

# Making Motherhood Efficient

Better Babies Movement Lessens Dangers of Most Hazardous Occupation

By Mary P. McCallum

The slogan of the greatest movement of modern times is "Better Babies" and that slogan is veritably waking the world to a realization of the rights of the baby to be born of an intelligent, educated motherhood. The movement in the United States has had an unprecedented career of success and progress. The war has had the effect on England of arousing her to the need of having every child born well and properly cared for. But what is known as the better babies movement, a concerted definite campaign to have better babies born and the babies already born better cared for is somewhat new in Western Canada.

For many years we people of the prairies were too scattered, too few and too pioneer to render the compiling of vital statistics feasible or even necessary. If any attempt was made to do so all details were avoided, and until birth rates and death rates and the causes of mortality rates are set down in figures of black and white even the most learned have no positive knowledge upon which to work. But when the vital statistics branch in our public health departments studiously and carefully set about telling us how many babies were born each year, and how many died each year, the months in which the majority of the infant deaths took place, and the causes of death we began to take cognizance that all was not as it should be. Alberta discovered when the statistics were compiled for the year ending 1915 that for every 100 births there were 8.79 deaths of infants under one year of age, or almost one baby out of every eleven born. Nearly 34 per cent. of all deaths in Alberta were of babies under one year of age. Saskatchewan found that of every 1,000 births 99.27 died before they were five years of age and of every thousand deaths during the year 234.55 were under five years of age. In commenting on the infant mortality rate in his report Dr. M. M. Seymour says, "Why should the rate for the first four years of life be so high? Earnest study is being devoted to the conservation of our forests, mineral deposits, etc. Surely the conserving of lives that might develop into good Canadian citizens is a subject of still more vital importance to the province and the Dominion. We shall not be true to our trust as a people if we continue to allow this sacrifice of Canadian born citizens."

## Better Baby Contests

Better baby conferences have long since passed the experimental stage. A better baby conference as it is now conducted is a campaign with a twofold purpose: (1) to give the mothers and fathers of a community the opportunity of learning the most important facts with regard to the care of the baby; (2) to bring home to the community a knowledge of the facts regarding the needless deaths of its babies and a realization of the ways in which it must protect them. There may be other ways of accomplishing those two objectives, but a better baby conference has the advantage over the other methods of being clever, attractive, popular, concentrated, brief and effective. It really has the effects of a clever advertisement in arresting and concentrating attention, and in directing public thought along the lines indicated by the contest. And like the clever advertisement it is getting results. It is paying in gilt-edge dividends.

Motherhood is the most responsible and the most precious of the professions. The most ignorant recognizes that it is so. Yet in spite of that fact motherhood is the only life work for which we have not considered the knowledge of education necessary. Needless to say if our girls had been taught the preparation for and the care of a baby the infant mortality rate would be lower. The root of much of the evil is ignorance. It seems almost barbarous to let a girl undertake the business of home-making when she knows absolutely nothing concerning the responsibilities facing her. The wonder of the matter is that so many babies survive the experimenting of their ignorant mothers.

## Widespread Movement in United States

Better baby contests as a part of child welfare work were, like most progressive endeavors, instigated and encouraged by private enterprise. When it was demonstrated to the satisfaction of governments that better baby campaigns were the educating factor they claimed to be, and really achieved the results claimed for them, it was gradually added as a part of the work of the health



A CHILDREN'S HEALTH CONFERENCE

Fully qualified doctors and nurses carry on the baby's examination and the prizes are awarded on a strictly scientific basis. The proud mother sitting by.

bureaus of the various states and of the federal government of the United States. In 1916 all states in the Union except one assisted in the national baby-week campaign. The movement is spreading to Canada. So far as I have been able to learn the health department of the province of Saskatchewan, at whose head is Dr. M. M. Seymour, is the only one to inaugurate a better baby campaign. This was held last July in Regina in connection with the annual provincial exhibition. About four hundred babies were entered and examined at this conference. Of the conference Dr. Seymour says, "The exhibit was well patronized, and as a result much benefit will accrue to the health of many of the children." Dr. Frazer of the Manitoba Health Department said the other day that next spring would probably see that province launch a province-wide campaign for better babies.

But although the governments have not to any extent taken this matter up it is easily within the

means and capability of the women of any community to undertake such a conference. Such a conference usually has two distinct functions, first the conference proper and in connection with it the better baby contest. Although many persons are opposed to a prize award for the most perfect baby it is a splendid incentive to interest mothers who might not otherwise give the conference a second thought. At any rate prize awards for the first conference will advertise the idea better than will anything else. Once its value is established it needs little special advertising. The preparation of the campaign is a wonderful education for those who are undertaking to conduct such a campaign. The actual campaign reaches the people and if well conducted paves the way for the real value of such an undertaking, the follow up work. Little of lasting value for the community will have been achieved if the campaign stops the last day of the conference. But follow-up work will be dealt with later. Aside from the question of awards the work of the conference is not so much concerned with the perfect baby but with the imperfect; not with the sick baby so much as with preventing the baby from being sick. It is unnatural for the baby to be sick. The primary efforts should be directed to keeping the child in a normal condition, taking first steps where necessary to restore such condition, by the correction of defects and the application of hygienic measures to assist in the recovery of health and to prevent the further development of possible imperfections.

Great care should be exercised in scoring the child, as such a conference is in no way connected with a mere "baby show" where the prettiest baby is the prize winner. The Woman's Home Companion publishes a score card that is very generally used, and has the commendation of most doctors who use it. It was the score card used at the recent better baby conference held at Stonewall by the Women Grain Growers. The card used in the Saskatchewan Baby Welfare exhibit is known as the Standard score card issued by the American Medical Association. Both cards take the height, not weight nor are as the basis is computing; that is, if the child's weight, circumference of head, chest, abdomen, length of arms and legs, are in correct proportion to his height, according to the tables of standards, he was not penalized for any of these measurements. Certain variations above and below the standard weight and measurements are allowed. Throughout, the perfect proportion of the child is the important consideration.

## The Educational Value

Dr. Richard M. Winans in an article on Expert Motherhood gives this dialogue from a health conference which will point out the value of the examinations to the mother of the child and incidentally to the other mothers who are listening.

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THE NEW MOVEMENT—ON STRIKE FOR BABIES' RIGHTS