PUBLIC DAY NURSERIES.

By Mrs. MOSER.

ABSTRACT.

THE introduction of public day nurseries urged as a means of diminishing disease amongst children and reducing infantile mortality. When the Education Acts of 1870 were passed, the adoption of some such provision was expected for the infants of working-women whose brothers and sisters could no longer act as caretakers. No such provision being made, the child is generally left to a neighbour—often old, ignorant, and very poor.

The idea of relieving a mother of these duties is opposed by some, but the nursery would not supplant but supplement the mother who is obliged to go to work, and would prevent the child from being the victim of these circumstances.

Public day nurseries should also be educational centres, spreading a knowledge of the sanitary and hygienic needs of infant life, our high infant mortality being due mostly to ignorance of the feeding of infants. Statistics prove that in some districts the infant death-rate is out of all proportion to that of other districts where more favourable conditions prevail, but no statistics shew the suffering involved, nor the numbers left incapacitated. Of that we have daily experience in a small public nursery in Bradford, where numbers of children are received suffering from ignorance and neglect in regard to previous feeding.

In such institutions an efficient staff should also give moral and mental training, and form good habits and healthy desires in the children. The nurseries should be small and scattered, near to the homes of those using them. The rooms light, airy, and sunny; and play-ground or open verandah essential. Careful arrangements for bathing, clothing, and feeding, so as to minimise risk of infection. Dietary and other arrangements under supervision of medical officer. A fee should be charged for admission, but such an institution could not be self-supporting. Suggested

that buildings for the purpose might be provided by municipalities, where Acts for the Housing of the Working Classes are being put into force.

In other countries public day nurseries are in most industrial centres an important branch of philanthropic effort. In France they are most fully developed, the first having been established there in 1844. There are now 303 in France. In Paris the 66 nurseries accommodate 2,466 infants; and in 1901, besides large sums from voluntary contributions, the municipality gave £5,400. These nurseries are subject to public inspection in matters of hygiene; and regulations as to feeding, the use of sterilised milk, style of feeding-bottle, are most strict; and the importance of children being breast-fed insisted on. Courses of lectures are also given in the nurseries to young women.

The advantages public day nurseries would help to promote are:—

For the Child—Health, full physical and mental development, habits of regularity and self-control.

For the Mother—Education in the laws of hygiene and sanitation.

For the Family—Opportunity for self-help, without neglect of the child.

For the Community—Relief in the cost of maintaining those whose failure in life is due to early neglect.