

## The Midwife.

### A BACHELOR ON THE BIRTH-RATE.

The Bishop of London has again been holding forth on the subject of the falling birth-rate. As usual, by inference at any rate, the blame is laid upon women, for much was said about the glory of motherhood, but in none of the reports that I saw was the glory of fatherhood mentioned. However, this is but a side issue, and does not alter the main argument.

But what does the good Bishop want? In the good old days, before big families went out of fashion, the model mother brought into the world a great number of children in quick succession, and sank herself into an early grave, and though, as a rule, about fifty per cent. of her children had preceded her to the better land, the rest were left to be brought (or dragged) up by strangers. Nowadays, though the average mother has less children, she more often lives to watch them grow up and to give them her help and sympathy during those sensitive years between twelve and twenty, when the child is least attractive to strangers and most in need of affection. And there are not so many little funerals as in the old days, though still too many.

The Bishop, being a man, can only dimly understand what it is to a mother to lose her child. No man can quite fathom that agony, not even a father, much less a bachelor; but I am sure he would agree that it is better to bring five children into the world and keep them there than to have ten and lose half of them, though the net result is the same.

Of course, mothers are blamed for the high death-rate among babies also. They are always being preached at on the subject; we are told that mothers won't nurse their babies, that they do not know how to feed them artificially, and that they will not take precautions to keep their food from contamination and their bottles clean. Mother-craft is now taught to girls in evening schools, which is very good. It would also be good if boys were taught the necessity for planning and building houses that are dry and weatherproof, so that little carefully nursed babies shall not die of bronchitis because of damp walls and rotting floors; houses in which cleanliness and the safe keeping of food are possibilities and not an idle dream. I am not speaking of slumdom. Evil conditions of this sort are found in houses whose tenants wear

top hats and all the other signs of respectability. And if the powers that rule on our councils and boards could be persuaded to attend evening classes there are several little things that they might learn, the application of which would have some effect on infant mortality and the public health generally. For one, that it is not conducive to health for the household refuse to be removed from house doors into open carts during those hours of the day when well-cared-for babies are taking their walks abroad, a custom which obtains in at least one suburb of London.

Then those gentlemen who write so hysterically in the halfpenny Press about the iniquity of bringing up babies on the bottle might learn a lesson from the farmers, or even from the results of last summer's drought. A farmer knows that his cows will not give good milk when not well fed, and he would not dream of allowing them to be chivied about all day. Yet a human mother is supposed to be able to supply nourishment for her babies when overworked, underfed and worried in mind.

Things want tidying up altogether for our little babies before we clamour for more of them, and lectures on the glory of motherhood and lessons in mother-craft will not alone suffice.

Even when things are made better for the babies there are not very many people nowadays who could honestly say, "I am in a position to bring up a large family well, and give them all a fair start." Everyone knows that it gets harder every year for *honest* folk to make a living, unless blessed with exceptional talents and opportunities, and that the number of folk increases continually whose daily labour could not possibly be a joy to them, whose whole life is one long monotonous grind, varied only by the dread of the wolf at the door. Again I speak of respectabilities in top hats. It is not the poor man only who shudders as he passes the workhouse door.

Glory of motherhood indeed! Many a mother as she watches her dearly-loved little ones, present worry and dread for the future tearing at her heart, wonders if she be not worse than a murderess to have brought her children into the world.

But one would not expect a bachelor, whose position, however onerous, is at least secure and well-paid, to realise these things.

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