

providing suitable food, or more commodious dwellings, the condition of the children might not be so lamentable.

#### THE ALCOHOLIC MOTHER.

Large numbers of our mothers are, or are in danger of becoming, alcoholic. Whilst probably there has been general improvement in the drinking habits of the upper and middle classes, particularly among the younger men, it is generally believed that alcoholism, often in not easily recognised forms, is increasing among women and girls, especially among the working classes.

Some of the effects of maternal alcoholism on the children and the home are of such importance that they call for special consideration.

#### PRE-NATAL ALCOHOLISM.

It is well that we should not forget that a drunken mother means an alcoholised offspring. Alcohol taken by the mother passes directly to the child, and so even before birth the babe may be subjected to the poisonous action of alcohol. Although the child may not enter the world with an actual alcoholic craving, it is often born with badly-nourished tissues, with unstable brain and nervous system, and limited in its powers for normal development. It is, therefore, much more liable than an ordinary healthy person to fall under the influence of drink, and is less able to resist the assaults of disease and the privations of poverty.

In this connection Professor Arthur Thomson's remarks in his recent work on "Heredity" will be of interest. "The predisposition which facilitated the hyper-alcoholic habit in the parent is transmitted. There may be intra-uterine intoxication of the unborn child if the mother is a drunkard. The tradition in favour of alcohol may persist. The conditions of nurture may also tend to induce the alcoholic habit in the offspring; but there is more. Much evidence points to the conclusion that the germ cells may (in cases of extreme alcoholism) be prejudicially affected along with the body of the victim. . . . If the germ cells are affected the offspring will also be affected." Professor Thomson further says:—"The alcoholic habit is prejudicial to the race, not merely through custom and tradition, not merely by affecting maternity, but directly through inheritance. There are so many cases of unhealthy, insane, and criminal persons among the offspring of drunkards that all possibility of coincidence is excluded. . . . The offspring of alcoholic parents are not necessarily predisposed in any one particular direction, except that the nervous system is most likely to be affected. They may be epileptic, paralytic, idiotic, insane, or sterile. The variety of result is great, but it is never on the right side."

#### NURSING FUNCTIONS OF MOTHERHOOD.

A careful study of infant life has shown how important the first few months are in the process of development. During these months the infant needs to be surrounded with special love and care, and, above all, to be suitably nourished. Many a little one, however, bears the marks even to, and through, adult years of deprivation in this direction.

In every rank of society women are neglecting, and even losing, their power to provide the fore-

most and most important means for the upbuilding of healthy bodies and minds in their children. Neglect or inability to provide natural nourishment may result in lifelong crippling. That protean disease which we call rickets, with its many consequences, is often induced, and may lead even to permanent impairment of life's usefulness.

The tendency to deprive the infant of its natural food has apparently increased of late years. It is due to a variety of causes. Selfishness born of luxury and indolence, thoughtlessness and ignorance, a limited outlook on life and its duties, the conditions of work of many women both before and after marriage, the neglect and malnutrition of many wives, and a genuine inability among a few, all go to deprive motherhood or much of its God-given power.

But what concerns us more particularly is the part played by alcohol in producing this condition. No doubt many of you are familiar with the investigations into this subject made by Professor von Burge. They are so striking, however, that I will venture to recall them. He contends that the failure of mothers to nurse their children depends, in many cases, directly or indirectly on the far-reaching influence of alcohol. He says:—"I made it my task to find out the causes of this inability by means of statistical procedures. I first of all found it to be hereditary. When a woman is unable to suckle, it is almost without exception that her daughter cannot do so, and the power appears to be lost for all the next generation. . . . There are some cases, and these are not rare, where, the mother having been able to suckle, the daughter has not been able to do so. Here we are close to the causes of the incapacity, and shall find it in the father, and we at once encounter alcoholism. In 78 per cent. of these cases the father is an immoderate drinker. . . . That the daughter of a drunkard is able to properly suckle her infant is a rare case. The rule is that, if the father is a drunkard, the daughter loses her power of suckling." Even when the alcoholic mother is able to nurse her own child, it must be remembered that in this way a certain proportion of alcohol may actually be taken into its system along with its natural food. The growth of the rapidly developing and increasing tissues may in this way be stunted and deteriorated, for alcohol exerts a harmful influence on all immature growing cells.

The more we probe into the conditions inimical to child life the more do we see that parental alcoholism is a potent factor—often, it is true, an indirect and not easily recognised one, but, nevertheless, most powerful and pervasive in its consequences. We shall agree, I feel sure, in recognising the immense importance that all mothers, whether actual or potential, should be made to understand how, directly through their individual action, and indirectly through domestic and economic conditions, they may, as far as their child is concerned, be prejudicially influenced by indulgence in drink.

Mrs. (not Miss) Mary Newton has been approved by the Central Midwives' Board for the purpose of signing Forms III. and IV.

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