

The Midwife.

Ophthalmia Neonatorum.

The earliest sign of this disease is a thin red line running across the upper eyelid, and the next sign observed is a discharge. At first this is often watery, but it soon becomes thick yellow or greenish matter, and is secreted in great quantities. The eyes swell, become intensely hot and tense, and the child will keep them closed. If the disease is not arrested, the cornea will ulcerate and perforate, and sight will be destroyed. The cause of ophthalmia neonatorum must be sought in the presence of infective maternal discharges. Infection may be primary or directly after birth; or it may not take place till the infant is several days old, when it is known as secondary infection.

About two-thirds of all cases of infective discharges are gonorrhoeal, but ophthalmia in the baby does not always mean gonorrhoea in the mother—occasionally another microbe in the secretions may cause it.

In every case, whether in private nursing or in hospital, the skin of the baby's eyelids should be gently but thoroughly cleansed from the vernix caseosa and secretions, with swabs of wool soaked in sterilised water or weak boracic. The hands and arms should also be dried as soon as possible to avoid any risk coming from the baby rubbing its eyes. At the first bath great care must be taken to keep the water in which the child's body is washed from splashing its face; and of course the face and head should always be washed first while the bath is fresh and clean. The nurse should daily examine the eyes for the first ten days after birth, and report the slightest redness to the medical attendant.

A solution of lunar caustic (silver nitrate) is often used in lying-in hospitals or for the infants of A.P.V.D. mothers; 2 per cent. solution is what Credi used, one drop being allowed to fall into each eye. Even with the greatest care this method may cause a reactionary reddening and discharge, and this has led many physicians to seek for another solution. It is found that 1 per cent. solutions are often more efficacious in preventing ophthalmia.

Silver solution should be kept in amber coloured bottles away from the light, and the drop applied to the eyes by a glass rod.

The greatest preventative of ophthalmia lies in the most scrupulous cleanliness on the part of the nurse who has to do with the baby and the mother. She must be most careful never to use the same towels or sponges for them

both, to wash her hands after attending to the mother and before touching the baby, and to see that a separate cot is provided for the child to sleep in.

GLADYS E. TATHAM.

An Insistent Demand.

We are glad to observe that the Midwives' Institute, is at the present time making an effort to enlarge its borders, and through its "Committee of Representatives" of affiliated Associations, to co-ordinate midwives throughout the country. The members of these affiliated societies are not necessarily members of the Institute, but their elected representatives are, or become so, and therefore have the right to vote on Institute affairs, including the election of its representative on the Central Midwives' Board.

At the same time, if the Midwives' Institute is to become the influence in the midwifery world, for which it has both the central machinery and the expert knowledge, it must realise the necessity for moving with the times, that, as midwives become better organised and better educated, they will not be satisfied with indirect representation on their governing body through the election of a person—not necessarily even a certified midwife—by the few hundred midwives on the Midwives' Institute, but that they will claim and secure representation of their interests on the Central Midwives' Board by certified midwives directly elected by the midwives on the Roll.

The Midwives' Institute has a great opportunity before it. It may voice this legitimate demand, or it may ignore it. If it decides upon the former course, it will commend itself to working midwives, and take the helm in promoting a popular movement. If it fails to grasp its opportunity, then it must realise that the demand is an insistent one, and will be voiced and carried to a successful conclusion by others.

The Departmental Committee of the Privy Council, appointed to enquire into the working of the Midwives' Act, recommended that the representative of the Midwives' Institute on the Board should in future be a certified midwife. It was not unreasonably supposed that this recommendation would give great satisfaction to the members of the Midwives' Institute, but, on the contrary, they are asking for two representatives, and to be allowed to choose them without restriction.

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