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George Walker

"THE FURNITURE MAN"

38 QUEEN STREET ☞ AUCKLAND

THE MIDDLE-CLASS BABY'S HANDICAP

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rule till there is something wrong. Now the aim of pediatrics is to keep the healthy baby healthy, not to treat the diseased baby. Take such an apparently simple thing as sickness. In an infant usually it is amenable to treatment, if seen early and treated seriously directly it occurs. But let it go on and it becomes most intractable.

It should be a *sine qua non* that the "nation's babies" should have the same right, whether rich or poor, to benefit by the Centres. In many Centres this is the case, but there are still others where the better-class mother is looked at askance. One journalist whom I know personally told me the doctor at the Centre said she could afford to go to a private practitioner. If every mother were to do so with healthy babies, he would have little time for anything else! And it's the healthy babies we want—to keep them so.

Though there is no doubt that infant welfare is still in its infancy, and that there is much to learn, at any rate it begins at the root, which is a step in the right direction. We found many of our conscripts were C3 men, and traced their ill-health back to childhood; then it was found that children were already defective when entering schools. Hence began a big campaign to start with the babies, which had already been initiated by people of vision, mostly lay women who were baby lovers and appalled by the unnecessary deaths and suffering. It was given a great impetus by the War; Lord Long

said it was the best war-work women could do. Men saw that if we were to survive as a nation, we must have healthy babies, but the mistake was that only the poorer babies were catered for.

At the moment it is only the middle-class mother with a fair amount of "nerve" who brings her baby regularly to the Centre. There is an impression that they are only for the poor. This impression is not confined to the mothers themselves, but many doctors will say the same, and resent it if their patients attend. Even our own staff are known to say, "I should think they could afford to go to their own doctor," which shows how little they appreciate the spirit of the work, and makes me think with gratitude of the Centre that came to our rescue.

Just as surely as Mother Shipton's prophecy that men would fly like birds has come true, so will preventive medicine in time wipe out most of the diseases of the earth. But if the middle-class is to survive it is up to us to see that there are Infant Welfare Centres in middle-class districts—it is up to the middle-class mother to see that she takes advantage of them. It is a disgrace that middle-class infants' death rate should be *no lower* than that of the slum babies attending a Centre. Antenatal work should also be a *sine qua non*—for the safety of mothers and babies.

"The race marches forward on the feet of little children."

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