

The Midwife.

A NATIONAL MATERNITY SERVICE.

The British Medical Association at its Council Meeting on November 20th considered two memoranda drawn up by its National Maternity Service Committee. The first memorandum emphasised the principle of continuity of medical and nursing care throughout pregnancy, labour and the puerperium as the basis of any successful scheme for a National Maternity Nursing Scheme. The Council considered that the following points should be embodied in the organisation of a National Maternity Service, and that the best method of providing such a service would be by an extended system of National Health Insurance. It approved the following recommendations:—

- (1) Efficient antenatal care by, or under the responsibility of, a medical practitioner throughout pregnancy in every case.
- (2) Attendance in every case by a certified midwife during the antenatal period, labour, and the puerperal period.
- (3) Attendance by the practitioner chosen by the patient during pregnancy, labour, and the puerperal period, when as a result of his antenatal examination, the practitioner has declared his personal attendance to be necessary, or when his attendance is requested by the midwife.
- (4) The provision in every case of at least one post-natal consultation between the patient and the practitioner (including if necessary, examination).
- (5) The services when necessary of a second practitioner (for example, to administer anaesthetic).
- (6) The services of a consultant when considered necessary by the practitioner.
- (7) The provision of laboratory services when considered necessary by the practitioner.
- (8) The provision of beds for such cases as in the opinion of the practitioner require institutional treatment; treatment in the institution being, as far as possible, continued by the same practitioner.
- (9) Supply of sterilised obstetric dressings in every case.
- (10) Provision of ambulance facilities for patients requiring to be removed to institutions.
- (11) The provision of "home helps" (i.e., women trained in domestic work), who would relieve the mother of the worries of domestic management during the lying-in period.

A WHOLE-TIME SERVICE OF MIDWIVES.

In regard to a whole-time service of midwives, concerning which the Council of the British Medical Association had before it a Memorandum on the Report of the Joint Council of Midwifery, the Council of the B.M.A. considered that if a whole-time Service of Midwives was to be adopted in certain areas it was more a matter for the midwives themselves than for the medical profession, but in the event of such a Service being established the following conditions should be regarded as essential:—

- (1) That there should be as free a choice as possible of midwife by patient.
- (2) That in the case of individual midwives, skill, judgment, and personality should reap their reward.
- (3) That the medical practitioner should have the opportunity of advising his patient as to the midwife who will undertake in association with him the responsibility for that patient's welfare.

CENTRAL MIDWIVES BOARD.

Mr. Leslie Farrer Brown, B.Sc., Barrister-at-Law, has been, with the approval of the Minister of Health, appointed by the Central Midwives Board to be Secretary to the Board, in succession to the late Mr. H. G. Westley.

THE SOURCE OF INFECTION IN PUERPERAL FEVER.

An important report issued by the Medical Research Council, by Dr. Dora Colebrook, entitled: "The Source of Infection in Puerperal Fever due to Haemolytic Streptococci," may, it is hoped, result in the reduction of the maternal deaths in England and Wales each year as a direct consequence of childbirth.

Of these deaths, 900 are attributable to a particular microbe called the haemolytic streptococcus, and it is estimated by Dr. Colebrook that 64 per cent., or 576 deaths, is definitely preventable, together with the non-fatal illness of over another 2,000 women.

The streptococci responsible for the patients' illnesses have been found in the nose and throat of doctors and midwives attending the patient in some instances, while in others it was traced to the handy-woman, the husband, child, mother or father of the patient.

The great importance of these findings is that their acceptance will result in the development of methods of preventing contamination of the mother.

THE TRAGEDY OF AN INNOCENT WOMAN.

In 1917 Miss Florence Annie Parkes, a certified midwife, was convicted at the Exeter Assizes of the manslaughter of a baby in her nursing home, and was sentenced to and served a term of six months' imprisonment.

Protesting her innocence, on her release from prison she appealed unsuccessfully to the then Lord Chief Justice in the Divisional Court for a re-hearing of her case, asserting that the mother of the baby had made a confession that it was an arrangement between herself and her mother, before the child was born, that it should be killed before it left the nursing home. Miss Parkes then went to the Court of Appeal, and again failed. She then endeavoured to get her case heard before the House of Lords, selling her last possessions to defray the cost of printing her petition, but found that the signatures of two counsel were necessary before it could be presented. Day after day for years she sat in the Central Hall of the Houses of Parliament endeavouring to interest someone in her case, so that her name might be cleared, and at night she slept in the shelter provided by the church of St. Martin's in the Fields.

Recently Mr. A. C. Reed, Unionist M.P. for Exeter, has been endeavouring to obtain a free pardon for Miss Parkes, and in a written reply to a question addressed to him in the House of Commons by Mr. Reed, the Home Secretary, Sir John Simon, stated that he had recently examined signed statements bearing on Miss Parkes' responsibility for the death of the baby. They were not admitted as evidence at the trial on the ground of privilege. Had they been available from the outset he was satisfied Miss Parkes would not have been convicted. In these circumstances he had felt it right to recommend that a free pardon be granted to her. Suitable compensation was being given to her.

We sincerely congratulate Miss Parkes and her champion, Mr. A. C. Reed, M.P., on the result of his efforts on her behalf. It is just that she should receive compensation. But what money can compensate her for wrongful imprisonment, for being subjected to an unjust charge for eighteen years, for poverty, and for the torture of mind which she endured?

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