

The Midwife.

A Reason for Optimism in Obstetrics.

Miss Elizabeth Raney, of the San Francisco Nursing Association, writing in the *Nurses' Journal of the Pacific Coast*, on her preference for obstetrical work, says, in part:—

Primarily, my ground for preferment is happiness. The occasion is joyful, and all elements seem to combine to emphasise the gladness awakened. . . . In confinement cases, generally speaking, we *know* what the result will be. That cannot be said of any other situation in our field of labour.

My additional reasons for favouring this line of work are surety and regularity. There is a comforting certainty in being able to count on a definite number of cases ahead. It means assured revenue, and that is a vital point to any young woman entirely dependant on herself for support. Other cases "turn up," to be sure, but they are, in the main, an indefinite quantity, and not to be counted on without the elastic "if." Moreover, the environment to be is always a question. You are likely to have to hie any place, any distance, or to any service. Where a baby is the prospect, ten to one you *know* where you are going and how long you will be retained. In obstetrical work, the period of suspense at worst is short, and, after the labour stage—to one who knows the work—the course is smooth sailing.

Why the major portion of our workers hesitate at entering this branch of the service I don't know. It would appear they either doubt their own competency, or, more probably, demur at the certainty of disturbed nights. I am not at all sure they speak truly when they say they don't "like" the babies. It is not within my understanding to conceive of any one's *not* liking them. That word "cross," as applied to babies, is a misnomer. As if a baby would shriek of choice! If it knew enough to employ a pastime, it would scarcely elect howling as its chosen diversion. What grown-up does not make known his or her distress if the order is aggravating? The difference is, their intelligence and powers of speech enable them to enlist immediate relief, whereas the poor infant has no choice but to employ a series of yells and thereby make known its sufferings. Babies only cry persistently when something is wrong. The

belching centre is invariably the cause. A little hot, weak bicarbonate of soda-water will dispel the pent up gas, and a hot-water bag and the stomach position will do the rest. Babies are only little animals—though very lovely little animals, I'll grant—and thrive best on the let-alone plan—once their needs are attended to. The slightest break in the routine care means distress, and distress is sure to vent itself in shrieks that are not to be surpassed. All this is not to be charged up to the baby. The baby is not responsible for anything, and only shows the right spirit of hardihood when it continues to cry till those cries are heeded.

There are certain qualifications requisite to success in obstetrical nursing. The work calls for breadth, willingness, and, above all, sympathy—not alone for the patient and wee-charge, but sympathy for the family, for the children, if there be any, for the cook, for any and every factor in the household. The servant problem is one that will yield to tact when all other means of persuasion fail. Force will not bend them, but firmness and consideration combined work wonders. They seem to be of one mind, that nurses, as a body, are nothing short of licensed trespassers, and that feeling can only be overcome by the broad sympathy that blends good-will with patience and helpfulness. They follow your lead, if your lead is kindly. Here arises the point of washing. If the nurse does the infant's washing—flannels and diapers—without exacting a measure of assistance from the servant at hand, that servant will neither appreciate her efforts nor feel in any way that the nurse has done other than the work she was paid to do. There is a happy medium of settlement in this concern. The arrangement should be made at the beginning of the service, and the maid will accept the plan without question, providing she is addressed in the right spirit. It is unfair that any servant should have needless and additional labour thrust upon her. I call an accumulation of soiled diapers needless and additional labour, and I think objection justifiable when so unreasonable an exaction is made on a co-worker, be that worker an equal or a subordinate. Here is the solution: Rags can be employed to the extent that there will be very few soiled diapers; those rags can be wrapped in paper and burned; the diapers to be placed in a pail of cold water—each one as it is taken off—

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)