

## The Midwife.

### A Study in Contrasts.

When one generalises as to any class of persons, it is understood that there are exceptions to the general rule; that certain individuals do not conform to type, but are better, or, may be, worse than the majority who form the class; and so, when we say that the midwife of days gone by felt little responsibility in regard to the general welfare of the lying-in woman whom she attended habitually and for gain, and that the modern certified midwife is impressed not only with her professional but her social obligations to her patients, it is with reservations on both sides.

But, broadly speaking, midwives in former days were drawn from the same class as their patients; consequently they had the same limitations, and shared their prejudices, in the same way that they shared their food and often their beds. They were not at all concerned to place higher ideals of life or morals before any of those whom they attended, but conformed to the traditions handed down from generation to generation.

With the modern educated and certified midwife, all this is changed. She not only takes her social obligations to heart, but is oppressed with the weight of them, with the knowledge of things as they are and the vision of things as they should be. The ignorant midwife took an untidy and dirty home as a matter of course and did her work equably in its midst. The modern midwife wages war upon it—kindly and tactfully, but seriously—as a menace to her patient in the immediate present, and as a danger to the social welfare of the family after the patient has recovered and she has ceased her attendance. So, as she attends to the mother or washes the baby, she gives lessons both by example and precept as to the paramount importance of soap and water, of thrift, sobriety, and good management, all of which mean comfort.

The ignorant midwife cheerfully accepted—and, indeed, demanded—the glass of spirits provided for her when the labour was over, and drank it in company with the patient, who thereby came to believe that alcohol was beneficial, and even necessary to her, after her confinement, and many a time drinking habits in a woman dated from her first confinement and the advice of the midwife at that time, and it may be added that the midwife often

received a bottle of brandy as part payment for her services.

The modern midwife realises the danger which the patient incurs by drinking spirits—that they are a fruitful source of hæmorrhage, and, through the mother's milk are prejudicial to the health of the infant; therefore, as a routine practice she prohibits their use before she leaves the house, and firmly refuses any which may be offered to herself.

In these and many other ways the midwife can be helpful to her patients, but the ten days in which she is in attendance are short in which to make a permanent impression, and her life is so strenuous that she has little time to keep in touch with past patients. A means, however, by which she can help to place the lessons which she has inculcated on a more permanent basis is by acquainting her patients with the work of the Mother's Union, and arousing their interest in it. If she acquaints the special Secretary, Mrs. Russell, St. Stephen's Vicarage, Battersea, S.W., with the name and address of any mother so interested, she will then be visited by the Superintendent of the local branch. Mothers who realise the responsibilities of motherhood are glad to avail themselves of the help which co-operation with others in the Union, with its definite aims affords them, and many have been helped to a higher standard of life by its means.

We should advise all midwives to acquaint themselves with the objects of the Union, and whenever an opportunity offers to make them known to their patients.

### A Surprise Visit.

The Princess of Wales, accompanied by Lady Wolverton, paid a surprise visit last week to the City of London Lying-in Hospital, City Road, E.C., of which she is patroness.

### The Examination of the Central Midwives' Board.

The next Examination of the Central Midwives' Board will be held in London on April 1st, at the Examination Hall, Victoria Embankment, W.C. On June 9th an examination will be held both in London, at the Examination Hall, and in the Provinces, at the University, Birmingham; University College, Bristol; Victoria University, Manchester; and at the University of Durham College of Medicine, Newcastle-on-Tyne.

*previous page*

*next page*