

The Midwife.

A BEAUTIFUL OASIS IN EAST LONDON.

AN APPEAL FOR THE EAST END MOTHERS' HOME.*

By MRS. H. B. IRVING.

Everybody who has had anything to do with this beautiful oasis in East London knows perfectly well that there is only one person who should be speaking to you this afternoon, and that is Miss Anderson. No one else could really tell you about all the work of the year that would go straight to the heart of everyone present.

Indeed, I think she is a sort of fairy godmother, like Cinderella's of old, who made carriages out of pumpkins, and shining garments out of rags, and in between your Committee days I believe she waves her wand, and in a moment things get pulled down and built up, renewed, enlarged, adapted and beautified until everyone rubs their eyes and cries out that the days of miracles are not yet past.

But I am sorry to say Miss Anderson insists that she will only be a silent Fairy Godmother at the Annual Meeting, so the only thing to do is just to try to tell you of everything here that lies nearest her heart, if I can only manage to find it all out.

And firstly, I have to appeal for money, because without it this Home cannot be carried on. You all know the splendid work that is being done here for the great cause of motherhood, and you realise fully that whatever happens it must go on and increase. But as a voluntary worker myself, I cannot help knowing that there is nothing so disheartening as striving perpetually to do the work and collect the money for the work at one and the same time. It does cheer the workers up so tremendously if they are helped by those who perhaps have money if not time at their disposal; they get depressed, because they begin to feel that people don't care, and I'm afraid very often it's true.

Yet surely we have begun to care a little! Never before have we heard so much as we are hearing to-day about Infant Welfare and Maternity. Public opinion seems thoroughly aroused. Now, why is it that we are thinking so much about Mothers and Babies to-day? It isn't really because the National danger of a declining birth-rate and a large Infant Death Rate comes home very much to the imagination of ordinary people. It is because we are not the same, any of us, as we were three years ago. We have learnt something. We have wakened up to find ourselves all brothers and sisters of one great family. How do we go on living to-day? Because we know our anxiety is every one's anxiety. How do

* An Address (abridged) given at the Annual Meeting, 396, Commercial Road, E.

we keep up our courage? Because we dare not fall below the standard we see all around us. We are made to think of each other by a common sorrow, and a common anxiety, and this sympathy and understanding is breaking down the old barriers as nothing else could have done.

It is just this element in our midst that is causing such human interest about maternity. It hurts a woman living to-day who has borne children in comfort, and been able to give them every chance, to know that there are other mothers and babies to whom the conditions of wholesome life are denied. They have begun to care, and it is only by caring tremendously that the wheels of that great machine called Public Opinion can be set going.

Next let us consider the need for such a place in this neighbourhood. Curative treatment is more or less obtainable even for the poor in present day London, but preventive treatment is not, and it is just because your Home combines the two in the best possible way that its benefit is beyond price to the women who seek its aid. The antenatal work of the Home alone is worth the total expenditure, because it prevents and detects early disease and suffering, and ensures a healthy maternity and an educated mother.

Left to herself the working class mother will accept the ill health of pregnancy as a matter of course just as she used to be satisfied (before Public Opinion on the subject was aroused) if her baby, ailing as it was, seemed no worse than the average baby in her particular street. And then, again, think of the post natal work—no one can urge too much the necessity of visiting and after care when a mother leaves the Home, or gets about again in her own house. It was owing to this great need that one of the earliest Schools for Mothers was started in the Home itself ten years ago, which eventually outgrew its surroundings and became the Stepney School for Mothers, which now works in close touch with the Home. It is wonderful indeed to think of the educative and preventive work done in the 23,587 visits made by the nurses to patients in their own houses.

One of the very grisliest bogies Infant Welfare Workers are fighting at the present moment is the untrained woman with a little knowledge who is installed as mistress of the ceremonies in far too numerous a proportion of lying-in cases. It may be the "Grannie" or the "Auntie" or mother-in-law, who would be mortally offended if not called in to the young mother, and who is the greatest enemy of progress, and one of the chief causes of early Infantile Mortality.

I was called in by our Parish Doctor the other day to see if anything could be done for a blind woman with a week-old baby, who was being looked after by an old Grannie of 80—among other evils it had developed a very bad attack of thrush.

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