

FANLING BABIES' HOME

Plans For Building Better Schools For Older Children Announced

SPEECH AT ANNUAL MEETING

Speaking at the annual meeting of the Fanling Babies' Home, held at St Andrew's Church Hall last night, the Chairman, Mr Hugh Braga, said that they were hoping to commence shortly on the work of preparation of certain buildings for school premises for older children. He trusted that by next year schooling for the older ones would be possible under better conditions than they were able to give them now.

The Hon Secretary's report for 1948 stated in part: The report for 1948 opens with a note of thanksgiving to God for graciously supplying all the needs of the Home throughout the year. Numerous friends in England, America, Canada, Hongkong and other places have maintained their prayer and financial support. The children have also been helped in many other practical ways.

Three sewing circles in Hongkong made clothes for the children from gifts of material, knitting wool and old clothing. The Hongkong Government, through the Social Welfare Office, continued its annual grant of \$5,000, besides free rations of rice and fuel. While the Committee gratefully acknowledge the generosity of the many friends of the Home, it is emphasised that no appeals are made for funds. The children make their own appeal, by their friendliness and winsomeness.

Although she had no holiday, Miss Dibden has kept wonderfully well in health. There were a few cases of Whooping Cough and Chicken Pox, but thanks to diligent care and precautions, there was no epidemic, and at the close of the year, all the children looked the picture of health and happiness. During the year 24 babies were received into the Home and of these only 5 died, in spite of every care and attention. There are now 121 children in the Home of whom 109 are girls and 12 are boys.

Adoptions

On several occasions visitors have enquired whether they might adopt a baby. Naturally they have invariably chosen the bonniest and brightest. It is only in exceptional cases that adoption of one of the children is permitted. The babies come to the Home under most distressing circumstances and are literally rescued from the grave by the loving care and devotion which Miss Dibden and Miss Clay bestow upon them.

The Committee were glad to welcome Miss Lucy Clay who arrived in November to assist Miss Dibden in the Home.

Four meetings of the Field Advisory Committee were held during 1948.

The year 1948 saw the completion of some necessary repairs and alterations to the buildings. These have increased the accommodation and are a great improvement. Looking ahead, Miss Dibden purchased in 1947 some property, not far from the present Home where she hopes the older children will grow up and be trained for a future life of usefulness and service to God. A sum of \$20,000 is still owing on the property and it is hoped that during the coming year, plans will be prepared and work put in hand for the repair and rehabilitation of the buildings on the site, which are estimated to cost about \$60,000. It is felt that if it is God's will that this

work should commence soon. He will provide the means to see it through.

The Fanling Babies' Home has become well known in the Colony and it has many visitors. It is known that the faith, courage and unselfish service of those in charge, are a living witness and all who see their work are deeply impressed with the wonderful atmosphere which permeates the Babies' Home. Here they see Christianity in action.

Chairman's Speech

Mr Braga said, *inter alia*: Miss Mildred Dibden, who had been in Hongkong and had been invalided Home to England answered the challenge and returned to Hongkong to open a Babies' Home on November 11, 1936. At that time the Home was under the auspices of the Hongkong Evangelical Fraternity the work of our President and his wife, Dr and Mrs Lechmere Clift. The Home occupied a flat at the rear of Catherine Building and, as the number of babies increased, complaints were received from the residents in the vicinity. In fact, if any baby in the locality cried, the newly founded Babies' Home was invariably accused of being the source of the noise.

Soon the premises were overcrowded and Miss Dibden made vain efforts to find a suitable place for the Home. Dr and Mrs Clift came to her rescue, however, and generously offered the use of their lovely cottage in Cheung Chow. Here, single-handed, Miss Dibden carried on the noble work. After many vicissitudes the Home was moved to its present location at Fanling in 1940, and it was then decided that the Babies' Home should stand alone.

The War Years

The following year Miss Ruth Little arrived from Australia to help with the work. A few months later, the Home was engulfed in the horrors of War. At the time of the Japanese attack on the Colony there were 98 children in the Home, all under the age of five years. But for the intervention of our Heavenly Father and the help of friends in Hongkong all must have perished during the Japanese occupation. Through lack of adequate and proper supplies of food nearly all the babies died during the terrible years of war and there were only 53 survivors.

Miss Dibden and Miss Little were invalided Home in 1945 and Mrs C. M. Bird, after 3½ years of internment in Stanley, volunteered to take over until Miss Dibden had sufficiently recovered from the effects of the hardships she experienced at the hands of the Japanese and the ravages of illnesses suffered during the war.

Miss Dibden returned to the Colony in 1946 and was joined by a new assistant, Miss Lucy Clay, who arrived here last November.

As this is the first public meeting of the friends of the Home, I have taken some time to go over briefly the history of the Fanling Babies' Home.

Friendly Welcome

Every visitor to the Home is received with a spontaneous friendly welcome by every child. All who have been there have remarked on the cheerful happy faces with which they have been greeted and have wondered. The secret of the happiness of the children is due to the fact that the Fanling Babies' Home is not just another orphanage, but is actually a Home. Miss Dibden is, not only in name, but also, in fact, "Mother" to the children.

"Where does the money come from for the work?" is a question often asked. You have before you the statement of receipts and expenditure of the Home for the year 1948. You will notice that our biggest single source of income is from China's Children Fund. This great American organisation, which exists solely for the purpose of caring for orphans, not only supports nearly half of the total number of children in the Home but also owns the property which now houses the children which is thus free of rent. The method of support by China's Children Fund is interesting. The organisation finds someone, or a group of persons, who is willing to support a child.

Direct contact is made with an orphanage and the sponsor knows the actual child for whom he provides. In the case of Fanling Babies' Home 58 of the children are supported in this way through China's Children Fund. But other friends in England and in other parts of the world are also interested in the same way. St. Andrew's Sunday School provides for the support for one of the children at a monthly cost of \$35.

Not all of the children have sponsors and assistance comes

from other sources. We are grateful to the Hongkong Government, through the Social Welfare Centre, for rice, milk, fuel, etc., during 1948 and an annual grant of \$5,000 for the work. The supplies are now being discontinued, but the grant has been increased to \$15,000 per annum to meet the cost of these items.

I would like to tell you the story behind the gift of the small sum of \$9.15. This was through the combined efforts of a group of Sunday School children. They had visited the Home and decided that they would like to contribute something themselves. They organised a concert, persuaded their mothers to make cakes and sandwiches, and then invited their parents and friends to attend. Their gift represented the admission fee and charge for refreshments.

No Appeals Made

Let me emphasise at this stage that Miss Dibden makes no appeals for funds for the Home. We are grateful to all those who have given, either in money or in kind, towards the support of the children. Nor must we overlook those who, by their prayer and encouragement, have contributed in no small measure to the successful work of the Home.

You have just heard from the Hon. Secretary that we are hoping to commence shortly on the work of preparation of certain buildings for school premises for older children. As the Home has been functioning for nearly thirteen years it is time for these children to be separated from the babies. Much work must be done to the existing buildings purchased for school purposes before they are rendered habitable and funds are urgently required. We trust that by next year schooling for the older ones will be possible under better conditions than we are able to give them now.

"What will you do with the children when they grow up?" The second object of the Home is "to bring up the children and provide them with spiritual, physical and mental training so that they may become children of God and fit members of their community". Some of the older children are already a great help with their younger brothers and sisters and we hope that some of them will be absorbed into the Home where they will be invaluable. We hope too that some of the young people may respond to the call for Christian teachers and nurses for their own country—the great land of China so sorely tried and torn asunder by strife and war. It is our fervent prayer that the Fanling Babies' Home may contribute, in a small measure, to the spreading of the gospel of peace which can be obtained only through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Miss Mildred E. Dibden, who is the Founder and "Mother" of the Home, spoke about the work done for the children and her hopes and aspirations for them in the future.

The officials of the Home for the current year are Miss Dorothy Matthews (Chairman), Mrs Hogben, Miss Taylor, Miss James, Miss Everard, Miss Burch, Miss McCurry, Miss Rosemary Cotton (Hon. Secretary and Treasurer), of the Home Council; Dr H. Lechmere Clift (President), Mr Hugh Braga (Chairman), Mrs Hugh Braga, (Hon. Secretary), Dr S. C. Wong, Mr G. T. Padgett, Rev. E. W. Raetz, Mr Wm. D. Goon (Hon. Treasurer) of the Field Advisory Committee; Miss Lucy Clay, Assistant Superintendent.