

The Midwife.

MOTHERS' PENSIONS IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

"American public opinion," says the *Lancet*, was considerably influenced by the publication in 1909 of the Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor-law in England, with its recommendations as regards outdoor relief to widows, and attention has gradually turned to the question of carrying out the scheme as a public measure. It was asserted that a large number of children were being put into institutions who, if the means were available, might be better and more economically brought up in their own homes; but as a result of an inquiry made in New York city by Dr. E. T. Devine, and published in 1913, it appeared that only about 4 per cent. of the children placed in institutions in the year of inquiry might have been kept at home with some assistance.

"The object of all the laws for the grant of mothers' pensions is to provide means for preserving ordinary home conditions for dependent children when, on account of death or disability, the usual means of support are wanting; and to secure that the children shall be cared for by their own mothers instead of being placed in institutions or under the care of foster-parents. With the exception of a few States, the laws apply only to mothers, and in a few cases the pensions are expressly limited to widows. Divorced and deserted wives are occasionally included. In Michigan alone are unmarried mothers specially included in the law. Need is, without exception, the basis of assistance in all the laws, but in some laws definitions are added, dealing with cases in which the woman owns property, &c. Practically all the laws require the mother to be a fit person, morally and physically, to have care of her children. In seven States it is made a condition that the children live with the mother and that she does not work regularly away from home. In other cases she may obtain, and is encouraged to obtain, part-time employment. The lowest age-limit at which the pension ceases to be allowed on behalf of the child is 14 years. More than half of the laws provide for administration by the Juvenile or County Court. In one case only, Massachusetts, was it made a function of the existing Poor-law officers, under the control of the State Board of Charities. In a few States the payment of mothers' pensions is carried out by the education authorities. Periodical supervision is required in all cases, either monthly, quarterly, or half-yearly visits, or general supervision. In the majority of cases the funds for the pension are derived from the county treasury, but in some States they are provided partly out of county funds and partly by means of a State grant.

"The methods of fixing the amount of the grant fall in practice into three groups: (1) To allow the mother a monthly sum equal to the difference between her average normal income and the average standard of expenditure, provided that the limits of the law are not exceeded; (2) to allow the mother the flat rate for each child fixed by the law; (3) to allow an amount for each child according to a scale in which the amount is less for each additional child after the first. The last of these methods is the one which prevails in most States. As to administrative working, in Massachusetts it appears to have been considered that if a new group of workers were appointed to carry out the administration of mothers' pensions the accumulated experience of the already existing Poor-law officers would not be utilised, as, it is stated, co-operation between the two groups was not anticipated. The administration of the new law was therefore, as we have seen, made a function of the existing Poor-law officers under the control of the State Board of Charities. The law specially provides that the pensions are to be non-pauper assistance.

"Effects of the Mothers' Pension System.—The danger that mothers' pensions may lead to the weakening of family obligation and the lessening of family responsibility is fully recognised. Another danger referred to in the Report of the Bureau of Municipal Research and elsewhere is that by the extension of the system of public subsidies employees of labour may be led to underpay their workers, relying on social legislation to make up the deficiency. The direct results of the pensions, inadequate though they are in many cases, on the economic position of the families concerned, is generally considered to be satisfactory. The chief probation officer in Cork County says that 'for the children of mothers with right motives and willingness to accept and follow friendly and intelligent advice the system has been of great benefit.' He points out that this form of assistance is not successful with mothers who, although they meet the requirements of the law, are not capable of using the money to the best advantage, or who are unwilling to accept advice on the subject."

MIDWIVES AND MINISTRY OF HEALTH.

The Incorporated Midwives Institute is, we learn, not in favour of being placed under the Ministry of Health, instead of the Privy Council, as the General Medical Council, and the Pharmaceutical Society are, according to the Bill, still to remain under the direction of the Privy Council. On the other hand, the Society of the Medical Officers of Health has issued a memorandum 'desiring' the inclusion of the responsibilities of the Privy Council as regards the General Medical Council and the Pharmaceutical Society, in the Ministry of Health Bill.

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