

The Midwife.

THE PROBLEM OF MATERNAL MORTALITY.

Speaking in the House of Commons in relation to Maternal Mortality, the Minister of Health said:

"Unfortunately, the problem of maternal mortality remains, and during the last five years there has been a slight increase in the maternal mortality rate. That is serious. A special committee was appointed by my predecessor to consider the complex problems of maternal mortality, and that committee has, amongst other things, been examining in detail individual maternal deaths, and out of that detailed investigation I believe that new light will come to us bearing on this subject. I am hoping that within the next month or two the committee will issue an Interim Report. It will be remembered that the Departmental Committee appointed to consider the working of the Midwives Act, with special reference to the training of midwives, reported not long ago, and their main recommendation was that a national maternal service should be instituted based on insurance principles under which necessary medical services should be provided as part of the medical benefit under the National Insurance Acts, and the aim of the service would be to provide for more women proper attention during confinement with a view to reducing the volume of mortality. The recommendation of that committee and other recommendations on this problem which have been made are now under consideration of the Government with a view to devising a scheme of maternity service which will have due regard on the one hand to maternity benefit under the National Health Insurance Acts, and on the other hand to the services provided by local authorities under the Maternity and Child Welfare Act, for I am convinced that this complex problem will only be solved by utilising every means at our disposal."

COMMON NUTRITIONAL DISTURBANCES IN INFANCY.

Dr. Eric Pritchard M.A., M.D., F.R.C.P., Chairman of the Executive Committee of the National Baby Week Council, 117, Piccadilly, London, W., and Medical Director of the Infants Hospital, Westminster, gave a very valuable popular lecture on "Rickets and other Common Nutritional Disturbances in Infancy" at the request of the Public Health Authority, Norwich, which has now been published by the Council in pamphlet form.

In the course of the lecture Dr. Pritchard said:—

We of the present generation have the privilege of living in a very wonderful age—quite the most wonderful in the history of the world. There have been far more scientific discoveries—electrical, mechanical, chemical, bio-chemical and medical—concentrated into the last thirty years than in all the centuries combined since the beginning of the world. But, in spite of the wonders of wireless, television, aeroplanes and motor cars, and in spite of all the pleasures and benefits which these inventions have conferred upon mankind, it is very questionable whether the discoveries in any domain of science are as remarkable for the benefits which have been conferred on humanity as the fundamental discoveries which have been made in connection with the so-called "vital" properties of our daily food.

A baby born to-day has twice as good a chance of surviving its first year of life as one born thirty years ago, and its expectation of life is now ten years longer than it

was fifty years ago. I do not suggest that these happy results are entirely due to improvements in methods of feeding, but I maintain that no other factor in our lives has contributed so greatly to them.

DISCOVERY OF THE "VITAL" PROPERTIES.

Strange to say, the presence of most of the vital properties in food, as now understood, was hardly suspected until the beginning of the present century. It was not realised that the vital sparks existing in food could be extinguished and destroyed by the processes of refinement, or by procedures which the ingenuity of civilisation had introduced for prolonging the apparent life of foods, for making them more agreeable to the taste, and pleasanter to look upon. When the population of this country lived for the most part on fresh foods, supplied directly from the garden or farm, there was little danger that the delicate and vital properties of the latter would be destroyed by submission to processes of preservation or by delays incidental to long journeys. But the segregation of vast sections of the population in cramped town areas has necessitated many changes in the character of the food, designed to make it keep, but which have interfered with its vitamin content.

CONSTITUTION OF MILK—THE BASIC FACTOR IN A BALANCED DIETARY.

It is only quite recently that we have realised that the animal body, like the inanimate machine, must be supplied with a very large number of different substances to keep it in working order and repair. We have long known that a baby could grow, move and have its being when fed on one food alone—namely, milk—and as long as we thought that milk was a simple food, or mixture consisting of just a few elements—sugar, fat, casein and one or two mineral elements—we misunderstood or failed to understand one of the chief secrets of adequate nutrition. At the present day we know that there are in milk a great number of separate and independent food elements—quite apart from the so-called fuel foods—which we never suspected thirty years ago. We know that in milk there are at least forty different elements or constituents, each of which performs some special function in the human body, and contributes in some way to the working of the animal machine. Milk, as we know from very long experience, is a complete and adequate food for the growing infant. We now know, also, that every adequate dietary which is substituted for it as the child grows older must also contain in some form or other the same constituent elements if health is to be maintained; and to produce equally good results in nutrition such substitutes must contain the same constituents in more or less the same definite proportions.

JOHNSON'S BABY POWDER

It must always be with a sense of responsibility that a nurse or midwife advises as to the powder to be used after the baby's bath. The tender skin is so easily injured—it may even be for life—if an unsuitable one is carelessly selected, perhaps just because it is attractively presented. A powder proved trustworthy should always be used; and we find that nurses who have once used "Johnson's Baby Powder" (supplied by Messrs. Johnson and Johnson, Ltd., of Slough, Bucks), are reluctant to use any other, so much do they appreciate its outstanding qualities.

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