Rich vs. Poor, Native Born vs. Immigrant, Mother vs. Mother: The Story of Wet Nursing in the United States

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Portrayal of Wet Nursing in the 19th Century
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“First of all, we must get a wet nurse.”
ESKAY’S FOOD
brought this baby from an emaciated condition to this picture of rugged health.

This is Alfred Long, 1014 Halsey Street, Brooklyn, N.Y. From three weeks to four months about every artificial food but ESKAY’S was tried and utterly failed, and the child wasted away to a shadow. Whooping Cough, Meningitis and Pneumonia followed, and finally, when almost dying of Cholera Infantum, all hope of his recovery was given up. He had to be carried on a pillow, and his little bones were almost through his skin. At five months he weighed less than six pounds. We then tried ESKAY’S FOOD, and the improvement was immediate and continual. He is now strong and healthy, and at 17 months weighs 43 pounds. His doctor gives full credit to ESKAY’S FOOD and calls it “the most wonderful case” he ever saw.

We will send free to anyone the story in detail how Baby Long’s life was saved.

SMITH, KLINE & FRENCH COMPANY 460 ARCH STREET, PHILADELPHIA, PA.

How Long Does Your Baby Sleep?
Twenty hours each day is right for the first month, then gradually less till at six months sixteen hours a day is just right. Your baby must have that sleep to get fat and rosy. And it will have that sleep if you feed it regularly and evenly on its mother’s milk or the nearest substitute—

Nestlé’s Food

If mothers would only realize the every-day danger of carrying consumption and other dread diseases to babies in cows’ milk! If mothers only knew that in one State where the laws are strict, there are 200,000 infected cows—one for nearly every baby in the State.

If mothers only knew that the Government inspectors found throughout the land only eight clean dairies in a hundred!

Nurse your baby if you can. If you can’t, give it the nearest thing to mother’s milk—Nestlé’s Food.

Safe because you add only water to prepare it. Safe because it is made under the strictest scientific conditions. Safe because no corn ever reach it in its airtight can.

Nestlé’s is made from the milk of healthy cows kept in sanitary dairies. All the heavy parts of milk are modified, so that the curd is soft and fleecy as in mother’s milk. All that your baby needs and the calf doesn’t is added. And—there you have Nestlé’s on which three generations have grown healthy and strong.

Send the Coupon. It will bring you a box of Nestlé’s Food—enough for twelve feedings—and a book by specialists, filled with things you should know.
The Unregulated Dairy Industry

- 72 hours to ship from farmer to consumer
- 8 gallon, uncovered vats
- Milk watered
- Milk whitened
- Milk thickened
- Dipper method
- Milkborne illness
Racist Stereotypes of Wet Nurses

“ Italians and southern Negroes when removed from their home environment secrete a milk poor in quality.”
Racist Stereotypes of Wet Nurses

Women recently arrived from Northern and Central Europe and of Slavic descent, but particularly Irish and German immigrants, “offer the ideal material.”

Impoverished, American-born white women unsuitable to work as wet nurses due to their “flat and narrow chests.”
Isaac Abt on Wet Nurses

“Their price was above rubies and they made the family pay it in submission to their whims, accession to their demands, and forbearance with their bad habits.”
Dr. Arthur Meigs on Wet Nurses

“The class of society from which wet-nurses are drawn is a very low one...and therefore the chance of their being diseased is very great; and besides, they are generally of such a low order as to be difficult to manage.”
“A wet nurse is one-quarter cow and three-quarters devil.”
WANTED:
Wet Nurse WITHOUT a Baby
Fanny B. Workman
“an end of all peace in the household”
“a simple, unintelligent-looking Irish girl”

Workman devoted a week “to the renovation of the person of the Irish Mary, whom it was necessary to clothe anew from head to foot.”

“If only the look of intelligence were not wanting!”

When the wet nurse carried Workman’s baby, “the child’s head hung over her arm and vibrated like a pendulum.”

“Her milk had a decidedly bad effect on her charge.”
Workman’s letter to *Babyhood* Magazine, 1886

Workman on her second wet nurse:

“decidedly unattractive, with a face of most heavy, unintelligent mould.”

“After an hour or two spent in argument I prevailed upon her NOT to go to the funeral. How I made her see that it could in no way benefit her to go, and might kill my child, I do not know. But finally she did see it all.”

She became “very unruly and obstinate.”

“The milk of the gentle cow has the advantage over that of the wet nurse—it is not affected by indulgence in peanuts, cucumbers, and ice cream.”
Other Mothers’ Letters about Wet Nurses

“immoral”

“of a low order”

“How can any mother dare...risk...the effect upon her child of a wet-nurse in whose family some terrible disease may be hereditary, or, what is worse than disease or death, who is an immoral woman?”
Laws Governing Milk Production and Sale in Chicago

- 1886 Milk “wars” began
- 1904 8-gallon milk vats must be covered and sealed
- 1912 Milk must be sold in individual, sealed bottles
- 1916 All milk sold must be pasteurized
- 1920 Milk must be kept cold during shipping
- 1926 All dairy cattle must be tested for bovine tuberculosis
Graph 2-14
Diarrheal Deaths in Chicago 1877-1925 Per 100,000 Live Births by Month
MOTHER'S MILK FOR MOTHER'S BABE
COW'S MILK FOR CALVES
(God's Plan)

The Long
vs.
The Short Haul

70 percent of city babies get their food through a tube 60 miles long. It takes about 36 hours—often 42 hours—for the milk to run from the cow end of the tube to the baby end of the tube.

This tube is open in many places and baby's food is frequently polluted. It is often wrongly kept in overheated places.

Then there may be a diseased cow at the country end of the tube. And Yet Some People Wonder Why So Many Babies Die!

On the other hand the mother-fed baby gets its milk fresh, pure and healthful—no germs can get into it.

To Lessen Baby Deaths Let Us Have More Mother-Fed Babies.

You can't improve on God's plan.
For Your Baby's Sake—Nurse It!

THE PREVENTABLE PERILS SURROUNDING THE CHILD

One baby out of every five dies before reaching the age of two years. About 80 percent of these deaths are from preventable diseases.

To break this Ring of Trouble
More Men and More Money are required.

Department of Health, Chicago. Educational Series No. 92.

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