

The Midwife.

SOCIETY FOR THE PROVISION OF BIRTH CONTROL CLINICS.

The Society for the Provision of Birth Control Clinics, 153, East Street, Walworth Road, London, S.E.17, has just issued its Annual Report, and it is one which should be carefully and thoughtfully studied by nurses and midwives: firstly, because it behoves them to know and understand the subject, so that they may be able to give a considered and useful reply when, in the course of their work, they are interrogated, as they are bound to be, on this much discussed question. Secondly, because there is so much loose and ignorant thinking as to what is implied in the term "birth control," which by many people is hastily assumed to be synonymous with birth prevention.

The first object of the Society, as defined in its Rules, is "in the interests of social welfare and for the relief of poverty, to establish and support clinics in which instruction in the most satisfactory method of contraception will be given to married women in poor circumstances by registered medical practitioners (preferably women), assisted when necessary by qualified nurses. The medical practitioners shall be solely responsible for the treatment of patients, and the nurses shall act only under the instructions of the medical practitioners."

The main point at issue is this: Is conception the most important, the most far-reaching act that human beings can undertake, to take place deliberately, after consent, or are children to be brought into the world heedlessly, irresponsibly, without due consideration of the consequences, physical, social and financial?

The medical officers of the Society connected with the Walworth Women's Welfare Centre, which we are now considering, enumerate in their Report types of the patients who come to the centre, "slum dwellers, already overburdened with poverty and ill-health, many already the mothers of large families; the younger mothers of one or two children who are still maintaining a higher standard of life, and who feel that for economic reasons (housing, unemployment) any further increase in the family would be disastrous to those already born; young mothers with babies in arms, often themselves mere girls, who wish to space their children; unhappy wives, whose husbands are unfaithful, drunken, or violent; wives who have mentally deficient or crippled children, or whose husbands are tubercular or suffering from some hereditary disease. For example, we had one patient who had already four children who were all conceived during the periodic leave of the husband from an institution for mental defectives; he was shortly due home again for a further visit, and she wished to protect herself against yet another pregnancy. Increasing numbers of patients are sent to us from hospitals, sanatoria, mental institutions, and private practitioners; patients suffering from such diseases as tuberculosis, epilepsy, mental disease, diabetes, disease of the heart and kidneys, and some deformity of the pelvis contra-indicating child bearing. Recently a young wife came for help because she had already borne two microcephalic idiots."

The medical officers (Miss L. C. Butler, M.R.C.S. (Eng.), L.R.C.P. (Lond.), D.P.H., and Mrs. G. M. Cox, M.B., B.S.), state: "Injuries due to excessive child-bearing are common, and our medical histories reveal that attempts at abortion, sometimes successful, are extremely common, and in many cases cause serious injury to health. *We should like to draw attention to the probable influence of the widespread practice of attempting abortion on maternal mortality and morbidity.*

The beneficial effects of a successful method of birth control, as an alternative to regular attempted abortion, are obvious."

Again, they emphatically assert, "We have abundant evidence that the methods we advise are reasonably successful and cause neither physical injury nor sterility. Of ninety-seven patients who ceased to practise birth control because they wished for a child, ninety-six became pregnant and had their babies; 158 patients, who, on one occasion neglected to use the method advised, became pregnant. We give these figures to refute the criticism that the practice of birth control causes sterility."

The Report states: "Frequently patients write to say how much happier they are with their husbands once the fear of an unwanted pregnancy is removed. It is encouraging, too, to note how frequently patients will conceive deliberately, and the proud look of the mother's face when she brings the desired child to the clinic is a joy to see."

We think it will be agreed that the Report affords much food for thought, and that it should be studied with an open and unbiased mind. The names of the Advisory Medical Committee of the Society, Dr. Bright Banister, Dr. C. P. Blacker, Dr. Frank Cook, Dr. Gertrude Dearnley, and Dr. John S. Fairbairn, merit for it this consideration.

MATERNAL MORTALITY.

The verbatim report of an important meeting on Maternal Mortality, held on November 15th last at the Friends' Meeting House, Euston Road, N.W.1, under the auspices of the Committee which is in permanent session on this subject, is now published in pamphlet form, and can be obtained from the Hon. Secretary (Miss Gertrude M. Tuckwell, C.H., J.P.), 13, Chester Terrace, London, S.W.1, price 1s. including postage, or 7s. 6d. per dozen.

The Chairman of the Committee is Mrs. H. J. Tennant, C.H., J.P., and the Chairman of the meeting was its Hon. Treasurer, The Countess of Iveagh, C.B.E., M.P.

The meeting was of special importance owing to the fact that the second and final reports of the Departmental Committee on Maternal Mortality were available for consideration, and that the Minister of Health (The Right Hon. Sir Hilton Young, M.P.) was present, and in a long and lucid speech detailed the policy of the Ministry on the subject under discussion, which he summarised in the phrase: "We shall accept no defeat in this matter of the Maternal death-rate; we shall accept no defeat, we shall allow no retreat. . . . Whatever may be the financial necessity of a Nation, we can never neglect to maintain in full efficiency its essential health services."

The speech deserves to be read in its entirety and carefully studied.

Also present throughout the meeting were Sir George Newman, Dame Janet Campbell, and other representatives of the Ministry of Health, and a very large and expert audience.

The following Resolution was carried unanimously:—

"This Conference reaffirms its belief in a comprehensive National Maternity Service and welcomes the recommendations of the Departmental Committee's Final Report on Maternal Mortality, which support this Conference's persistent demand for the development of ante-natal and post-natal care, skilled midwifery and the services of skilled obstetricians.

"As no Local Authority is as yet using all its powers to safeguard mothers, and many only a very small percentage, and as in many cases reorganisation of the Maternity Services is needed to render them effective, this meeting pledges itself to unrelenting work till in each area these vital services are completely developed."

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