

## The Midwife.

### Echoes From India.

#### A MIDWIFERY CASE.

We were daily expecting to be called to the house of a rich begum (Mohammedan lady of rank), who had asked us to attend her in her confinement. She had had children, but they had all died at birth or shortly after.

So she had decided to have the doctor, Miss Sahiba (European unmarried ladies are called Miss Sahiba) this time; "she had heard her praise from many lips."

At last it came—on a night as dark and wet as an Indian night can be. A carriage had been sent for us, and after driving through many narrow lanes, we stopped before a massive wooden gate, studded thickly with iron spikes, which led into a good-sized courtyard. Passing the men's quarters, we noticed through the open door that one of the rooms was furnished in semi-English style. Easy chairs, upholstered in bright coloured plush, massive gilt-framed pier-glasses, gaudy prints on the wall, and electric lights with rose-coloured shades made a very brilliant show.

We were led through dark passages and up steep stairs to the women's quarters. Here, in a small room lighted by a not over-clean lantern, we found our patient.

We had seen her attend hospital wearing bright-coloured silk pyjamas (full trousers worn by Mohammedan women in India), spotless white kurta (kind of bodice), beautifully embroidered, fine muslin chaddar (straight piece about 3 yards long worn over head and shoulders), and always a large quantity of gold jewellery.

We could hardly recognise the dirtily clad woman before us as the same. There was hardly standing room. There were sisters and sisters-in-law of all sizes, mother and mother-in-law, grandmothers and aunts, besides servants, all talking at the same time. We tried hard to get them to go away, but only succeeded in getting rid of the little girls. The grown-ups absolutely refused to leave till they knew how things were getting on.

We had brought our own lotion bowls, etc., with us, and the setting out of these things were a great source of amusement to them, and drew forth many amusing remarks.

"What wonderful people we were."

"Why must we scrub our hands, which already looked so white and clean?" What

was the lotion for; their Dais (midwife) never did this. But the greatest wonder of all was that we should put on clean overalls.

"This was waste, for they would surely get dirtied; such clean things were not necessary for such dirty work. Why that was the reason the patient had put on old and dirty clothes. When all was over then we should see what clothes she would wear."

The patient was very excited, but after examination the doctor assured her that everything was going on right. With a little more persuasion we succeeded in getting the women to leave, keeping two who seemed as if they could be made useful. We then opened the one small window, and set things a bit straight.

We had our back to the patient making some sponges when a shadow shot past us. Looking round, we saw a filthy old woman seat herself on the bed in front of the patient.

She was the family midwife, and was very angry that we should have been called.

"What was all this, that she had not been called? Had she not attended all the members of the family? Had she not attended this girl in her previous confinements when everything went right? True, the babies died, but that was Kismet (fate)."

With great difficulty we got her off the bed. Out of the room she would not go.

The second stage was tedious. The patient had good pains, but made no progress. The doctor reached for her forceps, but on seeing this the old Dai screamed, and, rushing out of the room, called out that we were going to cut the patient open, immediately all the women were back in the room, and we were told that we must not use instruments. The doctor asked to see the husband. He came up, and, after she had explained things to him, he called out some of the women and tried to explain to them what the doctor wished to do, but it was no use. After coaxing and scolding, he turned to the doctor and said, "Madam, I am helpless; these women won't listen." He begged the doctor to stay and do her best. One of the women brought in a small stone rolled in a not over clean strip of rag. This was laid on the patient's left thigh. Another had already been laid on the right ankle. It was now discovered that this had slipped. "All this was the cause of delay." It was re-adjusted, and now we were assured that matters would hurry up.

After this, we never succeeded in getting rid

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