

AN ILLUMINATING REPORT.

ANNUAL REPORT ON THE PUBLIC HEALTH OF FINSBURY.

(Concluded from page 141.)

Continuing our review of the Report of Dr. A. E. Thomas, Medical Officer of Health for the Borough of Finsbury, the next subject dealt with is

MATERNITY AND CHILD WELFARE.

Under this heading, Dr. Thomas writes of the money which has been voted by Parliament in aid of the expenditure of local authorities and voluntary agencies, in respect of institutions or other provision for maternity and child welfare, including the provision of consultation centres, concerning which he says, in conclusion:—

It is to be noted that the scheme is only concerned with nursing mothers, with expectant mothers, and with children under school age. The centre is meant to be a maternity centre and a child welfare centre, not a general sick dispensary for the treatment of all and sundry women and children.

The foregoing observations on the memorandum of the Local Government Board show what exceedingly important measures are brought within its scope, and indicate the completion of the public health chain and of the sanitary legislative advance foreshadowed by the Medical Inspection of School Children, the Public Health (Tuberculosis) Regulations, and the National Insurance Act. The health of the people is now an affair of State from before birth to old age.

HEALTH VISITATION.

Next we have some account of the duties of Lady Health Visitors. Concerning these we read:

While the first visits are made in a general way all over the borough, revisits and supervision of a minute character are chiefly directed to the babies who are not thriving, babies who are debilitated, ill, neglected, dirty, badly fed or clad, 'wasters,' twins, and others who need careful watching and attention.

When the desirability of visiting a mother is a matter of doubt, a very good test is to ask her to show for inspection the soap with which she washes the baby. If the mother at once, and without any hesitation, produces soaps of various kinds and qualities—scented, household, and disinfectant soaps—then on this head alone, it may be decided that the mother is a clean, careful woman, who can very well do without the aid of the health visitor. If, however, the mother does not know where the baby's soap is, if the request leads to a domestic discussion as to who used the soap last, and a recriminatory dialogue as to where the last user placed it, such a household is at once considered to be one for visiting and for revisiting. In Finsbury, home visitation is considered to be by far the most important work of the Health Visitor.

METHOD OF FEEDING.

Overfeeding is almost as common as underfeeding. Mothers who breast-feed their children, give them boiled bread or cow's milk as well, because the infant "does not seem to be satisfied," or because they think "he does not get enough at one whack." The results to the child are disastrous. His tiny stomach becomes overloaded and distended. He vomits and wastes.

The practice of drinking stout "to make milk" is very common. A mother stated that to give the baby sufficient nourishment she should have 2 pints of stout and 2 pints of ale a day. "Stout made the milk, and ale put it in the breast." When a mother really has insufficient breast milk, she endeavours to make up for the deficiency by giving the infant boiled bread or barley water, or both.

Barley water is possibly even more popular than boiled bread, and is much ordered by medical men, who probably have never seen the thick grumous mucilage, almost of the consistency of glue, which the mothers make with dirty hands in filthy utensils and which they call barley water. As made in Finsbury, barley water is probably responsible for many infant deaths every year. The mothers make it far too thick; they do not wash their hands before making it. It is made in a dirty glass, cup, or jug which may contain the dregs of a little stout, or may have been fouled by flies or animals. There are two other very important reasons for condemning the use of barley water. In recent years, barley has been "faced" with talc, steatite, or other noxious mineral matter, and, it is alleged, even with rancid oils. It is quite common also to find in barley, in rolled oats, and in porridge oats, even in some of the best brands, small black pellets which are the excremental droppings of mice. It is possible that the diarrhoea, which sometimes follows the taking of barley water by babies, may really be directly due to the fouling of their drink by this dried faecal matter. The use of barley water is very much discouraged in Finsbury.

CARE AND CONDITION OF BABY.

When the mother goes out to work early in the morning the washing of the children is delegated to the eldest, who may be only 8 or 10 years old, or they are left unwashed until the mother returns at night. Some mothers admit that they do not wish to wash their babies, "because the baby flops about so," "its bones and joints ain't what you may call set"; others say they do not know how to wash the baby's body, and therefore only wash its face. Some again fear that if they wash the baby "the cold will strike inwardly and set up inflammation of its little insides."

A SPECIAL LYING-IN ROOM.

Dr. Thomas emphasises a fact well known to all nurses and midwives that in mean streets the

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