

Assistance to the Wives and Children of Working Men.*

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Infantile mortality is one of the questions the most worthy of the attention of the public. It has been much studied in France during the last twenty years, and its causes enquired into, and both the State and private individuals have made it the object of their solicitude.

The aim of the present paper is to give an idea of what has been done at Paris, both by the doctors of the school of the late regretted Professor Budin, and by philanthropic persons, animated by the desire to ameliorate the conditions under which the children of the working classes are reared. It will not be possible to describe all the various works that for the last twenty years have had for their object the preservation of infant life; we can only mention in passing the most important of them.

The city of Paris maintains at its own expense seven consultations for infants, to which may be added three consultations in the suburbs, all equally dependent upon the "Assistance Publique" for funds. These ten consultations all of which are situated in poor and populous quarters, make free distribution of milk to the women who attend there regularly with their infants. In 1906 nine hundred and forty-one children were thus helped, of which number two hundred and eighteen were suckled by the mother. Two hundred and ninety-four thousand five hundred and fifty litres (599,100 pints) of sterilised milk were given. The total expenses for one year amounted to 147,335 francs (£5,880). If I give these figures it is to prove the real effort that the municipalities have made in the matter of assistance to mothers. Dr. Dubrisay has given in his interesting report the results obtained by the various clinics having annexed to them a consultation for infants: my part then is much simplified, and I have only to lay before you what appears to be the most fruitful field of action in the future, for those who have at heart the protection of the children of the working classes. To arrive at this, we must not only consider the good side, and the undeniable advantages of the *goutte de lait* so far as gratuitous distribution of milk is concerned, but also its inconveniences and dangers: it is a critical study, very precise, and supported by facts that would have to be

advanced, and the limits of this paper do not allow of our doing so. We will reduce then to a single point the objections that may be raised against the free distribution of milk—sterilised or not, as the case may be. To give milk to a mother gratuitously without being assured beforehand that she cannot possibly suckle her infant, is to offer a *premium on weaning*. To avoid this, the tickets for milk must be given with the greatest discretion, and only with the advice of the doctor, after an examination of the mother. This is an indispensable condition, but it is not enough. It is nearly always possible for a woman to suckle her child, so it is beforehand during the time of her pregnancy that she must be convinced that she can and ought to do it.

From this arises the necessity of joining to the consultations for infants, one for women, for the purpose of watching over them during their pregnancy, and where the mother will be expected to present herself *before* the birth of her child, if she desires to receive aid from the Dispensary afterwards. Now when a woman sees the possibility of obtaining—without any effort on her part—a regular supply of milk, she ceases as a rule to wish to suckle her child herself, and disperses her milk. This leads to the necessity of establishing equally with the distribution of milk, assistance of another kind, with the object of aiding the mother to suckle her infant: so, tickets for meat and flour, lentils and beans, are given, and form an excellent substitute for the milk tickets. The mother of the family is the gainer by the good nourishment that she receives, and at the same time, has the happiness of seeing her child profit by the better milk she is enabled to give it. The conclusion to be drawn from a daily experience of six years is, that the work, which has for its object the giving of effectual assistance to the mothers of the working classes, must not be merely content with instituting a *goutte de lait* even with consultations for infants, but must extend its field of action, and must comprise also a preventive consultation for pregnant women, and in addition to the milk supply to the babies, must give help in nutrition to the mother.

These necessary additions need not necessitate any increase of expenditure for the Dispensaries in which they are established; on the contrary, by avoiding the indiscriminate giving of relief, and in utilising the mother's milk—immeasurable wealth for the family and inestimable boon for the child—the funds of the Dispensary will be more successfully laid out, and its expenses diminish.

If anyone wishes for proofs in support of

* Read at the International Conference on Nursing at Paris, June, 1907.

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