

## THE NEW INFANT LIFE PROTECTION ACT.

### THE HISTORY OF THE OLD ACT.

WITH the end of 1897 the Infant Life Protection Act of 1872 came to an end, and it has been superseded by an Act under the same name, which was passed in August last. This detail is one of peculiar interest to us, inasmuch as it was mainly owing to the exposures in the BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL that the evil ways of baby farmers were brought under public notice, and a protecting Act was passed a quarter of a century ago. But the opposition which was encountered at the time to any legislation of the kind was such that it was possible to meet it only by emasculating the proposed Bill, with the hope that even a modified system of restraint placed upon the business of baby farmers, as then existing, would be better than none. Upon these lines the Bill passed into law in 1872, and up to December 31st, 1897, the Act has been in operation.

As was predicted, however, it never proved to be altogether satisfactory in checking the abuses for which it was designed, and especially within recent years it has been largely felt that some amendment of the law was urgently demanded. After several unsuccessful attempts on the part of the London County Council to introduce an amended Bill, and the appointment of a Committee of the House of Lords to inquire into the question, a Bill, placed in charge of Lord Denbigh, at length passed through both Houses of Parliament in August, 1897, and the Act comes into operation on January 1st, 1898.

### THE NEW ACT.

The new Act is an immense improvement upon the old one. The age of protection is raised from two years to five, and the clause in which this is set forth would be nearly perfect had it included all infants taken for hire or reward under the age of 5 years. But as we have frequently pointed out, the clause in this respect repeats the mistake committed in the superseded Act, and allows a baby farmer to take charge of one infant without rendering herself liable to the provisions of the Act.

Another clause lays down that it shall be the duty of every local authority to provide for the execution of the Act within its district, and we trust that this instruction will be rigidly carried out, especially in view of the fact that, as was shown by the reports of Our Special Commissioner on "The Baby Farming System and its Evils," published in 1896, the Act of 1872 was practically, through neglect, a dead letter out of London.

The new Act also usefully provides for the work of inspection under its jurisdiction to be done by women, and it is quite possible that this provision will materially facilitate its working.

A further extremely important clause relates to the payments down for the care of infants. Under the Act

Any person retaining or receiving an infant under the age of 2 years on consideration of a sum of money not exceeding £20 paid down, and without any agreement for further payment.....shall within forty-eight hours from the time of receiving such infant give notice of the fact to the local authority.

This clause will, or ought to, prevent the traffic in children, the evils of which in this respect have been so repeatedly exposed.

### THE DUTY OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES.

The above details set forth the features in the new Act which mainly call for notice. It now remains for the local authorities in whose hands the administration of the Act has been placed to make full use of it, whenever possible, within their district. We are glad to notice that in many local journals the Boards of Guardians of the respective districts have inserted lengthy notices calling attention to the new Act.

EDINBURGH OBSTETRICAL SOCIETY.—The following office-bearers were elected for the ensuing session:—*President*: Dr. J. Halliday Croom. *Vice-Presidents*: Dr. R. Milne Murray (senior), Dr. N. T. Brewis (junior). *Treasurer*: Dr. W. Craig. *Secretaries*: Dr. J. Haig Ferguson and Dr. W. Fordyce. *Librarian*: Dr. R. Milne Murray. *Editor of Transactions*: Dr. J. W. Ballantyne. *Members of Council*: Dr. Alexander Ballantyne, Dr. J. B. Buist, Dr. W. N. Elder, Dr. Hamilton (Hawick), Dr. Fraser Wright, Professor A. R. Simpson, Dr. Melville Dunlop, Dr. F. W. N. Haultain.

## REPORT ON FACTORIES AND WORKSHOPS.<sup>1</sup>

### SCOPE OF THE CHIEF INSPECTOR'S REPORT.

THERE has been considerable delay in the presentation of the annual report of the Chief Inspector of Factories and Workshops for the year 1896, owing to the difficulty experienced in obtaining and summarising the annual returns which, under the Factory and Workshop Act of 1895, are now required from occupiers of factories and workshops. However regrettable the delay, it is in a measure compensated by the addition to the report of these returns, the value of which will be realised in the future when comparisons require to be made between the number of people and children employed in the various industries year by year, and in the number of accidents and prosecutions. The report is issued in folio instead of the octavo form of previous years, the advantage claimed for this being that it will be in keeping with the other Home Office reports, and that it is more convenient for statistical summaries.

Dr. Whitelegge, who has been ably assisted by his staff, is to be congratulated upon the excellence and completeness of his first annual report. Since the Factory Act of 1895 came into operation a large amount of additional work has been thrown upon the Home Office; new duties have arisen in connection with the dangerous trades; metallic, animal, and other forms of industrial poisoning have to be recorded; fire escapes have to be inspected, in regard to which 144,000 occupiers are now obliged to make returns, and as there are also upwards of 10,000 laundries, docks, and warehouses to be inspected, it is clear that the resources of the Factory Department at Whitehall have of late been severely tested.

### ACCIDENTS.

As regards accidents, the number reported to the certifying surgeons in 1896 was 14,433, as against 10,466 for 1895. This seems an enormous increase, but it is partly explained by the large number of accidents brought within the meaning of the term "reportable accident" of the Act of 1895. There is a rise in the number of accidents in nearly all the industries, but especially in the metal and rubber trades, the increase being greater among adults than young persons, and among females than among males, while, as regards children, there is a decided decrease. In the textile industries, on the other hand, the accident rate is greater among males than females; it is highest among young persons and lowest among adults. Taking the accidents generally, it is interesting to note that the largest number of non-fatal accidents occurred during the month of October, while January showed the largest number of fatalities. Hoists still seem to be responsible for a considerable number of fatal accidents, owing to the want of proper fencing. The starting of machinery in factories without due warning, the cleaning of it when it is motion, and the adjustment of belts when machinery is running, are frequent causes of accidents, both in textile and flour mills.

### FIRE ESCAPES.

The Act of 1895 made provision for fire escapes in any place where more than 40 people are employed. It is estimated that in the United Kingdom there are 200,000 such places. Factory occupiers are often extremely careless in the provision of such means of escape. Frequently in our visits to factories we have been struck by finding fire escapes placed in most inaccessible parts of buildings, difficult to reach when all is tranquil, and quite impossible in emergency or panic.

### POISONING AND INFECTION.

Cases of lead, phosphorus, arsenic and anthrax poisoning are required by the Act to be reported to the Home Office. During last year 1,050 cases of industrial poisoning were reported, and of these 1,030 were due to lead. Shortly before the Factory Act of 1895 came into operation we drew attention in these pages to the obligations it imposed upon the medical profession. It is the duty of medical men to report all such cases of trade poisoning to the Home Office. During 1896 the largest number of cases of lead poisoning were reported

<sup>1</sup> Eyre and Spottiswoode, East Harding Street, Fleet Street, E.C., and Westminster, S.W.; or John Menzies and Co., 12, Hanover Street, Edinburgh, and 90, West Nile Street, Glasgow; or Hodges, Piggis and Co., Limited, 104, Grafton Street, Dublin. Price 5s. 1d.