

The Midwife.

A REVIEW OF MIDWIVES' INSPECTION.

Dr. Alfred Greenwood, B.Sc., D.P.H., County Medical Officer of Health for Kent, has included in his Annual Report for 1913, in addition to his review of the administration of the Midwives Act in the County of Kent for the year, a Review of Midwives Inspection 1909-1913, in which he states in part:—

"It is now possible to present a record of five years' work in connection with the inspection and teaching of midwives in the county. It is only by such periodical reviews that one is able to state whether satisfactory progress is being made or not.

"I have included the impressions by Miss Harrison and Miss Crownshaw for the five-year period ending December, 1913. The former supervises the work of the midwives in the Northern and Western portions, and the latter supervises their work in the Southern and Eastern portions of the county.

"I desire to express my appreciation of the work carried out by Miss Harrison and Miss Crownshaw, and of the enthusiasm they have invariably shown in the task of improving the standard of midwifery in the county.

"In reviewing the period extending from May, 1909, to December, 1913, it is interesting to note the changes in midwifery work generally. Miss Harrison says that when she first inspected the midwives, they received her with mixed feelings. Few realised that the inspection involved not only supervision and criticism, but also useful instruction and assistance. Some adopted a defensive attitude, others were apprehensive, expecting great changes and dreading the unknown, and a few were inclined to evade inspection, by absence when visited, and reticence when questioned with respect to their methods of practice. Records and outfits were mislaid or supposed to have been left at relatives' or patients' houses. The majority of women were prepared for a casual inspection of bag, outfit and register of cases, and were mostly unaware of their deficiencies.

"It is pleasing to record that inspection is now rarely resented, and that the majority of the midwives are realising that supervision of their work is in the best interests of mother and child; also the object of inspection is to enable the midwives to work more efficiently, and lessen their own worries and responsibilities in thus reducing the dangers to mother and child.

"As regards the bags and baskets in use, it was found that a great variation existed in both size and quality, ranging from the complete and cleanly equipment of the trained and conscientious midwife to the makeshift bag or basket of the

woman who had never been taught, or the careless trained woman. Many bags and baskets were without washable linings, and were consequently in a very dirty condition; few were complete, and many midwives took what items they considered necessary in their dress pocket. Amongst the *bona fide* women, thermometers and pulse glasses were scarce and seldom used, and Condy's fluid was the favourite antiseptic. One woman carried a silk-lined hand-bag, another a small chip-basket, black and shining with dirt and age. Many of the baskets were also used for shopping purposes, and such articles as tea, sugar, tobacco, candles, slippers, combs, &c., were mixed with the outfit. Some midwives even took with them stale raisins for the navel, and rabbits' tails for use as powder puffs; snuff, pepper, &c., were also considered necessary items.

"The model midwifery-basket containing a specimen of the outfit required by the rules of the Central Midwives Board (provided for demonstration purposes), was shown to the midwives, who received it with admiration. It enabled the less educated women to realise more easily what it was necessary for them to obtain and use. Many despaired of acquiring and maintaining a similar one, but after a simple and full explanation the idea was assimilated. On subsequent visits it was gratifying to the inspector to receive numerous questions and appeals for help in deciding how to adapt the bags and baskets in use, so as to conform to the new requirements. Help was given in various ways, such as in cutting out and fitting the linings of bags or baskets, or making small calico bags to contain the outfit. Prices of the various items in the model outfit were supplied.

"It is a cause of regret that many of the untrained—and, in the majority of cases, unsuitable women, with the ignorance and superstitions of the old type of midwife, are now engaged as maternity nurses, and too frequently continue to deliver and nurse their former patients, with the consent of the medical man in attendance. To this long list must be added those women who have been removed from the Midwives Roll for misconduct. Since the Maternity benefit came into force this pernicious custom has increased, and the necessity for all maternity nurses to be registered and controlled is obvious, in order to further safeguard the health and lives of the mothers and children, and so advance the good results obtained by the Midwives Act, 1902.

"The trained woman is gradually displacing the *bona fide* woman in the towns and large villages, but in sparsely populated districts there is not sufficient work to support a midwife without other means of obtaining a living."

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)