

The Midwife.

Vaginal Examinations by Midwives.

The *Lancet* publishes the following criticism as to the directions of the Central Midwives' Board in regard to vaginal examinations by candidates for its examination:—

The Central Midwives' Board, having had its attention drawn to the fact that in certain instances the certificate of attendance on cases (Rules-schedule, Form III.) required from every candidate for examination has been signed on behalf of those candidates who have not complied with all the conditions imposed by Rule c 1 (i.) has passed the following resolution, "which must be taken as indicating the minimum requirements of the rule":—

"No case can be counted in which the pupil has not made abdominal and vaginal examinations (that is, more than one), and has also personally delivered the head and body of the child and the placenta and membranes. This excludes all cases known as 'B.B.A.' (born before arrival), and also all cases in which the labour is too advanced on arrival to make (repeated) abdominal and vaginal examinations possible. It also forbids the same case being counted to more than one person. The fact that medical help becomes necessary to apply forceps or otherwise assist delivery does not prevent the case being counted to the pupil." Now, nothing could be more unfortunate than such a rule actually sanctioning and even requiring that "repeated vaginal examination" should be made in every case delivered in the face of modern experience and teaching. As far back as 1886 Credé wrote: "Even the simplest manipulation may cause infection. It should, therefore, be laid down and taught as a fundamental principle that internal examinations of parturient women should be altogether avoided or restricted within the narrowest possible limits. It can be very well replaced by external examination. To instruct their pupils as thoroughly as possible in this method is the present and future duty of teaching institutions." At the Rotunda Hospital (the largest maternity hospital in the British Empire) and at the New Maternity Hospital in Belfast, one of the main points taught to the students and nurses is to endeavour to avoid vaginal examination in order to do away with the greatest danger at childbirth of both mortality and morbidity. In

speaking of the selection of nurses, Mr. E. H. Tweedy, Master of the Rotunda, writes in his "Rotunda Practical Midwifery" (Oxford Medical Publications): "For ourselves [Mr. Tweedy and Dr. Wrench] we always tell the nurse to refrain from making vaginal examinations" (p. 37); and in one of the most scientific text-books of midwifery of the present day, Dr. J. Whitridge Williams (the head of the great obstetric clinique at the Johns Hopkins Hospital), writes, p. 304 (second edition), under the head "Directions for Obstetrical Nurse": "Don't examine patient vaginally under any circumstances." The suggestion of the Central Midwives' Board requiring midwives to produce evidence of their having made "repeated vaginal examinations" is contrary to much present teaching at home and abroad, and if persevered in will be considered by many to have the effect of increasing puerperal fever. It might also be suggested that the nurse or medical man endeavouring single-handed to perform all the operations suggested in the above resolution of the Central Midwives' Board would find it hard to satisfy the requirements of aseptic midwifery.

It must, however, be remembered that in Rule E. 6, subsection 8, the Central Midwives' Board enjoins "No more internal examinations should be made than are absolutely necessary."

Another point to be noted is that in the United States of America there is "no midwife question." The obstetrical nurse works under the direction of a medical practitioner.

Midwives' Act Committee.

The third meeting of the Departmental Committee appointed by the Lord President of the Council to consider the working of the Midwives' Act was held at the Privy Council Office on Thursday, 4th February, 1909.

Mr. Almeric FitzRoy, C.V.O., was in the chair.

Miss Bertha M. Broadwood, Honorary Secretary and Director of the Cottage Benefit Nursing Association, and Miss Rosalind Paget, Honorary Treasurer of the Incorporated Midwives' Institute, attended and gave evidence on behalf of their respective institutions.

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