

The Midwife.

THE SCOPE AND FUNCTIONS OF SCHOOLS FOR MOTHERS.

Dr. Eric Pritchard, in the course of a paper on the above subject, read at the National Conference on Infant Mortality, at Liverpool, in July, said that experience gained at Gouttes de Lait and other institutions, where large numbers of infants have been constantly kept under skilled medical observation, has revealed some very curious facts. It has shown, for instance, that the successful management of infants, whether breast-fed or bottle-fed, depends on the observance of a few very simple rules and principles which can be easily taught by a good teacher to moderately intelligent mothers, and very easily followed out in the home, in spite of unfavourable social and hygienic conditions. The second prize in our recent Mothercraft Competition in London was carried off by a woman who was successfully bringing up a family of three on 11s. 6d. per week.

The late Professor Pierre Budin very clearly proved the truth of the statement that good management is the chief factor in his Clinique Tarnier, in Paris; and it has also been proved at the School for Mothers in Ghent with results which a friend of mine described the other day as being "too good to be true." To these latter results I shall return later, but for the moment, I would indicate briefly the simple principles on which the successful management of infants has been shown to depend. This knowledge has been arrived at by the collective evidence of a large number of Schools for Mothers in France, Belgium and England. If infants are breast-fed, the feedings must be given at absolutely regular intervals and at not too short intervals; the infants must not sleep in the same beds as their mothers, and they must not be fed more than once at night, preferably not at all. They must not be wrapped up in too many clothes, they must not have stiff binders which impede movement, and when it is added that they must be regularly bathed, regularly aired, and regularly exercised, it may almost be claimed that all the canons of good mothercraft have been enumerated. It has clearly been proved that infants do not die because they do not receive enough food; they die because they are fed irregularly or too often, or because they are given too much. They do not die because they are exposed to cold and the inclemency of the weather; they die because they are kept too much indoors, with windows and doors too closely sealed; they die because they have too many clothes, not because they shiver in rags; they do not die because they are unloved and uncared for, they die because they are rocked and nursed and comforted too much; they die, in fact, for want of good mothercraft, and not

because of poverty, starvation or bad sanitation. Infants will live and thrive in spite of poverty and bad sanitation, but they will not survive bad mothercraft; and this is the discovery that schools for mothers have made, and the secret of this huge fall in the mortality rate during the last ten years. This discovery, this knowledge has filtered down from expert sources to the lower levels of intelligence, and it has welled up from the springs below and permeated every social stratum. To-day an infant has a better chance of survival if it is born in the most unsalubrious area of the East End of London than it had fourteen years ago in the healthiest and most favoured parts of Hampstead; and I maintain that this extraordinary result has been mainly secured by the spread of a knowledge of mothercraft through the agency of the Public Health Service, through the research and propaganda work of Schools for Mothers, and through the ordinary channels of personal communication.

It has now become the fashion to take an intelligent interest in matters of health generally, but in knowledge which relates to the health of babies I notice the most extraordinary improvement of recent years. Fathers, as well as mothers, now often make quite a study of the subject, and what with the active missionary work of whole armies of health workers, official as well as voluntary, and the educational influence of School Care Committees, enlightened knowledge on these subjects is spreading through the land like a fierce and living contagion. The most active foci of infection are undoubtedly those little beehives of industry which are known as Infant Consultations or Schools for Mothers. Here congregate together all those who take the keenest interest in infant welfare work, doctors, nurses, mothers, daughters, and sometimes fathers; and here pass in review before the eyes of intelligent observation all the phases of health, development and disease. To my mind it is impossible to over-estimate the value of such object lessons. In the old days of darkness and ignorance, women were counted authorities in baby management if they had had a tolerably large experience in their own families. We know how misleading these narrow experiences can be, we know that infants will occasionally survive the most monstrous mismanagement, and that owing to the accidental success of certain dangerous practices similar methods have been extended to other infants at the peril of their lives. At Infant Consultations visitors can see not individual infants, but scores of infants treated in accordance with various methods, and they can observe the results and draw their own conclusions. For this reason I regard it as important that the medical direction of these institutions should be in the best and most skilful hands. Budin said an Infant Consulta-

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