

## The Midwife.

### A BEAUTIFUL OASIS IN EAST LONDON. AN APPEAL FOR THE EAST END MOTHERS' HOME.\*

By MRS. H. B. IRVING.

(Concluded from page 338.)

The poor mother is not a bad or stupid mother, though we sometimes hear her called so in the papers; indeed, she compares very favourably with her better class sister in love and intelligence and self-sacrifice. But she is asked to do impossibilities. She is urged to produce children that will be a credit to the nation, yet an environment is given her to live in in which good and healthy maternity is well nigh impossible. It is an extremely rare thing to find a healthy mother of several children. They *expect* to be ill, or rather never to feel well, and they hardly get a chance to be otherwise. They just accept it along with all the other hardships such as bad housing, vermin, inferior drains, want of a water supply, air and sunshine. And the seeds of a life long ill health are sown very often in young mothers getting about too soon and not taking enough rest when the babies come. That is the enormous advantage of this Home, that the mothers when they come away from their families are forced to rest, and to rest their minds as well as their bodies without household cares—just the new baby and the tired mother together.

As Miss Anderson has told you in the Report, there has been a great strain on the motherhood of the country. Their men are away fighting, many are widowed already and have given their best—my man, my boy—to the great struggle for right and truth. It has been sometimes very fearsome during the long winter for the young mother, alone with her tiny children in the night, when rumour has run riot in the slums. And when it really came, that terror that flies by night, it wrought far more and wider havoc in human life than the lists of killed and wounded showed. It was marked by a sudden epidemic of still births, miscarriages, and premature babies, and if you looked up the charts of the breast-fed babies, who usually do so well in any maternity centre, you would find at that time loss of weight, wasting, enteritis, gastritis, and kindred troubles. So, it behoves us more than ever as citizens to see to the birthright and inheritance of the children left us as a legacy by the men who are fighting our battles.

We can all help to do this in some way, but the skilled maternity work itself can only be done by trained and qualified women. We can help them

to carry on by giving our loyal support, and our sympathy and understanding of their labours.

I know you would like me to say how very much you appreciate the work of the staff here, who, day in and day out, are toiling ceaselessly to comfort and relieve expectant motherhood, banishing fears, cheering the lonely and suffering, bracing the weak, and so building up the health of the women that their children may receive from them the most priceless gift a mother can bestow—the possession of a sound mind in a sound body.

There are two special ways in which friends have greatly helped the Home in the past. There is a very general impression that the working classes are better off to-day than they have ever been before, and certainly there is less absolute destitution; but, though wages have risen, perhaps 25 to 30 per cent., food has gone up over 100 per cent. and clothing 50 per cent., so most people are poorer than before the war.

Take boots for instance, and the difficulty of keeping a family dry shod in these days. It was quite amusing when the Government raised the soldiers' wives' allowances a little while back and paid up a monthly arrears at one time, to see family after family making for the shoe shops and spending it all in one go. No matter where one went that day, everyone seemed creaking about in new boots. And boots do not last like they used to; the material is getting shoddy; and there is no father at home to do the snobbing for the family, so they wear out much quicker. Wool and flannel are almost prohibitive, so the baby has to make shift with flannelette; and home after home that pawned its blankets in the early days of the war is still blanketless because there never has been enough money to spare from food to get them out again.

Nightgowns also are things very convenient to put away for the sake of a loaf and some margarine for the children's tea, and under ordinary circumstances they are not greatly missed; but let the new baby come to town a little unexpectedly and nurse will find she has to make bricks out of straw in the matter of clothing. What would she do, and what would the mothers do without the help of the Needlework Guild which works so splendidly away at the bed jackets, petticoats, the baby's flannels and shawls, the vests and the "nighties"? The number of garments sent in show a falling off this year, owing to the war; but Miss Anderson does beg that these munitions of the Home may be kept going in spite of all difficulties, as they are very badly needed.

I should like also to voice the grateful thanks of the fifty-seven happy babies who receive the babies' bundles in the "Nina" portmanteaux. Miss Lankester would welcome any new helpers, and Miss Anderson would be *most* thankful for gifts of clothing and old linen.

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

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