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## Editorial.

### INFANT AND CHILD MORTALITY.

The Report of Dr. Arthur Newsholme, Chief Medical Officer to the Local Government Board, on Infant and Child Mortality, and published as a Parliamentary Paper, deserves careful study by all interested in this important question. In his introductory letter to the President of the Local Government Board the writer states that there has been a widespread awakening to the importance of child mortality, and a concentration on efforts to diminish it such as has never previously occurred. He attributes great weight to the Presidential addresses given by Mr. John Burns at the National Conferences on Infant Mortality in 1906 and 1908, and says that sanitary authorities and their officers have devoted a large proportion of their time and energy to this supremely important matter. The Notification of Births Act and the appointment of health visitors have also had influence beyond the districts in which the Act has been applied and health visitors have been appointed; for the public conscience has been aroused and education, moral as well as mental, has rapidly progressed.

But a review of the favourable view of the question is not the object of the Report, which is threefold: to determine, on the basis of our national statistics, whether reduction of infant mortality implies any untoward influence on the health of survivors to later years; to indicate the communities which are characterised by a continuing high rate of infant mortality; and to assess, so far as is possible, the relative value of the different factors of excessive infant mortality.

Dr. Newsholme shows that the unequal distribution of infant mortality indicates the scope for saving life. During 1908

one-fifth of the total deaths at all ages in England and Wales occurred in infants in their first year of life. The object of his present Report is to stimulate more active sanitary and social work, the most helpful plan he considers being to bring into relief the terribly inferior position occupied by a number of administrative counties and by a number of towns in respect to mortality during the first five years of life. It is from this standpoint that the Report has been drawn up.

The causes and factors of infant mortality are dealt with in Part III., and this will be the most interesting section to nurses and midwives.

The vital superiority of women is evidenced from birth onwards, for male infants suffer from a higher death-rate than female infants, and this superiority persists throughout the rest of life except from the ages of 5 to 15, when boys and girls are equal in their freedom from the causes of death.

In connection with illegitimate births, taking the average for England and Wales, the death-rate among illegitimate children is twice that of children born in wedlock; and it is significant that under 3 months of age the prospect of death is 108 per cent. greater, from 3 to 6 months 126 per cent. greater, and from 6 to 12 months 72 per cent. greater among illegitimate children than among legitimate infants.

Dr. Newsholme refers to the unfortunate fact that in this country still-births remain unregistered, but a step in the direction of reform has now been taken by making it obligatory upon midwives—who probably attend about one half of the births in England and Wales—to notify all still-births, and by imposing a similar obligation on all persons present at a birth in districts in which the Notification of Births Act has been adopted. He also deals

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