

The Midwife.

Midwifery as a Profession for Educated Women.

Miss Alice S. Gregory, a member of the London County Council Midwives' Act (Special) Committee, has contributed an interesting article on "Midwifery as a Profession for Women" to the current issue of the *Nineteenth Century and After*.

She begins by showing that the mortality of English women from puerperal fever is 47 in 10,000, or 1 in 213, but that in three of the best lying-in hospitals it is 1 in 3,000. The startling point about these figures is that it is only 37 years ago that so great an authority as Dr. Matthews Duncan wrote: "If I read current literature aright, the prevalent opinion is that while medical and surgical hospitals are now on their trial, maternity hospitals are already condemned. The mortality of maternity hospitals is said to be so great that it is expedient, indeed absolutely necessary, to close them entirely."

Miss Gregory continues: "It is only fair to add that Matthews Duncan himself disagreed with this conclusion, and occupies the remainder of his book in disproving it." Events have proved the correctness of his estimate.

The average mortality, says Miss Gregory, of the three above-mentioned hospitals is one in 3,000. The average mortality in England and Wales one in 213, and "we feel there is something hopelessly wrong somewhere. It is almost incredible that so complete a reversal of the entire situation should have occurred in so short a period as thirty-seven years; still, we cannot doubt either of our authorities, and it becomes a burning question: By what means have the maternity hospitals so marvellously reduced their death rate in spite of the heavy drawbacks under which, from the nature of things they must always labour? And *why* has their example not been followed by those not suffering from these disadvantages—i.e., those working in private practice?"

The prime agent, as Miss Jane Wilson points out, in causing the death of 4,000 mothers every year, is the untrained midwife, "but she is the agent, not the principal. It is we ourselves, the controllers of the Government of the Kingdom, who are responsible for the sins of our agent."

Miss Gregory then goes on to discover the reason why, in spite of all that has been done, our philanthropy is so singularly inoperative. She shows that at Helsingfors, in Finland, no expense has been spared for many years past to give midwives a first-rate education in the admirable maternity hospital there, the course being for a year.

The system in force in Holland is highly com-

mended. There "the training is given to a large proportion of the students by the State, and at its completion they are bound to work wherever they may be sent for a period of two years, at a fixed salary, provided or subsidised by the Government or community. In this way provision is made for the delivery and nursing of those women who have the misfortune to live in too sparsely populated a district to tempt any midwife working up a practice for herself, and whose case otherwise presents an insuperable problem.

"The first year of a midwife's training in Holland is entirely devoted to theoretical study, seven and a half hours daily with an examination at the end. She then has a year's practical work (1) in attendance at confinements, (2) during the subsequent convalescence of the patients, and (3) in the nurseries which are attached to the training school.

"Further, in the Dutch training schools, the year of practical work may be prolonged to two at the command of the teachers. The schools are supported by Government; it is not, therefore, to anyone's interest that the pupil should leave at the end of the shortest possible period in order to make room for another pupil who will pay another fee. The women whom they are going to nurse in the future need not suffer from inefficient, inexperienced handling because the hospital could not scrape together sufficient funds to nurse its own patients without constant and rapid successions of paying probationers."

Compare this with our English system, in which a woman with no previous experience is expected to learn the same amount in three months as a Dutch nurse does in two years. It is the perennial question of thoroughness and efficiency of women's education involving expense, *versus* a short, less efficient, and comparatively inexpensive training. Miss Gregory's argument is that at the present day we are faced with the disastrous results of the work of untrained and uneducated midwives. We have tried to solve the problem by taking the daughters of these uneducated women and given them a very little training and paid them a very little salary, and still no one is satisfied. She pleads for the institution of central training schools by Government or otherwise as is done in France and Holland, in which case she believes the class of women entering the profession would be materially altered, and midwives would no longer be drawn from the class bred amongst the fatal old superstitions which have accompanied our midwifery from time immemorial. We may add that State Maternity Hospitals are established by Government in our own Colony of New Zealand, in the towns of Wellington, Dunedin, Auckland, and Christchurch, provision being made for this in the Midwives' Act of that colony of November 8, 1904, which was passed

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