

The Midwife.

A Crime and its Moral.

Much attention has recently been given in the daily press to the case of Daisy Lord, who, after being sentenced to death for the murder of her illegitimate child, is now undergoing penal servitude for life, a sentence generally felt to be excessive, so that a popular agitation has been started to obtain its substantial reduction.

We refer to the case because of its special moral for midwives and nurses. The question from time to time is raised whether they should professionally attend single women in their confinements, or whether their services should be restricted to those who are married. We are bound to say that the question is not raised as a rule by midwives or nurses themselves, but by committees under whom they work. The point of view of those who would restrict their services to married women apparently being that it is wrong to condone sin, and that there is the workhouse ward open to all.

But, if we elect to refuse our services to a woman because she has "lost her character," we must, to be logical, refuse them to all, whether men or women, whose illnesses are the result of their own misdoings. Yet if a drunkard falls down in the street and fractures his leg, we do not pass by on the other side and censoriously say the accident was his own fault, he must take the consequences; or, if a suicide is brought into a hospital ward, we are not Pharasaical enough to refuse to attend to his wounds. We concern ourselves not at all with what has caused his illness, only with the present duty of alleviating his distress and attending to his need. Why, then, when her hour of anguish comes upon a girl who has been sinned against as well as sinning, should we withhold the help it is in our power to give, and leave her friendless and alone to pass through a time in which under ordinary and happier conditions we recognise that a woman needs all the solicitude and tenderness which can be extended to her?

True, there is the other alternative, the workhouse maternity ward; it is no doubt a necessity, but whatever may be said as to the propriety of urging that the woman who, with her eyes open, sins time after time, should be admitted there, it can scarcely be urged that it affords a desirable environment for the young girl with her first baby, who has come to the parting of the ways; who, under the influence

of a kind and judicious midwife, may be impressed with the desire to live a better life for the future, or may, through the companionship of the women with whom she associates during her stay in a workhouse, be dragged still lower into sin. Added to this, there is the child to be considered, and the stigma that will be attached to it through life, by no fault of its own, if its birth takes place in the workhouse.

Is it likely that if Daisy Lord's child had been born in wedlock she would have been unattended by a doctor, midwife, or neighbour at its birth, yet had anyone been present the concluding scene of the tragedy of her shame might, and probably would never have taken place. Deserted, and alone, with the unwanted evidence of that shame in her arms, she forthwith ended the little life which had scarcely begun, and the law, which rightly protects human life, was set in motion against her.

Yet, which of us shall apportion the blame, for none can tell what was her mental condition when the terrible act was committed. Dr. G. T. Wrench, the late Assistant Master of the Rotunda Hospital, Dublin, in his book on Midwifery for Nurses and Midwives, referring to the "Insanities of the Reproductive Period," describes the "Insanity of Labour" as follows: "The patient is suddenly seized with a frenzy. She is dangerously mad. She may take the child when born and dash its brains out against the iron of the bed, or otherwise destroy it. The attack usually passes off rapidly." Who shall say that when she destroyed her child the mother was not temporarily insane, and if insane irresponsible.

But the moral is surely plain, for the sake of our common humanity, and for the sake of the unborn child, to extend our help to those who seek us in their time of peril and distress, their need being the passport to our services.

CONVALESCENT HOME FOR MOTHERS.

The President of the Convalescent Home for Mothers after their confinement, and for their babies between the age of three weeks and three months, at Sunningdale in Berkshire, states that the committee is anxious to bring the home to the notice of ladies and clergy working in the poorer parts of London, as they often have letters returned to them by subscribers to be used for the free admission of deserving cases from such neighbourhoods.

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