

The Midwife.

THE TRAINING OF MIDWIVES.

Miss Alice Gregory, Honorary Secretary of the British Hospital for Mothers and Babies at Woolwich, in her evidence before the Royal Commission on Venereal Diseases, impressed on the Commission her opinion of the necessity for every pupil midwife to receive a short course of lectures on venereal diseases, and clinical instruction at a lock hospital.

She thought midwives were absolutely ignorant on these matters, and that they usually had not consciously seen any case. She said that at one of the training schools, they had one very short lecture given to them without demonstration, and they had so much to put into their three months' course—[this has now been extended to six months—Ed.]—that she thought it rather a waste of time to give it. She was entirely averse to a course being suggested—even of three lectures—on this particular subject, unless their whole training was lengthened, because it was so excessively inadequate.

Asked by the Chairman if she had come across cases in which the ignorance of midwives had resulted in infection of the people they attended, Miss Gregory replied in the affirmative. She had not actually known the midwives, but she had known of epidemics amongst babies—one in South London, when three babies died. That was absolutely the case, but she did not know the midwife who caused it. She thought that was due to entire ignorance of what the rash would look like. She considered that midwives should be taught to recognize the manifestation, and if there was anything at all doubtful, always to wear gloves. That was not really enough impressed on them in many cases.

It was true, under the rules of the Central Midwives' Board, the presence of a purulent discharge, or of sores, had to be made known to a doctor; but it would very often happen that a person was suffering from such a discharge, and the midwife might not see it at the time. It had happened more often than not in her eighteen years' experience as a midwife. Midwives ought to be able to take care of themselves, and if there was anything doubtful, to send for a doctor; but, at present, they did not know enough to do so.

Asked by the Chairman, if she was aware of the nature of the examination these midwives were subjected to, Miss Gregory said she should be, as she prepared them nearly six times a year for the examination; and they gave a longer course at the Woolwich Home in these subjects than anybody else, but not nearly so long as they would like. They would like the pupils to be taught there for two years.

Asked by the Chairman, whether it would not be extremely difficult to exact a two years' course from these badly-paid women, Miss Gregory said it was done in other countries, so she did not see why England should sit down under a three months' course.

In reply to Sir Almeric Fitzroy, Miss Gregory said that France, Belgium, and Italy had such a two years' course.

At the Home for Mothers and Babies [now the British Hospital—Ed.], Woolwich, the course was six months for trained nurses and a year for those who had had no previous training. Asked further how much longer she would require in order to give as much special instruction in relation to venereal diseases as she thought necessary, Miss Gregory replied that she did not think any midwife fit to practice unless she had had a full year, whether she were a trained nurse or not. The trained nurse who had a full year would then be able to include some other subjects in the syllabus. As a general rule midwives were cottage women. At the Woolwich Home the class was rather higher than that. But midwives all over England were mostly cottage women or very low middle-class women. They were often the daughters of old midwives, and steeped in the superstitions of their mothers. Then they had this highly scientific course of three months, and she knew from personal experience that it fell from them as water from a duck's back. They knew absolutely nothing at the end of the time. They could not be supervised, and it was waste of time teaching them. Therefore to throw anything into that course would, she considered, be extremely disastrous, and merely make the midwives self-sufficient.

She considered that during their second years' training pupil midwives should have a small salary. That would entail expense, but not more than the cost of the babies who went blind and the mothers who had dangerous illnesses. She had not heard lately, but she knew the blind asylums used to say that between one-third and one-fourth of their inmates were those who need not have been blind. She had not heard about that for the last five or six years.

Sir Almeric Fitzroy here interpolated "Do you not think it would have been better to obtain more recent information before you advanced this extreme view of things?"

Asked by the Chairman whether enough instruction were given to all midwives, of a general character, apart from that on venereal diseases, to prevent any great danger as regards the carrying of infection, Miss Gregory replied that the instruction was given, but she did not think instruction given once or twice to perfectly uneducated women, who had not the least idea of

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