

The Midwife.

INFANT WELFARE CENTRES.

An admirable pamphlet on Infant Welfare Centres by I. G. Gibbon Esqre. D.Sc, giving an account of the work of Infant Consultations, Schools for Mothers, and Similar Institutions, has been published by the National League for Physical Education and Improvement, 4, Tavistock Square, W.C.

We publish slightly abridged, the account given of the work carried on in foreign countries.

One of the first things that strikes the international student is the wide extent and the rapid growth of the movement. These are an indication that the movement is deep-rooted in modern conditions, and that it meets an essential need. In Germany, Belgium and Holland there are a large number of infant consultations. France with the anxiety of a low birth-rate, has long been a pioneer in such work. There are infant consultations throughout the country, at some places in connection with milk dépôts at others in connection with the *mutualités maternelles*. These latter are institutions in which mothers can receive, in return for small periodical contributions, certain confinement benefits, such as attendance and money payments. The contributions meet only a small part of the expenditure and the work is largely charitable.

The United States have taken up the matter with characteristic hustle. At first milk dépôts were apt to be regarded as the panacea for infant ills. Now the emphasis is being transferred to the education of the mother. There are numerous infant consultations, and the number is growing.

Municipal authorities play an active part in the work in continental countries, many either themselves undertaking infant consultations or assisting in the work. Information respecting Germany, Belgium and Holland is published as an appendix. In France, also, the local authorities take a prominent part in the service. In the United States, as might be expected, philanthropic effort has more sway.

The readier tendency in some continental countries to rely on municipal effort is to be explained by historical reasons and does not necessarily arise from conditions fundamental in the work of infant welfare centres. It has to be remembered also that no country has nearly so thorough a public health service as our own.

There is in practically every western country a central organisation which endeavours to co-ordinate the labours of the local societies and to provide systematic means for comparing experiences and for stimulating the work. In some

countries the central organisation has funds for helping the local institutions. In Bavaria, the State places an annual sum at the disposal of the central association for distribution among the local societies which are affiliated to it. In the United States, in addition to a voluntary national society, a Federal Children's Bureau has recently been established. A report on infant welfare work in the various parts of the States has just been issued by the head of the Bureau, Miss Lathrop. In New York a Babies' Welfare Association has been formed "which acts as a clearing house for approximately 150 agencies (in September, 1912) working on behalf of infants throughout the greater city."

In some countries large sums are paid in premiums to induce mothers to suckle their babies. In France this premium system is very popular. Among the different kinds which are paid are premiums for attending the consultations (*primes de fréquentation*), for suckling (*primes d'allaitement*), and a premium if the infant reaches the age of twelve months in health (significantly termed *prime de répopulation*). Premium hunting might become quite an exciting pastime. In Germany likewise premiums (*Stillgelder* or *Stillprämien*) are given to a very large extent to mothers suckling their babies. In the city of Berlin over £8,000 was so paid in connection with the seven consultation centres in the year ended March, 1910. Midwives are utilised in the propaganda for breast feeding and at some places premiums are paid to midwives in respect of mothers attended by them who suckle their infants.

No doubt this practice of giving premiums increases the number of mothers who suckle their babies. How far it is necessary and how far the ultimate social consequences are beneficial are more open to grave question.

Germany has many homes for ailing infants. Some are elaborate and costly. It is doubtful how much good they do, and they can scarcely be regarded as a main force in the fight against infant mortality and morbidity, except, and this may be important, as laboratories for study. In France there are a number of institutions (*pouponnières*) where babies of women who have to go out to work and cannot look after their infants are boarded up to two years: these institutions have some other distinctive features. There are many other charities with the special object of aiding mothers with infants. Both in France and Germany there are many "industrial crèches" where mothers at work in factories or workshops can come to suckle their babies. Some of these crèches are on the factory or workshop premises.

In France special attention has been given to aiding expectant mothers, and many *consultations obstétricales* have been established where they may receive gratuitous advice.

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