

The Midwife.

On the Trail of the White Bearse.

Mr. Sherman C. Kingsley, Superintendent of the United Charities of Chicago, writes in *The Survey*:—

If you wish to know whether or not your city is right, get a map and an indelible pencil and ask your health commissioner to put a black dot on the map for every baby under two who dies in the month of August. Chicago's health commissioner did it last summer. 719 black dots—deaths from diarrhoeal diseases alone—were the startling result. July and September were almost as bad. The babies got sick in late May and June, fretted, cried, suffered, wilted and died in July, August, and September. The 719 ugly dots did not tell the whole story. Other hundreds of babies managed to live with constitutions blasted. Later they will be found among the undernourished and backward school children; then as delinquents; finally, on the books of charity organisations among the dependents to be cared for by society. You cannot make an efficient citizen out of a blighted baby.

Taking the back trail of these pathetic little funerals indicated by these dots we are led straight to the beaten paths of visiting nurses, truant and probation officers and charity workers into the region of the three-room homes where live widowed and deserted women and others whose income will not permit higher rent. Here unsanitary plumbing and lack of health conveniences do their deadly work. It is the destination of the poorest milk sold in the city. It is where streets are cleaned least often or not at all; where stalest bread and oldest meat are sold. To it in the dusk of evening, little children with shawls over their heads and market baskets on their arms return with their prizes from the city dumps and the garbage barrels of the market streets. Visiting commercial organisations are not escorted to this part of the town. The dignitaries from other lands are not taken here as visitors. The ninety and nine of the city's business men have never seen and know little about the conditions which prevail. It is left to the ward politician, the policeman, the insurance solicitor, the instalment man, the undertaker, the poor and their children. No matter what the adverse condition which prevails, whether simple poverty, or poverty plus ignorance, or poverty plus ignorance, plus intemperance and viciousness—down at the bottom of it all are the little children, and in particular the babies.

For five years the Chicago Relief and Aid

Society carried on a special work in summer for the babies of such districts. Fresh air tents, superintended by nurses from the Visiting Nurse Association and directed by a staff of expert physicians, who volunteered their services, were set up. The simplicity of the tents, their proximity to these humble homes, drew to them hundreds of suffering babies. The most superstitious and shrinking, the poorest clad mothers would come.

These babies, living and dead, have pointed out the weak spots in our municipal house-keeping. Medical inspection and nursing in schools is admirable, but it is five years too late. Unsanitary tenements, dust, mud, smoke, flies, impure milk, improper care, never seem so intolerable as when organisations are trying to help a sick baby combat them. What does the Infant's Welfare Committee hope to accomplish?

First, Some immediate reduction of infant morbidity and mortality.

Second, an advanced step in co-operation with the medical profession. The branch medical societies have undertaken this work in a broad, sympathetic, public spirited manner. This co-operation promises important educational and preventive results.

Third, a sustained campaign of education until the community, conscious of the situation, organises to meet the needs. Summer does not necessarily mean diarrhoea. July and August are not intrinsic enemies of the baby. They mark the full tide of summer, bringing forth and ripening the fruits of the earth to feed mankind. Their few extra degrees of temperature are not necessarily deadly. Their action upon the child is not direct but indirect through dust, smoke, flies, deteriorated milk and food. The evil consequences of improper care are likewise multiplied.

These consequences are entirely subject to correction and control.

The Midwives Act.

The report of the Departmental Committee appointed by the Lord President of the Council to consider the working of the Midwives' Act, 1902, has been presented to Parliament.

The Privy Council has approved for a further period of one year from September 30th, 1909, the rules framed by the Central Midwives' Board in pursuance of Section 3 of the Midwives' Act, 1902.

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