

## Medical Matters.

### A CRUEL OLD PRACTICE.



Dr. John Meredith writes strongly in the *British Medical Journal* on the cruel practice which he has found much in vogue amongst midwives in Somersetshire, (and with which all nurses who have done maternity work amongst the poor must be acquainted,) viz., that of "breaking the nipple strings" of newly-born female infants. "It is," says Dr. Meredith, "rarely done to male children—I have only had one such case. It is done by many of the midwives recognised now as *bonâ fide* by the Midwives Act and by other women as well who only act as nurses. The *modus operandi* is as follows. The nurse or midwife takes the infant's nipple between her finger and thumb and "works" it until a secretion, which the operating dame calls the "milk," issues from the little teat. Both breasts are manipulated in the same way. In every case swellings result and at times abscesses form. It goes without saying that such handling must cause exquisite pain. The chief reason given for it is that the child may in after life have a well-formed breast and nipple."

He goes on to say "the women who practice and sympathise with this work are not cruel or unkind people; they are so deeply impressed with the necessity of interfering with the children's breasts that it is practically impossible to prevent their doing so when a safe opportunity presents itself. They only act as they have been taught, and evidence that the work is cruel and has never done good has not entered their minds nor influenced them. The inspector of registered midwives employed by the Somerset county council mentions in her official reports many instances where midwives meddle with infants' breasts and some resolutely defend their practice. A medical practitioner writes from the eastern side of the country that he has a midwife in his neighbourhood who cannot be induced to leave infants' breasts alone. In many cases these zealous and misguided women have extensive practices and the question how to put an end to such doings should be faced. What women of the order I am referring to believe as an article of faith, they teach the younger ones during those friendly chats and gossips which enter so largely into the social life of the people. Teaching in this manner produces deep and lasting impressions upon the

minds of young girls present at these gatherings. It is not to be wondered at therefore that many of the untrained midwives—I mean not trained in accordance with present-day requirements—should object to be told to discontinue the practice of *breaking the nipple strings* in newly-born infants. They are only doing that which they have been taught to do and that it is all for the child's well-being in after life. What is wanted is a line of action by means of which the pernicious superstition could be altogether eradicated and its practice brought to an end. To attain this, the younger members of the community must be enlisted in the service.

"I would recommend, therefore, that the head teacher of each elementary school take the senior pupils in hand and talk to them about the practice, which is worse than folly, in that it is the cause of lasting injury and has not one redeeming feature. Young girls between 12 and 14 years of age are very susceptible, and special teaching given at such period is sure to bear lasting fruit and prove a corrective to some of the dismal "chatterings" told in the "gloaming" or at any other time. There are many superstitions in the country which tend to unhappiness beside "breaking the nipple strings" that might be fittingly classed with it for the teacher's special attention."

### A NEW CURE FOR THE OPIUM HABIT.

It is reported that the anti-opium movement in Malaya is assuming enormous proportions. The discovery that a plant said to be a cure for the opium habit grows freely in Selangor led to the commencement of active operations. Now an Anti-Opium Society has been formed, and the specific is distributed free, while according to Reuter's correspondent so great has become the demand for the "opium plant," as the Chinese call it, that those who gather the leaves in the jungle demand ten dollars per picul (133½ lb.) for them. The dispensaries established for the distribution of the specific are hard pushed to keep up with the demand, the applicants in Kuala Lumpur alone numbering over 2,000 daily.

The anti-opiumists claim to have cured, in the few short weeks since the plant was discovered, over 14,000 people in the Kuala Lumpur district alone, and the statement appears to be corroborated by the fact, which is vouched for by a partner in the opium farm, who is naturally deeply interested in the matter, that the receipts of the opium shops in and around Kuala Lumpur have fallen off by two-thirds, while several shops have had to close for lack of custom.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)