

CONTRIBUTED ARTICLES.

INFANT WELFARE WORK IN BOMBAY.

BY MISS GOLDING.

The Bombay Presidency Infant Welfare Society has nine centres in Bombay, most of them situated in the mill areas. The centres are :—

- (1) Dhobi Talao.
- (2) Tardeo.
- (3) Imamwada.
- (4) Kamatipura.
- (5) Clerk Road.
- (6) Kalachowkie.
- (7) Delisle Road.
- (8) Worli.
- (9) Sir Shapurji Broacha (Dadar).

The nursing staff consists of a Lady Superintendent and 20 Indian nurses. The Lady Superintendent supervises the work of all the centres, visits confinement cases and centre babies in their houses, attends clinics in order to get in touch with the mothers and advise them, and keeps the accounts of the Society.

There are two nurses at each centre. A Health Visitor who goes from house to house making friends with the women, giving them advice about their babies and trying to persuade them to bring their infants to our centres. She also visits expectant mothers, gives them advice, tries to persuade them to go to hospitals for their confinements and failing that asks them to have a trained nurse or attend them in their own houses. In some centres the people are friendly and appreciate our work but in other localities they are anything but friendly—shut the door in our faces, refuse to speak to us and hide their babies. In some instances the nurses have been visiting for two years in the same chawls but without result. The Supervisor works at the centre in the morning, distributes milk and medicines and does small dressings, etc. She teaches the mothers how to wash the babies' eyes and to prepare arrowroot for them. She keeps the milk account and attendance register for milk and medicine and does the compounding. In the afternoon she visits with the Health Visitor and calls on centre babies who are not attending regularly to find the reason of their absence.

In addition to the house-to-house visiting and work at the centres the nurses attend confinement cases in their houses at any hour of the day or night. Some centres do from 15—28 cases in the month.

One nurse is compelled to live at each centre to be on call for maternity cases. She is given her room rent free to compensate her for the extra work she does.

Most of the nurses do their work—even in their off time—cheerfully and are glad when large numbers attend their centres. The centres are open daily, Sundays included, from 7 to 11 a.m. and from 3 to 6 p.m. on clinic days. On other afternoons the nurses visit in the district from 3 to 6 p.m.

Most of our mothers are working women, either mill-hands, coolies, vegetable sellers or bidi makers. They are at work from early morning till about 6 p.m., when they go home to cook the evening meal. They have very little time to spend at our centres. They bring or send their babies regularly to the centres in the morning for milk and medicines but cannot stay to bathe them or to learn sewing.

Three lady doctors are employed by the Society—each is in charge of three centres and attends each of her centres twice a week. The babies are examined by the doctors and weighed in their presence. If the child needs milk or medicine the doctor orders what is necessary and enters the prescription on the child's card. The doctors give each mother advice about her baby. Each centre is allowed Rs. 300 for milk and Rs. 30 for medicine in the month.

The Society pays five annas a seer for the milk and sells it at two annas a seer to mothers who can afford to pay that sum, one anna a seer to the poorer ones and gives it free to the very poor. All medicine is given free.

The centre at Tardeo has a crèche attached, about 45 babies attend. They are brought to the crèche at about 7 a.m., bathed and put into clean clothes on arrival and given a drink of milk and some bread and butter. They then play with their toys in the verandah till 11-30 a.m., when they have their mid-day meal. In the afternoon all the children are made to rest for a couple of hours. They then have their hands and faces washed and their kurtas changed if necessary and are given milk and biscuits. At 5-30 p.m. they put on their house clothes and are ready waiting for their mothers who come for them at 6 p.m.

The work is gradually increasing and in most districts the nurses are gaining the confidence of the people among whom they work. We hope in time to teach them that our work is to prevent rather than to cure disease, and that our aim is to get hold of the healthy babies and teach the mothers how to keep them healthy. There are so many centuries of old customs and superstitions to work against, such as the opium habit, the branding of infant's abdomen, the deep-rooted idea that fresh air and water are harmful to the baby, that the cord must be left flopping about and well oiled. One woman stated that the application of a binder to keep the cord dressing in place would force the baby's intestines out and at the same time push the milk it drank out of its stomach.

The daily attendance for milk at one centre was over 700 last month (October), between 500—600 babies attended daily for medicine and treatment, 358 new babies were admitted, the attendance at clinics was over 3,000. The nurses visited 123 expectant mothers in October. From January 1925 up to date the Society nurses have conducted over 600 confinement cases in the houses of the poor.