

The Midwife.

THE OFFICE OF MIDWIFE.

The need for an increasing supply of well-qualified midwives was never more apparent than at the present time, when the importance of the preservation of infant life is leading to much activity in all that pertains to the care of expectant and nursing mothers and their infants, and therefore to an increased demand for the services of midwives, whether in their own particular sphere of work or as inspectors, health visitors, and in other branches of work in which their special knowledge is a qualification of great value.

A problem for solution in the immediate future is how to secure and maintain an adequate supply of midwives; and the first point which presents itself is the very poor and uncertain remuneration obtainable by midwives for their highly responsible and arduous work. It compares most unfavourably even with the modest salaries obtained by district nurses, whose work is fairly regular, and there is little to induce the right type of women to qualify as midwives or to practise when trained.

This is the more serious because, there is a shortage of medical practitioners in this country on account of those occupied in naval and military work, a shortage which is likely to continue for some time to come, as the war is affecting also the supply of medical students, and, therefore, midwifery work will increasingly fall into the hands of midwives.

This journal has always held in high honour the office of midwife, believing it is one of the utmost value to the community when rightly discharged, and which affords useful and satisfying employment for women. The trouble has always been, that outside institutions the difficulty for a midwife to make a living is considerable, and the only really satisfactory solution of the problem appears to be that midwives should be appointed and subsidized by the State and the local authorities, and of this we now appear to be within measurable distance. This will give the midwife an honourable position and consequently attract desirable women to enter the ranks of practising midwives.

The Manchester Midwives Supervising Committee has taken charge of the maternity section of the city's Maternity and Child Welfare Scheme, organised in three main divisions:— (1) the provision of four new centres for consultations and clinics; (2) taking over the medical and nursing work of the six centres established by the School for Mothers, the social work being left under the School for Mothers; (3) the opening of two centres for guidance and aid to pregnant women.

TO SAVE THE BABIES.

A deputation from the Association of Infant Welfare and Maternity Centres, which represents the majority of the 800 existing centres of this kind, was received by Lord Rhondda on Wednesday, 31st January. The Right Hon. Arthur Acland, a member of the Committee, introduced Dr. Eric Pritchard (Chairman), Dr. Flora Shepherd (Hon. Secretary), and Lady Spielmann (an active worker among East End mothers), and suggested, in addition to the particular pressing reform which the deputation had come to urge, various future forms of State-help which would materially strengthen the movement for saving the babies for the nation.

The deputation particularly urged the extension of the present Government grant of 50 per cent. of the approved expenditure incurred by the Welfare Centres, to cover the cost of supplying milk for children under school age, and nourishment for expectant and nursing mothers in necessitous cases. Dr. Pritchard pointed out the difficulty, under existing circumstances, for mothers, especially out of separation allowances, of providing the necessary $1\frac{1}{2}$ pints of milk per day for babies that had to be bottle-fed, and the still greater difficulty in affording as much milk as was really needed for children from 9 months to 3 years, if they were to grow up sound and strong. He also stated that a small quantity of sugar, now difficult to get, was vitally necessary for children under 18 months of age.

Dr. Shepherd referred to the importance of providing nursing and expectant mothers with adequate nourishment, and stated that her experience of the provision of suitable meals at Centres for Mothers (supplied at a cheap rate where prescribed by the doctor), was that it increased largely the number of cases in which the babies were breast-fed.

In the course of a sympathetic reply, Lord Rhondda foreshadowed early legislation as a war measure, with a view to increasing the powers of Local Authorities in helping the welfare of infants and of expectant and nursing mothers. He referred to the recommendations of the Food Prices Committee in favour of the supply of milk for infants and food for mothers, as suggested by the deputation, and he hoped that the measures he was proposing would, with the active co-operation of Local Authorities and Voluntary Organisations, result in a very material saving of infant life.

Sir George Newman, Chief Medical Officer of the Board of Education, presiding at a meeting of the Royal Sanitary Institute, said that in the last decennial period the rate of infant mortality

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