

OUR PRIZE COMPETITION.

AT WHAT SEASON OF THE YEAR IS INFANT MORTALITY THE HIGHEST? HOW MAY IT BE LESSENERED OR PREVENTED?

We have pleasure in awarding the prize this week to Miss Kathleen Kohler, Cathall Road, Leytonstone, Essex.

PRIZE PAPER.

Infant mortality is at its highest during the summer months, when more babies die from a severe form of diarrhoea and vomiting than from any other disease.

As it usually occurs in those who are being largely or entirely fed on milk, it is probably due to germs which have got into the food, and, favoured by the hot weather, have rapidly increased in numbers, and so rendered it unfit for consumption.

The death rate of infants under one year is between 140 and 150 per thousand, and nearly all die of what is really starvation; plenty of food is given them, but of the kind that their delicate digestive organs are unable to deal with, and in consequence they suffer badly from diarrhoea, rickets, tuberculosis, &c., and gradually waste away. This is mostly caused by ignorance on the mothers' part; they really do not know how to feed their babies.

Another cause is overcrowding in the slum districts, but this cannot always be avoided; the rents are heavy, and the poor are unable to pay them.

Neglect accounts for a lot, but this, again, is not always a mother's fault, as often she is the chief breadwinner, and there are not enough infant day nurseries to take all working mothers' babies, and so they are left to the care of a brother or sister who are nothing more than babies themselves.

Measles, whooping cough, congenital syphilis, and accidents account for a great many deaths.

It is difficult to say how it may be lessened by the parents alone; the poor are exceedingly brave, and struggle against overwhelming odds for the sake of their little ones.

The chief good can be done by educating girls in motherhood during their last school year, and the establishment of "Schools for Mothers," "Milk and Food Centres" for those who are at home, and "Infant Day Nurseries" for those compelled to work.

A mother should always feed her baby for the first nine months, and only serious illness on her part should prevent her from doing so. It should be fed every two hours for the first two months, every two and a half hours during the

third month, and every three hours till the child is weaned. A mother should not give up feeding her baby because she has not sufficient milk, but take a cup of milk, gruel, or milk and soda water half an hour before nursing. If still ineffective, give alternate feeds of cow's milk, diluted.

Cow's milk, if pure, is the most reliable substitute. It must be diluted with either plain water, barley water if relaxed, and lime water if constipated. Barley water must be made fresh daily. The milk should be obtained twice daily, and boiled for one minute as soon as received, and kept covered in a cool place.

Skimmed and separated milks are useless as foods. A good condensed milk may be given for short periods, especially during the hot weather, but should not be used alone for more than a few weeks. If the child does not thrive on milk alone a small quantity of fresh cream may be added to each feed. No starchy foods should be given before a child is six months old. Some fresh element must be given every day after it is four months old, such as orange juice, grape juice, or raw meat juice.

No matter how carefully and perfectly a baby is brought up by hand, nothing can make up for the loss of living organic matter to be found in human milk. It is advisable to vary the diet occasionally, but do not change a baby's food in the summer months if it can possibly be avoided.

Be very careful of the bottles. Have two in use, and use them alternately. When not in use keep them in cold water, to which a little salt has been added, covered over with a clean piece of muslin. Use a boat-shaped bottle with no tubes; wash after each feed, and boil twice a day.

Clothing.—Keep the baby warm. Let the underclothing be woollen or flannel, and not too tight. No part of the legs should be bare. The arms should be protected by long sleeves. A cotton binder in great use among the poor is best avoided, although it certainly gives support to the tender spine when the baby is being carried about by an older child, and for this reason it may sometimes be used.

The napkins should be changed as soon as soiled, and washed each time, never dried.

Air.—The windows of the rooms should always be kept a little open at the top, and they should be thoroughly aired twice a day. Children should be taken out each day in the daytime; infants must not go out at night. Children, if possible, should sleep in separate cots. A child should be washed all over once a day with soap and warm water.

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