

## The Midwife.

### The Care of Infants.

An interesting discussion on the above subject took place at the International Congress of Hygiene and Demography, held recently at Berlin, which is reported at length in the *British Medical Journal*.

Dr. Dietrich gave a detailed account of the advances made, and especially the organisation of the Berlin Institutes. He pleaded for mother's milk in the feeding of infants whenever this was found to be possible, and discussed the difficulties which had been met with in those establishments which had set themselves the task of carrying out the normal feeding of infants.

Dr. Taube said that while breast feeding was the physiological method of rearing children, fashion and work had led to a degeneration of the female breast, and indirectly to an increased mortality of infants. The importance of making provision for the care of infants was proved by the fact that poverty and high mortality went hand in hand, and that the most dangerous time of life was during the first six months. During the first month the causes of death were chiefly marasmus and atrophy, including syphilitic atrophy, leading to convulsions and lung affections. During the second month, over 50 per cent. of the deaths were due to affections of the intestinal canal. The greater number of marasmic infants could not be saved under any circumstances. In order to improve the conditions, he proposed that the working classes should be better fed, that the mothers should be taken care of before their confinements, and that an improvement in the knowledge of cookery, and a relieving of married women of part of the work they have to undertake should be carried out. He considered that breast-feeding could be increased by certain means, such as had been adopted in most of the infants' and mothers' homes, and that when it was found impossible to keep the infant exclusively on the mother's milk, *allaitement mixte* should be resorted to. Cow's milk was deteriorated by the action of heat, and for this reason it was imperative to offer the poorer classes at a cheap price a good milk kept cool in proper apparatus. All illegitimate infants should be under the supervision of the local authorities, and visited by salaried medical men and paid trained ladies. This had been carried out in Leipzig with good results.

Dr. Szana discussed the subject from the experience gained in Hungary, where he claimed that the problem had been solved. The Hungarian State undertook the care of destitute infants in the public interest. If the parents or others notified that those in charge were in want, the infants were admitted into institutions, and inquiries were made after such admission. He dealt with the importance of admitting the infants at as early an age as possible, since the later the admission the more marked was the deficit in weight, as compared with the average weight, and children with deficient weight died much more readily than those whose weight at the time of admission was at or about the average. He described the Hungarian method of supporting the mother and infant, and said that when it was conscientiously carried out the death-rate of the legitimate and illegitimate infants became equal. The death-rate of infants nursed by wet nurses had proved to be somewhat higher than that of infants fed by their own mothers. It was found, however, that no deaths took place among the infants of the wet nurses who suckled a second child as well as their own.

#### THE SUPPLY OF RELIABLE MILK FOR INFANTS.

Dr. Weber considered that if the milk supplied were free from pathogenic microorganisms it would be better for the infant, not breast-fed, to drink this unboiled; but as this was not the case, and as milk frequently contained tubercle bacilli, it became necessary to heat milk in a proper way. Provided that the milk were fresh, and that there were no bacterial products in it, it was possible to sterilise it by heat without so impoverishing it that it would become unsuitable as infant food. It was too early to decide whether the suggestion made by Dr. von Behring that certain chemical substances which possess bactericidal properties, but are said not to influence the character of the milk, should be used instead of heat.

Dr. Reiss considered that the existing regulations of the local authorities did not guarantee satisfactorily distinction between nursery and ordinary milk. It was, therefore, desirable that some method should be introduced by which nursery milk could be identified with regard to its quality. A police regulation recently introduced in Darmstadt limiting the bottling of nursery milk to the farms seemed to solve the difficulty, provided that the farms were under adequate inspection.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)