

Why Cannot Babies Digest Mother's Milk ?

(BY ADA E. CHAPPELL.)

In my work as the Plunket Nurse at Auckland, it has distressed me to see how many babies do not seem to thrive on their mothers' milk.

In a number of cases the nurses and mother have battled bravely through the difficulties of undeveloped, inverted, or sore nipples. In other cases there is sufficient milk for the baby, but it does not agree. The motions are curdy, and then followed by green, and very frequent. The baby is fretful, unsatisfied, and sleeps little night or day, and always seems ravenously hungry no matter how much or how often it is fed. The babies are just unhappy, suffering little atoms of humanity, and as unlike the babies our grandmothers used to tell us about (who used to sleep most of their time) as it is possible to be. As there is a cause for every effect, I have tried to discover the cause. I tried to think what I would do if these babies were on humanised milk. For indigestion, then, I would reduce the strength. One might even peptonise the humanised milk if the stomach was too weak to digest milk of a required strength unpeptonised. We cannot, however, do this with mother's milk.

It is usually supposed when a baby cannot digest mother's milk that there is too much proteid in the milk. To overcome this difficulty (unless able to regulate the mother's exercise, etc.), we could give the baby boiled water previous to a feed from the mother. This would dilute the milk in the baby's stomach by mixing with the water; but there are disadvantages even with this. Supposing the baby is new born and you give a bottle with water in prior to giving it a drink from the breast, baby will not readily take the breast milk, especially if the nipple is small. If you spoonfeed with the water the baby becomes so impatient that by the time you get it to the breast it will scream instead of sucking.

Then I thought: "Is there no way? Eventually I decided to reduce the length of time a baby feeds from the mother. I was called to one baby a few weeks old, looking old and careworn, in a home where every need could be supplied. The nurse said the milk did not agree, and the motions were curdy and green. They had sent for me to

show them how to make humanised milk for the baby. I inquired why the mother was not nursing the baby entirely. I was told she had not sufficient milk. I found upon inquiry that the baby was allowed to drink until she stopped of her own accord. I asked for the drinks to be limited to fifteen minutes, and the breast last nursed from to be massaged gently (not the full one, as that would waste the milk). I then gave baby three feeds per day of graded humanised milk. I got the mother to take milk-forming food. The milk supply improved, and as the baby was unable to digest a feed of fifteen minutes, I reduced that to ten minutes. Then the mother found she had sufficient milk to nurse the baby entirely. The mother still made the humanised in case her milk should fail, and drank it herself to transform to human the humanised milk. In the meantime the baby's motions had become nearly normal—it was sleeping better and gaining in flesh. "Now," I thought, "I can advance," and I gave permission for the feed to be extended to twelve and a half minutes. This brought a return of indigestion, shown by the curdy motion, followed by the green, colicky pains, sleeplessness and crying. We reduced the time to ten minutes again, and the indigestion disappeared. We let the baby remain at that for some days; then thought we might again increase, but more carefully, so only increased one minute. Again a return of indigestion, but not so bad as before, as shown by the smallness of the curd, which was not followed by green colour this time. Back we had to go to ten minutes, and once more there was a contented baby, sleeping a normal amount. I know this is only one case; but in every case where I have tried it, the effect has been the same.

Another case: A lady came to my office to see me. She wanted me to supply her with humanised milk as she had not enough, and the baby was always crying. "It used to be such a good baby," she said. I found the motions were curdy and green. The mother said, "I feel the draught of milk come and when it stops the baby cries and I have to put it to the other breast." I found it was two hours since the baby was fed, so I got her to feed the baby then. "I can feel