

The Midwife.

ANTE-NATAL HYGIENE.

PRACTICAL WORK AMONG EXPECTANT MOTHERS.*

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Superintendent of the Birmingham Settlement School for Mothers.

The "Birmingham Women's Settlement School for Mothers" began its work in February, 1909, in the three wards surrounding the Settlement.

Its aim is to educate the mothers in home and personal hygiene, and feeding, clothing, and general care of infants, with a view to reducing the very high infant mortality rate, and making the growing infants more healthy and better citizens.

After six months it was thought advisable to concentrate the work and take for its area one ward only. This ward has an area of 184 acres, and its population in 1911 was 11,917. This gives no idea of the crowded condition of its inhabited dwellings, unless account is taken of the factories, workshops, and workplaces, which are thickly interspersed among the houses; in many cases forming part of a court of back-to-back houses.

The highest birth-rate during the past eight years was 32.7 in 1908, and the lowest 26.9 in 1904. The infant mortality rate has been never below 200 during these years. Seventy-nine per cent. of the mothers work in factories from leaving school, and 61 per cent. continue to do so after marriage, either regularly or in times of stress, caused by sickness, holidays, or lack of employment for their husbands.

Weekly consultations are held, at which the babies are weighed, and those ailing or requiring advice are seen by one of the honorary medical advisers. The homes are visited as frequently as possible. In 1909 a club for expectant mothers was begun, and all savings of 5s. or more before the birth of the infant supplemented by a bonus of 1½d. in the 1s.

A sewing class was also begun, at which the garments for the expected infants could be made and other necessaries prepared, to ensure as far as possible cleanliness at, and during, the lying-in period. All materials supplied were paid for in small weekly payments. Very few could be persuaded to come to these classes, and other efforts were felt to be necessary.

In 1911 the Superintendent gave Monday morning to visiting expectant mothers in their homes, and collecting club savings. (Monday is the day on which the factory-working mother most frequently takes holiday.) These visits also gave opportunities for quiet talks with the

mothers about their health, food, and personal cleanliness.

During 1911, forty-seven mothers paid into this club and many more were visited, but of these latter the number was not registered.

In 1912 the Superintendent found it necessary to give the whole of Monday to this branch of the work, and the following records were kept:—

One hundred and eleven expectant mothers were visited regularly, from the second to the seventh month of pregnancy, up to the birth of the child.

Sixty-six of these paid into the club, and twenty-two earned the bonus. Seventeen made clothes and other necessaries at the classes, and the remainder prepared them at home, in many cases under the supervision of the Superintendent.

Twelve mothers had premature infants, five of whom lived over one month, and three are still alive, doing well.

Seven of these mothers, acting on the advice of the Superintendent, obtained medical treatment before the birth of the infants; and in two other cases a shock and a fall were believed by the doctors in attendance to be the causes of the premature births.

By an arrangement made through one of the honorary medical advisers of the School any mother is recommended for free treatment at the Women's Hospital, if unable to pay the registration fee of 2s. 6d. The Maternity Hospital, which is situated in the ward, is also a great boon to the mothers, and those whose conditions make it necessary that they become in-patients learn valuable lessons while quietly watching the daily routine. The out-patients also are taught many very necessary lessons by the midwives and pupils in attendance at their homes.

A private Society provides any nursing or expectant mother, recommended by the School, with daily dinners at a charge of 1d. per day, or free of charge if they are very poor. Too much cannot be said as to the opportunities given for getting at the very real difficulties of the expectant mothers during these home visits, and valuable lives have been saved through timely advice and help given.

In one case an expectant mother in her sixth month of pregnancy was found to have developed erysipelas in her throat and face. The week before she had complained of a cold and sore throat. Her only attendant was a young married daughter, who became much alarmed when the doctor notified the case, and an inspector visited the home from the Council House. On the third daily call of inquiry the Superintendent found the woman alone on a couch, partly delirious. Her husband was sent for from work, he went to the doctor in attendance and procured a recommendation, and the woman was removed to the

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