

The Midwife.

MUNICIPALITIES AND INFANT LIFE.*

(Abridged).

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The last half century has witnessed a remarkable awakening among municipalities as to the responsibility resting upon them for the health and life of the people.

The change that some of us have witnessed in our own life-time is marvellous and full of encouragement for the future; one of its phases is solicitude for the well-being of infancy and childhood.

I propose briefly to trace some of the efforts of one municipality—that of Liverpool—to guard and protect its infant citizens at the time of their entrance into this world, and during the earlier steps of their progress through it. Time and space will not allow me to go beyond the period of infancy. The changes I have to narrate are largely the result of the labour of our Health Committee and of our excellent Medical Officer of Health and his staff. Many of the details are taken from Dr. Hope's Reports.

I am afraid we have not as yet done much in the infants' interest to help the poor woman who is about to become a mother by amending her diet and guarding her from too arduous manual labour. This has been attempted in France; but we have tried to teach her some general principles in regard to the course of life she should pursue to render herself healthy and fit for the great responsibility of motherhood, and to explain to her the rules that should guide her before and after the birth of her child, for the benefit of both. This is done in part by our schools for mothers.

The vast majority of births are attended by midwives in the mother's own house—provision being made for the transference of the mother to a hospital if difficulty or complication should occur. In former times, the midwife being too often of the school of Mrs. Gamp, a dangerous degree of ignorance and uncleanness prevailed; but by the operation of the Midwives Act of 1902 the perils thus arising have been greatly reduced. During the year 1912 only thirty-five births took place under the charge of uncertified midwives. Moreover, a constant supervision is exercised over the methods and apparatus of the certified midwife, and any woman who is found to be careless and uncleanly is dealt with. As a result, the type of attendance on the parturient woman is rapidly improving; for example, it is the rule that the midwife shall take and record pulse and tempera-

ture at each visit. Whenever real difficulty or danger occurs, skilled medical help is obtained at once, or in bad cases the patient is removed to the Maternity Hospital. The results, on the whole, are very good.

The child thus makes his entry into the world under fairly favourable conditions. If there is anything abnormal about him, skilled medical aid is at once obtained; if, for instance, that terrible disease Ophthalmia Neonatorum occurs (a disease which causes life-long blindness if not promptly treated) a specially trained female Sanitary Inspector visits the case, and professional aid is at once secured. Provision has been made for the reception of both mother and child in a special hospital, and the measures there adopted nearly always save the child's sight.

Under the Notification of Births Act information of each birth is given to the Medical Officer of Health within thirty-six hours, and every mother in the poorer parts of the city is at once visited by a female Sanitary Inspector. More than 20,000 such visits are paid annually. The mother is helped and advised about her own health and that of the child, if such help is needful, while cards giving simple and easily understood rules for the care of the infant are distributed. There is great need for this guidance, for the ignorance of some of these poor mothers is appalling. Such articles of food as red herring or sausage have often been observed to be given to a baby a week or two old, also whisky, brandy, or gin. I once saw a mother cram her baby's mouth with a pork pie. All this is done with the best intention, but with most fatal result.

The absolute necessity of feeding from the breast is urged, and the avoidance, if possible, of all other food. When bottles are needed, care is taken to prevent the use of long tubes, or of any kind of bottle that cannot be readily cleansed. Bottles have often been found so foul that the contents when given to an animal have rapidly caused death.

If it is thought that the nursing mother is herself insufficiently fed, rations of good cow's milk are supplied daily for her own consumption by the city. When it is impossible for the mother to give the infant its natural food, and when ordinary cow's milk disagrees, the City provides a form of specially humanised cow's milk of varying strength for different ages at a low price or, when necessary, gratuitously. The cost to the city of this provision is about £3,000 a year. No food, of course, can be as good for the infant as the breast milk, but still the death-rate among the 3,000 or 4,000 children who receive this humanised milk is very low, and a great number of lives are thereby saved. In those cases in which unhappily the poor mother is compelled to leave

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