

The Midwife.

INQUIRY INTO RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING OF MIDWIVES.

The Minister of Health, Mr. Aneurin Bevan, and the Secretary of State for Scotland, Mr. Joseph Westwood, have set up a working party to inquire into the recruitment and training of midwives and any other matters which have a bearing on the present shortage of practising midwives. The chairman is Mrs. Mary Stocks, B.Sc., Principal of Westfield College, London, and the members are:—Miss J. P. Ferlie, M.B.E., R.G.N., S.C.M., Matron-in-Charge, Simpson Memorial Maternity Pavilion, Edinburgh Royal Infirmary; Miss V. R. Shand, S.R.N., S.C.M., Midwife Teachers' Certificate, Supervisor of Midwives, County of Lancashire; Mr. R. M. Titmuss (Cabinet Offices); and Dr. A. Winner (Ministry of Health).

The working party is being assisted by a steering committee, also under the chairmanship of Mrs. Stocks, consisting of:—Mrs. M. D. Baird, Convenor of Aberdeen Public Health Committees; Miss A. B. Horan, Trades Union Congress; Mrs. E. King, member of Winchester City Council; Dr. W. S. Macdonald, General Medical Practitioner, Leeds; Mr. Arnold Walker, F.R.C.S., Chairman of the Central Midwives Board; Mrs. E. A. Wills, Labour M.P., for Duddleston Division of Birmingham, and representatives of the Ministries of Health, Education, and Labour and National Service, and of the Scottish Departments of Health and Education.

All correspondence, including any suggestions from interested organisations, should be addressed to the Secretary of the Midwifery Inquiry, Ministry of Health, Whitehall, London, S.W.1.

BIRTH RATE CONTINUES TO RISE.

The Registrar-General for England and Wales announced recently that 221,891 live births were registered in the quarter ended December 31st, 1946, representing a birth-rate of 20.5 per 1,000 total population. This is the highest birth-rate recorded for any December quarter since 1921. For the same quarter of 1945 the number of births was 164,299, with a rate of 15.3.

The number of illegitimate births included in the total was 11,219 (or 5.1 per cent. of the births registered), compared with 13,766 (or 8.4 per cent.) in the same quarter of 1945.

The deaths registered in the quarter were 122,173 representing a death-rate of 11.3 per 1,000, compared with 11.4 for the same quarter of 1945.

The deaths of children under one were 9,139 giving a provisional infant mortality rate of 44 per 1,000 related live births: this is 7 per 1,000 below the average rate for the fourth quarters of the ten preceding years of 1936-45.

The "natural increase" of population (*i.e.*, the excess of births over deaths for the quarter) was 99,718.

191,256 persons were married during the quarter. This was 20,187 more than the average of the same quarters of the preceding five years 1941-46.

The birth-rate for the whole of 1946 was 19.1 per 1,000, the highest recorded since 1923.

The approximate reproduction rate for the year was 1.102 (*i.e.*, 10 per cent. in excess of that required to maintain the population). This is the first time the rate has reached replacement level since 1922, when the corresponding figure was 1.013.

Infant mortality (43 per 1,000) was the lowest ever recorded in this country, being 2 per 1,000 below that of 1944, the previous lowest.

THE FIRST ENGLISH MIDWIFE.

From the time of Moses, midwifery has been mainly in the hands of women, in every country in the world.

The first English midwife there is any record of was named Margaret Cobbe. She practised her profession under the Crown at a salary of £10 per annum. In 1470 she attended the Queen of Edward IV at the birth of his son and heir.

At that date it was considered to be highly improper that matters relating to midwifery should be put into any form of print lest men and boys should read them, and it was very difficult for anyone to improve her knowledge by study or through collaboration with medical colleagues. In the 16th and 17th centuries, different medical men attempted to organise midwives in order to obtain State instruction, and institute examinations. The licensing of midwives, at that date, was in the hands of the bishops who fought a battle with the male doctors to retain their power and their fees.

A strong prejudice existed against medical men attending confinements. In 1658 it is recorded that Dr. Willughby, son of Sir Percival Willughby of Wollaton, trained his own daughter as a skilled midwife, and took her into partnership with him in London. In a specially difficult case when she required her father's advice, it was necessary for him to enter the chamber unseen by the lady, this he did by creeping in on his hands and knees and making his exit in the same manner.

The invention of the midwifery forceps, and later, the discovery of chloroform, resulted in men securing a hold on midwifery. Princess Charlotte was the first royal lady to establish the precedent of having a man midwife, and Queen Victoria the first Queen to follow it.

ELEANOR PAGE.

THE ROAD BACK TO HEALTH.

The Ministry of Health has published a very fine little pamphlet on Medical Rehabilitation, which contains most interesting and vivid information, regarding the complete restoration to health of our Service and civilian casualties.

Not so very long ago, a person who was unfortunate enough to break his limbs or spine, was extremely lucky if he got away with a deformity, and in cases of a fractured spine, he was lucky to save his life. These crippling deformities severely handicapped a man who depended upon his sound constitution for his means of livelihood, and in addition much "manpower" was lost to the nation.

Today, happily, it is goodbye to all that! The most severe and crushing accidents can now, thanks to Medical Rehabilitation, have a happy ending, and even a patient suffering from a fractured spine, may look forward with hope to the day when he can walk and earn his living again.

The little booklet should be bought and studied by the man in the street, and he will find it well worth the modest 6d. he must expend on it. He will learn of the wonderful team work brought into existence during the war to enable a front-line casualty to be taken to a casualty clearing station, a base hospital, a boat, a train, or an air-ambulance, to a hospital in England, and at the same time, receive expert attention throughout the whole journey.

Then after his bodily cure he is helped by another team of experts to resettle in industry, business or perhaps a profession. All most absorbing and interesting. The booklet may be obtained from His Majesty's Stationery Offices throughout the country.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)