

The Training of Midwives and Monthly Nurses.

BY MISS MARGARET BREAY.

THE subject upon which I have been asked to write a paper is so comprehensive, that it is difficult to deal with it at all adequately, but I will attempt to put before you some of the points which appear to me to be most important with regard to the training of Midwives and monthly Nurses. This training has not so far engaged the attention of the Nursing world so much as one might expect in these days of rapid progress. A knowledge of midwifery is by no means universally expected of the trained and certificated Nurses of our large Hospitals, and yet, surely, no Nurse can be rightly considered as trained "all round" who cannot in an emergency conduct efficiently from first to last a normal case of midwifery.

This deficiency in the education of Nurses appears to me to arise from five causes:—

(1) The fact that the heads of most of our Training Schools are not themselves qualified midwives, and therefore do not understand the importance of this knowledge for their pupils.

(2) The expense of the training. I am only aware of one Training School outside the Infirmary which has for some time past given its Nurses an opportunity of Midwifery training. It has done this at the end of three years' Hospital training on the condition that the Nurses sign an agreement to remain in connection with the school for another three years. It is out of the question for most Nurses to pay the usual fee (twenty-five guineas) for three months' training in this special work, however desirable it may be that they should obtain it.

(3) The fact that Midwives have at present no legal status, and that therefore skilled midwifery Nurses are competing with many who have no claim whatever to the name of Midwife which they choose to assume, and who bring the whole calling into disrepute.

(4) The low standard considered sufficient in persons who present themselves for training in this special work. It is by no means uncommon for a Nurse or Probationer who has proved her-

self unsuitable for Hospital work to think, or for others to think for her, that she would make a "nice ladies' Nurse." She goes in for a course of two or three months' training at a Lying-In Hospital, and emerges professedly competent to undertake Nursing, which taxes at times all the skill, endurance and nerve of highly-trained Nurses. It is also quite usual for women with no general training, often of an age younger than that at which general Hospitals will accept Probationers, to apply for and receive midwifery or monthly training, and at the end of this time to undertake monthly Nursing. There seems to be a startling incongruity about this state of affairs. No surgeon or physician in a Hospital would be content to allow a Probationer of this standing, however promising, who has had a special training in an Ophthalmic, or Erysipelas, or Obstetric Ward, to assume the responsibility of the Nursing of that ward, even under the eye of the ward Sister. Why then should it be possible for anyone to undertake the charge of a mother and infant at a most critical period, when left entirely to herself except for the doctor's visit once, or at most twice, a day?

It is not easy, however, to see how this condition of things is to be remedied. So long as all the Lying-In Hospitals are content to receive untrained persons as pupils it is very difficult for *one* to make a stand. I am convinced, however, that if only one such Hospital could be found courageous enough to make the experiment, the effect of giving training only to certificated Nurses would result in such an increase of the reputation of the School that the experiment, even financially, would prove a complete success. Further, if the London Obstetrical Society could see its way to conferring its much-coveted certificate only on those persons who could show that they had satisfactorily passed through at least a year's general training, it would raise the standard of midwifery Nursing very materially.

(5) The short time considered sufficient for training in Midwifery and monthly Nursing.

The difficulty here is that of pounds, shillings and pence. If the present fee for training is necessarily prohibitive to most people, matters would be still worse with a proportionately larger fee for an increased period of training. The fact remains, however, that, under present circumstances, pupils must gain self-confidence in conducting cases either by taking them before they are efficient, *i.e.*, before they have gained sufficient practical knowledge to qualify them to receive the certificate of their Training School or the diploma of the Obstetrical Society, or they must go through the whole of their training under supervision, and consequently not acquire

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