

The Midwife.

DEATHS IN INFANCY.

"It hardly needs the foresight of a prophet to say that before long there will be such a development of public interest in this question as will give to the saving of human life in infancy the place that it ought to have in making the greater future of our country." These weighty words from the pen of Mr. Benjamin Broadbent occur in the interesting correspondence in the *Times* of last week on the above subject. The high mortality rate and the low birth rate in England is the subject of much anxious consideration and debate among experts, and many valuable schemes and suggestions have been set on foot to combat the evil in both directions.

Mr. Broadbent, in his most interesting letter, compares the method of Germany with our own as shown in the proceedings of the International Congress on Infant Mortality held in Berlin, 1911. He says if applied science could have annihilated the infant mortality rate it would seem as if there ought to have been a zero mortality rate in Berlin. Visitors from England and America were well nigh green with envy. But there seemed a gross inconsistency between the elaborate apparatus and the realised results, which were not at all comparable with those in London, where the efforts made were imperfect and incomplete.

"The German methods were wrong somewhere, and the English methods were somehow right." He attributes the results mainly to the fundamental doctrine held in our country that the only proper place for mother and babe is the home.

As regards infant mortality two main causes are quoted (1) The ignorance of mothers, (2) venereal disease. Mr. Ackland makes an appeal to women who have already done so large a share of the good work to deal more energetically with the first of these causes, which he rightly says is "real war work." Mrs. Fawcett, however, goes a step further and says that the removal of the second cause would be "real war work" also, and will never be effectively tackled till men and women face it together. She goes on to say "that it is no accidental coincidence which connects the prosecution of political enfranchisement by women with the fall in the infant death-rate, and supplies the following figures published by the Countess of Selborne, illustrating the vigorous citizenship of women and the fall in the infant death-rate. She takes the year 1909 for the comparison and divides countries, all of which are on a high plane of civilization, into three groups. In the first women have both the municipal and the Parliamentary vote; in the second they have the municipal vote, backed by a vigorous sense of citizenship; in the third they have no vote and are out of politics altogether. The figures

following the name of the country give the number of babies out of every 1,000 born who die before they are 12 months old.

Group 1	{	New Zealand, 62
		Australia, 72
		Norway, 72
Group 2	{	United Kingdom, 109
		Sweden, 72
		Holland, 99
Group 3	{	Germany, 170
		Austria, 205

These figures tell their own story. Where women have most power the babies have the best chance of living. Where women do not count in politics, the babies have the worst chance.

Miss L. E. Rogers, Inspector of Midwives, in criticising Mr. Ackland's letter, considers that he went astray in omitting one flagrant cause of infant mortality, which is the survival of the "bona fide midwife," *anglice*, a Gamp; and on the other hand there are hundreds of certified women who do not practise. "Whence," she asks, "this anomaly? For the reason that there is no opening for them. Strenuous opposition and starvation pay is the encouragement meted out to the certified midwife. Yet it is not in the multiplicity of inconsequent health visitors that the nation will find salvation. The remedy must be sought elsewhere. It is the true vocation of the midwife to attend and instruct the mother, not only in the pre-natal period, but also in the earlier phases of infant life. Her whole professional study is subordinated to this end. Also to no one else will the mother turn with the same instinctive trust and reliance as she will to the person who is to conduct her through the most trying experience of her life. It is true that long ago the old *bona fide* midwife would have found oblivion had the State realised the need for competent attention before, after, and at the time of childbirth. It is a disgrace that this neglect should have continued so long. At this time it becomes a peril to our country as well. Give the certified woman the recognition that is her due. Give her just conditions, just pay, and inducement to practise, and I venture to say there will be a very noticeable decrease in our present rate of infant mortality."

Miss Margaret Llewelyn Davies considers that the only way of inducing the many thousands of well qualified women whose names are on the Midwives Roll, but who do not practise to do so, is to institute a municipal service. She advocates salaries beginning at not less than £120. As a municipal officer the work of a midwife could be co-ordinated with all other public health work, including that of health visitors in a way that is impossible so long as the midwife is an independent practitioner. When fully trained

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