

The Midwife.

NATIONAL BABY WEEK.

THURSDAY, JULY 5th.

THE PROBLEM OF ILLEGITIMACY.

The Bishop of Kensington presided at the Morning Session of the Conference at the Central Hall, Westminster, on Thursday, July 5th, when the opening speech was made by Mrs. Creighton, who emphasised the importance of putting the unmarried mother in the way of earning her living without being separated from her child.

Judge Neil said that the unmarried woman should be relieved of disgrace, and it was necessary to bring about a change so that no mother should be penalised. She should receive proper care whether married or unmarried. It was our duty to see that the mother became a married instead of unmarried woman.

Miss Maud Roydon thought that "the term 'illegitimate' should cease. The parents should be illegitimate, but not the children. The interest in the child must come first of all, and that of the father and mother subordinate to the interest of the child. She suggested that a mother's pension scheme should be adopted in this country for deserted mothers—the unmarried woman should be put on the same footing as the married woman for the sake of the child. The home of the child should be inspected so as to see that it was not being neglected; if this was the case the child should be taken away. But in the interest of the child and mother both, should be kept together if possible.

Mrs. Gascogne Hart said that the most important thing was that the unfathered little ones should be provided with a guardian.

Mrs. Crawford approved of pensions for mothers. She said that it was most important that the responsibility of the child should be brought home to the unmarried woman and the burden of maintenance should be brought home to the father of the child. In most cases the mother hoped that the child would die or that someone would take the child from her. It was our duty to point out their responsibility to them.

Mrs. H. B. Irving stated that the woman should have someone at the back of her who could get hold of the father and make him feel the responsibility of his duty to his child.

THE CARE OF THE UNMARRIED MOTHER AND HER CHILD.

Mrs. Bramwell Booth, in speaking on the above subject at the Afternoon Session, stated that the mother was the best person to care for her child. Unmarried mothers were much more

numerous than we realised. The majority were driven by the indifference of the public and the injustice of the State to despair, and from them as a class arose much of the social evil that we deplore. The laws of the State ought more nearly to represent the law of Nature. The support of the child was naturally and properly the charge of the father, and therefore if the State failed to induce the father to do his duty, then it should undertake that duty. To separate the child from its mother was a wrong way to assist a mother, either married or unmarried. The natural maternal instinct was a sufficiently strong instinct to be a very material help, and a helpful link between mother and child. Certain alterations in the law were necessary. Marriage with the father of the child after its birth should legitimatise the child. This law prevailed in many of the States of America, in Russia and in Scotland. The best of the women feel that they have lost the respect of the man who should be their husband, and consequently that if they were to live together the presence of the child would only remind them of the past. Many marriages had proved that to be the best way. The mother should be able legally to obtain some support proportionate to the means of the father, the present allowance was utterly insufficient. Could we not demand that there should be suitable moral instruction for boys and girls, and that girls should receive some training which would fit them for motherhood?

Mrs. Wood, of the London War Pensions Committee, speaking of the future of unmarried wives, said that very often marriage cannot take place after the birth of the child, as the man is married to another woman. Divorce should be made possible for poor people.

Mrs. Somers Ellis thought that if the mother was given help, there was nobody to see that she spent her money properly. We needed a change in the law. More important was the need of a responsible authority to see to the welfare of the child. Two or more understanding women should be appointed in connection with the Guardians to find out and oversee every unmarried mother and her child in the district.

Some national registers should be kept of feeble-minded or partially feeble-minded boys and girls; and we should be able to protect the children of feeble-minded parents. We should be able to keep them from being at the mercy of a woman who is unable to develop her child's mind. About 25 per cent. of the unmarried mothers were feeble-minded.

FRIDAY, JULY 6th.

YOUNG CHILDREN UNDER THE POOR LAW.

On the morning of Friday, July 6th, the subject of the Conference was "Young Children Under the Poor Law."

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