

The Midwife.

The Choice of Fit Persons.

BY A HEALTH MISSIONER.

With reference to the case of the district nurse who taught women how to bring on abortion, mentioned in your article, "The Choice of Fit Persons," in this week's issue, may I suggest that lack of necessary teaching is the chief cause of the failure of a vast number of women of *all* classes to recognise the moral and physical iniquity of this practice.

It is not generally realised that in regard to knowledge of sex and reproduction most girls and young women are utterly at the mercy of whatever influences they may chance to meet, and that these influences are often evil. They are allowed to go out into the world destitute of any intelligent principles on this subject. It is no wonder that so many succumb to pernicious teaching, not infrequently that of their own husbands.

In the special experience that has come to me by reason of my being a nurse, I have encountered facts in this department of life that would appear incredible to many—facts absolutely appalling. All spring from the same root, namely, the absence of teaching and training in the laws of sex and reproduction.

It is not only amongst the uneducated that perverted views are held. Cultured, refined women are equally sinners in this respect. I happen to know of at least one fully-trained nurse, working on a Co-operation, who helps women to procure abortion. She could not be described—apart from this—as an unprincipled woman. She has simply never been taught to look at the matter in its true light. And I have reason to believe that many other nurses are equally guilty.

I frankly admit that if I personally had not been born with a deeply-rooted tendency to range myself on the side of law and order, and I had learnt that to procure abortion is illegal, I should most probably have adopted the harmful views on the subject which fate presented to me through friends. That I did not do so was certainly not due to anything but respect for the law. As I was told by several friends (charming women socially), I knew *nothing* of such matters. It was for me to accept their superior knowledge! And this is the case with many girls.

A former patient of mine, a conscientious, well-bred woman, finding herself pregnant, and

deploring the fact, once wrote asking me if I would counsel abortion, and recommend a means. She had confidence in me, and if I thought it inadvisable she would not interfere. I explained the risks and dangers to her, and said as much as I dare concerning the moral aspect of the practice. She abandoned for ever any idea of obtaining abortion. Here, ignorance on the point was the chief factor in the suggestion.

Quite lately a woman whom I know well wrote—to my astonishment, for she knows me well—offering me a guinea for directions how to bring on abortion, for a young married woman who had appealed to her. They were too poor to afford another child was her plea. She knew the guinea would be welcome to me, and she assured me that my name would not appear in the transaction.

In this case my answer was that I had never been able to regard intentional abortion as otherwise than murder, and that my self-respect would never allow me to lend myself to anything criminal. Also I pointed out to her the physical dangers, and the grievous, life-long injury to the child which results when abortion is attempted and fails. I know such children. I insisted that nurses who even countenance this practice are dishonouring their profession. I begged her to use all her influence in urging her friend to relinquish her idea and to go bravely through the task she had incurred. I heard nothing more of the matter.

In most of these cases I find it is a perverted notion of kindness, the wish to "help another out of a hole" which leads educated women to assist others to bring on abortion.

I am convinced that there is urgent need for teaching private nurses regarding this subject. Many hear their *first* information on it, and accept that, from some patient or friend who is so charming that she disarms criticism. That is the danger. If all the exponents of vicious practices were uneducated, and repulsive to good and pure girls, there would be no problem. The evil is spread in a great measure by those reared in cultured homes. I could relate many such instances known to me personally.

It seems to me that hand in hand with scientific midwifery should go instruction in the ethics of reproduction. Such definite teaching as that given by Dr. Marion Linton in her recent address at Bath would prove a safeguard to many of those who have never yet given the

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