

that prevails very largely. I want to enlist your co-operation in opposing it. See what it entails. The special training of a Monthly Nurse is supposed to be acquired in about two months. How much of this special training is a woman likely to obtain in that time, if she has first to be taught how to use a thermometer, how to pass a catheter, how to administer an enema, how to change a patient's linen, and so on? All her time will be taken up in mastering these elementary duties—duties that she ought to have known all about before coming to a special Institution; and the result is that she completes her course of training, having derived from it but a small part of the benefit she might have done.

The duties of a Nurse during labour, the minute care required after labour is over, the watching for, and recognition of, the subtle changes that indicate impending mischief during the anxious period of lying-in, the mysteries of baby-washing, baby-dressing, and baby-feeding, are quite as much as anyone can learn in the time allotted; and it cannot be wondered at that those Nurses, whose training-time has been occupied in learning what they ought to have already known, turn out failures.

While I am on the subject of training, I should like to speak of another matter. I find a great many Monthly Nurses entirely mistake the object of their training. They regard it, not as a serious preparation for a serious calling, but as a means of obtaining a certificate. So markedly is this the case, that I have sometimes wondered whether the plan of granting certificates is a benefit to the community or not. We who are teachers in Schools of Medicine have a similar difficulty to contend against there. Many of our students concern themselves—during their student-life—solely with what they think will be useful to them in passing their examinations, and in enabling them to obtain a qualification to practise, to the utter neglect of that teaching which has for its main object the fitting them for the practice of their profession. The use of a certificate, or diploma, is to enable the public to discriminate between Nurses who have been trained and Nurses who have not. It is perfectly natural that such a document should be highly prized by its possessor. I should be sorry to see it otherwise. But to enter upon a course of training for the mere purpose of obtaining such a certificate, is to aim at a low object, instead of a high one, and to trifle with a great opportunity. The object of training is primarily to fit the pupil to undertake the duties of a grave and responsible calling; and, in so doing, to confer a benefit on the community at large. Secondarily and incidentally, its object is to enable the individual to earn a livelihood.

Both are important; but to invert this order, and place the benefit to the individual before the benefit to the community, is to take a sordid and unworthy view of the matter, and to hinder the advance of Nursing to that position in popular esteem to which it legitimately aspires.

Those of you who have the opportunity of seeing the Medical journals are aware that the use of antiseptics in Midwifery has lately engaged a great deal of attention. It is a subject of such extreme importance that I make no apology for making it my principal topic this evening. I am perfectly convinced that no one can be trusted to carry out an efficient system of antiseptic treatment, without an intelligent knowledge of the principles on which that treatment is founded. The loose way in which I continually find Nurses pouring a few spoonfuls from a bottle of antiseptic solution into a basin of water, under the impression that they are carrying out the antiseptic system, is a matter to me of very grave concern. A Nurse who prepares her antiseptics in this way has not yet mastered the first principles, the A B C of the system. She is living in an atmosphere of false security, and is jeopardising the life of every patient that comes under her charge. Let me endeavour, as briefly as possible, to describe the object and methods of the use of antiseptics in Midwifery. It has long been known that women after confinement are susceptible to a disease known as puerperal or child-bed fever, which often proves quickly fatal, and which, if not immediately fatal, too frequently leaves the patient a wreck of her former self, crippled by internal inflammation, and incapacitated for the ordinary duties of life for weeks, months, and even years.

We have no means of knowing how many women are made chronic sufferers by the less fatal forms of this disease; but leaving these out of consideration, and taking note only of the cases that die, we are able to obtain some information from the reports of the Registrar-General. I find from these reports that, in England and Wales alone, upwards of two thousand women are certified as dying from puerperal fever every year. Probably for every woman that dies, five or six escape with a serious and prolonged illness. In this way we may arrive at some idea of the extent to which this disease prevails amongst the women of this country; and many other countries fare at least equally badly. Until quite recently, although much had been written, very little was known as to the cause of puerperal fever. It was known that it could be carried from one patient to another by those in attendance, and that when it appeared in any given district it was apt to follow the track of some one Doctor, or some one Nurse,

*previous page*

*next page*