

CHILD NEGLECTED.
North Tawton
Father Heavily Fined

FORMERLY OF BIDEFORD A charge of neglect of a child two years of age was heard at North Tawton Petty Sessions yesterday by Mr. H. Phillips (chairman), Col. Alexander, and Mr. W. G. C. J. Pedler. Two defendants were summoned, Alberta Potter and her son, Percy Potter, the child alleged to have been neglected being Daisy Potter, the daughter of the male defendant. The woman did not appear, and it was decided to proceed with the case against the father and settle later as to what course should adopted as to his mother.

Mr. J. J. Newcombe prosecuted on behalf of the N.S.P.C.C., and Mr. W. G. Seager defended. Mr. Newcombe stated that the father of the child was a widower, and lived with his mother, who was 68 years of age, at Bathe Moor Cottage, North Tawton. The cottage had three rooms, and in November the Relieving Officer visited the place, and from what he saw he made a communication to the Inspector of the N.S.P.C.C. The latter made several visits. On the first occasion he found 'the child and its garments dirty, but it was fairly well nourished. The living room was in a vile condition, and there was dirt an inch deep in places. The two bedrooms were also in dirty state'. The Inspector warned the woman but the next time he went there he found no improvement. Then notice was served on the father. Following this, there was improvement in the conditions and the state of the child, but after a while this relaxed, and in March the child was very dirty. The rooms were filthy, and the bed clothing was swarming with fleas. It was almost impossible to get into the living room for dirt and rubbish, and there was a hen scratching about the floor.

At the end of April, the child was removed to Okehampton workhouse. It could not be that there was poverty, because the father was at regular work on a tractor. Mr. F. Spry, Relieving Officer, said the place was stinking. Inspector Hay ward. N.S.P.C.C, told the Bench that on one occasion when he went to the cottage he found twelve hens in the living room.

In cross - examination, witness said the grandmother appeared be ill at that time. He never saw the father there, and understood he was away at work near Okehampton. P.C. Spicer agreed that the child was fairly plump, though weak. He was told she was fed with milk from a bottle which was standing in the room. This was corroded with milk and smelt very stale. Cross-examined: did not think the child was underfed. Dr. Desprez considered the conditions were detrimental to the child's health. The grandmother was weak, and suffered from rheumatism, and was too ill to look after the child. Mr. Seager, for the defence, suggested that the story of the prosecution as to the state of the surroundings had been greatly exaggerated. The floor was of rough cement and could not be made to appear clean. The father of the child was part proprietor of steam-threshing machine and was away sometimes two or three weeks at a time. He formerly lived in Bideford, where his wife died of tuberculosis last year. He then took his daughter to be taken care of by his mother who, however, was now old and weak, and perhaps not able give the child the attention they would like her to receive. The father had received the summons from the Society, and these proceedings came to him as a great surprise. The male defendant, sworn, said he was unaware that the child was not properly looked after. It was well fed, he knew. Evelyn Potter, sister-in-law of the male defendant, said the child appeared clean when she saw it, and well fed. She did not often go to the house except in the evening. The Chairman; 'The fowls had then gone to roost' - (laughter).

The Bench fined the father £5 and ordered him to pay half a guinea towards the costs of the prosecution. They warned him that if there was any further neglect of the child the punishment would be far more severe. The Bench allowed the charge against the grandmother be withdrawn.