

THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON INFANT MORTALITY.

The Lord Mayor of Liverpool presided at the opening session of the National Conference on Infant Mortality, in St. George's Hall, on July 2nd, and in welcoming the Conference to the city, pointed out that a high death-rate meant much more than the death of the children concerned. It indicated conditions, causing many of those who survived to grow up physically unfit. No one could contend that it was economically sound, humane, or justifiable, to allow this, if the unfitness were preventable. The right course was to take early steps to prevent physical unfitness, and so relieve the country from enormous expenditure later in life.

As the President of the Local Government Board, who was announced to give the Inaugural Address, was unable to attend, his place was taken by Mr. J. Herbert Lewis, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary to the Local Government Board; Mr. Samuel, who was engaged with the Standing Committee, dealing with the Milk Bill, in the House of Commons, in writing to express his regret, said that in promoting the purposes for which the Conference stood, he was rendering more useful service even than in personally attending it, and added that the presence of the Right Hon. Herbert Lewis was an indication that the interest of the Local Government Board, in the movement of which Mr. John Burns had given such frequent proof, remained unimpaired.

Mr. Herbert Lewis was able to state that the campaign against infant mortality had made great strides, and the results achieved in the direction of lives saved and better health secured were remarkable. Had the death-rate during the five years—1906-1910—been equal to the average death-rate during the years 1871-1880, nearly 150,000 more infants under one year of age would have died than was actually the case; and more than 400,000 infants under five years of age. The saving of infant life had become an Imperial question. If they were to maintain the position of the race, they must secure its future by preventing the waste of infant life. In removing causes which struck at the lives of infants, and in securing more beneficent conditions, they were also securing stronger, healthier and happier lives for those who lived. The prevention of the waste of child life and the avoidance of ailments which would cripple through after years, and cost much money and pain, was expenditure remunerative in the highest degree.

Alderman Broadbent, of Huddersfield, in proposing a vote of thanks to Mr. Herbert Lewis, said that the Government was fully committed to a line of work which made for the preservation of infant life and the care of maternity.

MORNING SESSION, JULY 2ND.

The first paper was presented by Dr. A. K.

Chalmers, Medical Officer of Health for Glasgow, who said, in the course of a paper devoted to the consideration of Ante-natal Hygiene and its Relation to Still Births, Premature Births, and Mortality during the First Months of Life, that there was obvious reason for regarding the causes of death in the early weeks of life as forming to a large extent the centre of the problem of infant mortality, and it was a natural outgrowth of this that the enquiry should be pushed into the ante-natal period. Action should be pushed along three specific lines—the mother's health during pregnancy, the Maternity Benefit under the National Insurance Act (which, he thought, might be administered so as to provide for the mother during the last months of pregnancy such medical guidance as her condition sometimes demanded), and the registration of still births. He was of opinion that until by some such means the causes of pre-natal death could be inquired into that much of the difficulty surrounding postal natal deaths from immaturity would remain obscure.

Dr. Janet Campbell, Medical Officer to the Board of Education, dealing with The Teaching of Infant Care and Management to girls in Public Elementary Schools, said that the Board of Education had for some years past encouraged the teaching of infant care and management to elder girls in public elementary schools. In 1910 they issued a Memorandum on this subject, and since that time had consistently endeavoured to promote and extend the provision of facilities for affording girls some practical knowledge of the care and management of little children.

Dr. Eric Pritchard, in an interesting paper on The Scope and Functions of Schools for Mothers, summarised his views by saying that the most effective weapon with which to fight infant mortality is good mothercraft, that good mothercraft is best taught and best learnt in schools for mothers, and that the work of these institutions deserves public recognition and some form of State endowment, with stringent inspection by the Central Authority.

AFTERNOON SESSION, JULY 2ND.

At the Afternoon Session, Dr. E. W. Hope, Medical Officer of Health, Liverpool, contributed a paper on The Aims and Objects of Methods of Sterilization of Milk. He said that the Liverpool Health Committee had adopted the system established in 1894 for mothers who could not suckle their infants of supplying them with cow's milk modified so as to imitate human milk, rendered free from disease producing germs by sterilization, and sent home in bottle, which could be used as feeding bottles, and so fastened that contamination was impossible.

Dr. David Forsyth of London who spoke on the health of children under school age said that one of the most disquieting results of State Medical inspection of elementary school children was the discovery of widespread physical deterioration among the entrants to the infant departments.

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