

The Midwife.

INFANT LIFE PROTECTION VISITING.*

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I want to set before you as briefly and as clearly as I can the need for, and the duties and opportunities of, a nurse as an Infant Life Protection Inspector.

By the measure passed in 1897, power was given to local authorities to provide for the registration and inspection of children placed out to nurse in cases where more than one infant was taken, under the age of five years, for a longer period than 48 hours.

This left the homes where only one nurse child was taken quite free from inspection. An enquiry was then made by the N.S.P.C.C. which lasted over a period of seven years, and the area covered by the investigation was England, Ireland, and Wales. As a result of this, the necessity for a change in the law became evident, the ultimate result being the amendment of the law on Infant Life Protection as secured in Part I. of the Children's Act of 1908, which provides that "Any person taking for reward the nursing and maintenance of one or more infants under the age of seven years, apart from their parents or having no parents, he shall within forty-eight hours from the reception of any such infant give notice in writing thereof to the local authority."

This being done, the local authorities send the woman a form, which she fills in, giving the name, age, date and place of birth of the child, together with the name and address of the person from whom she received the child. This form she returns to the authorities and it is copied into a register; it is then sent on to the Inspector, and he or she enters it also and takes over the inspection of that home, woman and child.

The children that come under the care of the Infant Life Protection Inspectors are for the most part illegitimate children, and very many of them children of servants. It is therefore essential to the mother of the child that the secrecy already maintained through the long weary months in order that she might retain her place must still be continued through the years to come, and she therefore must find someone who will take the child, and the

risks of it falling into the hands of undesirable persons are far greater than its chances of good fortunes.

The more this subject is considered the more it becomes evident that money is the great and important factor in these transactions. Evidence has been obtained from all sources showing that people will lay themselves out to obtain children with many promises of care and attention, when in reality their one object is to make out of them as much as possible; throughout the whole of the wretched business the child being the *last* to be considered, born under a cloud, nursed without affection, a stranger to that mother's love we all have known and prized, unwelcome, unloved; a burden to be got rid of, on the one part, and a means of making money on the other.

In reading the newspapers, one often sees cases of horror, cruelty, and neglect practised on these poor unfortunate children. A woman appeared some time ago at Tottenham for an offence under the Cremation Act. She had been in the habit of receiving children for adoption, with varying sums of money, from £15 downwards. A number of infants had been traced to her, and it was certain that six had died in one year; their reception had not been notified, and their deaths had not been registered, and they had not been buried. *Their bodies, it was proved, had been burned in the kitchen stove.*

In another case a woman was charged with having abandoned three infants. It was proved that she took them with premiums varying from £15 to £20; one infant about twelve hours old was left on a seat in a London railway station, the other two were left in carriages on the same line. Many similar cases may be read in our newspapers time after time, and there have been, no doubt, and are still, many deeds of cruelty and neglect practised on these defenceless little ones, in spite of all precautions.

I do not wish to suggest for one moment that all the women who take these nurse children are like this; they are not. There are many who have come under my notice who do their duty to the children honestly and to the best of their means and knowledge, and I have known many who have kept these children as their own because they have grown to love them, rather than send them away

* Read at the Nursing and Midwifery Conference, London, 1912.

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