

The Midwife.

MOTHELCRAFT.

Not long ago I was listening to the description by a friend of a new baby niece, a first child, apparently a most charming baby.

"Is the mother very delighted with it?" I asked.

"Well," was the hesitating reply, "she is getting more reconciled to it now."

"Oh these women!" was my unsympathetic retort, for the parents are young, healthy, and well endowed with this world's goods, and I thought of the many unmarried, motherly women I know who desire a child more than anything else on earth.

Later, when speaking of the matter to another woman whose work brings her the confidences of hundreds of stranger women, she told me that her experience of modern wives is that most of them would not mind having one or two children if the making of the child demanded only three months instead of nine. Nine months is a long time to have to give up all one's games and most of one's social amusements, she urged. But I disagreed vehemently. To my mind nine months is all too short for such a stupendous task. What are nine swiftly passing months when one realises that at the end of that period the unalterable foundations and the structural outlines of the child's physical vehicle are built, that vehicle through which its future destiny must be worked out, its latent abilities be expressed. Every constitutional weakness, each æsthetic flaw, must inevitably one day prove a source of pain or hindrance. Each point of strength or of physical beauty will as surely contribute to the success and happiness of the child.

Then, it was urged, so many women shrink from the pain of childbirth; they really cannot face it. I pointed out how for countless centuries women have endured this pain, some of them many times, and millions have borne it bravely, silently, hopefully, cheerfully. I have myself witnessed many such instances. Are women becoming less courageous? True, increasing civilization tends to render the process of Nature more tedious and painful; but must we not admit that we outrage Nature's laws by many of our civilized habits, and that tight-lacing, pointed and high-heeled shoes

cannot be indulged in without their certain effects on the generative system.

That the suffering inseparable from even the most willing and hygienic motherhood is often very great is a fact not to be overlooked. But in this regard there is an insufficient realisation of the truth that there is nothing in this world worth having that does not cost a great deal to obtain. Creation in art, in science, in literature, in crafts, stands for boundless patience, labour, and suffering in many ways; more especially is this true of masterpieces. Carlyle, writing of the Sorrows of Teufelsdröckh, recognized clearly how the achievements of the greatest of men followed infinite travail.

When we regard a wholly successful child as a masterpiece, a creative work in which we may extensively associate ourselves with Nature, the physical and moral endurance which such a production entails does not appear disproportionate. As Emerson says: "For everything you have missed, you have gained something else; for everything you gain, you lose something." Here, as in all other departments of life, the law of compensation works unfaillingly.

Moreover, the results of the sufferings of childbirth are so obvious. With the greater part of earth's pain—much of which is heroically and silently endured—the results are only visible to the eye of faith or of philosophy; but in motherhood they are so instant and so blessed that one can see and know the end, and that implies courage to work, to wait, and to endure. Motherhood is *a work and a duty*, not merely a passive submission to an inexorable law of Nature; and if we elect to work with Nature instead of against her, she responds very readily and bountifully to our co-operation. When a woman has set before her, and steadily adhered to, the ambition to create a masterpiece of a child, she will find all her labour and suffering far more than repaid in the joy that will be hers when she first sees the masterpiece that she has wrought.

MÉNA M. G. BIELBY.

THE CENTRAL MIDWIVES BOARD.

The next examination of the Central Midwives Board will be held on February 12th in London, Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Manchester, and Newcastle-on-Tyne. The Oral Examination follows a few days later.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)