

The Midwife.

An Interesting Conference.

A Conference of health promoting institutions, of great interest to midwives and all whose work brings them into touch with problems concerning the national health, was held at the Guildhall on Thursday and Friday last week, convened by the National League for Physical Education and Improvement, when the Lord Mayor presided at the annual general meeting, and said that of all subjects for the holding of conferences none could transcend in importance that of health. The Earl of Aberdeen, who moved the adoption of the report, also spoke of the excellent work achieved by the Women's National Health Association of Ireland.

FIRST SESSION.

HOW TO WORK A SCHOOL FOR MOTHERS.

At the first Session of the Conference Alderman Benjamin Broadbent, of Huddersfield, who has taken such a keen practical interest in reducing infant mortality in that town, presided, and Lady Meyer, Vice-President of the St. Pancras School for Mothers, presented the first paper on "How to Work a School for Mothers." The school was first projected in May, 1907, and organised and carried out under the supervision of Dr. Sykes, Medical Officer of Health for St. Pancras. The aim and object of the school has been, firstly, to encourage the natural feeding of infants, as against any system which should make bottle-feeding more easy or more desirable, and a direct result has been the gradual reduction of infant mortality in St. Pancras during the summer months.

During the day the school was on view, and many of the members of the Conference availed themselves of the opportunity of visiting this pioneer school of mothercraft.

INFANT WELFARE SCHEMES ABROAD.

Miss Helen M. Blagg presented a paper on the above subject dealing with the special characteristics of the problem of infant mortality on the Continent. She pointed out that here, at home, the general rate of mortality among infants remains stationary, in spite of a falling death-rate, or even in some cases has a tendency to rise. On the other hand, the fall in the birth-rate, which is considerable in almost all civilised countries, has increased the "value" of babies from an economic point of view, and many countries—France especially—are threatened with the dangers of depopulation.

Miss Blagg said that it was not until within the last ten years in this country that organised effort was made to fight specially against infant mortality, either by legislation, by the municipal authorities, or by private philanthropy. The methods of warfare were, broadly speaking: (1) The forcible removal of the causes which led to the evil; (2) the prevention or the amelioration of these causes or conditions; (3) indirectly, by the education of public opinion.

Legislation was chiefly concerned in the following matters: (1) The regulation of the hygienic and industrial conditions of the mother; (2) the regulating of the mental, moral, and physical environment of the child itself after birth; (3) the regulating of the supply and sale of such things as food, drugs, and milk.

SECOND SESSION.

The Duchess of Marlborough, who presided on the morning of Friday, December 9th, said that she looked forward to the day when the teaching of the care of infants and the education of mothers would form part of a great State-aided scheme.

DAY NURSERIES.

The first speaker was Muriel Viscountess Helmsley, chairman of the National Association of Day Nurseries, who said that the cry of the children rings from one end of the land to the other, and questions are for ever arising as to what is to be done, both as regards health and education. People spoke as if death were the worst that could befall, but it was not. To drag out an existence unsound in mind or body was a living death, and much of the unsoundness came from violating the laws of nature.

The National Society of Day Nurseries was one of the many societies endeavouring to meet a great want, to provide care for thousands of poor children, and to give them a good start in the race for life when it was impossible for the proper guardians or friends to do so.

CHILDREN'S CARE COMMITTEES.

Mr. Whitaker Thompson, Chairman of the London County Council, presided during the reading of the next paper on "What may be Accomplished by Children's Care Committees," by Miss M. Frere, a member of the Education Committee of the L.C.C.

Miss Frere explained that Section A of the Education (Provision of Meals) Act, 1906, lays down that in every necessitous school there shall be a School Canteen Committee, on which shall be imposed the duty of administering the relief work of the school. Previous to this, Relief Committees under the London School Board had dealt with underfed children attending schools in poor districts, and when the London County Council became the local Educational Authority the Relief Committees were reconstituted as Children's Care Committees, consisting of two or three local Managers and other suitable persons, nominated partly by the Central Care Sub-Committee and partly by the group of local Managers from a list of voluntary workers.

THIRD SESSION.

Sir Shirley Murphy, Medical Officer of Health to the London County Council, presided at the last Session, when Mr. Douglas Eyre, Vice-Chairman of the London Branch Council of the National League for Physical Education and Improvement, presented the first paper.

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