

THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED
THE NURSING RECORD
EDITED BY MRS BEDFORD FENWICK

No. 940.

SATURDAY, APRIL 7, 1906.

Vol. XXXVI.

Editorial.

THE IMPORTANCE OF GENERAL EDUCATION.

At the last meeting of the Central Midwives' Board, during the discussion on the revision of the rules, Sir William Sinclair gave notice that he would, at the next meeting, propose that evidence of education should be required of candidates prior to their entering for training as midwives.

The regulation of the Board at the present time is that "any candidate who during the Examination shows a want of acquaintance with the ordinary subjects of elementary education may be rejected on that ground alone." Sir William rightly pointed out that when a candidate has been at the expense of obtaining her special training, examiners are naturally most reluctant to reject her on the ground of want of general education alone, and that indeed it would be unjust to do so except in extreme cases; nevertheless it was extremely desirable a standard of general knowledge should be required, but the proof should be forthcoming at the beginning, not the end, of the training.

It is a well-established principle in all professions to require evidence of general knowledge before the special training is proceeded with, and the reasons for this practice are sound. If a person is to benefit largely by special education in any subject he or she must bring to bear upon the instruction given a mind trained to assimilate knowledge, otherwise not only is it absorbed with much difficulty, but it is apt to be retained only so long as it serves the purpose of convincing examiners of its possession. It is merely a means to an end, and the greater part is forgotten as soon as it has served this purpose. That this is the case with uneducated midwives heads of training schools can testify. The educated person, on the other hand, values knowledge for its own sake, and has usually

acquired the habit not only of cramming for a given purpose, but of treasuring information when gained, and of adding to it whenever possible.

But education implies more than the mere possession of knowledge. It has been defined as "the training that goes to cultivate the powers and form the character," and it is just this cultivation which it is so important the midwives of the future should possess. If we take an uneducated adult from her ordinary surroundings, give her six months' special training, and then return her to her native place, she will have acquired a certain amount of manual dexterity and technical knowledge. The cultivation, which is so important a factor in raising standards of life and dispelling prejudice, will be almost wholly absent. The habit of a lifetime is strong, and the midwife's own prejudices remain ingrained.

It may be asserted that the educated midwife is desirable but unattainable. We may point out, however, that the question is primarily a financial one, and secondly, one of organisation. The woman whose services it is desirable to obtain will not undertake the responsible duties of a midwife for the pittance not infrequently offered of £30 or £40 per annum, and small blame to her. But, it must be remembered, maternity does not come upon women unawares, and if facilities are offered for putting by a small sum weekly, to cover the doctor's and midwife's fee, many gladly avail themselves of it. In case of actual need, why should not the parish pay the midwife as it already does the doctor? The country has already more than a sufficiency of illiterate midwives and it is most undesirable to add to their number.

As a sound fundamental principle, as applied to the organisation of all callings, we heartily endorse Sir William Sinclair's proposition in relation to midwives, and hope that he will succeed in carrying it.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)