THE MILITARY CHILDREN'S WELFARE CENTRE.

By MILDRED LISTER.

Every children's welfare centre is an Imperial asset. In many minds, however, there still lingers the belief that this work, while of unquestionable value in congested slum areas, is altogether superfluous when applied to healthy subjects living under more satisfactory conditions. With regard to the military welfare centre in particular, how often do we hear the argument: This is such a healthy place, and soldiers' children are so strong; there is no need for a welfare centre here. In other words: Let us do nothing for those who, by reason of their sound heredity and favourable environment, present the finest raw material for successful race culture.

By all means let the nation bring knowledge and common sense within the reach of all its citizens. There is no one, however unenviable his lot, who cannot, by his own effort, improve certain aspects of his condition; while public assistance, if wisely administered, is a national investment and not an extravagance. At the same time we are faced with the undeniable fact that the scientific and social work carried on in connexion with the childhood of to-day, while raising many a potential C 3 citizen to be a Class II Briton of the future, does undoubtedly increase, to a considerable degree, the proportion of degenerate survivals.

It is therefore of the utmost importance that the flower of British working-class babyhood, the Class A 1 baby, should enter into his rights, and receive from an enlightened and sympathetically counselled motherhood the fullest opportunities for sound and vigorous development.

I do not claim for the soldiers' babies that they are in any way unique in the possession of those latent qualities which make for useful citizenship; but where, if anywhere in this country, can we find such a conveniently organized group of “desirables”? Their fathers on enlistment have passed a test of physical fitness, their homes (if their parents are living in quarters) are subjected to strict hygienic supervision, and adequate medical attention is provided. It is just because they already possess so much and require so little, that the giving of that little is so tremendously worth while. But now I must face a real difficulty in writing an account of my experiences of child welfare work for the JOURNAL OF THE ROYAL ARMY MEDICAL CORPS. Until a request reached me, asking me to do so, I had never seen a copy of that Journal. Who, then, will be my reader? Probably not the one person to whom I feel fitted to write—the woman who, like myself, has found herself in charge of a military welfare centre without any previous knowledge of this particular work. My acquaintance with infant welfare work is only of two years'
date; my previous experience of public work amongst children having been in connexion with the abnormal child—physically, mentally and morally—of school age, in institutions under the London County Council.

However, as the military welfare centre depends for its success upon the co-operation of the R.A.M.C. with the women organizers of these centres, and upon their mutual belief in one another, perhaps a description of this work, viewed from a different—a lay—angle may be of some slight value.

The centre of which I have been asked to give a description has, in a brief existence of seven months, attained a certain measure of success; and this is largely attributable to the co-operation of the R.A.M.C. and of my helpers, combined with the enthusiasm of the mothers themselves. To the mothers indeed we owe our most spectacular success; for we are the only military welfare centre to have entered candidates for the Mothercraft Examination of the Association of Infant Welfare and Maternity Centres. Owing to the shortness of the time available for coaching and preparation only six candidates were entered, but they were all successful, and the quality of their work won for us a letter of praise from the Hon. Secretary of the A.I.W.M.C. in which she wrote: "Our examiner told me that she has never had better papers in the non-competitive examination than those sent in by your mothers." We were also honoured by receiving a letter of congratulation from Lady Worthington-Evans, wife of the Secretary of State for War.

Organisation of a Welfare Centre.

The Chairman.—Undoubtedly, the first difficulty of welfare centre organization in the Army is the military doctrine of predestination. If a military welfare centre catechism existed, I think it would begin somewhat as follows:—

Question 1: Why are welfare centres needed?
Answer: Because an instinctive knowledge of mothercraft does not come to a woman automatically upon the birth of her child.

Question 2: When does this knowledge come to her?
Answer: On the day when her husband is promoted Lieutenant-Colonel.

The Lieutenant-Colonel's wife, by reason of the years spent by her husband in acquiring knowledge of military affairs, frequently finds herself, without preparation or experience, at the head of an existing welfare centre, or under the obligation to open one. Personally I never mind who leads me so long as I am well led, and I could work loyally and happily under the guidance of the junior captain's or subaltern's bride, provided that she knew her job. At the same time nothing is ever gained by disregarding deep-rooted prejudices, and so long as the senior officer's wife has no illusions as to her own infallibility, it may be all to the good if others will bestow a certain measure of ready-made confidence upon her.
Having recognized her lack of experience (and it is for the inexperienced alone that I write) the novice chairman must take steps to acquaint herself with the work of other centres, and so acquire a clear idea of the standard which can be attained. I began my inquiries by visiting the chairman of a neighbouring centre. The questions to which I hoped to receive answers were the following: Where do you obtain instructional leaflets on welfare organization? What are the infant foods in greatest demand, and how do you import these? (We were overseas.) What educational work do you undertake with regard to the mothers? The answer to all these questions was briefly "We don't," and the following explanation was added: "Our centre is just like a family party; if you try to teach the mothers anything they will be offended; my mothers simply love me." Of course it is very nice to be loved, but the opportunities afforded by the welfare centre as a personal popularity agency had not occurred to me. Certainly there must be love—the love of young mothers directed into practical channels for the good of their children, through the loving sympathy and willing service of those in a position to help them.

I returned home and wrote a letter to the secretary of one of the biggest London municipal centres, the one which had that year been awarded the Mothercraft Shield, and I asked her to give me an account of all the activities undertaken by her centre. She replied giving me much practical information, and above all, putting me into touch with the Association of Infant Welfare and Maternity Centres, 117, Piccadilly, London, W.1. My advice to the inexperienced chairman is to write, or better still, to pay a personal visit to this organization. I, myself, can never be sufficiently grateful to Miss Halford, the Hon. Secretary, for all the help and advice she has given me. In the absence of any leaflet dealing with the organization of military welfare centres, the novice chairman cannot do better than obtain from the A.I.W.M.C. a copy of their leaflet "How to start a Welfare Centre in a Rural District." She will also be informed of the qualifications required of a welfare centre wishing to apply for affiliation to the A.I.W.M.C. and she should endeavour to obtain affiliation for her centre at the earliest possible moment. Arrangements can also be made for her to pay personal visits to some of the large municipal welfare centres and day nurseries, where she will see this work being carried on under the most up-to-date conditions.

The Building.—When she has formed a plan as to the general lines on which she intends to run her centre, the selection of a building must be made. The accommodation should consist of a large room or hall suitable for the general work of the centre, including consultations, lectures, teas, etc.; a smaller room adjoining, to serve as a toddlers' playroom; a pantry with sink and gas ring; a lavatory; a covered place for perambulators; also adequate lock-up cupboard accommodation for storing the welfare equipment. In the case of large centres where lectures form an important part of the work, a nursery with cots for infants, out of sound range of the hall, is of inestimable comfort to the speakers.
The Helpers.—The chairman is next confronted with the problem of enlisting helpers. If, as in the case of my overseas centre, she is in charge of the welfare work of a large district, her task is comparatively easy. She will ask each regiment or unit to appoint one representative, and in almost every case someone genuinely interested in the work will be found. If, however, she has come to the station as a stranger, and is under the obligation of selecting most of her helpers personally, a useful plan is to ask several people to suggest various names, giving their reasons. Thus she will be told: Mrs. White and Mrs. Grey ought to help, they never do anything, but Mrs. Black and Mrs. Green are always so busy. Here at least is a valuable clue, and she will invite the assistance of busy Mrs. Black and energetic Mrs. Green. Mrs. White and Mrs. Grey are probably 25 years of age or more, and if they have succeeded in reaching that age without finding anything to do, the value of their help is open to doubt. Little Mrs. or Miss Brown, fresh from school, is a new and untried proposition. If she brings with her a good head and a willing pair of little hands she will prove an extremely valuable assistant, while the mothers, some of whom are little more than children themselves, greatly appreciate the presence of one or two very young helpers. The next step is to call a meeting of the helpers and let each, as far as possible, select the branch of work she prefers. Up to this point everything is sure to have gone smoothly for the chairman, but Heaven will indeed have showered its mercies upon her if, as time goes on, nobody ever takes offence. But if trouble occurs, she should contrive to shoulder the blame personally for any supposed slight, in order that peace may be quickly restored, as she presumably is made of some sort of non-inflammable material. If, however, the disease does not yield to treatment in spite of all her efforts, she may assume with tolerable certainty that there has been previous history of the complaint, and that the distressing attack of which she has been the unwitting cause is not a malady which the sufferer has contracted like measles, but rather an aggravated chronic condition. At the same time she must not forget that most of us have the vices of our virtues, and that she who is hard on others often sets a very high standard for herself. She may easily be one of the best helpers and just the one to be relied upon in an emergency. However, there is another kind of helper, the perfect helper. I have been told that she does not exist, but this is not true. I have known her and worked with her many a time. Here is her portrait:—

THE PERFECT WELFARE CENTRE HELPER.
(With apologies to her cousin, the perfect guest.)

She always sent a line to say
When she was forced to be away,
And made arrangements with a neighbour
To undertake her sphere of labour.
She never said she couldn’t bear.
To miss her golf in weather fair,
Nor feared a chill when blizzards blew
Though mothers came and babies too.
The morning of each welfare date
She always came and pulled her weight;
Her playroom, food or clothing store,
She set it out, nor left it for
Some other helper to arrange.
She always brought sufficient change,
And never said she couldn’t stay
To help to put the things away.
When others failed she didn’t grumble
But helped with door lists, teas or jumble,
Or tiny mites in cots she tended,
She never seemed to get offended.
Her fountain pen did not run dry.
And when the mothers came to buy
Foods, books or woollies, soft and light,
Her cash account was always right.
She never seemed to fuss or strain
Because she always used her brain,
And never failed to do her part
Because she had a mother’s heart.

Circularizing the Mothers.—As soon as the date of the opening meeting
has been fixed, a circular, describing the aims and advantages of the centre
should be drawn up, and distributed (by personal visit if possible) to all
mothers with children under school age, coming within the area of the
centre. Certain equipment, notably the weighing machine, must be
procured before the opening meeting; but perhaps a description of a
visit to my centre on a welfare day will give the best idea of what will
be required.

The Welfare Centre Meeting.—We open at 2.30 p.m. on alternate
Tuesdays, and at that time the mothers with small babies begin to arrive.
The mothers of toddlers, who do not require to be weighed fortnightly,
usually come at about 3 o’clock. Upon entering we find the walls covered
with bright posters relating to health, infant management, cleanliness, the
care of the teeth, etc. These are nearly all given to us free by various
societies.

Registers and Charts.—Near to the door we find an officer’s wife in charge
of the attendance and numerical registers (printed forms are obtainable from
the A.I.W.M.C). Each mother on entering gives her number, and a cross
is placed against her name in the date space provided. A newcomer states
her name, address and husband’s rank and unit. She is then provided with
an infant’s weight card which she takes to the weighing table, where
particulars of the baby are taken down to be entered later in the Infants’
Register. A convenient loose-leaved register is obtainable from the
A.I.W.M.C. and specimens of a variety of record sheets will be sent on
application. I should not, however, advise the use of a large number of
records by a military centre; firstly because the time involved is too great
where no paid secretary is employed, and secondly because the officers' wives and the medical officer are in closer personal touch with the mothers than is possible at a large municipal centre. Personally I keep two record sheets for each child. The one a form on which weights and health notes are entered, and the other a weight chart. Where the medical officer follows the plan of examining each mother when she first joins the centre, together with her children as a family unit, special forms for this purpose can be obtained; these constitute a valuable record requiring comparatively little work in keeping up to date. This is especially useful in stations where there is no military families' hospital. In this case one of the helpers should be chosen to bring the newcomers to the medical officer and to enter up the family records. She should also have charge of the health of the toddlers, as these necessarily escape the vigilance of the weighing table. Many mothers fail to realize the need for medical treatment unless a child is definitely ill or in pain.

The Weighing of Infants.—But let us watch the weighing of the babies. As it is winter time a good fire is burning in a stove and round this the mothers sit to undress and dress their babies. This particular hall is so well provided with seats that plenty of spare chairs are available on which to lay the little clothes, but I have seen in use in other centres very practical wire baskets which clip on to the backs of the chairs. The weighing machine stands on a long table conveniently near, and is screened from draught by high wooden stands covered with washing dust sheets. A Pollard infant weighing machine is used, and this is placed sufficiently far back on the table so that a sitting-up baby can see the table close below, instead of gazing into the fathomless abyss from the machine to the floor. The basket or pan in which the infants are placed is padded with a soft Turkey towel, and a fresh piece of tissue paper is placed over this for each infant. The weighing is conducted by a fully certified nurse. Someone must assist her by filling in the particulars on the weight cards, and in the Infants' Register, so that she is able to give all her attention to the mother and babies. Occasionally an unusually nervous child is frightened by the process of being weighed. In this case we explain to the mother the necessity of teaching him to conquer his own fears, and warn her of the mischief that is often caused by using force to a sensitive child. I have found the following plan very successful with these cases. The mother is asked to wait until all the other children have been weighed. The machine is then placed on the floor and the mother invited to kneel on the floor beside it and play with her baby. (The child with sufficient mental development to be consciously frightened is never the young infant, but always the middle-aged or elderly baby.) One day we had two such cases, and very soon one small person began to realize the possibilities of the weighing machine as a means of dragging himself on to a very unsteady pair of legs. His gurgles of joy soon reassured his little friend, and the first lesson in facing the unexpected and trusting mummy had been learnt.
The Military Children's Welfare Centre

this will be realized later if such children are obliged to receive hospital treatment. There is no excuse for a welfare centre which cannot devote infinite time and infinite patience to its minor problems. Unlike the hospital it has no serious cases. Its work is essentially educational, and its mission is not to replace the mother, but to teach her how to fulfil her part. The earlier centres were known as "schools for mothers." This name has in most cases been dropped, and rightly so, as it did not tend to raise the dignity of motherhood. Still it had one merit. No one can say in connexion with a school for mothers: "If you try to teach the mothers, they will be offended!" But however excellent the teaching, its effective value depends upon the confidence inspired in the mother, and she will only bestow her confidence upon us if she feels that we are not dealing with mothers collectively or in the abstract, but are in sympathetic personal touch with her and her child. In this connexion let us not neglect the lighter side. Those who have laughed together are the better friends.

I remember one mother showing unusual excitement at the weighing table and confiding to us that her sportsman of a husband had got up a sweepstake on the baby's weight! We are always delighted to hear of any amusement coming to a father in connexion with his baby. The early days of parenthood in a small home must inevitably mean considerable discomfort and inconvenience, and the young father does not always adopt a sportsmanlike attitude.

On another occasion a very young mother waited to ask me a question. She and her husband were in disagreement upon an important point and they had decided to take it to the welfare centre for arbitration. Baby had been christened "Dudley Esmond," father wished to call him "Dudley," but mother did so want him to be "Esmond"—which name would I chose? "Far be it from me," I replied, "to take sides between husband and wife, I shall call your child "Desmond"; "but, joking apart," I added, "if you really want my advice, let his father choose his name. Baby belongs equally to both of you, but while he is small and weak he depends almost entirely on you, and nearly all the decisions for his welfare must be made by you. That is why so many fathers feel that they mean very little to their babies, and begin to lose interest in them. And if you let your husband choose baby's name, don't you think that perhaps next time he is roused in the night by the screams of his first-born, he may bear more patiently the cries of 'Dudley' than of 'Esmond?'"

This all seems very unimportant, but baby's health and dawning mental development reflect very quickly the atmosphere of the home, and I once heard a speaker ruin an otherwise excellent address by offering the mothers this cruel and short-sighted advice: "If your husbands try to interfere, don't listen to them, just tell them that they know nothing about it."

Sale of Foods, etc.—We now come to the department where infant foods are sold at wholesale or greatly reduced prices. We keep in stock: Virol, Cow and Gate food, Ovaltine, Ovaltine Rusks, also toothbrushes. We
Mildred Lister

procure to order Allenbury's food and cod-liver oil and malt. At the oversea centre I also stocked Glaxo, and would do so in England, but, except for export, it is only supplied at special welfare centre prices in cartons and not in tins. This applies to a considerable number of other valuable products. I wish that other centres would support me in refusing to stock perishable foods unless supplied in airtight tins.

Clothing.—Our clothing department is becoming very popular. We supply paper patterns free of charge and also take orders for children's garments, supplied by a wholesale firm which makes them to the specification of the clothing committee of the A.I.W.M.C. These can be chosen from model garments kept on view or from catalogues. We also supply knitting wool in various colours. Both the food and clothing departments are run practically at cost price, as a benefit to the mothers and not as a source of income.

Literature.—To each mother joining the centre we give free, a copy of the excellent textbook issued by the A.I.W.M.C., “To Mothers and Fathers.” (As far as possible we try to give these books to expectant mothers when or before they go into hospital.) We also give away a variety of books, pamphlets and leaflets which we obtain free from such organisations as the Health and Cleanliness Council, the National Milk and Publicity Council, the Dental Board of the United Kingdom, etc., also books containing useful information supplied to us by various manufacturing firms. We also stock copies of “The Mother's Cookery Book.” These we either sell or give away in prizes.

Toddlers' Playroom.—The welfare worker who has charge of the toddlers' playroom has by far the hardest work of any of the helpers. She is also cut off from the rest of her companions and is unable to listen to the lectures. We are trying to evolve a satisfactory system for relieving her during part of the time, but it is positively amazing how quickly a group of little angels can turn into something entirely different when they feel the absence of the personality with the gift of controlling them and keeping them interested. We have a large number of toys, all of which have been given to us, and we are very proud of our miniature furniture, a gay little red and white table with chairs to match. These were made for us by one of the artificers out of tea chests. We recently held a painting competition, the National Milk Publicity Council having given us large outline drawings depicting the eight Rules of Health. The Health and Cleanliness Council also gave us delightful little painting books and balloons with health mottoes.

Nursery.—Next to the playroom is the nursery. This is only used during the lecture hour, and it is a great pity that all mothers cannot be induced to part with their babies for this short time. Those which are brought to the lectures are often very disturbing. The nursery is furnished with cots containing chaff-filled mattresses, the mothers bringing their own pillows and rugs from their perambulators. The mattresses are not left at the centre, but are taken away and thoroughly aired before use.
Jumble Sales.—At each alternate meeting we hold a small jumble sale, which forms a valuable source of income to the centre and is of very real benefit to the mothers.

Teas.—At about 3.45 p.m. tea is served. We are fortunate in having the use of a large number of card tables round which the mothers form little groups. We charge 2d. per mother, and for this she receives as much tea as she wishes, also a buttered bun and a slice of plum cake. We have so far made no charge for the children, as the local civilian centre gives free teas to all its members, and as the deficit is extremely small, only 6s. 4d. on over 700 teas.

Health Talks.—Tea is followed by a health talk. This opens with a distribution of free samples. Whether the sources of supply will eventually run dry I cannot say, but so far every type of product has generously hearkened to my appeal—except soap! Health talks have already been given on the following subjects:

“Fresh Air and Sunlight,” “The Common Cold,” “The Care of the Teeth” (Dental Lecture with cinema given by the Dental Board of the United Kingdom), “Clothing for Infants and Older Children,” “National Conference on Maternity and Child Welfare, an Account of Visits paid by the delegates to various London Institutions for Children,” “The Feeding of Toddlers and Older Children,” “Character Training,” “Thrush and Diarrhoea,” “The Preservation of Health in Tropical Countries,” “The Value of Milk as a Food” (lecture given by the National Milk Publicity Council) “Cases of Illness which might have been Prevented,” “Exercise, Occupation and Amusement.” Also a lantern lecture on the “Life of Women and Children in the Harems of Morocco.” We also held a debate on “Child Management,” at which the mothers were encouraged to tell their personal experiences, and we called this our “True Story Afternoon, Nothing out of Books!”

Of course, the majority of the mothers maintained complete silence, but some of them found courage to speak, and even the silent ones seemed greatly to appreciate the feeling that we were all mothers together and that an account of even the simplest little happenings in one mother’s life may be of interest and help to someone else. For the assistance of those proposing to hold health talks, the A.I.W.M.C. has published a pamphlet called “Syllabus of Health Talks.” A series of addresses to mothers has also appeared in recent numbers of National Health, the journal of the National League for Health, Maternity and Child Welfare.

Further Activities.—The foregoing description does not profess to cover the whole ground of useful activities which can be, and are, carried on at welfare centres. It must be remembered that the centre described has only been in existence for seven months. Moreover, local conditions must be considered. For instance, we have not attempted to establish needlework or knitting classes, as these are held by both the Mothers’ Union and the Guild of St. Helena. Cookery forms a very important part of welfare
work, but we have not yet had time to deal with this subject, apart from holding a cake-making competition; while our arrangements for home visiting still leave room for considerable improvement. Other branches of work which I should like to see established are dental inspections of toddlers and expectant, and nursing mothers, and an overseas settlement department, for giving information to wives of men about to leave the Army. Welfare is a very comprehensive term, and after visiting a London centre where among other activities I was shown artificial light and massage clinics, the medical officer informed me that any centre which has not got a section for fathers is only fifty per cent efficient! The fathers' section was in the nature of a club where lectures and debates were held on subjects including the following: "Juvenile Employment," "Elementary Education," "Venereal Disease," "Tuberculosis," "Overseas Settlement" while practical demonstrations were given in carpentry, boot repairing, etc.

Finance.—It is difficult to start a centre satisfactorily without money, and there is no greater extravagance than to purchase cheap make-shift articles with a view to subsequent replacement. Money must also be permanently tied up, if a stock of foods, etc., is to be purchased and maintained. The running expenses of a military centre should, however, be extremely low. If small monthly jumble sales are held, the proceeds should be sufficient to cover the running expenses and leave a margin for propaganda and for the gradual redemption of the initial cost of equipment and food stocks. Some centres receive a grant of £6 annually from the War Office; but the sanctioning of this grant depends, I am informed, not upon the efficiency of the centre but upon its geographical situation with regard to the nearest civilian centre. In many cases the cost of equipment, etc., can be met by means of donations, but where this is not possible, some solution should be devised whereby less well-to-do centres are not faced with the depressing alternatives of inferior equipment or debt. And even debt implies the existence of someone to lend the necessary money. Moreover, the chairman must be prepared to hand over the centre in a solvent condition at any moment when her husband may be ordered elsewhere. Under these circumstances, if instead of giving an annual grant of £6 to certain centres, the War Office would give an initial grant of about £15 to all centres conforming to an approved standard of efficiency, the ultimate cost would be lower and the assistance more valuable. This £15 could be allocated as follows:—

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Cost of weighing machine, approximately</td>
<td>£5.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>For purchase of stock of foods, etc.</td>
<td>£8.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>For purchase of books, registers, etc.</td>
<td>£2.00</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>£15.00</strong></td>
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The following statement covering a period of seven months and including the period of inauguration may be of interest. Total number of mothers enrolled, eighty-seven (this includes a few temporary members
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whose husbands were on short courses at the station); total attendances, 595; average attendance, 37; maximum attendance, 52; minimum attendance, 23.

Debit. | Credit.
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Purchase of saleable stocks | £41 16 11 | Sale of food, clothing, etc. | £84 8 8
Purchase of equipment | £12 12 10 | Sale of books | £1 18 0
Purchase of books and registers, Examination fees | £5 16 10 | Tea receipts, at 2d. per mother or welfare helper | £6 7 3
Cost of tea | £6 13 7 | Proceeds of Jumble Sales | £11 3 3
Affiliation fee to Association of Infant Welfare and Maternity Centres | £1 1 0 | Donations given to defray specific expenses | £9 6 0
Delegates’ tickets for National Conference on Maternity and Infant Welfare | £0 17 6 | Donation given to form fund for the purchase of saleable stocks | £8 0 0
Hire of Cinema for Dental Film and Lecture | £2 0 0 | Value of stocks in hand | £9 15 7
Postage | £1 3 0 | £2 4 2
Miscellaneous expenses including speakers’ fares, prizes, gratuities, etc. | £3 2 6

£75 6 2 | £80 18 9

£93 11 7

Organisation.—A one-man show is an unsound show, and the ultimate object of the chairman must be the decentralization of the work. The helper who has the control of her department will feel more keenness and devote more time to it than she would otherwise do, and though the chair- man must be prepared to give up a considerable portion of her time to the development of her centre during the first few months, it is neither reasonable nor possible for her to undertake to do almost all the work permanently. At the same time decentralization is not nearly so simple as one would at first imagine, as the ultimate responsibility both as regards finance and efficiency must rest with the chairman, while all her helpers are purely voluntary workers.

There is, however, another important side to the organization of welfare centres. I refer to organization from above, for which I and others have sought in vain. Why are we of the military centres not inspected, advised, assisted, encouraged or reprimanded by one greater than ourselves, sitting at the War Office, in the same way that civilian centres are watched over by the truly excellent organization of the Ministry of Health? We know that some central authority exists, because when we ask it for £6 it sends us very kind words, but even these are not words of guidance. How did it happen that last June when I attended the National Conference on Maternity and Infant Welfare I was informed that out of 700 delegates I was the one solitary representative of a Military Welfare Centre? (I had arranged to take our matron, but she was unavoidably prevented from coming.) And yet if all military centres had been circularized, asking them to send in the names of the delegates they appointed to represent them, a large number would have been glad to come. Why have

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we no Mothercraft Shield to be won in annual competition between military centres? It is practically impossible for us to compete in an open class with the big municipal centres for the Shield of the A.I.W.M.C. Yet competition has an amazingly invigorating effect upon the vitality of a centre and upon the keenness of the individual mother. Why is no annual meeting held at which the heads of all military welfare centres can meet together and profit by one another's experiences?

Perhaps the time is not far distant when some member of the R.A.M.C. will devise a scheme for the strengthening of the military welfare centre movement through the creation of a central organization, possessing not only the knowledge which helps, but the belief which inspires. When this occurs he may rest assured of the enthusiastic and loyal support of all those who, from practical experience, realize the moral effect produced upon local activities by a stimulating and vigorous headquarters policy.

Note.—The above is intended to apply to the case of the average Military Children's Welfare Centre at home and abroad. It is not applicable to the case of certain centres possessing their own specially built accommodation and residential nursing staffs. Such centres can only exist in commands where exceptional financial resources are available.