

How to Bring Up Baby.

(By **HYGEIA**)

Published under the auspices of the Society for the Health of Women and Children.

"It is wiser to put up a fence at the top of a precipice than to maintain an ambulance at the bottom."

Infantile Mortality.

THE following communication by Dr. Truby King, the general president of the Society, will be of interest to our readers:

Influence of the Press.

In connection with the leading article in the "Otago Daily Times" of the 4th June, in which the paper deals appreciatively and sympathetically with the work which has been effected by the Society for the Health of Women and Children during the last five years, there is one great influence which is not mentioned, but of which the society has had the benefit throughout—namely, the influence of the Press.

The weekly devotion of a column to "Our Babies"—a column which we know how hard it is to spare—has had the effect of interesting the community as a whole and of forcing upon the public the knowledge of the fact that something was gravely amiss in regard to modern motherhood and babyhood, and that more attention ought to be paid to the simple, beneficent, easily understandable, easily followed laws of Nature. Besides these weekly articles, the society has been indebted to the Press for full monthly reports of meetings and encouraging editorials from time to time. Indeed, from any point of view, the goodwill and backing of the Press has been of inestimable service in our mission, and I do not think there need be the slightest misgiving as to the validity of the influence I drew at the annual meeting regarding the benefits that have accrued so far from the work in which we have been jointly engaged.

Other Agencies.

In saying this I do not for a moment lose sight of other agencies which have been working in the same direction, particularly the Health Department, the Maternity Hospital, and the progressive sanitation of cities. A point, however, which has been noted universally in connection with modern municipal improvements in drainage, sewage disposal, etc., and the growing recognition on the part of the public as to the need for cleanliness, fresh air, and exercise, is the consideration that, while these factors led to a steady decline in the adult death rate, they left the infantile death rate practically unaffected—sometimes, indeed, increasing. To state the matter more correctly, the decline in infantile mortality which might have been expected to ensue on improved general sanitation and general enlightenment was counteracted, and sometimes more than counteracted, by the tendency to an increasing mortality among children arising out of the complex factors involved in our latter-day civilisation—a civilisation which was tending to reduce the average physique of women and to render the mothers, year by year, less able, and often less willing, to nurse their offspring than formerly.

In this connection nothing more significant could be cited than the following passage, which I quote from the latest edition (1911) of Professor Holt's great Textbook on Children:—

In spite of all efforts to the contrary, it is nevertheless a fact that the capacity for maternal nursing is steadily diminishing in this country, chiefly in the cities, but to a considerable degree in the rural districts as well. Among the well-to-do classes in New York and its suburbs, of those who have earnestly and intelligently attempted to nurse, less than 25 per cent, in my experience, have been able to continue satisfactorily for as long as six months.

Ignorance, the Great Destroyer.

When summing up leading features of the infantile death rate for Dunedin and suburbs during the 12 years of the present century, at the close of Dr. Champa-loup's lecture, I was interrupted by the excitement and alarm occasioned by the great fire just opposite at Messrs. Nimmo and Blair's. This has caused some slight

confusion as to the import of the figures I quoted, and possibly some doubt as to the relevancy and bearing of a prediction which I cited as having been made some seven years ago as to what might be expected to follow on a more general recognition and understanding of the needs of mother and child.

In a pamphlet I wrote seven years ago on the "Feeding of Plants and Animals," occurs the following passage:—

"Civilisation is tending everywhere to undermine humanity, and we have no reason to be proud of the fact, that apart from dairy calves (which we treat rather worse than our own offspring) there is no young creature in the world so ignorantly and cruelly nurtured as the average infant.

In this colony alone a generally diffused knowledge and recognition of infant requirements and maternal duties would save to the community at least one life per diem, and would correspondingly increase the strength and vitality of the rest of the rising generation. Statistics reveal the appalling fact that with artificial rearing infant mortality may be as high as from five to 30 times the death-rate of children nourished by their mothers. Yet careless bottle-feeding is still resorted to by the majority of women."

Some three and a-half years later, at the inauguration of the Timaru Society, we printed a manifesto headed "Our Best Immigrants" from which I should like to make a few extracts:—

"In the next 11 years about 250,000 (a quarter of a million) children will be born in New Zealand.

"Almost every new born babe is capable of living and doing well, if properly treated, yet nearly two thousand die every year. It is safe to say that this death rate can be reduced to less than half by simple practical instruction of the mothers in their homes by means of competent specially trained nurses."

When this was published it was somewhat generally regarded as an expression of rather unwarranted optimism. The figures were, however, not really shot at a venture, but were based on a careful analysis of the assigned causes of deaths appearing in the official registers, taken in conjunction with the data and experiences accumulating in connection with the work which was then being carried out in our main centres of population by the Plunket Nurses.

A Falling Death Rate.

Since then, from time to time, references have appeared in the Press, drawing attention to the distinct fall which was taking place in the infantile death rate, notably two years ago by Dr. Finch (the Chief Health Officer for Christchurch), and last year by Professor

Benham in Dunedin—both doctors speaking at the local annual meetings of our society, and both connecting the reduction with the work that the society was carrying out. While quite aware of these figures I was personally disinclined to quote them, simply because it appeared to me wiser to wait for at least five years from the birth of the society, before attempting to make use of inferences based on statistics. Indeed, when spoken to on this subject and urgently pressed to draw attention to the significance of what was apparently taking place, I always declined to do so, feeling that the stability of the statistics could be depended on only if a reasonably long time—say five to 10 years—were allowed to elapse. On my taking out the statistics for Dunedin and suburbs, however, just before the recent annual meeting, the figures appeared so convincing that there seemed to be no longer any reason for hesitating to draw attention to them. At the same time it must be clearly understood that a fluctuation of 1 or 2 per cent on particular years may still take place in our local infantile mortality rate, but I feel quite confident that during the next five years the average infantile death rate for Dunedin and suburbs will not exceed 4 per cent, and there appears to me to be good grounds for expecting a still further reduction during that time. One ground for saying this is the fact that out of the 72 infants who died in Dunedin and suburbs in the last 12 months no fewer than three were killed through their mothers' lying on them. It is safe to say that not more than 1 per cent. of babies who sleep with their parents are completely suffocated, so we may fairly assume that in Dunedin and suburbs at least 300 children every year still suffer all the disadvantages and privations inseparable from the pernicious custom in question. Every single one of these babies is more or less devalitized, and these 300 unfortunate undoubtedly contribute an unduly high percentage of deaths directly attributed in the annual statistics to other causes, such as infantile diarrhoea, etc.

I may now quote from the report of my remarks at the close of Dr. Champa-loup's lecture:—

The Society for the Health of Women and Children was founded just five years ago. Taking the seven years from 1900 to 1907, the average death rate among children under five years was 8 per cent. For the last five years, 6 1/2 per cent.; for the last three years, 6 per cent.; for the last two years, 5 per cent.; for the last year, 4 per cent. These are the figures for Dunedin and suburbs. If the infantile death rate for the whole Dominion were similarly reduced from 8 per cent. to 4 per cent., it would mean a saving of nearly 900 lives every year. But that is not all. One must remember that a reduction in the infantile death rate involves a reduction in the death rate among older children also—indeed, looking ahead, a lower death rate throughout the whole community. However, the society is less concerned in reducing the death rate than in increasing the health of the community.

The Timaru Manifesto.

As I believe there are very few people who properly realize the material and moral aspects involved in the question under consideration, I venture to quote

again from what we circulated at Timaru three years and a-half ago:—

Assets v. Liabilities.

Every healthy young adult is worth £300 to the country. Every unhealthy wastrel and dependent who has to be kept by the public is a grave liability instead of an asset. There are, for instance, at the present moment many insane persons and other unfortunates who have cost the Dominion from £500 to £1000 each for maintenance, sometimes extending over an unbroken period of half a century. Hospitals, alone, are costing us over £200,000 a year (at the present moment I should say, inclusive of private hospitals, nearer half a million). We want to prevent our normal assets from continuing to be converted, through ignorance and neglect into grave liabilities. The sickness and debility of babies is due to mere ignorance; rarely to intentional cruelty or neglect.

Ill-health Life's Main Handicap.

The main cause of suburgence and failure in the battle of life is ill-health. Our expenditure on hospitals and charitable aid will keep on growing as long as we continue rearing and educating the race in ignorance and, indeed, in defiance of the primary laws of Nature.

We Get What We Deserve.

Every country has just as many unfortunates, invalids, and criminals as it deserves—no more! Ill health means unemployableness, unemployableness means morbid thought and feeling, and morbid thought and feeling mean loafing, vice, and crime.

Our Best Immigrants Are the Babies.

Postscript.—The infantile death rates for the Old World are: Norway, 9; England, 14; France, 17; Austria, 24; Russia, 28.

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