

The Midwife.

THE BUSINESS OF NO ONE.

It is always a notable achievement to build a bridge, and this has been done by the pioneers of the Nursery School at Rommany Road, Norwood. Charitable and official activities have provided for child welfare from birth to the age of about two years, but midwives who keep in touch with "their babies" beyond this age are puzzled to know what advice to give to the mothers as to their care and supervision for the next three years. The Government takes up the responsibility at the age of five, but until the past two or three years the interval between these ages has been the business of no one. It is somewhat extraordinary that the most receptive years of a child's life have been practically disregarded by the many organisations for its well being.

We recently had the opportunity of inspecting the work of the Rommany Road Nursery School, and further of being personally conducted by its pioneer and founder, Miss Belle Rennie.

It has been in existence for about two years and a-half, and has amply justified itself.

Its organisers have not been deterred by the many difficulties that beset their path at its inception. They were determined to make a start somehow, and to make the best of such accommodation as presented itself.

A temporary building with a corrugated roof, which is used for religious services on Sunday, was selected. Forty children are the most that can be received, but this number by no means represents the applications that are made. The children are taken from the poorest homes, and an extraordinary effect on their physique, appearance and manners is noticeable after two or three weeks' attendance. There may be some who prate that the mother is the proper person to have the sole care of her children during these years, and that it is a mistaken kindness to relieve her of the responsibility. Given she has proper housing and opportunity of leisure, there may be something in the argument, but we see no reason why she should not in a small measure emulate the example of her more fortunate sisters and enjoy some time in the day a respite from her incessant maternal cares.

For example, in this Nursery School there are twins aged two-and-a-half years; at home (in case anyone should imagine their mother is disporting herself at the cinema) there is another pair of twins aged sixteen months, and as if that were not enough, a babe of four weeks. Think of it! Five children under two-and-a-half years!

To go back to our visit of inspection. We came in through the kitchen. Here, in a very circumscribed space, is carried out the cooking of dinner for forty children. Good nourishing soup, baked

crusts, and delicious milk pudding formed the menu that day.

In the main room the children were at play and the head teacher kindly pointed out the various arrangements to us. Simple, plain and complete they all were. The work is reduced to a minimum as the children, infants though they be, are all taught to play their part.

At a word from the teacher these tiny tots cleared up the floor from toys, &c., and packed them tidily in the cupboards round the room. Another few moments they were seated in a ring on the floor singing action songs. A beckoning finger caused them to crowd round the teacher, who whispered mysteriously to the little group something which evidently was satisfactory to judge from the little smiling faces. We judged it to refer to dinner, as these tiny little people at once quietly began to spread the miniature tables with miniature cloths of coloured check. Small Japanese trays were produced and tots of two and three years old gravely placed spoons thereon and proceeded to the table and placed them in a manner which suggested embryo parlourmaids. Other children decorated the centre of each little table with a vase of bluebells or buttercups. These arrangements being complete, the "waiters" were attired in overalls, the other children seated at the table and dinner commenced, after a simple grace.

It needed seeing to believe, but at the two "high tables" from which the dinner was served, were seated two of this miniature band, who, the dishes having been placed before them by the waiters, began to serve out the soup with a fine air of importance. This, be it spoken, without any apparent supervision. The "waiters" having served their companions, sat down to their well-earned meal.

The business of clearing away and washing up is all done by these small people, and we were told that so carefully are they trained that only *three* articles have been broken since September!

After dinner the small stretcher cots are prepared by the children, who then lie upon them for their midday rest and sleep. Previous to their rest, however, faces and hands are washed and teeth cleaned, the towels and tooth-brushes are kept strictly separate, but instead of numbers, which they are too small to recognise, each child has a little design over its hook by which it knows its belongings—a boot, an umbrella, a saucepan—a corresponding design is placed over the outdoor clothes.

We have only been able to sketch briefly some of the many attractions and advantages of this nursery school.

There is no attempt at "book learning," but the little ones are trained to use minds and hands on the Montessori method. We were immensely struck by the absence of all fuss or orders on the

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