

The Midwife.

MOTHERING.

Dr. Helen Y. Campbell, Chief Medical Officer, has presented an extremely interesting Report for the year 1918 to the Bradford Health Committee concerning its Infants' Department, in which she emphasises the urgent necessity for the institution of a comprehensive and efficient Maternity Department, which, including in its provision all necessary antenatal supervision and treatment, would secure attention to the problems underlying defectiveness of congenital, or more properly speaking antenatal, origin. She considers that for the reduction of Bradford's infant mortality, the work of such a Maternity Department, acting in close co-operation with the Infants' Department, is a primary and most pressing necessity.

In regard to the "Mothering" of 1,606 infants registered with the Infants' Department during the year, Dr. Campbell reports: Of the 1,606 infants, in 581 (36.19 per cent.) of the cases this was good; in 416 (25.90 per cent.) it was fairly good; and in 609 (37.91 per cent.) it was not good.

Bad "Mothering" or the infant's lack of good "mothering," as met with in the actual, practical work of an Infant Health Centre may be due to (a) ignorance of mothercraft, (b) low standard of character and lack of ideals in mother, (c) physical or mental inefficiency of mother, and while these factors to some extent overlap, our main difficulty undoubtedly lies with the mothers of group (b). These can only be improved, if at all, to a very limited degree, in my belief, at such a Centre; any influence which may be brought to bear upon them during their brief and infrequent visits there being insufficient to secure result. One is forced to think retrospectively in such cases, of the earlier influences in the home and industrial environment, and to seek *here* prevention for the future.

We are also confronted with the problem of the actually mentally deficient, of the more or less feeble-minded, and of the deranged epileptic or chronically alcoholic or otherwise mentally abnormal mother. The bad "mothering" of these cases is quite unimprovable at the Infant Health Centre, and a very definite if not relatively very large percentage of our infants are suffering severely as a result of dependence upon such "mothering." The problem of dealing with these mothers is obviously difficult, but it is one which the better care of infancy demands a solution of, and which this better care when universally provided, will itself largely solve.

Not a few infants are directly suffering from lack of good "fathering" owing to (a) low standard of character and lack of ideals in father, leading to bad habits of intemperance, laziness or withholding and diverting elsewhere a proportion of

earnings essential to family maintenance and (b) physical or mental inefficiency.

The preventive ideal with its immense possibilities in earlier childhood and the utilisation of doctors and nurses in its realisation, is so dimly understood as yet by the community at large that one can scarcely wonder if many of these mothers should seem slow to "sense" it. One looks perhaps especially to those voluntary workers in the field of social service for mother and child welfare to prepare the soil and foster the growth of the seed sown at the Infant Clinics. I am convinced that such work making available for all these mothers much-needed change, amusement, rest, social activities and wider interests, should be more developed in the future in close co-operation with the Health Services, and that it is an essential department of our national effort for the prevention of infant mortality.

There are mothers in our industrial areas who, working day in day out in the factories from their early teens, have had scant opportunity for the acquirement of the qualifications and to a great extent characteristics requisite for successful child nurture, and housekeeping on a slender and uncertain allowance. For some of the mothers something quite other than advice and teaching in mothercraft is necessary. The lives of these mothers have been and are being spent in an environment possessing little or nothing to stimulate and inspire imagination and develop intelligence and ideals, and in the absence of some development of these the Infant Clinic sows its seed in barren soil. The effect of this purely "mental" deprivation together with the discouragement and degradation often resulting from material privations have no relation in the great majority of cases to vice—the instinctive mother-love which is so seldom lacking, and sometimes unselfish, even if misguided effort, supply abundant proof of this.

Knowing these mothers so well by long acquaintance I feel very strongly that developed schemes of social work which recognise this deficiency and contrive to secure for them not merely technical instruction in mothercraft, but wider interests leading to a larger mental horizon, and some of those influences conducing to a higher capacity and quality of the imagination, are essential to the solution of much of the bad "mothering" of the slums. Further, if thoroughly democratic in conception and affording that real recreation and social life so much needed by our working-class mothers, if rather the "Mother's Club" embracing many more activities than the "Mother's School," these voluntary schemes must be to many in the first instance at least, more attractive than the Health Centres, and hence one feels that they might considerably aid in drawing and keeping mothers in attendance at the Centres whose infants most need their supervision.

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