

The Midwife.

The Monthly Nurse.

Sir William Sinclair, in his interesting pamphlet on *Municipal Maternity Homes*, to which we referred last week, has some wise things to say about the monthly nurse. He advocates the employment of the well trained hospital nurse, with midwifery training, in addition, and thinks that the irreducible minimum should be the training and examination of the Central Midwives' Board. That is to say, that anyone acting as a monthly nurse should be a certified midwife. We quote in full his remarks on this important subject.

THE MONTHLY NURSE AND HER INTERESTS.

Here we must abandon hope of improvement: the order as definable at the present time must disappear in the interests of lying-in women of all classes of the community. A woman who has been brought up under conditions of fastidious cleanliness of home and person may possess the aptitudes that will make her a thoroughly efficient nurse with but little technical training. We have all met with some of these; I have known many; but they are the exceptions, and they contrast in a striking manner with the members of the order as a whole.

In Manchester and surrounding area we are specially unfortunate. Our lying-in hospitals, which ought to have exercised an elevating influence upon midwifery nursing, have for a generation been granting certificates of qualification as "monthly nurse," in some cases to women of unascertained character and education, and in one institution, in every case after the most attenuated period of "training" and practically no testing examination. Many of these women, calling themselves nurses, and wearing in public the much-abused garb, have been competing for professional employment and emolument with the genuine nurses who are first thoroughly trained and finally tested by examination at our general hospitals. The monthly nurses have seldom undergone the discipline to self-control, reticence, patience, and loyalty which result from the long-sustained physical and mental strain and the self-denial essential to the prolonged hospital training; and they seldom belong to that better class of women who would now be accepted as probationers by the Matron of a good general hospital. Their "training" does not last long enough to imbue even the

most teachable with the import of surgical cleanliness and to accustom them to the manner in which it may be attained. Quite recently, for example, I saw in consultation a case of puerperal fever. The personal cleanliness of the patient and of her bed and bedroom appeared to be all that could be desired, all of which was obviously due to her own tastes and habits. The medical attendant was an experienced, skilful, and sensitively conscientious accoucheur. Whence then the child-bed fever? We found on inquiry that the "nurse" had been using for the six days of the puerperium already elapsed, for purposes relating to a slight injury which need not be specified, the same piece of flannel kept in a soap-dish without any pretence at disinfection or even of thorough washing. The source of infection and the delay in the appearance of symptoms taken with other facts were thus sufficiently cleared up. This is only one recent case taken from a dismal repertory by way of illustration of "monthly nursing" in these parts.

In the report (1905) of our Midwives' Supervising Committee it is a pleasure to read: "We cannot expect women who have had little training and less practice in thorough cleanliness and in the use of antiseptics to acquire at once the habit of surgical cleanliness which it takes intelligent men and women years to acquire when trained under the best conditions."

Semmelweis, genial and kindly, when roused to indignation by some homicidal perversity of his colleagues, called their inaction a crime, and then proceeded to find extenuation in their sheer ignorance. The analogy is obvious. The argument in the report quoted above refers to midwives; it becomes *à fortiori* when applied to "monthly nurses."

The monthly nurse may have served some useful purpose at some period in the course of the evolution of professional nursing, but her little knowledge makes her now a dangerous thing in our social system. She has the presumption born of initiation into the mere forms of nursing, and the popular belief that she is trained augments the danger of her. Her disappearance would entail no hardship on any class, and for the public welfare disappear she must along with the *bond-fide* and illiterate midwife.

The well-trained hospital nurse, who only

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