

The Midwife.

Infant Mortality.

Dr. W. E. Heilborn, Assistant Physician to the Bradford Children's Hospital, in a paper read before the Bradford Medico-Chirurgical Society, and published in the *Lancet*, writes in part as follows:—

For the purposes of this paper I am limiting the term "infantile mortality" and intend it to refer only to the deaths of infants (up to the age of one year) *born healthy*, and that death is not due to any special cause or disease—*e.g.*, the infectious fevers, pneumonia, meningitis, etc. In short, it refers to infants who could, and should, have grown up healthy, and have never been given a chance to live. The primary cause of death in these cases is neglect or ignorance, or both, on the part of the parents. The former is either wilful or due to circumstances; the latter is universal.

Wilful neglect and ignorance can be, and ought to be, dealt with, but neglect due to circumstances is the most important and most difficult problem. A great factor, too, is the increase of woman labour. This leads to the question of putting infants out to nurse—in my opinion an almost criminal procedure. The other primary cause of death—*i.e.*, ignorance—can only be described as amazing.

Many years ago there was an outcry because it became fashionable for mothers not to nurse their babies but to feed them artificially, and to this was ascribed the great increase of infantile mortality; but at that time the fashion was chiefly amongst the well-to-do. Amongst the poor many women nowadays have not sufficient milk to nurse their babies, and when we come to consider the conditions under which they live, the scanty nourishment they themselves get, and the amount of work they do, this is not surprising.

After referring to the various methods which have been employed to remedy this state of affairs. Dr. Heilborn continues:—All these methods are bad, inasmuch as they are beginning at the wrong end. Instead of teaching the mothers how they can best prepare themselves to nourish their own children we are teaching them to avoid nourishing them by making it *apparently* so easy for them to feed their infants artificially, and having taught them to do this we are supplying them with dirty milk which has to be cleansed and prepared at great expense, instead of turning our attention to

the dairies, and obtaining a pure, clean milk from its very source.

What we have to do now is to set about undoing all the harm that has been done, and to commence at the very beginning again.

1. Institute a thorough system of education for those about to become mothers. This should consist in teaching them how to prepare themselves for motherhood and in instructing them in the art of cleanliness, and in the general management and feeding of infants. They should be taught that the proper nourishment for an infant is the mother's milk; if that fails, that the only substitute is pure fresh cow's milk, with or without the addition of a certain quantity of water. That infants do not require feeding every hour during the night, or every few minutes during the day, or whenever they cry, and that the regular weighing of the infant is the sole guide as to whether it is thriving or not.

2. To pass a law preventing all women about to become mothers from working in a factory or mill, and this should hold good during the whole of their child-bearing period.

3. To institute a system of dairies through which the public can be supplied with pure, fresh milk.

4. That every physician who delivers a child should look upon that child as his patient, and that it should be under his immediate supervision during the whole of its infancy.

5. That the sale of patent infant foods to the public be made illegal. (If physicians would only impress upon the public the harmfulness of these foods this would be unnecessary.)

6. To obtain an efficient army of competent and trained lady inspectors who shall visit every infant each week, and immediately report to the physician if the infant does not seem to be thriving.

7. To make it illegal to insure an infant's life.

Meanwhile, we must find means to deal with the wasting babies which are the result of our hopelessly inadequate system. At present we are sadly behind the times in this respect, and those who have been abroad and have seen the provision made for this class of case must feel a sense of shame that as yet nothing has been done for them in England. I refer, of course, to the nursing hospitals of Paris, Berlin, and Vienna, with their army of wet-nurses. The results obtained at these institutions are little short of marvellous.

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