six of the private placements were good, and twenty-eight were actually bad either because the child was subnormal or because the foster parents were unstable or even criminal.

It is undeniably true that both foster parents and children are far safer if an agency is used. Babies adopted privately are usually taken straight from the hospital in a few days, even a few hours. Little is known of the mother's background. The father may be entirely unknown.

Neither is there much protection for the child in private placements. Take the case of Joe. He had been with his foster parents since he was an infant. When he was fifteen they were killed in an automobile accident. Joe then discovered that they had never legally adopted him. He had no claim at all on their modest estate.

A well-run agency makes sure that the natural mother has had time and guidance to reach a final decision before it accepts a legal surrender of her baby. But private placements offer no insurance that she will not change her mind and demand her child back after he has been taken into some home, with consequent disruption to his welfare and tragedy for his foster parents. Among the records in the Children's Bureau in Washington is the heartbreaking personal story of a woman on the Pacific Coast who obtained a five-day-old infant from a doctor in September, 1944.

"I loved him right away," she wrote later. "He was so helpless!"

The baby's mother was thirty-five years old and unmarried. She had come from a distance in order to hide her situation from her family. She gave written consent to the adoption, and after six months the foster parents applied for court approval, in accordance with the state law. At that point Miss R. turned up again. She had told her family about the baby, she announced, and they had forgiven her. She wanted the boy back. She (Continued on Page 42)
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Washington, D. C., by passing an effective law, seems to have smashed the black market. But if there is a number of "baby brokers" flourishing in the capital, one of them had operated successfully for eighteen months, according to the Children's Bureau. A favorite trick of the Washington racketeers was to hint that a baby's mother was the daughter of an Stateless congressman and that therefore a prominent and intellectual married man. In fact, one infant placed by Joanne Tann's unit in Memphis, was not in Memphis, although she worked out a slick scheme with prominent citizens on the board of its principal headquarters in Nash- ville. Tennessee; only Miss Tann's unit in New York cooperated with Florida social agencies in cracking this case.

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likely applicants by telephone interviews. The Free Synagogue Child Adoption Committee can usually decide on rejections after preliminary talks held within a few months of application. Mrs. Florence G. Brown, of the committee, says that children are now placed only after accepted applicants within a little over a year instead of three to four years.

The authorized agencies have very grave responsibilities. Sometimes an older child has to be tried out in four or five successive homes before a truly suitable one is found. In the modern social worker's view, there are few children who are not adaptable—even problem children like nine-year-old Nick Pappas.

Nick was a pint-sized terror. He had been running wild for six years while his parents were dying of cancer. He was not adopted by anyone. Mrs. Renée Goodwin, of the Cuyahoga County, Ohio, Child Welfare Board, placed him with an unhappy Italian-Hungarian couple in the grocery business. Nick discovered that his new foster father was left-handed, like himself, and that was a start. The Fodors encouraged his mechanical aptitudes.

Two years later he was a different boy, proud of small responsibilities and entirely happy in his adoptive home.

Older children are always more difficult to place. But findings, left on a doormat, about whose background nobody knows anything, are difficult, too.

Agencies usually observe them for long periods before trying to find families for them. The Cuyahoga County Board had such a case in Gertrude. The baby was being cared for in an asylum. She refused to eat and would barely move her hands. She was looked at as if she might be a spastic or an idiot. Mrs. Goodwin decided to take a chance, on the theory that she simply needed affection. Gertrude was proposed to a pair who decided to take a chance, on the theory that she simply needed affection. Gertrude was proposed to a pair who wanted "anything to love." The husband was a pharmacist with premedical training; a few weeks before they took the baby home, the couple visited the asylum daily to hold her and feed her until she responded to this personal attention.

The authorized agencies are playing God in finding homes for babies. They are fully aware that they make mistakes and are humble about them. They would like to do as few as possible. The case of Johnny, for whom an adoptive family was chosen in an Illinois town, is a good example of the care taken to insure proper placement. The family of the Grovers, of Chicago, had been keeping the baby for adoption on their own, when an enlightened social worker suggested that they might as well try the agency. The baby was placed with a menschboarding-mother while the agency worker checked on his development. He gained weight steadily, seemed to have no problems, was alert and responsive. After observing his personality for a time, the agency suggested him to Mr. and Mrs. Green, a gentle, friendly couple whose background was rather like Johnny’s own.

The Greens visited Johnny several times in his boarding home to play with him and to learn in detail about his eating habits and the routines of his life. When he left them at the age of five months, for his permanent home, he wore the same sleepers he had been wearing. He was wrapped in the blankets he had always known. He had a familiar toy. For a time his formula was to be the same as at the boarding home. Because of this careful planning, he adjusted to the Greens right away. For a year, until the adoption was approved in court, the agency supervised his new home, advising the Greens on child-rearing problems and helping with the legal formalities.

The care and attention, not to say love, given to Johnny’s adoption are probably typical of a well-run placement agency. Social workers take great pride in successful placements. The science, if it can be called that, of caring for illegitimate or abandoned children has come a long way in the last fifty or sixty years. Until the turn of the century, the New York City police rounded upFoundings as though they were stray animals and took them to a municipal hospital, where most of them died. For some years after that, orphans were still being shipped by the wearing. He was wrapped in the blankets he had always known. He had a familiar toy. For a time his formula was to be the same as at the boarding home. Because of this careful planning, he adjusted to the Greens right away. For a year, until the adoption was approved in court, the agency supervised his new home, advising the Greens on child-rearing problems and helping with the legal formalities.

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