

The Association for Promoting the Training and Supply of Midwives.

The above Association held its annual meeting on Thursday in last week at 24, Park Lane, by the kind permission of Lord and Lady Brassey. In the unavoidable absence, through illness, of Lord Balfour of Burleigh, the chair was taken by W. Wallace Bruce, Esq., Chairman of the Housing Committee of the London County Council.

The Chairman pointed out that midwives attend from sixty to seventy per cent. of the maternity cases in England and Wales, and until the Midwives Act was passed in 1902 England was alone of all the civilised countries in not regulating their practice. The object of the Association, whose claims they had met to support, was to facilitate the training of midwives so as to meet the requirements of the Act.

The first speaker was the Mayor of Huddersfield, Mr. Benjamin Broadbent, who in a speech which went straight to the hearts of his hearers described how he came to take an interest in the work of an Association concerned in the circumstances of motherhood. He was keenly interested in the protection of infant life. It seemed to him so infinitely sad and pitiful that so many of these little lives should be sacrificed, and that there should be such an amount of avoidable suffering and useless pain amongst infants simply from neglect. The mortality, suffering and pain were manifestly avoidable and to be fought against, the wail of the children was in his ears, and until he had done something to try to stay it he could not sleep at night. He had endeavoured in Huddersfield to bring about a better state of things and was encouraged to believe that his work had not been altogether in vain. But the moment he came into real touch with the issues involved he found that lack of attention and of skilled advice to the mother at the time of the child's birth were intimately associated with infant mortality, and so he was brought into direct relation with those who were working to supply skilled midwives to the poor.

He therefore made the most earnest appeal to those who were mothers to aid their less fortunate sisters. Babyhood and birth made all mothers kin, and those to whom the pains of life were nullified or greatly ameliorated should determine to do what they could to ease the suffering of the world, to do something for less fortunately-placed mothers and children. The personal element was of great moment. He had come much into contact with working class mothers and had been astounded at the lovely and beautiful things which were to be seen in the homes of the poor. To be familiar with them ministered to the good and sanctity of one's own life. He would not have the memory of them obliterated. It was one of the things which made life worth living.

Mrs. Charles Trevelyan said that the majority of people were annoyed by an appeal for money. They considered it one of the evils of possession. But a sudden fellow feeling was aroused by a common need. Such a feeling was that possessed by those who had

experienced the infinite pain and the infinite happiness of motherhood. She appealed to those who were mothers to help other mothers through the black gates of pain to the golden gates of a new life. Prevention was better than cure, and a child should be a strong and healthy creature from its birth. There was no greater treasure than health. It was the salt of life, nay life itself. She therefore begged mothers to hold out a helping hand to others on whom life pressed hardly. Their work would bear splendid fruit when a healthier race should arise which would be an honour to the country.

Dr. Champneys said that the nation was just waking up to the fact that it had not too many children, and that it could not hope to hold its own unless it had an adequate population. The State should see what could be done with regard to the production of large families, but an additional birth-rate was useless if the children died, or if the mothers were crippled and prevented from having others. From the point of view of the State the child which did not grow up was useless.

If the crippling of mothers, if ophthalmia and subsequent blindness of the child were not to occur in consequence of neglect at the time of birth skilled midwives were a necessity. The midwife stood at the gate of life, and it was in her power to ward off danger. If she were unskilled the danger to both mother and child was terrible.

Many of those on the Midwives' Roll might be described as gilt-edged midwives. They acted as monthly nurses to private patients, and very properly qualified as midwives to make themselves thoroughly competent, but that did not help the poor. At present while the mortality in the lying-in hospitals was very low the mortality in child-birth throughout the country was not substantially lower than it was thirty years ago, which was not creditable. If, however, the Association for the Training and Supply of Midwives was properly supported, he thought that they would find the mortality did go down. The Association was thus not only doing a philanthropic work but one of the highest value to the State.

Miss Lucy Robinson spoke from the point of view of the midwife, and described the value of the work in the homes of the poor. The women nursed would take from a midwife advice on questions of hygiene, morality, health, and the care of children which they would take from no one else. Every year at present there were at least 2,000 deaths in this country from puerperal fever—an entirely preventable cause.

The cause was also eloquently supported by Dr. Singer, who proposed a resolution expressing the conviction of the meeting as to the value of the work carried on by the Association, and by Mrs. Charles Ebdon, who seconded it.

The Committee are to be congratulated on the organisation of a meeting in which the speeches not only reached a high level of excellence but were remarkable for the high tone maintained throughout. Neither philanthropy nor patronage were the dominant note, but rather that members of the State owed a duty to one another which could not be ignored. The doctrine of Socialism had penetrated to Park Lane,

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)