

The Midwife.

State Aid for Maternity.

For some time past, says the *British Medical Journal*, there has been a strong feeling in Manchester that sooner, or later, there will have to be some national provision for sickness in relation to maternity. The question is one of so much importance and interest at the present time that we quote the article, as follows, *in extenso*.

The movement, says our contemporary, received a great stimulus several years ago when Dr. T. Arthur Helme, in his presidential address to the Lancashire and Cheshire Branch of the British Medical Association, advocated a more systematic provision for maternity, pointing out how largely the health of the coming generation depended on antenatal conditions, and how impossible it was for a large proportion of the working women to make proper provision for times of childbirth, the result being an enfeebled motherhood, a high rate of morbidity among both mothers and children, and a high infant mortality. Something has been done by the Health Committees of the Manchester and Salford Corporations by their health visitors, who have as far as was practicable visited pregnant women and given advice as to food and proper care of health during pregnancy, and more particularly as to the care of the infants. This work has been supplemented by voluntary efforts, among which may be specially mentioned what is now called the School for Mothers; it is a place to which expectant mothers are invited, and where some systematic instruction in motherhood is given. An attempt has been made to extend this by appointing medical practitioners to attend the meetings, and it has even been proposed to appoint specialists to make physical examinations of the women and give advice as to their fitness or otherwise for child-bearing. It has generally been assumed that all such work by medical men should be done gratuitously, though it is strictly professional work, the excuse being that no funds are available to pay medical men. Other proposals have been made for the nationalisation of the whole medical service, which it is held would be specially beneficial in the case of parturient women.

In view of the intention of the Government to introduce a scheme for sickness and invalidity insurance, the Lancashire and Yorkshire sections of the Women's Co-operative Guild recently held a meeting in the hall of the Co-operative Wholesale Society, Manchester, to discuss the needs of working women in these respects. Miss Llewelyn Davis, the general secretary, opened the discussion by urging the need for a national provision for maternity and for sickness among women. She said that the ordinary wage of from 18s. to 30s. a week was insufficient to allow an adequate sum to be saved to meet such needs, and from the want of proper provision an immense amount of privation and suffering resulted both to mothers and

infants. For lack of proper attention women often suffered all their lives, and society suffered great losses by enfeebled motherhood, weakly children, and heavy infant mortality. The expenses incidental to childbirth, she said, averaged from £3 to £5, and there was need for outside assistance. The difficulties in the way of a compulsory contributive scheme included those of securing payments from husbands out of work or ill and men engaged in seasonal trades or only casually employed. Perhaps the simplest and most effective way would be by a grant in aid from the State, to be paid to the municipalities to enable them to provide doctoring and nursing in all instances in which the income was below a certain level. So far from such a scheme being demoralising, she thought it would tend to create a feeling of greater responsibility, as the condition of public feeling would make parents more anxious to see, when there was no need to pay doctor and nurse, that proper food and clothing were provided. She concluded by moving a resolution calling the Government's attention to "the urgent necessity for making public provision for maternity and for married women's sickness and invalidity." Several speakers expressed the fear that many women would regard such outside help, whether from the State or the municipality, as a charity to be avoided, while others urged the nationalisation of the entire medical service. "If it be true," one speaker said, "that every child born is worth £200 to the State, surely the State can afford to provide a mere £5." The resolution was carried unanimously, and it was directed that a copy of it be sent to the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

There can be little doubt that more provision is needed than at present exists in Manchester for this special class of cases. A very large proportion of the working women either engage the cheapest midwife they can obtain or depend on incompetent neighbours to give assistance at the time of their confinements, and an immense amount of suffering results from the want of proper medical attention. Very few of the sick clubs of the district admit women to their benefits, or if they do, it is only for other illnesses, anything connected with pregnancy or confinements being excluded except for special extra fees. The arguments used at the meeting of the Women's Co-operative Guild may be held to show the necessity for further provision for medical attendance during pregnancy and at confinements and for some time afterwards, but no satisfactory reasons were given which would justify a non-contributory scheme for these cases, nor was it shown that State sickness and invalidity insurance would be insufficient to meet the requirements.

In the new wing which is being added to the Cardiff Infirmary a ward is to be specially devoted to maternity cases, and Lady Bute has promised to endow the "David" bed.

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