

"INSTINCT OUT OF DATE."

Miss F. Leucah in *The Australasian Nurses' Journal*, writes:—

"Education has advanced tremendously the last few years, and now almost every branch that can be useful (and many that can't) is taught in our schools, yet the one most important of all—the care and treatment of infant life—is still left to that over-rated quality known as maternal instinct. This instinct of affection and unselfish care does exist, but in all my experience I have never found it a reliable guide to the bodily welfare of the child.

Doubtless the maternal instinct fulfilled all requirements in our aboriginal days, but it fails most lamentably when put to the test of modern conditions.

The very affection of the parents for their infant, unless directed by education, constitutes a danger, and therein lies the tragedy. Much too tender-hearted to refuse the little darling anything, the fond mother will give up her own pork and beans to still the plaintive wailings. The yet more plaintive wailings that ensue later are never connected in the maternal mind; castor oil temporarily sets matters straight, and history is repeated until permanent damage is done.

It is a usual custom for the baby to spend the night on its mother's arm, and when we remonstrate are told 'It is natural; the baby needs the warmth of its mother's body,' and so again we launch upon the explanation. 'It was and it did,' in the days of our distant ancestors, when they slept under trees and the soft airs of heaven blew all round; but when they sleep in a packing case 8 in. by 10 in., the window nailed up, and the door locked, the conditions are different; but the maternal instinct has not sufficed to teach that, so the infant continues to lie between its parents, well below the upper line of the bedclothes, literally a cave within a cave; and no words can persuade the mother to adapt herself to the altered times.

Upon one occasion I showed a mother a cardboard shape of the stomach of an infant three months old. Much was her amazement at its smallness. 'Lor! Miss,' she ejaculated, 'I thought 'e was all 'oller!' And upon that supposition she had acted.

Rarely a day passes but we see varying forms of the same ignorance, and there seems no method to overcome the evil but to begin from the beginning. Prevention is better than cure, and though much good is certainly done in showing the mothers the faults in their want of system, yet it would be incomparably better were organised instruction given to the girls before they assume the responsibility of motherhood. The average Australian infant at birth is a magnificent thing, fat and strong, the reverse being quite a notable exception. But the ignorance of the mother, combined with excessive affection, is too often its undoing. There are many excellent institutions to deal with the child in sickness, so that side needs no prominence; to maintain the health

with which it was originally endowed would be the main point.

So here is a button for someone to press. The teachers would have to be qualified and practical nurses, able to give illustrations, in drawing, of the why and wherefore, the faculties of all of us being more visual than auditive, to deliver lectures unencumbered with technical terms, and interesting withal. The one who could persuade the authorities to establish instruction upon some such lines would confer an inestimable boon upon long-suffering infant humanity, and go far to assist in rearing the healthy race of men and women of whom Australia stands so much in need."

PURE FOOD FOR BABIES.

Miss Maud writes to the *Times*, from the Lyceum Club:—

"As a frequent visitor to other countries, and deeply interested in social work and problems, one thing amazes me constantly. It is the lamentations of our law-makers over the mortality of the infant population, renewed with such grave cause recently, owing to the last statistics. Is it possible that these gentlemen fail to realise the main cause of this mortality among the children of the working classes, and that the remedy lies entirely in their own hands? England stands almost alone among civilised nations without a pure food law; and, in consequence, the food of the children is not only lacking in the nutriment necessary to build up their little bodies, but, in the case of the bread, milk, sugar—their principal diet, is adulterated with positively deleterious substances. This has been so repeatedly proved and exposed that it is beyond dispute. The teeth of the children loudly proclaim the fact. Feed the children with pure wheat and rye bread, pure milk and sugar at least, and we shall no longer have cause to lament their early death; nor will those who do survive possess, as they too often do, stunted and diseased bodies. Would not the organising of such a work be pre-eminently suitable as Women's National Service, backed by a pure food law?"

NO RISKS TAKEN.

Many and varied are the subjects that come up for discussion before Boards of Guardians, and it is seldom indeed that these bodies allow that anything is beyond their ken. Recently admission was applied for to a Union Infirmary for a case of puerperal fever. Stout and elderly gentlemen solemnly weighed the inadvisability of admitting what they understood to be an infectious case into the general wards. Finally it was decided the risk should not be taken, and it was suggested by one bolder than his fellows that the waiting relative should appear before the Board in order that the refusal should be explained. Horror was depicted on the faces of his brother Guardians. Bring infection into the Board room? Perish the thought! Guardians cannot, of course, risk being cut off in their prime by such wanton foolhardiness.

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