

OUR PRIZE COMPETITION.

HOW MAY NURSES AND MIDWIVES HELP TO DIMINISH THE MORTALITY AMONGST INFANTS AND CHILDREN UNDER FIVE YEARS OF AGE?

We have pleasure in awarding the prize this week to Miss Dora B. Vine, Eversley, Exmouth.

PRIZE PAPER.

The mortality amongst young children under five years is much higher than it should be, and nurses and midwives can do much to help on the cause of health.

First, they can study as much as possible to make themselves able to impart really up-to-date knowledge. It is not enough for nurses to go on in the same old routine of their training school. That may have been excellent in those days, but change affects everything, the outlook in medicine as well as other things, and nurses must be progressive. Again, some nurses may be able to do their own work well, but may not know how to teach their patients how to care for the babies. This knowledge can, to a great extent, be acquired if the nurse is really in earnest. It is not enough that a baby is well cared for as long as the nurse or midwife is in attendance; she must try to ensure the same care when she has left. Some nurses like to be thought indispensable, to be "missed." In reality it is a far better ambition to be like the key that winds the watch: it is necessary to start the machinery, but that having been set in motion, the key is not needed. Every nurse must do her utmost to teach the mothers how to learn. They must learn how to recognise the symptoms of disease, how to care for babies, and how to teach them to care for themselves. Therefore, I repeat, the nurses' first duty is to prepare themselves by actual study, observation, and lectures. They should keep in touch with modern thought, read the best books on subjects that will help them, and, whenever possible, attend post-graduate courses.

Secondly, nurses and midwives must co-operate with the local authorities in planning for the welfare of mothers and babies. It is much better for all concerned if such teaching is undertaken under the ægis of the "powers that be," and nurses who are diffident will be able to get the courage they need from the other workers. Co-operation, too, prevents overlapping, and should ensure harmony in carrying out the various Acts designed for the benefit of mothers and babies. Pre-natal care, classes for mothers and elder sisters, and baby clinics all come under this heading, and they

must be thoroughly well thought out and organised. In some places it is necessary to ensure that the expectant mothers have the opportunity of sufficient and suitable food by establishing dining halls, &c., that can often be made self-supporting. If there are sufficient members they can pay a small sum, and the economic fact that catering for many is cheap and makes meals from good joints possible, will tempt women to join. With a little tact it can then be arranged that they buy and cook in turns, and perhaps even "run" it all by themselves. The poor are intensely proud—and rightly so—of their independence, and strongly resent being taught their maternal duties as if they were irresponsible children; but a nurse or midwife who can teach them to "run" their own clubs is doing a glorious work for the whole nation.

Thirdly comes the nurse's personal work and influence, and this is perhaps the most vital point of all, for if the spark of enthusiasm is missing, all else is vain. The nurse must explain the facts about infant mortality; she must prove how preventible so much of it is, and she must do it in a way that will convince her audience. England is a free country, mothers will say, and they will do what they like with their own babies; but if the nurse knows how to manage her patients they will not take that line. She will assure them that they are at liberty to give their babies six dummies if they like, but that if they do they must expect the consequences. Lectures are no good without personal influence and example. Mothers must learn unconsciously that nurse's precepts are borne out by her practice, and they must learn to look on her as a friend, not as someone to whom they can always fly for material help; that should always come through the proper channels; but they should remember that nurse has given up the best years of her life to learning something about children, and that she is willing to pass on her knowledge.

HONOURABLE MENTION.

The following competitors receive honourable mention:—Mrs. J. E. Taylor, Miss B. Mackenzie, Miss M. Robinson, Miss E. Sanderson, Miss J. Wright, Miss J. G. Gilchrist.

Mrs. Taylor writes:—The midwife comes in contact with the expectant mothers, and so can teach them how to keep themselves healthy and fit, and thus to bear healthy children. Above all advise them not to take alcohol in any form unless ordered to do so by a doctor.

QUESTION FOR NEXT WEEK.

What devices can a nurse employ in caring for a patient suffering from sleeplessness?

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