

REPORT ON THE BABY-FARMING SYSTEM AND ITS EVILS.

[SPECIAL REPORT TO THE BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL.]

V.—THE INFANT LIFE PROTECTION ACT IN THE PROVINCES. In a previous article a full description was given of the working of the Infant Life Protection Act in London under the Public Control Department of the County Council. It is proposed now to deal with the administration of the Act in the provinces. We are indebted to the chief constables of the large towns in England for information on the following points: (1) The number of licensed houses under the Act in the district; (2) the system of inspection carried out; (3) the known cases of evasion of the Act; (4) the defects in the Act as proved by local experience of it. In all, twenty-nine chief constables supplied the information asked for either partially or in full, and we are glad to take this opportunity of acknowledging our indebtedness to them.

While prosecuting inquiries for the purposes of this report upon the baby-farming system, the assertion was made to us that the Infant Life Protection Act was practically inoperative out of London; that baby farms existed, independently of the Act, to the number of 600 in the English provinces; and that the Act in its present form was powerless to prevent the evils the suppression of which it has been designed to achieve. The extent to which the truth of these statements is borne out by the inquiry just held will be gathered from what follows.

PAUCITY OF REGISTERED HOUSES.

Among the twenty-nine towns—and this is inclusive of one Scotch centre, namely, Edinburgh—the evidence shows that only 2 houses are registered under the Act; that is to say, that out of London the Act is operative in respect to the registration of baby-farms in only two instances—there is one registered house in Manchester and one in Bath.

Surprise was expressed in a previous article that there should be only 38 houses registered in London. But it will be admitted that this revelation in respect to the absence of registered houses in the provinces is still more surprising. It seems difficult to realise that in the towns in question the Act is not enforced on the grounds that no necessity for its administration exists.

ILLEGITIMATE BIRTHS.

In reflecting upon this matter, let attention be directed to the number of illegitimate births in these large centres of population. Excluding Manchester and Bath, the number of illegitimate children born in the year 1894 in twenty-seven of the large towns in England was approximately 5,000. To this large total the Infant Life Protection Act has been shown not to apply; practically, therefore, although the Act was mainly expected to benefit the outcast offspring of illicit intercourse, this inquiry emphatically demonstrates that, so far as these children are concerned, the Act might never have been passed. In the year 1894 the total number of children registered as born out of wedlock in the metropolis was 4,934. The returns for the same period of the number of infants under 1 year is 121 in registered and 275 in unregistered houses.

For argument's sake, let it be assumed that each child of this number was illegitimate; the conclusion then is that the circumstances of only 396 out of 4,934 illegitimate children in the year 1894 became known to the inspectors under the Infant Life Protection Acts, or not more than 8½ per cent. The evidence of the inspectors, however, is to the effect that many houses—baby farms—exist in London of which they have no direct knowledge. The Act, perhaps, may be complied with, so far as the baby-farmer refrains from taking more than one infant under 1 year; but, on the other hand, it is practically certain that by means of the faulty clause relating to the age of the children, and the concession as to one child, in the present Act, many women are enabled to carry on the business of baby farming without the knowledge of the authorities, and without fear of molestation. In view of these facts concerning London, it seems only reasonable to conclude that a similar state of things may prevail elsewhere. Must it be held that large towns such as Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, Bradford, and other centres, in which no licensed houses under the Act exist, differ from

London in respect to the care and culture of their population of illegitimate children? In this connection, perhaps, valuable information might be obtainable were an inquiry to be made respecting the mortality among the illegitimate children under 5 years of age, say, for the last decade in all the large towns in England in which no registered houses exist.

ABSENCE OF SYSTEMATIC INSPECTION.

The next point to which attention may be directed has reference to the second query addressed to the chief constables—namely, the system of inspection carried out. The majority of the replies made no mention of this matter. In one the answer was, "In strict conformity with the Acts of Parliament;" in others the word "*Nil*," supplied the information asked for, and in two instances it was pointed out that the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children had an inspector stationed in the town to whom the police looked to receive a report in any case of contravention of the Act. Thus it would appear that no systematic inspection is resorted to by the police—that is to say, that no officials, as in London, are especially made responsible for the inquiries respecting the administration of the Infant Life Protection Act in the districts. So far as the two registered houses are concerned, no information was given with regard to the inspection carried out in one, while in the other it was stated that the house was visited by an inspector of police.

EVASION OF THE ACT.

The replies received to the third query addressed to the chief constables—namely, that referring to the cases of evasion of the Act—was also in the main negative. In all direct answers were received from eleven, and all save two were to the effect that no instance of evasion of the Act had come under notice. In the two cases mentioned it was stated that the persons concerned discontinued their offence as soon as the matter was pointed out to them.

DEFECTS IN THE ACT.

The last point to be dealt with in this connection concerns the opinion of the chief constables upon the question of the defects in the Act, as proved by their experience of it. In nineteen of the replies no mention was made to the subject. In three the answer was "*nil*," in one the opinion expressed was "as proved by my experience of it the Act is satisfactory"; in another, "I have experienced no defects in the Act"; in another, "The provisions of the Act (35 and 36 Vic., c. 38) meet the requirements of my jurisdiction"; in a fourth, "I cannot give any practical opinion on the working of the Act." In a fifth the answer was, "The police keep a strict look-out on all places of entertainment, etc., where the Act is likely to be infringed, and I know of no case where the law has been evaded in this borough since the Act came in force, and I have, therefore, not experienced any defects in this Act."

USELESSNESS OF THE ACT.

In reflecting generally upon the replies to the series of questions above submitted, the conclusion is unavoidable that the Infant Life Protection Act in its present form is, in the provinces, clearly useless for the purpose of effecting its objects. In Leeds, for example, the population was 222,154 in 1891; and in 1894 the births there of 435 illegitimate children were registered. But the report of the chief constable is to the effect that in this large community no baby-farming is practised. He further states that some years ago the matter of the Infant Life Protection Act was taken in hand, but it was found that there was little or nothing to supervise or register, and thus the inquiry was comparatively dropped. The testimony also of the medical officer of health is to the effect "that it would appear that there is really nothing in Leeds to register." But with Leeds, as with other towns throughout England, inclusive of the metropolis, the question cannot be ignored—what becomes of the large number of illegitimate children if they are not provided for in baby-farms? This is really so important a matter that one would suggest to the chief constables of all the large towns in England that they should depute an officer or officers specially to inquire into the existence of the houses in their districts in which children are taken for

hire. Many such houses must exist, in the provinces unknown to the police. The proprietors of them in all probability are careful to keep within the letter of the law, but the fact nevertheless appears to be indisputable that the police in the provinces have but little knowledge of the Infant Life Protection Act, inasmuch as it fails to accomplish its objects. It might be well that the Legislature should call for a return from all the large towns in the kingdom, showing as nearly as possible the number of unregistered houses to which the present Act does not apply. If full details were forthcoming in this particular, including the number of the children received, their ages and the rate of mortality, the data would undeniably be of use in showing how far the need for some change in the Act was urgent as would appear to be the case.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE ACT IN EDINBURGH.

A few words may now be added respecting the administration of the Infant Life Protection Act in Edinburgh. According to the chief constable's report, there are no licensed houses under the Act in the city. Persistent and regular steps are taken by the police to ascertain whether the Act is evaded; but we are informed that these steps are not of such a kind as to make it desirable that they should be published. Again the chief constable states that no cases of evasion are known to him, but there are numerous cases in which several children have been adopted by the same person, although no cases are known in which the adoption of a child under 12 months of age has taken place until the others have passed that age. Thus it may be gathered from these replies that a good deal of care is exercised in administering the Act in Edinburgh so far as its limited provisions will allow. The further opinion is added: "It seems to me that the Act should be amended so as to embrace all persons who 'adopt' more than one child, irrespective of the age of the children." It is curious to note that of all the replies received from the chief constables, this was the only one which contained any criticism upon the working of the Act.

REPORT ON THE APPLICATION OF THE NEW PHOTOGRAPHY TO MEDICINE AND SURGERY.

[REPORT TO THE BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL.]

By SYDNEY ROWLAND, B.A.,

Late Shuter Scholar of St. Bartholomew's Hospital.

VII.

It seems as if for the present the new process had reached another stationary stage. The introduction of the focus tube caused an immense advance—from the hand to the limbs and joints—and now we must await the next stage—the skiagraphy of the trunk. Such an advance, to be of practical use, can be made in two directions—either by increasing the power of the tube or by rendering the plates more sensitive. Although with the methods at present in use it is just possible to get through the entire body, yet such a result is too uncertain and takes too long a time at present to be of much practical use in diagnosis.

CONVERSION OF LIGHT WAVES INTO x WAVES.

The most interesting record of the week is the fact that it has been found possible to convert light rays into x rays.

M. Troost has stated to the Paris Académie des Sciences that the *blende hexagonale artificielle*, or hexagonal zinc sulphur, can replace Crookes's tubes used by Roentgen. The artificial "blende" that M. Troost and M. Henri Sainte-Claire Deville obtained in 1861, having the form of hexagonal prisms, is transparent, either colourless or faintly yellow, and is capable of becoming phosphorescent under the influence of the sun. These crystals, placed in a cardboard box, M. Troost has substituted for Crookes's tube with success. A number of photographs were submitted to the examination of the members of the Académie des Sciences. This method is more easily applied in clinical observations. It is inexpensive, and when the apparatus is fixed on the region to be photographed, covered with a sheet of black paper, the patient can move about. M. Lannelongue has obtained from Professor

Troost further details of the manner of preparing the crystals as described at length at the time, T. II, p. 983, of the *Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Sciences*.

THE NEW TUBE.

Fig. 1 shows a section of the "focus" tube. The cathode plate *k*, is a concave disc of aluminium, which focuses the

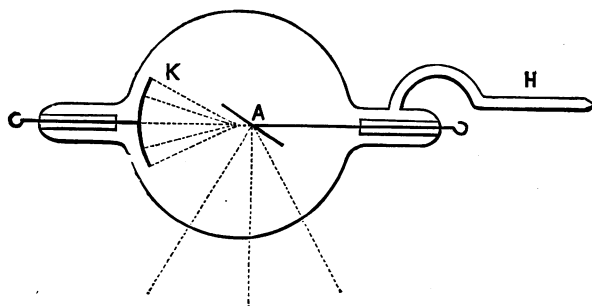


Fig. 1.

kathode rays at a point near the centre of the bulb. The anode plate, *A*, is a small piece of platinum foil placed at an angle a short distance beyond the focus of the cathode rays. Curiously enough, the cathode rays do not cross like rays of light at the focal point, but behave rather like a number of fluid jets coalescing at the focal point, and proceeding thence onwards as a solid parallel jet. The point where the rays impinge on the platinum still retains its small dimensions, though the plate is placed some distance beyond the focal point.

Platinum is known to be one of the most opaque substances for the cathode rays, and thus very little of the radiation passes through the platinum foil. The greatest part of the radiation is absorbed by the platinum, and given out as x rays from the luminous point by a kind of diffuse reflection. The anode plate, *A*, being set at an angle, the best part of the radiation is directed downwards through the sides of the bulb, where it can be conveniently utilised to produce the photograph in the usual way. The tube, *H*, through which the bulb is exhausted, is shaped so as to permit the tube to be fixed in a stand at the required height. The anode and cathode plates are connected to the terminals of the induction coil by platinum wire fused through the glass.

PROGRESS IN ENGLAND.

Accounts continue to come in of the successful application of the method by practitioners in this country. They are too numerous to mention in full, but show the extent to which the adoption of the process has already gone, and the advantages to be gained from its use.

THE CRYPTOSCOPE.

So much difficulty has been experienced in making the fluorescent screens for this instrument that as yet it is not capable of practical use. There is great difficulty, too, in maintaining them in working order, and when once prepared they do not last. Until these difficulties are overcome the instrument cannot be of any practical use. It is confidently hoped, however, that before long this most useful of the applications of Professor Roentgen's discovery will be in a condition fit for practical use.

SKIAGRAPHY IN DETERMINING THE POSITION OF FOREIGN BODIES IN THE LARYNX.

The laryngologist is not infrequently called upon to give an opinion as to the presence or absence in the pharynx or larynx of a foreign body which has undoubtedly passed beyond the fauces. His examination is usually rendered difficult on account of the nervous state of the patient, abnormal sensibility of the parts, and excessive secretion of mucus, while his knowledge of the fact that a scratch or abrasion may give rise to misleading subjective impressions often renders a decided opinion impossible. At a later stage, when acute symptoms have subsided, a foreign body embedded in the soft tissues