

Her Majesty has very independent ideas about the position of women, and is the first Empress of Japan who ever had the moral courage to appear in public seated side by side with the Emperor in his carriage. The Empress is a kind and charitable woman, and, like the members of our own Royal family, is constantly bringing her influence to bear upon her people on behalf of hospitals, asylums for orphan children, and similar benevolent projects.

### The Arcuccio:

AN APPARATUS TO PREVENT THE OVERLYING OF INFANTS.

THE *British Medical Journal* has a very interesting article on the Arcuccio, which is an Italian appliance to prevent the overlying by mothers of their infants. The article says:

"Every year, especially on the nights following some general holiday in the colder parts of the year, a large number of infants meet with their deaths in their mothers' beds, being 'overlaid,' or more probably suffocated under the bed-clothes, during the sleep, sometimes, perhaps, the drunken sleep, of their mothers. Numerous cases of this kind were reported during the cold season in January and February last, and even more recently, and in many instances, coroners' inquests have been held, but we are not aware that any practical means of checking this annual tribute of life has been suggested. The proposal to seek special legislation forbidding mothers to sleep in the same bed with their infants under special penalties in the event of injury has, been made, but it is to be doubted whether such a proposal would meet with much support in Parliament, or indeed from public opinion.

Under these circumstances it may be interesting to call attention to an apparatus of a simple kind which is used in Italy, or in certain parts of it, designed to prevent the suffocation of infants in bed with their mothers or Nurses. The apparatus is described briefly in the late Dr. Charles Clay's 'Cyclopædia of Obstetrics.' The appliance is there described under the name 'Arcutio,' and is said to have been 'formerly used in Florence.' It appears, however, that it is still well known in Florence under the name 'Arcuccio.\*' At our request Dr. Stuart Tidey kindly made some inquiries for us in Florence. He applied in the first place to an old servant in his employment, who is, he states, well acquainted with the popular customs and traditions of Tuscany. In answer to his question the old woman said that it was the general rule for the infant to sleep in the same bed with the mother or nurse. When asked whether infants were not sometimes suffocated, she replied at once, 'No, Signor, but then the arcuccio is always used. It is a wooden framework, with arches of iron to prevent the child being overlaid. It is placed in the bed between the husband and wife. In my country (Pistera) we call them "arcocchi."'

In answer to the question whether they were in common use in Florence, the old woman replied in the affirmative, and offered to borrow one for inspection

\* The word is derived from *arco*, a bow or an arch, and the appliance is very similar to the surgical "cradle," and serves the purpose of keeping the pressure of the bed clothes with risk of suffocation from the infant, and it also prevents too close contact of the mother.

from a neighbour who had brought up a large family. Within five minutes the arcuccio arrived. It had evidently seen much hard use, but was still serviceable. It consisted of a wooden head-piece, measuring 10 inches by 13 inches, two wooden sides 29 inches long and an inch or so thick, a top bar of wood of the same length, and a curved iron bar as a footpiece. The width was the same at the head and foot, but the head piece was 3 inches higher than the footpiece. This arcuccio was said to be larger than usual, and a second arcuccio, borrowed from another neighbour, and designed for the protection of a newly born infant, was 22 inches long, 9½ inches wide, 9 inches high at the head and 8 inches high at the foot. The dimensions given by Dr. Charles Clay in the work cited above were 3 feet 2½ inches long, and 1 foot 1 inch broad. The framework of the arcuccio is frequently bound with flannel.

The arcuccio is also used as a protection to the infant by day. If the peasant mother go out to work she will leave her child in the bed protected by the arcuccio, over which the bedclothes are drawn, but so as to leave a space for air near the head. It would appear therefore that the arcuccio, in addition to preventing suffocation in bed, has the further virtue of diminishing the risk of falling out of bed, which is a frequent accident in the homes of the poorer classes in this country, and the cause of much distress and impaired health, and sometimes of serious injury.

In the 'Cyclopædia' it is stated on the authority of 'The Art of Nursing' (London, 1733), 'in respect of the arcutio, that every Nurse in Florence is obliged to lay the child in it, under pain of excommunication.'

As to this Dr. Tidey's informant stated that the country priests do exhort mothers not to leave their infants unprotected by the arcuccio; should a death occur through such neglect, the mother would incur ecclesiastical censure. There appears to be no special law upon the subject in any part of Italy, but the use of the arcuccio is enforced partly by public opinion, which would judge very severely any mother whose child lost its life owing to failure to use a well-recognized precaution, and partly by the injunctions and threats of the Church.

On the whole it would seem that the use of the arcuccio is very general in Tuscany at the present day. It is used, Dr. Tidey thinks, 'invariably when the child is left in bed in the day time, and generally at night to prevent its being overlaid.' We are indebted to Professor Boncinelli, who personally investigates the causes of deaths in Florence, for the information that deaths of infants from suffocation are extremely rare. He has only met one such case in the course of the seven years he has been entrusted with the duty of making medico-legal inquiries in Florence.

Dr. Luigi Concetti, Professor of the Diseases of Children in the University of Rome, in a private letter, confirms fully the accuracy of the information obtained for us by Dr. Tidey. He states that the arcuccio is in general use in Tuscany, to prevent the suffocation of infants either by the bedclothes or by their mothers. It is placed, he says, in the middle of the bed, with the child within it. He adds that there is no special law with regard to the use of this appliance, but in the case of the suffocation of an infant in bed action would be taken for homicide by negligence. He says, also, that the statement that the Church would excommunicate the mother in the event of the death of the infant is incorrect."

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